

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

PRAIRIE TINNEL

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A SOLDIER'S LEADER:
'GENERAL Z'; RETIRES AFTER NEARLY 4
DECADES OF LEADING SOLDIERS

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ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

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Take it From the Top:

Senior Leader's Corner

No room for sexual assault/harassment within our ranks.

To the Soldiers, Airmen, and Civilian Employees of the Illinois National Guard and Department of Military Affairs:

Zero tolerance. As Commander of the Illinois National Guard, I have zero tolerance for sexual assault and sexual harassment among our ranks. It doesn't matter rank, position, duty status, or service of an offender, sexual assault and sexual harassment will not be tolerated.

Ensuring we have a force that is prepared to protect our state, defend our homeland, and fight our nation's wars when called is vital. However, we can only achieve this if we treat each other with dignity and respect. Service members must be able to trust the members within their units and believe that the chain-of-command at all levels takes sexual assault and harassment complaints seriously.

In the wake of a recent event within the Illinois National Guard, it is important to address each and every one of you directly. On a recent active duty deployment, an Illinois National Guard Soldier was convicted of sexual assault against another service member. The offender held the grade of E-9 at the time of the crime. He was court martialed, reduced to the grade of E-1, dishonorably discharged and subsequently incarcerated at Fort Leavenworth for a period of 10 years. The Illinois National Guard worked with our Active Duty counterparts in this case to ensure the victim was provided care and assistance while also ensuring the offender was prosecuted for the crime committed.

Don't be a bystander, if you see something, say something. In this case, a bystander came forward and identified something was wrong. They gave support to the victim and provided them a voice, when it was difficult for the victim to do so on their own.

I encourage any victim of sexual assault to come forward and report the offender. Having the strength to come forward and report this misconduct will prevent the offender from harming someone else. However, if you are a victim of sexual assault and are not comfortable talking about it and/or involving law enforcement, you have the option to make a restricted report to the Sexual Assault and Response Coordinator (SARC), a Victim Advocate (VA), or healthcare provider. By making a confidential restricted report to the SARC, VA, or healthcare provider, you are able to receive services and care while recovering from the trauma without leadership or law enforcement ever knowing.

If you file a restricted report, you can later decide to make the report unrestricted, however, once you decide to make an unrestricted report, you cannot later choose to make it restricted. Once a report is unrestricted, it is no longer confidential and the command is obligated to investigate and respond to your complaint. During this process you are entitled to a special victim's judge advocate (JAG) to advise you of your rights, assist you with obtaining a Military Protective Order (MPO), and guide you through the investigative process.

If you report to anyone other than the SARC, VA, or healthcare provider, a case is not able to remain restricted. Likewise, if you are not a SARC, VA, or healthcare provider and someone informs you that they or someone else is a victim of sexual assault, you are obligated to immediately report this information to your chain of command.

The Illinois National Guard State Sexual Assault and Response Coordinator's (SARC) telephone number is (217) 299-9407. Please reach out to her if you or someone you know are a victim of sexual assault. The Illinois National Guard State Equal Employment Manager telephone number is (217) 761-3670. Please reach out to her if you or someone you know is/has been a victim of sexual harassment. If you are experiencing depression or thoughts of self-harm, you are never alone. The DoD Safe Helpline is available 24/7 and can be reached at 1-877-995-5247.

Eliminating sexual assault in our ranks takes more than just education and training. It requires moral courage and decisive action. We need Soldiers, Airman, and Civilian Employees who will stand up, speak out, and protect their military family members from those who wish to do them harm. Together we can attack this corrosive problem that violates human dignity and corrodes the readiness of the entire organization.

Very Respectfully,



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

Illinois highlights Pride month with panel featuring LGBTQIA+ Soldiers

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The Illinois National Guard hosted a Pride month panel for the first time June 10. The panel, moderated by Command Sgt. Maj. Dena Ballowe, the Senior Enlisted Leader for the Illinois National Guard, kicked off with a pair of videos detailing the history of the movement to secure equal rights and protection for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals within the United States. The Gay Rights Movement gained traction in the late 1960s after decades of unequal treatment and abuse, and it was the social and political movements of the time that helped create lasting change.

Special emphasis was placed on the rights of LGBT individuals to serve in the military, and how recently those rights were secured. For lesbian, gay, and bisexual troops, the right to serve openly wasn't implemented until 2011 with the repeal of the infamous Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT). In 2016, then President Barack Obama rolled out a policy allowing transgendered servicemembers to serve openly. That policy was repealed in 2017, then reinstated in 2021. A small number of transgender



servicemembers were grandfathered in if they “came out” between 2016 and 2017 under the 2016 policy rolled out by Barack Obama and then-Secretary of Defense Ash Carter.

Both of the women on the panel joined the military prior to the repeal of DADT. The first, Army Capt. Jennifer Hillyer, who

identifies as lesbian, serves as a supervisor in the Supplies and Services department of the United States Property and Fiscal Office at Camp Lincoln.

“I enlisted back in 2004, back when I wasn't supposed to, back when it was wrong to be gay,” said Hillyer, who recently returned from a deployment and took command of the 1544th Transportation Company. “But 17 years in I still do it, I still love it, so we'll see how long we can make it last.”

When asked what she would tell other LGBT troops within the ranks, as well as those who might want to enlist, Hillyer had some advice to share.

“Just be you, be yourself, and be proud of what you do especially if you're wearing the uniform,” Hillyer said. “It's not a distraction, it's who you are.”

The second panelist, Army Staff Sgt. LeAnne Withrow, an Equal



Employment Opportunity Specialist in the State's Equal Opportunity Office, is also the first openly transgender service member in the Illinois National Guard, and the first to fully transition through the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) and serve in her correct gender. She identifies as a transwoman and a lesbian.

"I always wanted to join the Army, ever since I was a kid," said Withrow, who serves as an Operations NCO with the 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment out of Chicago. "My dad was in the military, his dad was in the military, so on and so forth, it's just something I've always wanted to do."

Withrow's commentary focused more narrowly on how leaders and the organization can better understand their LGBTQIA+ troops, and work with them to provide support.

"There were a lot of people in early in my transition that made me feel safe and not uncomfortable," Withrow said. "There were a lot of people in leadership particularly that really helped me feel like it was ok, and that I wasn't being a burden by being myself."

Withrow highlighted that the majority of the ILNG has grown to be an accepting and open-minded community. Nonetheless, older mindsets persist and more training is needed.



"There are things that we can do as an organization to do better I believe," Withrow said before describing some of the negative attitudes and mindsets surrounding the initial transgender awareness trainings that

were distributed in 2016. "I think there's work to be done."

Withrow spoke about issues still facing marginalized communities. Many of LGBTQIA+ soldiers are unwelcome in their

own homes or have been disowned or disavowed by friends and family for simply being themselves. Rates of being the victim of a violent crime, homelessness, and other societal problems are disproportionately prevalent among the LGBTQIA+ community, especially for people of color.

"If you have soldiers that are in the LGBTQIA+ community," said Withrow. "Keep in the back of your mind as leaders that these troops are dealing with something that you don't necessarily see between drills." 🏳️‍🌈



Duty First

ILNG and First Division Museum at Cantigny help honor local Viet Nam Veteran

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

The Illinois National Guard and the First Division Museum at Cantigny helped celebrate the career of former Army Staff Sgt. Bob Dulak.

Friends, family and neighbors gathered at Dulak's house in Wheaton, Illinois, June 1, to honor his service with the 1st Infantry Division during Viet Nam.

Dulak was an infantryman conducting multiple aerial reconnaissance missions from 1969 to 1970 where he earned the Army Commendation Medal and the Army Air Medal for his service.

Master Sgt. Josh Jiannoni with the Illinois National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters who deployed under the 1st I.D., and Col. (ret.) Krewasky Salter, Executive Director of the First Division Museum gave remarks honoring Dulak for his service.





MAN IN THE ARENA:

Lawson fights adversity after retirement by applying life lessons

*By Maj. April McLaren, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs
Photos courtesy of Brig. Gen. (ret) Christopher F. Lawson*



SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – When Brig. Gen. (retired) Chris Lawson retired in 2020 from the Illinois Army National Guard after 33 years, he had no idea what was in store the next 18 months.

World-wide pandemic. Marriage. New wife with colon cancer. His own life-saving liver transplant.

Yet his positivity and personal life lessons from multiple significant moments in his military service got him through.

“I believe perpetual optimism is a force multiplier,” he said. “The world is a dangerous and complex place with wicked, seemingly unsolvable problems everywhere. When problems are difficult and these solutions are wrong, it all comes down to people. Kindness, compassion, civility and gratitude matter. These things are not earned. They should be freely given to each other to get the most out of all of us.”

Lawson’s culminating military assignment was the Vice Director J5 for the National Guard

Bureau in Washington, DC. Prior to that, Lawson served as the Chief of Sustainment for 3rd Army, U.S. Army Central, Chief of Staff of the National Guard Joint Staff for National Guard Bureau (NGB) and the first Chief of the Joint Staff for the Illinois National Guard (ILNG). Lawson also had multiple successful Illinois Army National Guard (ILARNG) commands with the 634th Forward Support Battalion, 66th Infantry Brigade Logistics Integration Support Team, Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting Command, 108th Sustainment Brigade, and as deputy task force commander of Task Force White Eagle of the Polish Land Forces.

As
retirement



approached, Lawson was a nominee for the J5 Director for the U.S. Southern Command as well as the Chief of Staff for the Army Futures Command. Understanding the time considerations for the nominations and dealing with several unresolved medical issues, Lawson retired Aug. 31, 2019.

“Chris has always been the type of leader who connects with people on a personal level and works to connect people together,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, Illinois National Guard Adjutant General. “Those connections along with his talents as an innovative leader and visionary has had significant long-lasting positive effects on the Illinois National Guard.”

Upon retirement, Lawson married his soul mate, Heidi Parker. Two months later he found himself in the emergency room with



a multicomponent, complex liver disease requiring a liver transplant. Before Lawson was ultimately put on a liver transplant list in January 2021, he endured weekly treatments at Walter Reed and multiple hospitalizations fighting the disease. He was hospitalized for emerging renal failure and the development of ascites, which required removing more than 10 liters of deadly fluid each week.

“As time went on, he got weaker and weaker. It was really hard on him because he’s a doer,” Heidi said. “But the biggest thing we had was a lot of love and respect for each other. We told each other, no matter what, we’ll get through it together. Our inner strength of love made us stronger and stronger.”

As Lawson fought for his life with enough mental, physical and emotional strength to be considered for a liver transplant, Heidi was diagnosed with colon rectal cancer in December 2020. This required an immediate eight-hour surgery and continued care. This also

meant Heidi could not be Lawson’s primary care giver, which was a requirement to be considered for a liver transplant.

As Heidi was on the road to recovery, their family and friends provided the physical and emotional support they both required. Then just two months after Lawson was on a national transplant list, he got the call.

He grabbed his go bag with a three-hour notice of the surgery.

“I underestimated what all this meant,” Lawson recalled, as he prepared for surgery in the middle the COVID-19 pandemic. “Heidi didn’t get to go in the hospital for surgery prep or even a visit. It was a significantly emotional experience for her and (me).”

When Heidi was in the hospital, Lawson created a friends and family text chain to keep the love, support, and positive energy flowing to support her in the hospital. Then Heidi expanded these text chains just four months later to support her husband during his surgery and recovery.

As Lawson was in surgery, Heidi patiently waited for updates from the doctors, expecting an eight-hour surgery and at least two days before she could actually speak to her husband. To her surprise, the doctor called her after six hours to let her know it was a “beautiful” surgery and everything went as good as it possibly could. By the next morning, she received a Facetime from Lawson.

“All I could do was cry,” Heidi said. “His throat was raspy, but he said he just had to call to tell me he loved me. I can’t describe the elation of feelings of love that overcame me.”

During his immediate recovery,



Lawson stayed over a week in the hospital with only seeing family and friends via Facetime and personal videos. Preparing for this moment, Lawson knew he was a people person who craves personal interaction. So he made a deliberate effort to learn the names, families and favorite colors of fellow patients and the hospital staff.

“I believe perpetual optimism is a force multiplier”

“They were my guardian angels,” Lawson said. “I built friendships in a week. It was beautiful and it kept me sane.”

His long-time military friends and family around the world kept him going, too. Lawson said he wanted to be private and felt vulnerable to share his story on social media. However, he decided to step out of his comfort zone and post a video about his disease, transplant and road to recovery. Over 1,000 people watched his video and provided encouraging comments.

“It was a reason to live,” he said. “It reminded me of my purpose and that my connections were intimate and meaningful.”

Maj. Travis Turner ILNG Bilateral Affairs Officer in Poland, first worked for then Col. Lawson when he was a lieutenant and Lawson a colonel. Turner said Lawson is an energetic leader who knows how to build his team while truly getting to know his people.

“The one memory that hits me the hardest, is after a flood (state active duty), he gave me a handwritten card that said ‘you’re a rock star,’” he said. “I still have it in my office today.”

When Lawson was the first ILNG Joint Chief of Staff, he assigned then Maj. Lenny Williams, as the first Interagency and Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison in Chicago.

“He took the train up to Chicago (from Springfield) on my first day to personally give me his guidance through a white board

session. Essentially, we built the plane while it was in the air for this position,” said now Col. Williams, ILARNG Chief of Staff. “He gave me the autonomy to develop and execute the strategy for the position and his vision for our Chicago partnerships.”

Williams said he appreciated Lawson’s leadership style because he gave his vision

and parameters for his team to execute while keeping his focus on the long-term and strategic goals of the organization.

As he reflected on his military career, Lawson’s intimate and meaningful connections with those he served beside lead to many life lessons...

Retired Brig. Gen. Chris Lawson’s personal memories and life lessons:

When: 1990

Where: Fort McCoy, Wisc.

Situation: I was a Second Lieutenant and acting commander of a medical company during a mission essential task list evaluation. The evaluators were from another state, loyal to units from their home state and viewed out of state units inferior. The senior evaluator was a Lieutenant Colonel. I kicked his team out of our company command post for being rude, unprofessional and not qualified for the assessment. I informed my battalion and brigade commanders. Both gentlemen were upset and supported me in this assessment. We later received a letter of apology from the 47th Infantry Division Deputy Commander.



Lawson’s Life Lesson: “Stand up for what was right, support your people, and as a leader back your subordinates when they’re honest, true, and selfless.”

When: 2002

Where: Heidelberg, Germany

Situation: Then major Mark Jackson (now a major general) told me he went two days without thinking about his son. It crushed him. I went to comfort him and he said he could fix this, but then said "What if my son went two days without thinking about me?" This thought was unbearable for Mark and changed him deeply.



Lawson's Life Lesson: "This military service is hard and especially hard when you live as a civilian most of the time in the guard. As a leader, you must make time and create activities to stay connected back home so it prevents soldiers from becoming disconnected and disillusioned."

When: 2008

Where: Kirkuk, Iraq

Situation: An altercation occurred at an Iraqi Army base when a Kurdish training officer disrespected an Arab trainee. The altercation escalated quickly with weapons and ammunition, so the Kurdish base commander asked for assistance from the U.S. advisor team. We arrived with 2 U.S. advisors, all with combat gear and weapons. After I assessed this was making the situation worse, I instructed the U.S. team to sling arms, take off their Kevlar helmet and take a knee. Everything stopped and all the trainers and trainees were staring at the U.S. team so we could start to negotiate a resolution.



Lawson's Life Lesson: "Passively doing the unexpected and not trying to establish dominance is well received during a time of crisis. Smiling in negotiation lets everyone think you know what is going on, even if you don't."

When: 2013

**Where: Ghazni
Providence
Afghanistan**

Situation: Our coalition unit of Polish and U.S. forces were attacked by the Taliban in a large-scale complex attack. The attack included a 3,000-pound improvised explosive device (IED), RPGs, rockets, suicide bombers, and incinerator materials. The IED exploded approximately 100 meters from my building where the roof and the doors dislodged and took off hinges, while rockets and RPGs were flying and fires emerged. I ran to the joint operations center approximately 70 meters away, I narrowly missed an RPG that hit an air conditioning unit behind a company command post adjacent to my building where I was running. I took cover there for several minutes while checking for injuries. I realized I had some ringing in my ears and no physical damage to my body. I got up and started to run towards the joint operation center and a few coalition Soldiers saw me and later asked me why I was smiling during the middle of this attack.

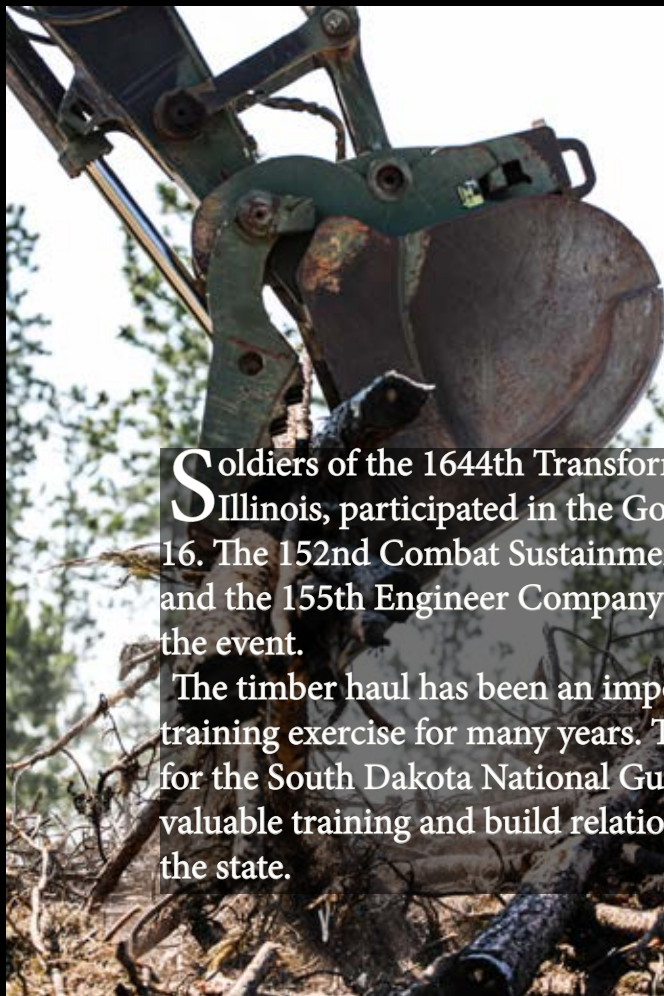
Lawson's Life Lesson: "It was this day, I realized that you do not decide when it's your day to die, so don't wait. Live your days and don't just try to survive them- celebrate life and the connections you make with enlightenment, education, friendship, love and honor."



Its Weight in Gold

1644th TC participates in Golden Coyote Timber Haul

Courtesy of Spc. Andrew J Washington, 982nd Signal Company



Soldiers of the 1644th Transformation Company, based in Rock Falls, Illinois, participated in the Golden Coyote Exercise timber haul June 16. The 152nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion from South Dakota and the 155th Engineer Company from South Dakota, also participated in the event.

The timber haul has been an important part of the Golden Coyote training exercise for many years. The mission provides the opportunity for the South Dakota National Guard and other participating units to gain valuable training and build relations with tribal communities throughout the state.



It's only natural:

Illinois National Guard helps Arcola Soldier become a U.S. Citizen

By Robert Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

CHICAGO - A journey that began about 25 years ago when a 7-year-old child traveled to the United States from Mexico ended June 10 with Spc. Alan Juarez becoming a U.S. Citizen.

"I've been waiting for this moment my whole life," said Juarez, an Arcola, Illinois, resident.

In front of his fellow Illinois National Guard Soldiers, Juarez raised his right hand and swore oath of allegiance to the United States of America. The ceremony was at the Cook County Health's vaccination site in Harvey, Illinois, where the Soldiers are helping in the fight against COVID-19.

The oath in many ways echoed the solemn promise Juarez made to support and defend the U.S. Constitution when he enlisted in November 2019, but this time he became a Citizen of the country he had already sworn to defend.

"I'm so thankful for the military, the Illinois National Guard, which helped make this day come a lot faster and easier than it would have otherwise. I'm proud to call myself a Citizen of the only country I've ever really known - I've always considered myself an American."

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Chicago Field Office Director Kevin Riddle administered the oath to Juarez, who has been working at immunization sites in Cook County



since March.

Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle joined Juarez on his special day. Neely said the Illinois National Guard has been spreading the word about the military expediency program for naturalization.

“It is very simple for us to do this for a Soldier,” Neely said. “It makes the naturalization process go very quickly for them.”



Under the program, a service member can apply for naturalization after a year of military service during peacetime. During periods of hostility, including the present, a service member can apply for naturalization immediately after enlisting. Juarez applied

for naturalization during his initial job training with the Army, called Advanced Individual Training or AIT.

Juarez did not have legal documentation throughout his childhood. As a young adult, he was able to obtain a work permit through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, established by the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act). He became a permanent U.S. resident in 2016 after his marriage to Kristina. Juarez had spent several years and more than



\$10,000 in fees, legal expenses and other requirements to get to legal residency. He was still looking at several more years and more fees to become a citizen.

Joining the Illinois National Guard changed all that. “All the benefits of joining the

Illinois National Guard are there, and I would encourage anyone thinking about joining to look into it and call a recruiter,” Juarez said.

After enlisting, he became a citizen within two years and the military picked up all the fees. Juarez will return to his manufacturing job after the Illinois National Guard’s COVID-19 response and continue working on his business marketing degree at Parkland College. He attends the college tuition-free thanks to the Illinois

National Guard Grant and will be eligible for additional education benefits after 90 days of active

duty at the immunization sites. Juarez will also continue drilling with E Co., 634th Brigade Support Battalion, based in Decatur, Illinois.

Neely said he was honored to be a part of Juarez’s naturalization ceremony.

“When you hear the oath of a new citizen, you quickly realize how closely it aligns with the oath you swear as a U.S. Soldier,” Neely said. “As a Soldier you have already taken the oath to protect and defend the U.S. Constitution. It is only natural that a service member becomes a U.S. citizen.”



Illinois Army National Guard welcomes new commander: Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd becomes first African American ATAG - Army

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



SPRINGFIELD –Governor JB Pritzker and Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, have selected Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd as the next Assistant Adjutant General – Army.

As the Assistant Adjutant General, Boyd will become the first African American officer to command the 10,000 Soldiers of the Illinois Army National Guard. Boyd will replace Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, who retires at the end of July after more than 38 years of military service.

“I am honored to appoint General Rodney Boyd Assistant Adjutant General -Army of the Illinois National Guard, making him the first Black soldier to hold the position in the state. This historic moment, while long overdue, is proof not only of Boyd’s excellent qualifications but also a testament to the Guard’s commitment to advancing service members and ensuring

senior leadership reflects the diversity of our great state,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “On behalf of all Illinois residents, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia for his decades of exemplary service and wish him well in his retirement.”

Brig. Gen. Boyd’s career accomplishments make him exceptionally qualified for the position.

“We considered many qualified candidates however none could match General Boyd’s unique military and civilian experience and professional qualifications. Boyd represents a success story for the Illinois National Guard. We hope it also inspires all Soldiers and Airmen to see a path to senior leadership, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. The strength of the Illinois National Guard requires that we include the viewpoints and award the talents and hard work of

many different leaders from diverse backgrounds,” Maj. Gen. Neely said. “Major General Zerbonia deserves our gratitude for almost four decades of exceptional service to the US Army, the National Guard and to the Illinois State Police. His legacy is the many service members he has helped excel in the military and in life, including General Boyd.”

Brig. Gen. Boyd said he is honored to be selected for command of the Illinois Army National Guard.

“There is a tremendous amount of talent in the Illinois National Guard of all different backgrounds. General Neely is making diversity and inclusion a priority to ensure we are developing and tapping into all that talent. I hope that young Soldiers look at this appointment and realize the Illinois National Guard is an organization that strives for equal opportunity for all,” Brig. Gen. Boyd said.

Brig. Gen. Boyd is a decorated combat veteran of both Iraq and Afghanistan, where he earned the combat action badge. He is a proven leader

who commanded the 108th Sustainment Brigade and has held key command and staff positions throughout his career, including experience in strategic planning. He has had a successful civilian career in law enforcement and as a consultant for military training.

In his civilian life, Brig. Gen. Boyd served with the Bellwood Police Department for 23 years, working his way up from a patrolman in 1990 to the Chief of Police in 2011.

After retiring from the Bellwood Police Department in 2013, Brig. Gen. Boyd worked as a vice president for operations for JP Morgan Chase Bank and as a supervisory criminal investigator for the Northwestern University Police Department. Since April 2018, he has worked for MAG Aerospace, which supports the Army National Guard Mission Command Training Support Program.

Brig. Gen. Boyd began his military career as an enlisted Marine Corps Reservist in 1982. After completing his enlistment with the Marines, he joined the Illinois Army National Guard. From 1989 until 1990, he attended the Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School, receiving his commission as a second lieutenant in the Quartermaster Corps in August 1990.

Brig. Gen. Boyd's military education includes Quartermaster Officer Basic Course, Quartermaster Officer Advance Course, Transportation Officer Advance Course, Combined Arms and Services Staff School (CAS3), Intermediate Leadership Education Course, Theater Sustainment Command



Course, Combat Service Support Pre-Command Course, the U.S. Army War College, and the Joint Combined Warfighter School-Hybrid.

He has held many leadership and staff positions during his more than 35 years of service to include company, battalion and brigade command

and multiple staff positions in operations and logistics at all levels. He was deployed to Afghanistan as an ammunition officer with the 33rd Area Support Group from 2004 to 2005, where he received the Combat Action Badge. In 2007 to 2008 he deployed to Iraq and then deployed to Kuwait in 2014, both with the 108th Sustainment Brigade.

Some of his military awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal (2nd Award),



National Defense Service Medal with Bronze Service Star, Iraq Campaign Medal with one Campaign Star, Afghanistan Campaign Medal with one Campaign Star, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal and Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal.

Brig. Gen. Boyd received a bachelor's

degree in Criminology from Northern Illinois University, a Master of Arts degree in Education from the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, and a Master of Strategic Studies degree from the U.S. Army War College. Brig. Gen. Boyd has been married to Darlene Boyd for over 30 years and they have two sons (Rodney Jr. and Randy) and one grandson.

Springfield Soldier promoted to chief warrant officer 5

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – More than 34 years after enlisting in the Illinois Army National Guard as a flight medic, Thomas Black of Springfield was promoted to Chief Warrant Officer (5) at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield on June 4.

Black, who enlisted in 1987, is the Deputy of Supply and Logistics Management for Supply and Services. He reclassified from flight medic and spent most of his enlisted career as an automated logistics specialist before attending Warrant Officer Candidate School at Fort Rucker, Alabama, in 2005.

“You don’t get anywhere if you don’t surround yourself with great people,” Black said as he thanked friends, family and mentors for their support during his career. “I knew as a senior in high school, we wouldn’t have the money to attend college. I spent a weekend with my brother, Reggie, who at that time was attending Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. At the end of the weekend, I asked how I could do it. He told me if I wanted to go to college, go into the Illinois National Guard, it’s a free ride to get here. Thirty-four years later, here we are.”

Black said his brother was one of his mentors growing up and kept him on a straight path.

“I’d never be here without him,” Black said.

Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, of Chatham, Illinois, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, said the key to being promoted to Chief Warrant Officer (5) is to become a subject matter expert in one’s technical branch.

“This is a great day for Tom and the family. A

Chief Warrant Officer 5 is like a unicorn in the U.S. Army,” said Zerbonia. “How do you make CW5? You become a subject matter expert in your technical branch and Tom is a top expert in the supply field, not only in Illinois but the nation.”

Zerbonia thanked Black’s family for their sacrifice during his career.

“Thank you for the sacrifices you’ve made and the support you’ve given Tom during his career,” he said.

Black shared a few stories involving mentors throughout his career.

“When I interviewed to become a federal technician in 1993, the last question I was asked was ‘Why should we hire you?’” he said. “I still use that question when I interview potential employees. My answer was I wanted to give back to the Guard what it gave to me – an education, experience and I wanted to be part of a team.”

Black said he appreciates the opportunities he has been given over the years.

“Each of my mentors have made a difference in my career,” he said. “In your own way, each of you helped me hone my skills. Without your support I would have never made it this far.”

A final story Black shared involved the Minuteman Statue which sits in front of Joint Force Headquarters at Camp Lincoln.

“When I was a young staff sergeant, I was sent to Wisconsin, near Fort McCoy in a box van and was told not to break the item I was picking up when I got there,” he said. “The box van was filled with mattresses from the old RTI. I had no idea what I was picking up, but lo and behold, it was the Minuteman Statue which now sits in front of the JFHQ building. Of course when I called to let them know I picked it up, I jokingly told them it was broken.”

At the end of his brief remarks, Black thanked his family.

“I can’t say enough about my family,” he said. “Mom, you have been a rock and this one’s for you and dad.”



Springfield Soldier promoted to major

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – More than 26 years after enlisting in the U.S. Army as a parachute rigger, Illinois Army National Guard Soldier Christine Hurley, of Springfield, Illinois, pinned on gold oak leaf clusters during a promotion ceremony to major at the Illinois State Military Museum, Springfield, Illinois, June 4.

“I never knew how special this day would be until it happened,” Hurley told friends and family gathered for the promotion. “They said they’ll promote anyone. I’m here to tell you that’s not true. You have to work really hard for this. I’m honored and humbled to be promoted.”

Hurley enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1994, serving first as a parachute rigger and then as a truck driver. In 2011, she graduated from Officer Candidate School as a transportation officer.

Lt. Col. Michael Barton, of Greenville, Illinois, Commander, 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB), based in Springfield, Illinois, described Hurley as “someone special who’s going somewhere.”

“Christine is a fantastic leader who gets stuff done,” he said. “You care about others who wear the uniform more than yourself and that’s a trait that every leader should have.”

Barton also thanked Hurley’s family for their support throughout her career.

“After wearing the uniform for a long time as Christine has, this is a pretty special day,” Barton said. “She couldn’t have done it without your support. You didn’t sign up for this,

Christine did. But your support is greatly appreciated. She couldn’t do this without it.”

Hurley also thanked friends and mentors throughout her career.

“You gave me the confidence to figure things out,” she said. “Each of you allowed me to be successful. I’m also indebted to my noncommissioned officers for keeping me alive during deployments.”

She also thanked her family, especially her wife, Jill.

“Jill, you earned this alongside me and your support means so much and I love you for it,” she said. “Thank you to my family for always being there and offering support when we need it.”

Hurley has served in a variety of leadership assignments in the

Illinois Army National Guard, including platoon leader with the 1644th Transportation Company, based in Rock Falls, Illinois; motor and rail transportation officer in the 1144th

Transportation Motor Transport Battalion, based in Delavan, Illinois; commander of the 1344th Transportation Company, based in East St. Louis, Illinois; training officer for the 634th Brigade Support Battalion, based in Sullivan, Illinois; an instructor at the 129th Regiment (RTI); commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 129th RTI, based in Springfield, and training officer for the 108th Sustainment Brigade, headquartered in Chicago.

Hurley serves as the executive officer for the 232nd CSSB.



Illinois National Guard colonel takes command in Poland

By Dutch Grove, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –Illinois Army National Guard Col. Jorge Fonseca of Bolingbrook, Illinois, took command of Area Support Group-Poland (ASG-P) during a change of command ceremony in Poznan, Poland on June 10.

The ASG-P was established in January 2019 to centralize U.S. Army support functions in the region, improve base functional support, alleviate tactical units from performing non-standard missions, and improve Soldier quality of life. ASG-P is a subordinate unit of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command based in Kaiserslautern, Germany.

“I look forward to working with our Polish partners and maintaining the community relationships that will be vital to our success,”



said Fonseca. “Let us not forget the strategic importance of the bilateral U.S. and Polish relationship.”

Fonseca is the second Illinois National Guard leader to command the ASG-P. Polish Army Brig. Gen. Grzegorz

Grodski surprised Fonseca by attending the change of command ceremony. Grodski and Fonseca were classmates at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where they graduated together in June 2019.

Fonseca will command the ASG-P for the next two years.

The Illinois National Guard and the Polish military have enjoyed an immensely successful partnership since 1993 when they were paired as among the first of the National Guard Bureau’s State Partnership Program partners. The Polish nation

has emerged from behind the then-Soviet Union’s Iron Curtain and, with some help from the Illinois National Guard, has become part of NATO and a staunch U.S. ally.



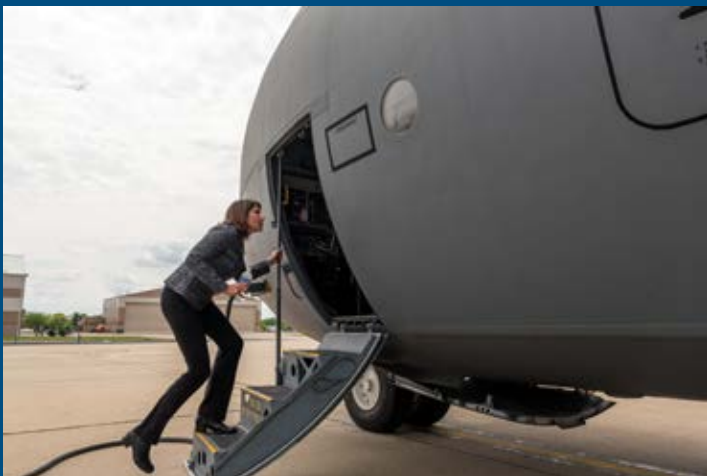


Representin'

Rep. Cheri Bustos visits the 182nd Airlift Wing

By Tech Sgt. Lealan Bueher, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Illinois 17th district Rep. Cheri Bustos, visited the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, June 12, as part her on-going initiative to job shadow industries within her congressional district. Col. Daniel McDonough, the commander of the 182nd Airlift Wing and his staff gave Bustos and her staff a tour of the facilities and briefed them on the C-130 Hercules before taking them on a familiarization flight in the aircraft.





LIVING THE DREAM

*Former Afghan
interpreter, Fahim
Masoud, realizes
dream of military
service in Illinois
Army National
Guard*

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, ILL. - When Fahim Masoud was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1988, the country was at war with the Soviet Union. Fast forward 17 years, Masoud graduated from high school and faced one of three options for his future - study in India on a scholarship, go to a local university in Afghanistan, or apply for a risky job as an interpreter for the U.S. military.

with a captain in the U.S. Marine Corps, Frank, who was conducting the interviews. He and I talked for a good hour or two before he decided to hire me."

Masoud said the first meeting with Frank was quite intimidating because it was very new, but at the same time quite exciting for a 17-year-old person.

"That first morning in basic training, when I got up at 3 or 4 a.m., my first thought was 'Boy you have made a mistake'"

Masoud applied for a job as an interpreter. "I've always taken the risky, adventurous road and working for the U.S. military as an interpreter in Afghanistan was risky," he said.

The decision to apply for an interpreter job set Masoud, who now lives in Stafford, Virginia, with his wife and two young children, on a path that would ultimately lead him to the United States and pave the way for his own service in the U.S. military and the Illinois Army National Guard.

"I arrived at Camp Stone, in Herat province Afghanistan in March 2006," he said. "I met

"He asked if we were on a convoy what would happen if the convoy went down and the American Soldier next to me got shot and was wounded badly," Masoud said. "This was the test question for Frank. I told him I would pick up the weapon and continue fighting. He decided then and there to hire me."

From Camp Stone, Masoud was sent to Kabul, Afghanistan to undergo a number of medical tests to make sure he was healthy.

Masoud, now an Illinois Army National Guard second lieutenant with Company D, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion,

headquartered in Bloomington, Illinois, worked for the U.S. military for a year and one half as an interpreter, where he met Chief Warrant Officer 3 James Ditter, a member of the Iowa Army National Guard.

“I was one member of a 34-member volunteer team sent to Afghanistan as embedded training troops,” said Ditter, of St. Peters, Missouri, who retired from the Iowa Army National Guard in 2018. “I served as a maintenance advisor and was needing an interpreter. I met Fahim and there was an instant connection.”



Ditter, who began his military service in 1985, enlisting in the Illinois Army National Guard, serving with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Effingham, Illinois, said he and Masoud developed a good relationship so it was a no-brainer to sponsor him for a student visa.

“My family was very supportive of the sponsorship. We got him enrolled, and accepted, in community college and things rolled from there,” Ditter said.

Masoud said he and Ditter talked often about education opportunities in the United States.

“We talked about education opportunities in the United States and after getting to know each other, he told me he was going to sponsor me to the United States to continue my education,” Masoud said. “When I came to the United States, I was 19 years old.”



Masoud said he had two reasons to come to the United States – the education opportunities and his desire to serve in the U.S. military.

“Growing up in a third world country, being willing to learn English, I wanted to come to the United States not only because of the education opportunities but also join the military,” Masoud said.

Faced with unknowns, Masoud set out on his path with the help of Ditter, who submitted the paperwork to sponsor him through a student visa.

“I initially landed at Newark, New Jersey, and after talking with Chief Ditter, I flew to St. Louis because that’s the only place in the United States where I knew someone,” he said. “I came to the United States with \$99 in my pocket. But when you’re 19 years old, you’re not just thinking about the education benefits but the excitement of a new place.”

Masoud attended college in St. Louis, graduating from Washington University. After graduation, following a series of interviews,



he was hired by an intelligence company in Chicago.

The United States had implemented a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) by 2007 when Masoud arrived, but very few interpreters or Afghan nationals working for the United States

could go through that process to enter the U.S.

"In 2007, the United States had an embassy in Kabul, but you couldn't get a visa to come to the United States," he said. "I had to travel to Pakistan to get a visa to come to the U.S."

The process for a SIV was different and would have taken a long time to get approval.

"We didn't want to wait a long time, so Chief Ditter sponsored me through a student visa," Masoud said. "About a year after I arrived in the United States, we began the process of applying for the Special Immigrant Visa."

Masoud and Ditter met with then-Brig. Gen. Robert Livingston, who was the Adjutant General of South Carolina at that time. Livingston wrote a letter to the Department of Homeland Security vouching for Masoud, asking them to start the SIV in the United States.

"It was extremely unique to come to the United States then start the process," he said. "About a year later, the application was approved by DHS and I received my green card in December 2009."

Five years later, in July 2015, Masoud became a United States citizen. It would be another



three years before he would realize his dream to serve in the U.S. military.

"I always wanted to serve in the military," Masoud said. "I took the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery with the Marine Corps in St. Louis, but then I met my

now-wife and those plans were put on a back burner."

Masoud said his wife, Zohra, an Afghan national who grew up in Canada, at first wasn't supportive of his joining the military, but she eventually supported his desire.

"We were living in Chicago and we already had a 6-month-old baby," he said. "I kept saying I wanted to go into the military. I had a corporate job and just wanted to be in uniform."

Masoud said his wife finally agreed and he enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard.

On July 31, 2018, Masoud left home to attend Basic Combat Training and immediately following graduation, attend Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia.

"That first morning in basic training, when I got up at 3 or 4 a.m., my first thought was 'Boy you have made a mistake,'" he said. "But I stuck with my decision. And it has been a wonderful

journey."

Ditter said it's amazing to see where Masoud was when they first met, and where he's at now.



“To see him realize his dreams of an education and then join the military, it’s very heartwarming,” Ditter said. “He’s going far and I’m just so proud to be a part of it.”

Ditter described one of the more than 64 missions they were on together during his deployment to Afghanistan as hair-raising. But, Ditter said, Masoud proved time and time again why he was always requested as an interpreter.

“One of our convoys included a military team from Spain. We were on a mission and came under attack, disabling the Spanish team’s ambulance. Their policy is no equipment gets



left behind,” Ditter said. “The Spanish team was intent on staying with the ambulance. Fahim kept telling me it would not end well for them if they stayed.”

Ditter said they finally convinced the Spanish team to leave the ambulance and they would come back to recover it.

“We went back the next day and the ambulance had been burned,” Ditter said. “We set out to load the ambulance and during this time, Fahim was out talking to the Afghan elders, assuring them we were working to get the ambulance loaded and get out of there. He could read the people moving in on us and saw the situation deteriorating, and he risked everything to buy us enough time to recover the vehicle and leave.”

Ditter said all the Afghanistan interpreters he met during his deployment were there to help

the U.S. military, but Masoud’s desire to help stood out above all.

“He was always requested to lead the convoys because he knew the roads and everyone knew he would keep them out of trouble,” Ditter said. “He was truly there to help the U.S. military.”

Masoud, a father of two, a daughter Ava and a son, Rumi, hopes to make a career of military service.

“I want to be in the military until they kick me out,” he said.

Masoud said he always tells people, immigrants and Americans alike, there is no other place in the world like the United States.

“My story couldn’t be possible anywhere else in the world,” he said. “What makes the United States such a remarkable country is we have issues and challenges but at the end of the day the United States is really every person around the world’s last hope for freedom, liberty and opportunities.”





Otis B. Duncan Honored

ILNG Participates in ribbon cutting at newly renamed Duncan Park

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





Illinois Army National Guard Col. Maurice Rochelle, the Deputy Chief of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff, helped dedicate a Springfield (Illinois) park to Col. Otis B. Duncan of the Illinois National Guard's famed "Fighting" 8th Infantry Regiment. Duncan was the highest ranking African-American officer to serve overseas during World War I. Because of institutional racism in the U.S. Army during World War I, Duncan and his fellow African-American Soldiers fought under the French. The 8th Infantry, re-designated the 370th Infantry Regiment during the war, was the only African-American combat unit commanded by African-American officers. Duncan was awarded the Purple Heart and the French Croix de Guerre for gallantry in action. The Springfield (Illinois) Park District named a park in his honor and cut the ribbon on the re-dedicated park on June 22. Duncan was from a prominent Springfield family and the Col. Otis B. Duncan Park is about a half-mile from the Illinois National Guard headquarters at Camp Lincoln, where Col. Duncan often trained.



Conquering Fear

Airman from 182nd ALW steps up in uncertain times and excels

By Staff Sgt. Joseph Pagan 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Peoria, Ill. – “I was scared, so I took a lot of vitamins,” said Senior Airman Destiny Zuniga. The 182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron traffic management specialist had initial concerns after being placed on duty with the Illinois Air National Guard for a COVID-19 domestic operation at McCormick Place Convention Center in Chicago in March 2020. Her mother even sent soluble vitamins packets to dissolve in water alongside her vitamin C and D tablets. Zuniga said she took this cocktail of vitamins daily in hopes of avoiding contracting the virus.

“We didn’t really know what this virus was or how it affected us,” said Zuniga. “My family was freaking out, and I was freaking out.”

Zuniga said although she struggled with the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, she didn’t let fear deter her from readily volunteering to assist in the relief efforts.

“If they say they need help, I am always one of the first to say I’ll do it,” she said. “That’s part of the reason I enlisted.”

Avoiding the virus would be only one of the many challenges she would soon have to

overcome if she were to make a difference as an Airman during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The original mission was to establish a makeshift hospital at McCormick Place in less than a week.

“They wanted us to build 500 beds in five days,” said Zuniga. She would often find herself overwhelmed in the beginning, taking frequent bathroom breaks to gather her thoughts and calm her nerves. “The first week was the most hectic. We worked 16 hour days,” she said.

The scope of the operation broadened as the pandemic worsened, spanning three different locations across Northern Illinois and an additional 4-month time commitment with widely varying work responsibilities.

Zuniga was made responsible for assembling and sorting medical supplies for future COVID patients.. The first dilemma she

faced, apart from avoiding contracting the virus, was how inefficient the process was and how cumbersome the dialog was between her and her civilian counterparts aiding in the relief efforts. Adding to the frustration was the reluctance everyone had to offer feedback. She said her commanding officer would set



expectations and give opportunities for input and opinions, but everyone was reluctant to share their ideas.

Zuniga said sorting through the inefficiencies and resolving conflict made juggling college that much harder. She had volunteered for COVID-19 relief efforts

even though she was juggling a full college course load at the time.

“I was still in school full time!” said Zuniga.

Despite all the difficulty she faced, Zuniga said giving up was never an option. While many of her coworkers complained about the risk they were assuming and the circumstances they were in, she concluded if she were to make a difference, she would have to confront and work through the adversity in front of her.

“If they say they need help, I am always one of the first to say I’ll do it. That’s part of the reason I enlisted.”

Zuniga said the days were long and she didn’t know when they would start or end. However, at the end of the duty day she’d immediately return to her room to write papers, take tests, or often have Zoom calls with her professors past midnight. Zuniga said continuing her education while serving was very important to her in order to serve in a greater capacity someday as an FBI or DEA agent.

In addition to continuing her education on duty, Zuniga’s coworkers said she tackled and resolved problems at work as well. Senior Airman Cara Motter, a fellow 182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron Airman who worked alongside Zuniga, said she distinctly remembered Zuniga’s assertiveness in determining the most efficient way to complete a task and then advocating that idea to the commanding officer.

“Sometimes you need somebody to stand up and take the lead on a certain job, and I think she was really good at that,” said Motter.



Zuniga handled her work responsibilities so well she was hand-picked to serve on a small team that would be transported from the McCormick Place to a warehouse in Roschelle, Illinois, to assemble and store medical kits for future pandemics or natural disasters..

She recalls

towards the climax of the operation when her commanding officer, 1st Lt. Jon Kent, requested her to stay after work. She said she vividly remembers him saying, “Your base commander, Col. McDonough, is coming to visit, and I want you to give him a tour.”

Zuniga recalled the fear she initially had assuming such a big responsibility.

“I was an airman first class, at the time,” she said. “I was freaking out!”

However, Zuniga worked past her concerns by remembering the confidence 1st Lt. Kent had in her. Zuniga said relying on the faith of others in times of self-doubt is a source of confidence. She told herself, “Clearly he sees something in me that maybe I can’t see myself right now.”

Zuniga said when McDonough arrived, she took a deep breath and said something she always says before an important basketball game in high school: “It’s game time.” She successfully escorted the base commander around the area of operation and explained in detail all events that took place from beginning to end.

At the end of the operation, Zuniga received 10 Airman of the Week awards, passed all her classes with an above-average grades and was personally responsible for the efficient packing of medical kits that expedited the build-up and teardown of McCormick Place. Zuniga said in times of fear and uncertainty, courage is paramount if one is to make a difference and it is impossible to grow without such adversity.

A Soldier's Leader



'General Z,' Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard retires after nearly 4 decades of taking care of Soldiers

By Lieutenant Colonel Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois – Sweat poured from Mark Twain High School Tiger running back Mike Zerbonia Jr. His thick eyeglasses were fogging up, a clunky knee brace was strapped around his leg and his full head of hair was drenched in sweat – but he kept on churning out yardage.

“He would never give up and he would never quit,” said life-long friend Colonel (retired) Troy Phillips, who played football with Zerbonia at the Center, Missouri, high school and was later an Illinois State Police trooper and Illinois National Guard officer with Zerbonia. “It was never about Mike Zerbonia. It was always about the team and not wanting to let down his teammates. Much of his leadership was forged through sport.”

After more than 38 years of military service

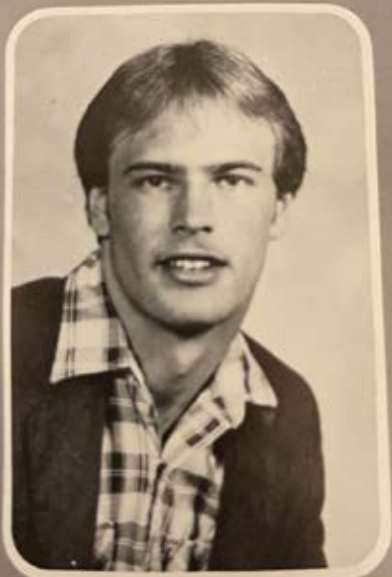
including combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, Major General Michael Zerbonia, the Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the more than 10,000 Soldiers of the Illinois Army National Guard, will retire at the end of July.



Zerbonia, affectionately known as ‘General Z,’ said he really had nothing left to accomplish in the military. “It is not about you. No one individual is bigger than the organization,” he said. “It is all about working as a team and building those

relationships. Everything you do should be about taking care of Soldiers and preparing them to fight and win.”

Major General Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, said that Zerbonia’s



Michael Raffaele Zerbonia, Jr.

legacy are the excellent leaders he has developed and mentored. "The Illinois Army National Guard has excelled under Major General Zerbonia. It is at or near the top of multiple readiness metrics and has excelled at every mission it has been given. Much of that is because of the inspired leadership of General Zerbonia and how he has developed those

leaders who have served under him."

Those who worked with "General Z" for years love him for his down-to-earth blue-collar approach to leadership, which he developed growing up in a small Midwestern town. Zerbonia earned a master's degree in strategic studies and completed multiple advanced strategic-level programs including Harvard University's General and Flag Officer Homeland Security Executive Seminar, but he explains strategic priorities to the troops in plain English - always calm, but occasionally laced with some colorful adjectives. Zerbonia is known for his tough demanding leadership, but

troops know they can joke with the general when the St. Louis Cardinals lose or for his inexplicable but lifelong love of the NFL's (now Las Vegas) Raiders.

Command Sergeant Major



Michael Behary, the Command Sergeant Major of the Illinois Army National Guard, has worked with Zerbonia on and off for 17 years. "He is no different now than he was when I first met him as a unit supply sergeant. He was a Soldier's leader then. He is a Soldier's leader now," Behary said. "He values your input and opinions whether you are a private or a sergeant major."



Behary said the trust that Zerbonia places in noncommissioned officers has led to great respect among the NCO Corps. "He gives you guidance and then lets you do your job. He lets the individual work issues and solve problems. He understands and reinforces the vital role of the NCO and gives the command team the authority and ability to do its job, and holds them accountable."

Retired Missouri Army National Guard Staff Sergeant Jeff Barton has been friends with Zerbonia since they competed together on the Mark Twain High School football team. Zerbonia, Phillips and Barton enlisted in the Missouri Army National Guard together, all as Military Police. "I think coming up as an enlisted Soldier before ROTC helped shape him as a leader. He's always been a Soldier's leader - just an all-around great guy," Barton said. "He's honest and forthright. He's a special person and officer."

Zerbonia served with the Military Police from 1983 and commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1986 after completing the Reserve Officer Training Corps program at Northeast Missouri State University. In 1988, General Zerbonia

transferred to the active Army as an air defense artillery officer. He joined the Illinois National Guard in 1991 as the assistant air defense coordination officer with the 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery Regiment.

“He just has this blue-collar work ethic. None of it is phony. He is genuine. He gets it and the Soldiers trust him, even when he has to make unpopular decisions.”

With the 1st Battalion, 202nd ADA he worked with Command Sergeant Major Robert Haverback. “From the start, you got the sense that this officer was the real deal and you would follow him anywhere. He also asked for advice from the junior to senior NCOs that were on the ground. His judgement was spot on and you knew he would always look out for all,” Haverback said. In the ADA, Zerbonia worked his way up from a battery commander to a staff officer and then to battalion commander. “He was also smart by surrounding himself with good junior officers. We always worked hard, but then would take the uniform off and go socialize. Many good decisions are made around a table,” Haverback added.

Zerbonia served under now retired Colonel Rick Todas in what was then the Illinois Army National Guard’s 66th Infantry Brigade. “He did the jobs he didn’t want to do very well,” Todas said. “Anyone can do well with the jobs they enjoy doing, but when you don’t want to do a certain job and still do it well and do it enthusiastically – that’s a test of character.” Zerbonia was one of those high-character

officers, Todas said.

He also said that Zerbonia had a great sense of humor, which he attributed to his many years as an Illinois State Police trooper. “Those guys need to have a good sense of humor or

they can’t do that job for very long.” Zerbonia became an Illinois State Police trooper in 1987 and retired from the state police in 2015 as the Colonel of Operations just before becoming the Illinois National Guard’s Assistant Adjutant General – Army.



Retired First Sergeant Lloyd Anderson worked with then-First Lieutenant Zerbonia in Battery B of the 202nd Air Defense Artillery in the early 1990s. “He would report for drill after working the third shift with the Illinois State Police in Chicago the night before, and we’d go right into the field. We bivouacked his first drill with the unit – we were out in the field almost every weekend. I remember one drill he had worked some murders the night before. That had to be tough, but you would never know it. The Soldiers really liked him. He was a heck of a leader – led from the front. You just knew there wasn’t anything he couldn’t handle. He listened to the NCOs and let them do their jobs.”

Anderson remembered Zerbonia studying for the Illinois State Police sergeants’ exam



while in the field with his National Guard unit. "He was dedicated."

Retired Colonel Tracy Nelson served as brigade commander when Zerbonia commanded the 244th Army Liaison Team. "He was not one to shrink away. Troops really loved him. He worked

hard to stay engaged and to stay 'in the know.' That is harder for (traditional Guard Soldiers) – to assimilate, but he engaged people both inside the Guard and outside. He got to know people across the spectrum."

Zerbonia said he values the relationships he has built. "That is the biggest job as a leader – to go and talk to and to learn from Soldiers. If you are relatable, then if they have issues they are not scared to talk to you. Then you can act for the benefit of the organization and for the benefit of the Soldier."

Many of those relationships have crossed international borders. Both of Zerbonia's combat tours, to Iraq and to Afghanistan, were as a U.S. officer serving with the Polish military. From May 2005 until May 2006, Zerbonia served as an intelligence officer under Multi-National Division - Center South in Iraq, which was led by the Polish military.

He deployed to Afghanistan from October 2012 until May 2013 as the commander of the Bilateral Embedded Staff Team A10 and as the deputy brigade commander for the Polish 12th Mechanized Brigade. He has traveled to Poland multiple



times through the years as part of the Illinois National Guard's State Partnership Program with the Polish military.

"The relationships with the Polish have been very special. Some of those Polish officers I met earlier in their careers are three and four-star generals now. The

partnership with the Polish has done great things for the Illinois National Guard and our Polish friends," Zerbonia said.

The troops loved Zerbonia because he was genuine and down-to-earth, Barton said. He grew up in the small blue-collar community of New London, Missouri, with a population of about 1,000. His father, Michael Sr., was a plumber and chemical worker with American Cyanamid for 30 years. His mother, Jeanne, worked for the Hannibal, Missouri, Courier-Post newspaper. "His mom was always doing something," Phillips said.

The general was born the oldest of three boys and one of his brothers, Tony, would follow him into the military. Tony is now a sergeant major in the Missouri National Guard. However, when Zerbonia first enlisted in the Army with Phillips and Barton, his father was not pleased. "I think his father told him that enlisting was the stupidest thing he could've done. But his dad



came around. In fact, he told me he 'sure was wrong on that,'" Phillips said. By the time Michael Zerbonia Sr. died on Veterans Day last year, he was very proud of his eldest son and

very happy that Michael Jr. joined the Army.

General Zerbonia would make mistakes too, although rarely, Behary said. "When he makes a mistake, he admits it - puts some perspective on it - and moves on. He never acts entitled. He just has this blue-collar work ethic. None of it is phony. He is genuine. He gets it and the Soldiers trust him, even when he has to make unpopular decisions."

Being a leader sometimes means making a decision that benefits the organization, but might hurt some individuals, Zerbonia said. "Being the boss means pissing people off - even if you have a great relationship." The best way to approach it is just to be straightforward and honest, he added.

Playing football for a small high school competing against much larger schools meant losing quite a bit, Phillips said. "I think we only won five games, but Mike persisted. He

wouldn't get down on himself and he wouldn't

let his teammates get down on themselves either. He just kept doing his best and pushing his teammates to do their best. Mike has been like that throughout his life."

'General Z' said his proudest accomplishment is the Illinois Army National Guard team. "What makes the U.S. Army the greatest - our one big advantage - is that we let our young NCOs use their ingenuity and make decisions and that's what sets us apart from every other army in the world. At the state-level, we have assembled one of the best staffs that work together on problems and identify and implement solutions - most of which come from the field. We've got very capable and extraordinary brigade and battalion command teams and I trust them implicitly to continue our success into the future."





Joint Flight Ops

B Co. 238th AVN participates in joint exercise at Scott AFB

By Airman 1st Class Mark Sulaica, 375th Air Mobility Wing Public Affairs



Company B, 2-238th Aviation, General Support Aviation Battalion and Airmen from the 375th Air Mobility Wing Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron and 375th Medical Group held a joint training exercise on Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, June 10, 2021. The joint exercise was a rare opportunity to show Airmen how to evacuate patients on an unfamiliar aircraft.



ILARNG unit cooks up win in Army Food Service competition

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –Army Culinary Specialists with Company D, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, based in Galva, Illinois, have cooked up a win in the Department of the Army’s 53rd annual Philip A. Connelly Award for Excellence in Army Food Service in the National Guard Field Kitchen category.

“I’d like to congratulate Staff Sergeant Andrew Trigg and the field feeding section. You all blew it away,” said Capt. Michael Kamys, of Elmhurst, Illinois, who was the commander of Company D during the award period. “I am very proud of each of you. I just can’t say enough about your accomplishments.”

Company D competed in the national competition after advancing through the regional competition in August. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the unit set up and competed in the national competition at Marseilles Training Center in November.

They competed against National Guard units from six other regions across the country and were evaluated in several categories that ranged from field food safety to food preparation and quality.

Kamys said the win is about teamwork.

“It takes a team to win the Connelly Award. Many members of Company D had a hand in winning this competition,” he said.

The awards were presented virtually July 22 and unit leaders joined online to congratulate the Soldiers on a job well done.

“Congratulations to Company D for your efforts,” said Col. Michael Eastridge, Commander, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. “I’m proud of your accomplishments. I know you had a great time participating in the award competition. We are looking forward to next year and winning this award again.”

Each category winner will receive the Philip A. Connelly trophy for their respective category. This is not the first Philip A. Connelly Award for the Illinois National Guard.

Established in 1968, the Connelly program aims to recognize excellence in Army food service and is named for the late Phillip A. Connelly, a leader in food service management.

He worked diligently throughout his life to promote professionalism in food service, in both the civilian industry and military services.

The Phillip A. Connelly award is co-sponsored by National Restaurant Association (NRA) / National Restaurant Association Education Foundation (NRAEF) and the Department of the Army.

Company D, 634th BSB, traces its lineage to Company D, 17th Illinois Volunteer Infantry which served in the Civil War from 1861-1864. From 1865 to 1937, no National Guard presence existed in Galva until Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment was formed. Since 1953, the Galva Armory has been home to

infantry, field artillery, transportation, air defense and chemical units.



Open Range

New Range Opens at MTC

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs



The Illinois National Guard (ILNG) hosted federal, state and local leaders to officially dedicate the upgraded Automated Record Fire (ARF) Range at the Marseilles Training Center (MTC) in Marseilles, Illinois, July 23.

“For nearly 20 years, the Marseilles Training Center has been a critical asset supporting our mobilizing units, and also supporting the readiness of the whole Illinois National Guard,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “The upgrades we’re unveiling here today will ensure a constant state of readiness for decades into the future.”

The upgraded ARF Range doubles the number of Soldiers and Airmen who can qualify in a day, not only supporting unit and individual readiness, but supporting the local community as MTC hosts the Boy Scouts, ROTC events, Navy cadet activities and local and federal law enforcement agencies for training.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

June

4 1903: President Theodore Roosevelt dedicates the Springfield Armory



In what marked his third visit to Springfield, President Roosevelt dedicated the old state armory at Second and Monroe Streets in Springfield before 8,000 spectators. In his remarks he stated, "It is a good thing for us, by speech, to pay homage to the memory of Abraham Lincoln, but it is an infinitely better thing for us in our lives to pay homage to his memory in the only way in which that homage can effectively be paid, by seeing to it that this republic's life, social and political, civic and industrial, is shaped now in accordance with the ideals which Lincoln preached, and which all his long life he practiced." Roosevelt had previously been to Camp Lincoln in 1901, for a dinner as Vice President. Within fifteen days of this visit, President McKinley would be assassinated, and Roosevelt would assume the office of President of the United States. Fire destroyed the building in 1934.



5 1917: Riot at Joliet Prison

On June 5 a riot began at the old prison in Joliet, Illinois. The warden called for help from the 131st Infantry to retake control of the prison and restore order. Company G under the command of Major Clinnin responded to the call, and restored order without any loss of life.

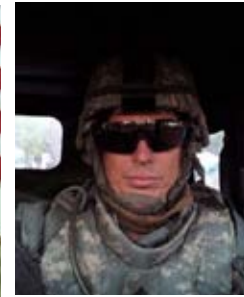


6 2005: Sgt. Brian Romines

Brian Romines, 20, of Simpson, Illinois, was killed in action when an improvised explosive device detonated near the vehicle he was travelling in near Baghdad, Iraq. Romines was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment based in Milan, Illinois.

6 Woodford earns Medal of Honor

1945: Staff Sergeant Howard E. Woodford of Company I, 130th Infantry, made his way through the jungle on the Philippine island of Luzon to link up with an inexperienced guerilla force attached to his own unit. Finding them under heavy fire and taking many casualties, he sprang into action. He assumed command and evacuated the wounded. During the firefight he reorganized the unit, and led them to a nearby hilltop which afforded a better defensive position. He chose to remain with the men through the night. The decision sealed his fate. The Japanese counterattacked before dawn, and while they failed to rout the now battle tested unit they managed to kill Woodford. He did not go quietly, as he took thirty enemy combatants with him. For his profound leadership, he posthumously received the Medal of Honor.



19 Staff Sgt. Joshua A. Melton and Staff Sgt. Paul G. Smith

2009: Staff

Sgt. Joshua A. Melton, 26, of Carlyle, Illinois, and Staff Sgt. Paul G. Smith, 43, of East Peoria, Illinois both died of wounds sustained when their vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Melton was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, Marion, Illinois and Smith was assigned to 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry, Aurora, Illinois.

30 George Rogers Clark arrives in Illinois

1778: Col. George Rogers Clark, the famed militia leader of the Revolutionary War, crossed the Ohio River into southern Illinois. He and 175 Soldiers established a base of operations at Fort Massac. He had orders from Virginia to destroy British forts in the state used to supply weapons and provisions to the loyalists to the Crown and effectively isolating the British within the state. Clark planned to lead a force from Massac to attack Fort Kaskaskia on the Mississippi.

July

1 Aviation emerged in the ILNG

The largest and oldest of the three Illinois Air National Guard units, the 126th Air Refueling Wing, traces its history and lineage back to 1927 when the 108th Observation Squadron, 33rd Division Aviation, Illinois National Guard organized at the 131st Infantry Armory at 16th Street and Michigan Avenue. On July 1, 1927, the unit obtained federal recognition and received its first aircraft, PT-1's, during its first encampment later that year at Camp Grant, near Rockford, Illinois. The unit had an initial compliment of 16 officers and 74 enlisted men from among the hundreds of World War I veterans in Chicago.



6



Camp Lincoln officially established

1886: Illinois Adjutant General J.W. Vance, on orders from Illinois Governor Richard Oglesby, established Camp Lincoln in Springfield through General Order Number 14. It read: "The permanent camp and rifle range established for the Illinois National Guard, near Springfield, is hereby designated and will be known as Camp Lincoln." Since 1886 Camp Lincoln has served as the state headquarters for the Illinois National Guard, and provided troops for all major American military operations, as well as for assistance in cases of state emergency.

6

Sgt. Chester Hosford and 1st Lt. Derwin Williams



2009: Sgt. Chester Hosford, 35, of Ottawa, Illinois, and 1st Lt. Derwin Williams, 41, of Glenwood, Illinois, died of wounds suffered when the vehicle they were travelling in encountered an improvised explosive device in Khanabad, Afghanistan. Both Soldiers were assigned to Troop B, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, based in Dixon, Illinois.

7

Sgt Christopher Talbert



2009: Sgt. Christopher Talbert, 24, of Galesburg, Illinois, died of wounds suffered when the vehicle he was travelling in encountered an improvised explosive device in Shindad, Afghanistan. Talbert was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Dixon, Illinois.

29

Sgt. Gerrick Smith

2009: Sgt. Gerrick Smith, 19 of Sullivan, Illinois, died as a result of non-combat related injuries while in Heart, Afghanistan. Smith was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment based in Marion, Illinois.



31

Lincoln appoints Grant as commander of Illinois Volunteers

1861: Colonel Ulysses S. Grant of the 21st Illinois Volunteer Infantry received word from Washington that President Lincoln had promoted him to command all Illinois volunteers. With the appointment came a promotion to brigadier general. Grant picked Cairo, Illinois to serve as his base of operations.

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