Mississippians serving Mississippians

By MAJ. DEIDRE MUSGRAVE
Camp Shelby Public Affairs

What does it mean to serve? For some it is fulfilling the initial obligation of military service while others strive for retirement from military service. Then there are those who continue serving well beyond retirement without compensation, just because they have a desire to achieve a greater good.

The attitude of Mississippians serving Mississippians is what you will find when you meet a member of the Mississippi State Guard. This group of dedicated professionals come from a various background of occupational specialties, branches of service and for some members, no military service at all.

The Mississippi State Guard is an all volunteer organization that is a part of the Mississippi Military Department. The organization has no federal mission, being responsible only to the governor of our great state and the orders of the Adjutant General of Mississippi. The Mississippi State Guard is to the Mississippi National Guard what our National Guard is to the United States Army.

"We are Mississippians helping fellow Mississippians. We are volunteers. We get paid only when called into service. It is what you do to help your fellow man in Mississippi," said Col. Keith Reeves, commander of the MS State Guard 3rd Security Brigade, which is headquarted at Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center.



Maj. Deidre Musgrave/Camp Shelby Public Affairs

SERVICE... The 3rd Brigade welcomed their newest member, Pvt. Patricia Elam of Petal, during their drill on Dec. 11 at Camp Shelby. Commander Col. Keith Reeves of Brookhaven initiated the Oath of Office Ceremony for Elam.

Reeves is a resident of Brookhaven and is proud to serve in the MS State Guard.

The mission of the MS State Guard is to replace Mississippi National Guard members in the event their units would become mobilized. MS State Guard members would become custodians of vacated armories, military facilities and equipment left behind by departing units.

The 3rd Security Brigade meets once a month for one day of training and four days for annual training. The unit focuses their training for support during natural and man-made disaster relief operations, shelter operation assistance and security assistance. Members are trained and proficient in civil defense, homeland defense and search and rescue operations.

The unit is highly trained in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) operations. Members of the 3rd Brigade exercised their skills in conjunction with FEMA during operations surrounding Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Hurricane Gustav in 2008.

"We worked mostly in shelters. Many agencies commented on our professionalism," said Biloxi native Maj. Mark Eckman, operations officer for the 3rd Brigade.

The professional contributions during the trying times of Katrina and Gustav motivated the recruitment of Lt. Col. Mary Miller of Gulfport.

"I was with a reserve component during Katrina and wanted to stay in this area to help and to serve," said Miller who served in the Army Reserves for 12 years as a Medical Doctor and is now continuing her education in Criminal Justice at the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. Miller is 72 years 'young' and has served in the MS State Guard since January 2006. "The most impressive part is a true volunteer service member. People make their own way and we make it work," said Miller.

Recruitment isn't only for members after retirement. The 3rd Brigade welcomed their newest member, Pvt. Patricia Elam of Petal, during their drill on Dec. 11 at Camp Shelby.

Elam was working at the Military Clothing and Sales store at CSJFTC when she met the MS State Guard Commander Col. Reeves. She inquired about the different uniform and what he did at CSJFTC. Reeves explained what the MS State Guard was all about and the great service that they provide.

Elam said that she felt a strong conviction to join and to serve.

Upon completion of her application and background check it was only a short amount of time until Elam received her acceptance letter and invitation to the December drill. Elam's husband, Staff Sgt. Prescott Elam, works at CSJFTC for the director of logistics as a bay leader.

"She seemed determined so I might as well support her," said Prescott Elam on his wife's decision to join the MS State Guard.

Staff Sgt. Elam and his wife have five children; Jamie Wallace 26, Jerrica Blount 22, Britney Elam 20, Kayla Clark 20 and Shelby Elam 18.

The MS State Guard is recruiting new members. Men and women ages 18 to 70 that have a genuine desire to serve are welcome to inquire. Prior military service is not required. Receive more information about the State Guard by emailing Sgt. Maj. Carolyn Parker at cpark049@aol.com.

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