

# *The* KEYSTONE

Fall-Winter 2013

## **252nd Engineers**

**- A look at deployment training  
at Fort Indiantown Gap from  
start to finish**

## **728th CSSB**

**- Command Sgt. Maj. Hentz  
assumes responsibility**

## **Lithuania + PAARNC**

**- Continuing a partnership**



A SUPPLEMENT PRODUCED BY THE 109TH MPAD FOR THE 213TH RSG



## Featured Journalists



### Staff Sgt. Coltin Heller

Staff Sgt. Heller has served the PA Guard as photojournalist with the 109th MPAD since his enlistment in 2006. He deployed with the MPAD in 2010 in

support of Operation New Dawn, where he traveled Northern Iraq to gather the Soldier's stories. He is a recent graduate of the Basic Multimedia Illustrator course offered at the Defense Information School located on Ft. Meade, Md.

### Staff Sgt. HollyAnn Nicom



Staff Sgt. Nicom joined the PA National Guard in October 2001 as a Transportation Specialist, an MOS she held during her deployment in 2003 with the 131st Transportation Company, running line haul missions from Kuwait to Iraq. After another deployment and over a decade in transportation, she recently joined the 109th MPAD to become a photojournalist.

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## The KEYSTONE

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# 252nd Soldiers complete training at FTIG

Staff Sgt. Coltin Heller  
109th MPAD

**FORT INDIANTOWN GAP, Pa.** – When hearing of Soldiers readying for an upcoming deployment, many think of the near endless days and time spent in the field. However, more than field training goes into preparing Soldiers for long months spent abroad.

For deploying National Guard Soldiers, deploying means more than just that; it means leaving behind civilians jobs, family and an entire way of life.

To prepare for the transition and eventual deployment, Soldiers assigned to the 252nd Engineer Company, 103rd Engineer Battalion, 213th Regional Support Group, Pennsylvania Army National Guard conducted a myriad of training in support of their scheduled deployment.

Their time spent at Fort Indiantown Gap comprised of several types of field training, preparing them for contingencies the Soldiers may face while in a deployed environment, in addition to several informative briefings to mentally prepare the Soldiers for life overseas.

“It’s a wake up call after you get into it,” said Sgt. Chad Monferdini, a heavy equipment operator with the 252nd Eng. Co. who will be



U.S. Army National Guard Photo By Staff Sgt. Coltin Heller, 109th MPAD

Soldiers with the 252nd Engineer Company, 103rd Engineer Battalion, 213th Regional Support Group, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, pull security during an individual movement technique training course, Nov. 10, 2013. The 252nd Soldiers used the training to build bonds and unit cohesion between Soldiers organic to the 252nd Eng. Co. and Soldiers from companies across the state, who bolstered the units’ ranks for the deployment.

going on his fourth deployment.

The 252nd Soldiers, supported by Soldiers assigned to the 103rd Forward Support Company, 103rd Eng. Bn., and other Pennsylvania Guard assets, conducted several training lanes providing first time and refresher training to others.

Monferdini, who went through a “train-the-trainer” course offered by the Pre-mobilization Training Assistance Element, took the helm on the lanes training the Soldiers in their common tasks.

“They trained me on how to train my fellow Soldiers,” said Monferdini, speaking about the PTAE. “Pretty much any of the classes we had that were mandatory, I was either the primary or secondary instructor for the lanes.”

For Monferdini, a native of Portage, Pa., and veteran on his fourth deployment, the training provided a refresher, while for Private 1st Class Bradley Armstrong, who just passed his one year mark in the Army at the beginning of training, the two-week period gave him a base of knowledge needed in a deployed environment.

“The training gave you the basic foundation of everything to slowly stack and get your muscle memory for things, such as the IED training, how to determine what an IED is, your stand off distances and your perimeter,” said Armstrong, a heavy vehicle mechanic.

In addition to IED training, 252nd Soldiers conducted various

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# *CSM Hentz assumes responsibility*

Command Sgt. Maj. Scott M. Hentz assumed responsibility for the 728th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 213th Regional Support Group, Pennsylvania Army National Guard from Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony F. Mainiero during a ceremony held in the Phoenixville, Pa. armory Dec. 7, 2013. "Enlisted leadership is always there and because they are always there, Soldiers expect more from us. They expect us to understand them, to help them, suffer with them and if necessary to live or die with them in combat," said Hentz, who calls Myerstown, Pa., home. "Those [non-commissioned officers] who consider themselves a success should never forget that they are a product of Soldiers with whom they have served. I look forward to serving with all of you and am proud to be your Command Sergeant Major." ▼



Photos by Staff Sgt. HollyAnn Nicom, 109th MPAD

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types of field training from land navigation, movement techniques, low-visibility driving with night vision equipment to the standard weapon qualification training.

Instructors did their best to make the training as realistic as possible. During the Combat Lifesaver Course, the Soldiers went through the Medical Battalion Training Site, where they first learned types of injuries and ways to treat them, before putting their knowledge to the test by evacuating two simulated casualties amid sight obscuring smoke and the sounds of gunfire and explosions.

The individual movement techniques and IED lanes also simulated battle, as the Soldiers were fired upon by Soldiers posing as opposition forces, had simulated incoming fire and casualties, tying in previously learned training.

"Things got hectic when we did the training, and even more so when you have [opposition forces] shooting at you, but our training helped us stay focused and on track and enabled us to complete our missions while out on the lanes," said Armstrong.

The training also acted as a team builder for all Soldiers in the 252nd Eng. Co. as not all the Soldiers were organic to the unit.

"Seventy-five percent are engineers from Johnstown," said Capt. Joshua Kupchella,



U.S. Army National Guard Photo By Staff Sgt. Coltin Heller, 109th MPAD

**Spc. James Grisham and Spc. David Messing both heavy equipment operators assigned to the 252nd Engineer Company, 103rd Engineer Battalion, 213th Regional Support Group, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, grapple for a dominant position during Modern Army Combatives training, Nov. 08, 2013. The Soldiers were instructed on basic combative skills and other individual skills for their upcoming deployment early next year.**

commander for the 252nd Eng. Co. "We have backfills and supernumeraries from companies throughout the state."

Soldier who act as backfill and supernumeraries fill the ranks of deploying units and train with them in the event of injuries, illness or other factors that would prevent Soldiers from deploying, this way the unit remains at full strength. For units to be effective, these Soldiers must integrate with unit and build strong bonds. Training is one way this is accomplished.

"We're building that team together with these guys, some have been working with us since the summer and others joined us here just last month. It's been a lot of a team building aspect with

this training," said Kupchella, who hails from Strongstown, Pa.

In order to keep the National Guard on the cutting edge, training must evolve and adapt, with new training models and aides being required. The Pennsylvania Army National Guard, taking this concern in mind, as well as the concern of it's citizen-Soldiers not being away from their homes longer than need be, created the pre-mobilization training platform at Fort Indiantown Gap.

Monferdini says the training is new compared to the training he received prior to his last deployment.

"It's pretty different. The only other time I did something like

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# *Lithuanian officials continue partnership with Pennsylvania National Guard*

Sgt. Matthew Keeler  
109th MPAD

**FORT INDIANTOWN GAP, Pa.** — Lithuanian diplomats and other dignitaries visited the Pennsylvania State Capitol in Harrisburg, Sept. 15, 2013, as part of the partnership between Lithuania and the Pennsylvania National Guard.

“As, and on behalf of all Pennsylvanians, I am pleased to welcome you to the commonwealth and to honor you for your service,” read

the proclamation from Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett to the speaker of the Lithuanian parliament, the honorable Vydas Gedvilas. “Please accept my best wishes for success in all your future endeavors.”

Lithuania and Pennsylvania have worked together for more than 20 years after their partnership was established April 27, 1993, under the National Guard Bureau’s State Partnership Program, said Capt. Teresa Ruotolo, State Partnership



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Matthew Keeler, 109th MPAD

Pennsylvania Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Wesley E. Craig shakes the hand of Vydas Gedvilas, Speaker of the Lithuanian parliament; before receiving an award from the speaker commemorating the continued partnership between the Pennsylvania National Guard and Lithuania at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., Sept. 15, 2013. The partnership between the Pennsylvania National Guard and Lithuania was established more than 20 years ago under the National Guard Bureau’s State Partnership Program.

Program Director for the Pennsylvania National Guard. Since the partnership began, over 500 exchanges have taken place between the

Pennsylvania National Guard and Lithuania.

Speaker Gedvilas was accompanied on his visit to Harrisburg by Lithuanian Ambassador to the U.S. Zygimantas Pavilionis along with other key dignitaries involved with Lithuania’s political and

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U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Matthew Keeler, 109th MPAD

Staff Sgt. Julian Dennis, an infantryman with the 56th Stryker Brigade, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, teaches Zygimantas Pavilionis, Lithuanian Ambassador to the U.S., the functions and firing techniques of an M4 rifle at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., Sept. 15, 2013. Pavilionis was joined by Vydas Gedvilas, Speaker of the Lithuanian parliament, and other dignitaries during a visit to the Pennsylvania State Capitol in Harrisburg and the Pennsylvania National Guard’s headquarters at Fort Indiantown Gap. The instruction on the M4 rifle was part of a weapon simulator tour given to the dignitaries.



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Matthew Keeler, 109th MPAD

**Col. Marc Ferraro, chief of the joint staff, Pennsylvania National Guard, introduces the different aspects of the Pennsylvania National Guard to the Lithuanian dignitaries during their visit to Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., Sept. 15, 2013. The presentation explained the different capabilities the Air and Army Guard components offer the commonwealth.**

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congressional affairs.

"The Pennsylvania National Guard are wonderful reliable people," said Pavilionis. "Every soldier that I've met in Lithuanian knows [the Pennsylvania National Guard]. They appreciate your experience and your partnership."

Pavilionis also discussed the importance of those not only cross-training between the two countries, but the development and connection of those Lithuanians who immigrated to the United States.

"Lithuanian Americans have been here since the 19th century," he said. "Some of them are even part of the National Guard and they have been telling stories and that is important; the

moral, spiritual, and also militaristic link that we have."

After visiting Harrisburg, the group ventured to the Pennsylvania National Guard's headquarters at Fort Indiantown Gap for a presentation on the different components of the Pennsylvania National Guard and their diverse capabilities. The briefing was given by Pennsylvania National Guard officers Col. Marc Ferraro, chief of the joint staff, and Col. Barry Lowen, director of the air staff.

During the briefing, Pennsylvania Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Wesley E. Craig mentioned the importance of training both active and reserve soldiers in preparation for national defense.

"The speaker and

I have been having a discussion on the cost of defense," said Craig. "Our country had a choice to put 21,000 more soldiers on full-time duty these past 12 years or use the National Guard when they needed us."

"We are a tremendous bargain for national defense and this is something that your country can consider between the mix of forces," said Craig.

Once the presentation was finished, Speaker Gedvilas presented Maj. Gen. Craig with an award for the work that he and the Pennsylvania National Guard have done to support Lithuania.

"I have the greatest respect for the National Guard," he said. "[They are] ready to stand with us."

Maj. Gen. Craig presented a Liberty Bell to Speaker Gedvilas, as a symbol of respect and liberty.

The day was not complete however as the Lithuanian dignitaries were then given a tour of Fort Indiantown Gap and the different types of training offered there that could be incorporated into their own forces. Different training opportunities like urban scenario training and weapon simulators were discussed and demonstrated.

During weapon

simulation training, the group was able to learn the monetary value of using simulators to prepare soldiers for live-fire range qualifications and weapon familiarization.

"During your mission you fired over 600 rounds," said Sgt. 1st Class Damon Hassinger, a simulators noncommissioned officer at Fort Indiantown Gap. "A single 5.56 round can cost about 60 cents. These simulators can save you a lot of money."

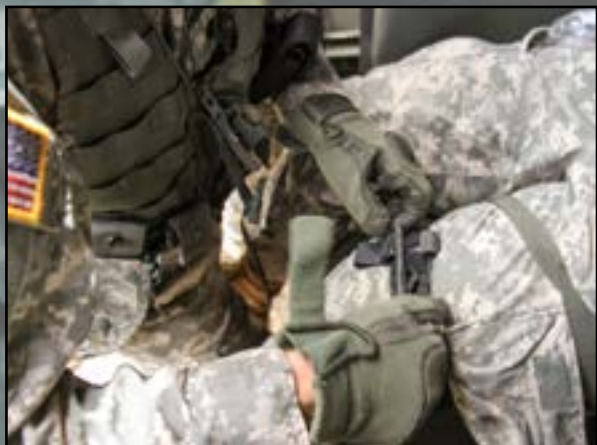
Not only do simulators save on the cost of ammunition and renting out ranges, but they're able to be controlled and measured, he said. Each scenario can be recorded and the playback can display where each simulated round went.

The simulators and tour of the base were the final leg of the day for the Lithuanian dignitaries, but Ambassador Pavilionis noted the need to continue such developments between Pennsylvania and his country.

"I think now we have to look to the future. We have been training together and working hard in Afghanistan and Iraq, but let's see now what we can figure out in 2014. We are really looking forward to new forms of cooperation," he said. ■



# 109TH MPAD





# GALLERY 2013





U.S. Army National Guard Photo By Staff Sgt. Coltin Heller, 109th MPAD

Soldiers with the 252nd Engineer Company, 103rd Engineer Battalion, 213th Regional Support Group, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, get ready for a low-visibility driving course by attaching night vision goggles to their helmets, Nov. 05, 2013. The Soldiers conducted various training lanes such as individual movement techniques, and land navigation in addition to driver training.

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this was in 2008. We came down to the Gap for a two-week operation. It was pretty much common task oriented.”

Monferdini went on to add, he only did training like this when at mobilization station, such as Fort Dix or Camp Shelby and the training is a valued refresher and looks forward to more specific training.

“If you already get some of the training out of the way and you already got a little understanding on it, it helps you a lot when you get to a mob station and hopefully we can get a lot of job oriented [military occupational specialty] training when we get there.

While Monferdini, who works

full time for Fort Indiantown Gap, knew the training capabilities, Armstrong and other new Soldiers got a glimpse into the up-to-date training facilities on post.

“I didn’t think they had all this judging by the look of the place,” said Armstrong speaking on the posts’ training areas. “But as you go from place to place, and room to room you see just how good it is. Everybody is knowledgeable, all the teachers are knowledgeable on what they are teaching you and the training areas are spot on.”

While most on the outside looking in at Army training see only the field craft, many more hours are spent in a classroom, first learning what must be done in the field in addition to knowledge

Soldiers must utilize at all times.

252nd were no exception to this rule, and endured day-long classes before movement into the field.

“Briefings? Oh, there were a bunch of them,” says Monferdini, laughing a bit.

“Of course we received briefings on all the lanes, IED awareness and counter-IED [operations], combat lifesaving, you know, pretty much everything we did had a classroom part first,” he added.

The briefings, however, did not just pertain to training in the field.

“We’ve done [judge advocate general] briefs, those were good as they informed us of our legal options we have when we’re overseas, like who we can put in charge of paying our bills while we’re gone,” said Armstrong.

For first time deploying Soldiers, the briefings provide insight and options they didn’t know they had, as well as preparing them to interact with those from a vastly different culture.

“I only knew about their culture from what I saw on TV, said Armstrong. “I thought I knew enough about the people over there to get along. The cultural awareness training taught me more, really opened my eyes to the culture they have over there.”

Even still, for the individual Soldier, more goes into the preparing for a deployment than

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training and briefings. Each Soldier has to mentally prepare for the time away from friends and loved ones and prepare to have their interest at home seen to while they are gone.

"I work at a metal refinery, making forgings for steel and power plants," said Armstrong, when asked about his civilian employment. "A lot of those guys are veterans, so when I go to them and say 'Hey, I'm getting deployed and would like your insight,' they would tell me what they knew. A lot of them went through Iraqi Freedom, and they give me insights on what they went through and how I can mentally prepare for it."

Deployments have become somewhat of a routine for Monferdini, who says while you can talk to people about it, being there is the only thing that can get you in the mindset of a deployment.

"I think it's one of the most simplest forms of life, you just eat and do your job. I think you have to be a different person to be able to deploy," he said. Some days are bad. Some days are good.

Everybody is your battle buddy and I think the closer you are with them the better."

In order for Soldier's to stay focused while in the field, they must know their affairs at home are taken care of, something both the veteran Monferdini and Armstrong have a handle on.

"When I was at basic, if I needed money, my parents would gladly lend me money, or put money in my account. My sister kept ahead of my bills and it was easy sailing from there. And since that method wasn't broke, I'm going to go with that while I'm gone," said Armstrong.

Monferdini also, until recently, employed his family to oversee his finances.

For the first three deployments it was pretty much my mother," said Monferdini about who handled his finances. "But the online stuff is getting better now, so you can pay a good bit of your bills online, balance your checkbook, stuff like that."

Not only do the Soldier have prepare themselves and their assets, but also the families who will have

the home fires burning and waiting for their return. For this, units have a Family Readiness Group which provides counseling to Soldiers families and a support network as well.

"We have a pretty well developed FRG at the company," said Kupchella, who's wife is the president of his units' FRG. "We've been working on it for the past year with getting events together, such as family picnics, getting speakers to come in brief the families, to try and get the families ready.

With all the pieces coming together, the Soldiers of the 252nd Eng. Co. will be successful in their upcoming deployment, where they will assist in the removal of forward operating bases during their deployment early next year, thanks in part to their training, both indoors and out at Fort Indiantown Gap.

"The experience here has been great. I'm glad something like this was put into place so that way new guys like me, the future leaders have that good base that we can pass on to the next generation of Soldiers." ▀



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