

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

# PRAIRIE SENTINEL

VOLUME 10



BACK HOME:  
33RD IBCT RETURNS FROM  
DEPLOYMENT TO UKRAINE

SPRING 2021



# ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

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# Take it From the Top:

## *Senior Leader's Corner*

### **To the Illinois Army National Guard: Thank you for 38 years!**

After 38 years of service, I retire from the Illinois Army National Guard later this summer. I end my full time duties 31 May 2021 and retire completely 31 July 2021.

It has been an honor to serve both with and for you as your commander over the last six years. During my time, the officers, NCOs and Soldiers of the Illinois Army National Guard have consistently demonstrated they are the best this country has to offer.

Throughout overseas deployments, major training exercises and multiple state active duty missions, it is clear to all the Illinois Army National Guard will succeed when our nation and the citizens of Illinois need them! The men and women of the Illinois Army National Guard are the ones who make this happen, not Mike Zerbonia.

My plan is to visit as many units and training events as possible over the next couple of months. What I will miss the most at the end of this is being out with Soldiers, interacting, teaching, learning and getting to know many of you on a personal level.

Words cannot express the level of pride and admiration I have for all of you and how grateful I am to have served beside you. I want to thank every one of you for the hard work, commitment and dedication to the mission of the Illinois Army National Guard!

MICHAEL R. ZERBONIA  
Major General, ILARNG  
Commanding





## Air Force Museum exhibit features DoD's first woman sniper, an Illinois Air National Guard captain

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Illinois Air National Guard (ILANG) Capt. Jennifer Weitekamp, of Athens, Illinois, did not set out to be a trailblazer with her military service, but when then-Senior Airman Jennifer Donaldson graduated from the Air National Guard's pilot Counter Sniper School on April 14, 2001, she

scared and nervous. But I kept telling myself I could do it so others could attend."

Weitekamp, a lifelong resident of Illinois, joined the ILANG as a member of the security force squadron while still in high school and attended basic training the summer after graduation. During her six years in security

forces, she spent nearly three years on active duty, deploying several times in support of Operations Noble Eagle and Enduring Freedom. She later earned a Bachelor's Degree in psychology and a Master's of Education from the University of Illinois.

Weitekamp said she chose security forces because she wanted a civilian law enforcement career. However, her devotion to service, as well as the growth of her family led her to working full-time for the Air National Guard.

"I wanted to be a law enforcement officer," Weitekamp said. "I decided the military was the best way to get my foot in the door."

Following a stint as a paralegal, she started work

in personnel. It was working in this role for the 183rd Air Operations Group that Weitekamp applied for and earned her commission as a second lieutenant. She now works as a personnel officer for the Joint Staff at Illinois' Joint Force Headquarters on Camp Lincoln, in Springfield, Illinois.

While her accomplishment two decades before may seem all but forgotten, the 'Women in the



became just that – a trailblazer for military women.

"The Counter Sniper school sounded like a lot of fun, a 'cool school'," said Weitekamp, who became the first woman to complete a U.S. military sniper school – the first woman sniper in the Department of Defense. "It was a very challenging course, not fun, but I learned a lot. There were days I wanted to go home. I was

Air Force' exhibit at the National Museum of the Air Force, located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, near Dayton, Ohio, ensures others know her two-decades-old feat.

The exhibit, titled 'Women in the Air Force: From Yesterday into Tomorrow,' highlights Weitekamp's and others' achievements in their civilian and military careers with an emphasis

on the U.S. Air Force. It opened March 5 as part of Women's History Month.

According to Weitekamp, who attended the exhibit's opening, the display is sprinkled throughout the museum, so visitors can view the different timelines and achievements covered by the exhibit as they walk through the museum.

"Each person honored on the exhibit was invited to attend the opening," she said. "It was surreal to see myself on an exhibit."

Weitekamp said military service is what one makes of it.

"I would urge anyone thinking of military service to know what you want from your service," she said. "I've benefited from several mentors and without those leaders, I wouldn't have been able to do half of what I've accomplished. Someone has your back and I would urge you to be that person for others."

According to museum Curator Jennifer Blankinship, telling the story of what women in the Air Force have overcome and their contributions to support the mission is a significant chapter in Air Force history, and by expanding the museum's exhibits to better represent the role of women, the museum is able to better highlight how vital the contributions of each Airman is to the future of the Air Force.

"Courageous women have broken barriers in all walks of life and those in the Air Force are certainly no different," said Blankinship. "It has always been important for us to tell the story of what women in the Air Force have accomplished, and it is my hope that this exhibit will inspire future generations to pursue their goals regardless of how difficult it might seem."

Weitekamp is an active member of the National Guard Association of the United States, the National Guard Association of Illinois, Menard County Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6871 in Petersburg, Illinois, the local blood bank and her church. She and her husband John have three children. 🇺🇸





# Rising Star



## Geneva Soldier promoted to brigadier general

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

Photos by Staff Sgt. Katie Grandori and Spc. Kyle Paneto, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – A combat veteran known for bringing about positive change in his military assignments and within civilian employers will be the Illinois National Guard's next general.



Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard has appointed Colonel Justin

Osberg of Geneva, Illinois, as Deputy Assistant Adjutant General of the Illinois Army National Guard. Osberg will be promoted to Brigadier General. He will serve as the deputy to Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, the Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard.

"Throughout both my military and civilian careers, I have helped organizations examine changes in the strategic environment and effectively adapt," Osberg said. "I'm grateful for this opportunity to help guide the Illinois Army National Guard through what promises to be major changes in the U.S. Army and the U.S. Department of Defense as we face new national defense challenges."

In his civilian career, Osberg is a senior manager for Clerestory Consulting where he is responsible for consulting company executives in the area of change management. In the military, Osberg has served on three combat tours; twice to Iraq and once to Afghanistan.



Last year he led “Chicago’s Own” 108th Sustainment Brigade’s Advise, Assist and Enable mission in Taji, Iraq. The unit earned the prestigious U.S. Secretary of Defense Maintenance Award for Sustainment Train, Advise, and Assist of Foreign Military Forces for assisting the Iraqi military in transforming its logistics capabilities.

“The Illinois National Guard needs to continue to innovate and evolve, and Justin will help us as an organization bring about that positive change,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “He is the right officer at the right time to take on the responsibilities of the Illinois Army National Guard’s Deputy Assistant Adjutant General.”



“Justin has had tremendous success with multiple challenging assignments throughout his military career and I’m proud to have him by my side as we move forward into a new era for the Illinois Army National Guard,” said Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, the Assistant Adjutant

General – Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard.

In 2012, Osberg served as the logistics officer for Task Force White Eagle within the Polish 6th Airborne Brigade in Ghazni, Afghanistan, as part of the Illinois Army National Guard’s Bilateral Embedded Support Team A9. As part of this historic mission, he served both as a liaison officer between U.S. and Polish forces in Afghanistan and as a senior staff officer embedded in the Polish brigade.

In 2008, during the surge of U.S. forces in Iraq, Osberg served as a senior advisor to the 14th Division of the Iraqi Army as part of the Coalition Army Advisory Training Team within Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq in Shaibah, Iraq.

His most recent assignment was as the Illinois Army National Guard’s Civil-Military Operations Officer or “G-7.” Prior to this he served as the Commander of the Chicago-based 108th Sustainment Brigade, after serving as the brigade’s logistics officer and then deputy commander. Previous to this, he served as first a plans officer and then the operations officer within the 108th Special Troops Battalion. He started his career as a commissioned officer first as a platoon leader and then as a battalion maintenance officer, company commander and the information management officer within the 133rd Signal Battalion.

Osberg started his military career in 1993 as an enlisted CH-47 “Chinook” helicopter mechanic with the National Guard’s 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment. He earned his commission as a second lieutenant in 1997 through the Illinois Army National Guard’s Officer Candidate School, branching as a Signal Corps officer.

Osberg has earned several awards including the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal (with Oak Leaf Cluster), Meritorious Service Medal, Polish Army Medal (Bronze), Army Commendation Medal (with Oak Leaf Cluster), and Army Achievement Medal.

He lives in Geneva, Illinois, with his wife, Jessica and has two daughters, Chloe and Ava, and a son, Evan.





# ***Shalom!***

## ***Rabbi (Cpt.) Aaron Melman sworn in as Illinois' newest Chaplain***

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – The Illinois Army National Guard (ILARNG) offered a hearty Shalom, hello, to the ILARNG's newest Chaplain, newly commissioned Capt. Rabbi Aaron Melman, of Northbrook, Illinois, the head rabbi at Congregation Beth Shalom (CBS) in Northbrook.

"I am still in awe," Melman said during his commissioning ceremony March 17 at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois. "I'm also excited with a bit of trepidation as I serve our state, country and God."

Chaplain (Col.) Stephen Foster, Illinois National Guard State Chaplain, welcomed

Melman to the Chaplain Corps during the ceremony.

"The Army has great confidence you will serve our troops and nurture their souls and just assist them to grow closer to God," Foster said. "We are so excited about what God is doing through you and the plans he has for you in the future. We're going to work together and do great things."

Melman thanked his wife, Elisa, who attended the ceremony virtually; son, Jordan and daughter Hannah, as well as his congregation at CBS for their support in his decision to serve.

Melman received a direct commission as a



captain in the Illinois Army National Guard and will attend the Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course later this year.

"I am incredibly honored and humbled as I begin this new adventure," Melman said to those gathered electronically. "Without your support, I wouldn't be able to serve in this capacity."

Melman's service as a student rabbi with the New York Fire Department in 2001 played a role in his ultimate decision to seek out information on serving in the military.

"I was at Ground Zero on September 12," Melman said. "As a student rabbi, I was able to provide a sense of comfort to the firefighters, first responders and others who were on site. That ability to provide even a little comfort to them pushed that piece of me who wanted to serve. It ultimately propelled me to this day."

Melman, a native of Toronto, Ontario, is no stranger to military service as his father served in the U.S. Army Reserves.



"I've always thought about serving in the military," Melman said. "The opportunity to serve in my state seemed like the right fit. I will have the opportunity to serve troops in the Chicagoland area, so serving in Illinois Army National Guard made perfect sense. This is a spiritual call to duty."

Melman said he attended a webinar on chaplaincy in the Armed Forces in October 2020 and later talked to a friend who served as a chaplain in the Massachusetts National Guard.

"He told me if I was serious about this, he had contacts in the Illinois National Guard," Melman said. "I came to Springfield in November and met with my recruiter, filled out an application and started the ball rolling."

Even as a native Canadian, Melman's family has ties to the Illinois National Guard.

"I had a late cousin who served in the Illinois National Guard in the 1960s," he said. "He was activated for duty at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago." 🇺🇸





# Back from the Capital:

## Illinois' mission in the nation's capital comes to an end

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Approximately 400 Illinois National Guard members returned home March 15, following a draw-down of National Guard forces in Washington, D.C.

Approximately 100 Illinois National Guard members volunteered to remain in the nation's capital as part of nearly 2,300 National Guard members who will provide continued support to the U.S. Capitol Police until about mid-May.

The U.S. Department of Defense approved an extension of this mission. These 100 Illinois National Guard Soldiers volunteered to continue supporting this mission as part of the overall National Guard force provided by the Governors of multiple states.



Illinois Governor JB Pritzker activated the approximately 500 Illinois National Guard members to support security in the nation's





provided the bulk of the Illinois National Guard force for the Washington, D.C. mission.

"Time and time again the Illinois National Guard has answered the call to duty," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "I am proud to lead these extraordinary Citizen-Soldiers and Citizen-Airmen as

capital in late-January at the request of the Department of Defense.

"Since January hundreds of the brave men and women of the Illinois National Guard have been in D.C. to support the U.S. Department of Defense's mission to protect our nation's capital. They have done their duty with pride and immeasurable selflessness and I am proud to welcome them back home," said Governor JB Pritzker. "On behalf of the entire State of Illinois, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the Illinois National Guard and their ongoing commitment to protecting our state and the entire nation."

The Illinois Army National Guard's Chicago-based 108th Sustainment Brigade and its subordinate battalion, the North Riverside-based 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion,

they continue to serve their state and nation."

The Illinois National Guard members were activated under the provisions of U.S. Title 32, which leaves them under the authority of the Governor with all costs paid by the federal government.



# *A Life in the Clouds:*



## *Illinois Army aviator caps 25-year career with 'fini flight'*

*By Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Spreitzer, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs; Photos by Tech. Sgt. Lealan Buehrer, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs*

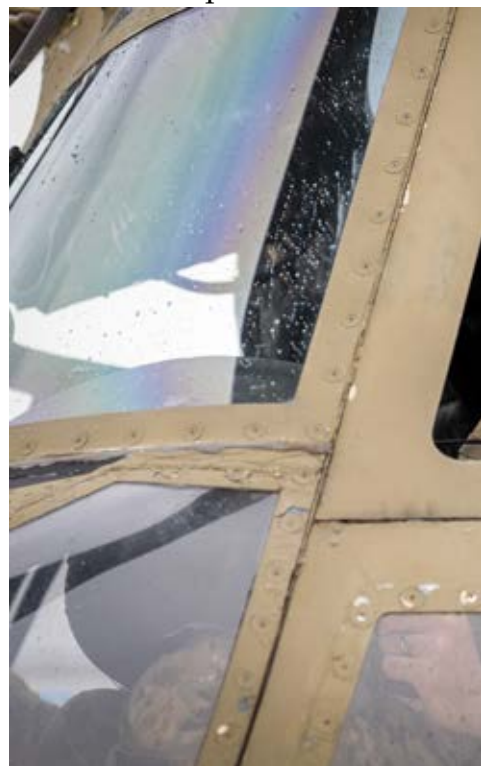
**PEORIA, Ill.** – On an overcast day in late March, the hard thump of rotor blades beating down the air accompanied by the high-pitched whine of twin Lycoming turboshaft engines accompanied the normal din at the Peoria International Airport in Peoria, Illinois. It was the unmistakable sound of two CH-47 Chinook helicopters on approach to the Army Aviation Support Facility across the tarmac from the airport.

As the two helicopters made their way to the ground and taxied back to the facility, a fire engine waited on the ramp, ready to douse

the lead Chinook with a deluge from its water cannon. As the blades ceased their rotation and the engines wound down, a smiling Jason Rassi, chief warrant officer 4 and Chinook pilot with B Co. 2nd Battalion, 238th Aviation Regiment, could be seen from his side window. This was Jason's "fini flight," a time-honored tradition among aviators taking their final flight before retirement.

Jason began his career as a 67U Chinook mechanic 25 years ago to help pay for college at the University of Illinois in their aviation program.

"The Guard was an opportunity to help pay for school," he said. "Not only did I get some good experience, but through the G.I. Bill and the Illinois National Guard Grant, I really





didn't have to pay for my flight training hours out of pocket."

After a short stint as a Chinook mechanic, the opportunity presented itself for Rassi to become a pilot. With a little prodding and direction from his squad leader, Rassi finished his application packet over a drill weekend and was accepted to the Army's flight program at Fort Rucker, Alabama.

"We were standing in formation and the command team was asking if anyone wanted to be a pilot. I raised my hand with about five other guys from the unit," said Jason. "After my (staff sergeant) sat me down and made me finish the application, I was one of the only ones to actually go to flight school."

Jason said he had one annual training as a mechanic, then he was off to flight school. When he returned to the unit for the next AT, he was driving, or rather, flying a Chinook. He said that most pilots refer to flying a Chinook as driving.

"There are many names that we affectionately call each other, but bus driver and hooker for the Chinook are typical," said Jason. "I always thought of it as more of a Cadillac; it may not

look cool, but it handles like a dream and has more power than people give it credit for."

He also said other aviators have nicknames too, like gun bunny for Apache pilots and hawk driver for Blackhawk pilots. He said they are all terms of endearment, but some are more appropriate than others.

Over his 25-year career, Jason said he has many fond

memories and too many stories to tell. He deployed four times, first to Iraq, then three times to Afghanistan. Jason also flew many



missions at home during domestic operations, most recently, he flew a Chinook to California to assist in the wildfire fights in 2020.

"I've got too many memories to pick one favorite, from all of the domestic missions like South Dakota in 2011 to the wildfires in California to the deployments overseas," he said. "The Guard's given me so many opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise."

He said 2011 was one of the biggest years for aviation support for domestic operations.

"It seems 2011 was the year of the floods; I think that's the year we had t-shirts made that said 'flooding sucks'," he said. "We had the flooding here at home on the Mississippi and Ohio, then we had support to South Dakota, and later in the year support to Vermont in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene."



Jason said all of the domestic operations were very rewarding, but recalled the support to Vermont for Hurricane Irene being memorable because of how remote some of the impacted



people were and how quickly they made things happen.

"You'd see these people out stranded and we'd drop pallets of water and food and everything else off, and it would look like a mess because we're dropping it and just going and going," he said. "But we'd come back an hour and a half or so later and everything's gone and the pallets are all stacked to be burned and they're ready for more."

Jason said he thinks the most rewarding part of his career was being an instructor pilot.

"As an instructor pilot watching guys coming out of flight school and growing was one of the most rewarding things," he said. "These guys come out of flight school knowing how to fly, but watching them go from being new pilots to PCs [pilots in command] flying under night vision, was rewarding."

Over 25 years, Jason said he has many stories, but one of his favorites came from a deployment to Afghanistan when his crew carried an AH-64 Apache for repairs at another airfield.



"On my last deployment we had an Apache taxi into a tower on the ground. Luckily, nobody was seriously injured, but they had to move it out," said Jason. "We ended up sling-loading it out. The night before they stripped the Chinook down to the lightest it could be and still fly. Before the sun came up the next day, we flew out and got it all hooked up. Then, just as the sun was coming up, we flew it



back under the Chinook."

Jason has a photo in his new office of the Chinook carrying the Apache off the flight line.

"I've got a photo of it hanging in my new office," he said with a bit of a giggle. "One of the bosses at the new job hates it - he was a former Apache pilot."

During his career, Jason flew and worked with a many people. Lt. Col. Jason Celletti, a Blackhawk pilot and the Illinois Army National Guard State Aviation Officer, is one of those that worked with him.

"What can I say?" said Celletti. "Jason is a professional - one of those guys that always does what needs to be done. I'm super happy for Jason and his family, but it's a little sad knowing we'll have a big gap to fill."

Celletti said Jason's expertise and deployment experience are something that can't be measured in the way it translated to training new pilots.

"I'm sure Jason talked about some of his



mentors, but those were the old CW5s that the pilots looked up to. When they left, Jason stepped in and filled that role," said Celletti. "Jason became that warrant everyone looked up to. He was always the one that was doing the hard work, staying late. He also had four combat rotations. That's experience that can't be measured and is hard to replace."

Celletti said that experience also made Jason a perfect instructor pilot and leader.

"He's someone that's always stepped up and the guys around him notice," said Celletti. "He's always been there to step up and pass along his knowledge and he always showed the new kids what right looked like."

Celletti has worked with Jason for the better part of 15 years and the two have developed a relationship that led to some firsts in Illinois Army National Guard aviation.

"Every time a mission popped up, Jason would take it and roll with it" said Celletti. "He was the main reason we were able to pull off the helocast training with the 106th Cavalry back in 2015 or 2016."

Helocasting is an insertion technique developed by Airborne troops where personnel step off the aircraft's ramp at a low altitude and low speed directly into the water below.

Celletti said the two sat down in a room and figured out how to get it done when everyone was saying it couldn't be.

"Jason went to work digging through the regulations and found the way forward," said Celletti. "I asked him what equipment he



needed, and he said 'nothing, I just have to fly 10 feet above the water at five knots,' and we did our first ever helocast from the Chinooks at Camp Ripley."

Celletti said it's going to be tough to fill that gap of experience that Jason leaves behind, but the aviation community is a tight-knit family and those that leave are always popping in and out.

"It's going to be tough, but Jason set so many people up for success behind him, that we'll be able to find someone to step up," said Celletti. "It's bittersweet, but he's not far if we ever need him, he's right across the ramp in Peoria."

Jason said he's not done flying. He was offered a position with OSF Life Flight in Peoria, Illinois, as a pilot and to serve as their safety officer. He said the timing of the offer was a major factor in his decision to retire from the Guard.

"The opportunity came along and I couldn't pass it up," he said.

"The timing worked out. I felt like after four deployments and all of the domestic operations, it was my time. It helped that the unit wasn't up for a deployment, so I didn't feel like I was leaving my aviation family high and dry."

Jason said he's grateful for all of the opportunities the Guard has provided and that he looks forward to new opportunities with OSF Life Flight and to spending more time with the family.

"I've had a great career with the Guard. I'm grateful for all of the opportunities I was provided," said Jason. "The experiences that I've had and the training, all put me where I am now."



# Action Jackson:

## Illinois' Officer selected as DCGOPS for 1st Army, promoted to major general

By Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs, Photos by Mr. Robert Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Illinois Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Mark Jackson of Frankfort, Illinois, was selected as the Deputy Commanding General of Operations for First Army and was promoted to Major General in Early April.

Guard and Reserve Soldiers are trained for deployment,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “He is a strategic leader and combat veteran who truly cares for those who serve under him. I cannot think of a better officer to help prepare Soldiers for combat.”

As deputy commander, Jackson will serve directly under First Army Commander Lt. Gen. Thomas S. James. Jackson’s new position and promotion means that after 37 years he will no longer drill with the Illinois National Guard where he was the Director of the Joint Staff since March 2020 and, since July 2020, dual-hatted as the Deputy Commanding General at U.S. Army Southern European Task Force – Africa.

“I’m a little sad about leaving and not having drill and interacting with the people over drill weekends,” Jackson said. However, as much as he will miss seeing those in the Illinois National Guard, he’s grateful for the opportunity with First Army. “It is truly humbling to be selected

“As First Army’s Deputy Commander, Mark Jackson will greatly influence how National





for major general and to serve with First Army. To go from being a private who never intended to go past my first enlistment to major general is a true blessing. I'm thankful to all my mentors and mostly to the Soldiers and Airmen, because it was really them who got me here."

While Jackson will miss many Illinois National Guard troops, he will be greeted with a familiar face when he reports to First Army. Sgt. Maj. Philip Barber was a noncommissioned officer on all of the general's previous deployments and will be Jackson's senior enlisted leader at First Army. "I know I'm getting a professional, quality, officer," Barber said. "He practices what is called connected leadership. He will talk to a (private first class) on the range and ask him questions because he truly wants to hear his answers – and he'll value those opinions."



Jackson and Barber first deployed together to Kuwait from August 2000 to February 2001 when then Major Jackson was the Security Force Commander with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment for Operation Desert Spring. Barber was a staff

sergeant. They deployed together again when Jackson was the Force Protection Liaison Officer under Task Force Santa Fe in Germany from January 2002 to August 2002. Both deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom from January 2005 until May 2006, where Lt. Col. Jackson served as the Task Force Blackhawk Commander with the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, and Barber was one of his senior NCOs.



Jackson will replace Maj. Gen. Troy Galloway at First Army. Galloway accepted the Deputy Commander position with U.S. Forces Command. "General Galloway called me into his office and said this officer is being strongly considered to be his backfill. He said 'Do you know this guy?' Yes, I've known him for 20 years and I was thrilled. I've seen him operate since he was a major in 2000 and now he'll be promoted to major general. He is a talented guy," Barber said.

Jackson is known for his sense of humor, and he uses it as a leadership tool. "There are enough stuffy people. We're all volunteers. I want people to know me - to feel comfortable coming in and giving me straight answers. I'm fallible, just like everyone else," he said. "We all have a boss, but I believe I truly serve the men and women in uniform below me. My job is to get them the training, the tools and the resources and then to let them do their jobs."



# ***It Starts with a Seed***



## ***Illinois National Guard members volunteer at community garden***

*By Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez, 126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs*

**EAST ST. LOUIS, ILL. -** Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen working with the East St. Louis Health Department's COVID-19 immunization program dedicate long hours each day to protect the health of the community's residents by administering life-saving COVID-19 vaccines.

So what do these troops do in their spare time? At least one group of troops protect the health of the community's residents, this time by dedicating many honors to the F.R.E.S.H. Community Training Garden in East St. Louis, Illinois.

"I enjoy community work," said Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Jonnie Sorenson, a small arms artillery repair technician from Creve Coeur, Illinois. "The community helps with the mission and I wanted to give back. Plus, I get to

learn a lot of techniques about gardening."

In 2010, Elizabeth Patton-Whiteside used her education and agricultural prowess to take a half-acre of untamed overgrowth, in the middle of East St. Louis, and turned it into a foothold to fight against the area's food desert. Not only did she plan to feed her community with the food grown in this garden, but she built up the location to house classes to teach anyone willing how to plant, grow, harvest, cook and sell produce.

For a few soldiers from the 123rd Engineer Battalion, Illinois National Guard, this garden became just that - a place to learn and grow.

Illinois Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 3 William Ellis, the unit's maintenance warrant officer, is a Murphysboro, Illinois native and a







member of the Armed Forces for 19 years. Ellis works as a federal technician in Peoria, Illinois. When Ellis heard about an opportunity to volunteer service, he turned to his soldiers and asked who would want to help.

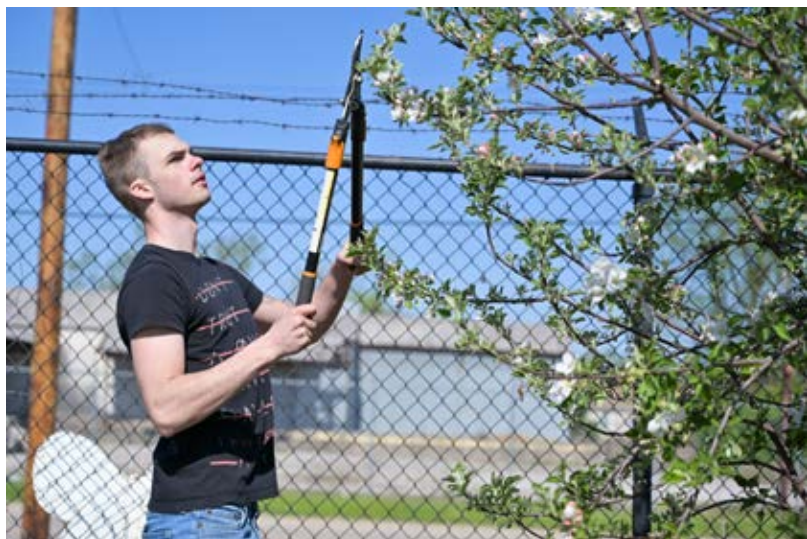
Sorenson was the first to raise his hand. Sorenson has been in the military for three years. As a traditional guardsman, he spends his civilian time working as a welder with Profab in Morton, Illinois. When he is free from his work duties, he likes to practice and become more proficient with drawing.



Knowing they would be volunteering their downtime after the week's long days at the vaccination site, Sorenson and Ellis traveled to the garden to help, not once, but twice. The second time Sorenson volunteered his time to assist with the Garden, his example invoked community spirit in his fellow Soldiers.

Sorenson and Ellis were joined by Spc. Justin Poorman of Robinson, Illinois, quartermaster

chemical equipment repair specialist; Spc. Lawrence Black, construction engineer from East St. Louis, Illinois and Spc. Elliot Mitchell, construction engineer from Belleville, Illinois. A few hours into their service, this group from the 123rd Engineering Battalion was met by Chief Master Sgt. Christina Rizzo, the new Command Chief Master Sgt. of the Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Air Refueling Wing. Together this diverse group of service members assisted Whiteside and her family in planting onions, clipping apple trees, tilling garden beds, and maintaining heavy landscaping.



"I can't say how glad I am," Whiteside said, "You guys are here to help me and there are no words for my appreciation."

Ellis highlighted Sorenson and his service. "For him to volunteer his downtime this early in his career, and after the week we had at the site, it speaks loudly about his character. He is a good Soldier, and I am proud of these guys for stepping up."

Members of the Illinois National Guard are encouraged to serve outside of the military. It builds the character of our service members and it strengthens the relationship between our Guard members and the citizens they protect.

In Sorenson's words, "vegetables were not the only things grown today, the community has grown too."

A photograph showing two men in military uniforms saluting. The man on the left is wearing a blue flight suit and a light blue face mask. The man on the right is wearing a dark blue military uniform with many medals and a light blue face mask. They are standing in front of three flags: the United States flag, the Illinois state flag, and the Air National Guard flag.

# Star Power:

## 183rd Wing Commander promoted to brigadier general; selected as Director of Logistics for the ANG

By Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs, Photos by Mr. Robert Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – The Commander of the 183rd Wing, Col. Donald “DK” Carpenter, who rose through the enlisted ranks and then through the officer ranks as a ‘problem solver,’ will now put his skills to work at the national level as the new Director of Logistics, Engineering, and Force Protection for the Air National Guard.

With this selection, Carpenter will be promoted to brigadier general.

“DK has been put in positions throughout his career where problems needed to be solved or processes needed to be improved and he has always left those jobs with the organization in better shape than it was when he started,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “This is a well-deserved promotion that will put his skills to work at the national level.”

Carpenter said he was honored to be selected as the Air National Guard’s newest general officer. “I always volunteered to do things to

better myself the organization and to go where the National Guard needed me to go.”

Maj. Gen. Pete Nezamis, the Assistant Adjutant General – Air and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, said that Carpenter’s experience in the enlisted ranks and the officer ranks uniquely positioned him for his new position in the Air National Guard.

“He is a combat veteran who has seen the Air National Guard for many years with different sets of eyes - as an enlisted Airman and then

as an officer. He has also worked extensively with the other U.S. services and the services of other nations,” Nezamis said.

Carpenter spent several months deployed overseas with the Illinois Air National Guard’s Peoria-based 182nd Airlift Wing. He served as the aircraft maintenance squadron commander

on deployments to Germany (July 2001 - September 2001), Oman (September 2002 - November 2002), United Arab Emirates (March 2003 - August 2003), and Afghanistan (August 2008 - October 2008 and November





2011 - March 2012.) He also served as the senior military officer in charge of C-130 maintenance training for the Polish Air Force as part of the Illinois National Guard's State Partnership Program with the Polish military.

More recently, he was hand-selected to be the assist and advice team lead for the Air National Guard Readiness Center providing oversight to the Puerto Rico Air National Guard following the fatal 2018 crash of a Puerto Rico National Guard WC-130H aircraft in Georgia. He learned important lessons from the toughest jobs, Carpenter said. "It was these experiences along with great mentors and the Airmen who served under me that grew me along the way."

Carpenter started gathering leadership experience early in life. He was a Boy Scouts of America Eagle Scout at the age of 14. Right after high school, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and spent seven years as a Sailor. After an 8-month break in service, he enlisted in the Air National Guard and continued serving in the enlisted ranks rising to the rank of master sergeant. He earned his commission at the age of 32.

"I've learned from my mistakes and have tried to get a little bit better every day," he said. "My advice to young service members is not to just settle - seek. Strive for continuous learning. Stay mentally and physically in the game. All things come with sacrifice and at the end of the day, it is about bettering you."

Carpenter is a graduate of the U.S. Army's Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt Course and is certified as a Continuous Process Improvement Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt. "It was honestly the toughest course



Air Force Command and Staff College, and the Air Force War College.

Carpenter jokes about being a "Cross Fit addict." Every morning at 6 a.m., he participates in a Cross Fit session. "It is about having a healthy mind and healthy body," he said. "To me, the secret to success is formulating great habits. All those things in life you want to do - all the 'would've, could've, should've's' - you can

accomplish those with great habits."

He's also thankful for the continuous support of his spouse, Dana, and his large mixed family. "I brought three children in from my previous

marriage, two were hers, and we had one together. I consider them all our kids." Their children include Kylie, Courtney, Kami, Kameron, Caitlyn, and Chloe. Chloe, the youngest, is a student at Notre Dame High School in Peoria. They also have seven grandchildren.

"I couldn't be where I am today without my family's sacrifices," he said. "People always thank the veteran, but really the family deserves that thanks as much if not more than the service member."





## Illinois bids farewell to Inspector General

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – The Illinois National Guard bid farewell to its Inspector General in a small ceremony April 9 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois.

Col. Thomas Ransom, of Highland Park, Illinois, served as the Illinois National Guard's Inspector General (ILNG IG) from July 2017 to May 2021. Ransom, an active duty U.S. Army officer, was recently selected as the Deputy Chief of Exercises (G-37) at Fort Shafter, Hawaii.

do the job as Inspector General," Ransom said. "Thank you for the opportunity to stay on as the Inspector General after you became the Adjutant General."

Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard described Ransom as a "very low key person who didn't want a lot of fanfare".

"We wanted to recognize you and most of all your team wanted to recognize you," Neely said. "You can tell a lot about a leader based on the support of a team and you have some extraordinary support from your team here."

Neely thanked Ransom for the work he has done as the Inspector General.

"When you have an active duty colonel come into the Guard, it's a lot of education for them," Neely said. "But given your background of military service, and then seeking out the opportunity to serve as the Inspector General speaks volumes about you."

Ransom enlisted in the U.S. Army in May 1988 as an armor crew member. He left active duty and enlisted in the Michigan National Guard in the summer of 1991. He accepted a scholarship through the ROTC program at Central Michigan University in August 1992 and commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army in May 1995, returning to active duty.



"It's a great feeling to know senior leaders in Illinois had confidence in me to be able to





"I wish the active duty component would be able to rotate more people in support of the Guard and Reserve components than we do right now," Ransom said. "It would open their eyes quite a bit. I feel a little embarrassed that my active duty counterparts don't value what the Guard and Reserves bring to the military in the roles they perform. You are civilians and on the weekends you are putting on the uniforms, doing very demanding tasks on both levels."

Ransom said he would continue to advocate on behalf of the Illinois National Guard whenever possible.

"My active duty brothers and sisters sometimes fail to understand the time available to train for Guard and Reservists is critical," he said. "You can't just show up and expect to perform well without practice. It's a lesson lost and a missed opportunity."

During the low-key and brief ceremony, Ransom thanked his family for their support.

"Any success I have is truly related back to the support my family has given me during the entire time I've been in the military," he said. "My wife, Juana, is the greatest wingman I have ever had. She's the rock and allows me to focus all my efforts on doing the military side of the house."

Ransom said he could never thank his wife, and three children, Thomas, Jeffrey and Esmeralda, enough for all they do to allow him to continue to serve in the military.

Ransom said the greatest thing he will miss are the people, especially his team in the IG office.

"Thank you for the tremendous ride. You have taught me a lot and I continue to be amazed at the professionalism you bring to the office each and every day," he said.

During the ceremony, Ransom received a Meritorious Service Medal for "exceptional service and extraordinary leadership" while assigned to the Illinois National Guard as the Inspector General. The citation read in part that Ransom's proactive approach to leader development coupled with his unwavering desire to resolve all matters helped the Illinois National Guard meet all state and wartime requirements. He also received the Illinois National Guard Military Medal of Merit for "critical management of the Illinois National Guard Inspector General office during a sustained period of unprecedented domestic turbulence which was critical to senior leader decision making processes."

"When I came in as the TAG I felt really confident with your abilities," Neely said. "You have the ability to look at and make a mature and deliberate analysis of those issues and bring back great advice to me as well as other senior leadership within the entire organization."

Neely commended Ransom on an extraordinary job during a year in which the Illinois National Guard saw duty during a pandemic, civil disturbance and floods.

"I really depend on the IG to get out and be the commander's eyes and ears and look out for the welfare of the troops, much like the Chaplain Corps," Neely said.



# Greenview Soldier promoted to lieutenant colonel

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Michael Barton, of Greenview, Illinois, was promoted to lieutenant colonel at a ceremony at the Illinois National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois, April 5.

“This promotion is about two groups of people,” Barton told friends and family during the ceremony. “To those who got me here today and to those who wanted to serve but were unable to do so, this promotion is for you.”

Barton also thanked his family.

“Thank you for your love and support but also for your faithful understanding that although you didn’t volunteer to serve, you have had to bear the same uncertainty and struggles my past 25 years has thrown your way,” he told his wife, Kelli, and children, Myleigh, Rhett, Bryar and Scarlett.

Barton enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard Feb. 29, 1996 as a heavy wheel vehicle mechanic, serving with the 1644th Transportation Company, based in Rock Falls, Illinois. Barton rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant before receiving a direct commission to second lieutenant in 2006, branching as a transportation officer.

“Mike Barton is a heck of a Soldier,” said Maj. Gen. Michael R. Zerbonia, of Chatham, Illinois, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National

Guard. “He does what needs to be done, but the family also helps. We appreciate your support which lets him do what he loves to do and be a Soldier.”

Barton has served in multiple command and staff positions, most recently as the Assistant to the Chief of Staff,

Illinois Army National Guard. Barton currently is the Division Chief, Strategic Plans and Readiness Officer for the Illinois Army National Guard.

“I like to think I bring intensity to the job which fuels my passion for working with Soldiers, wearing the uniform and the mission of the U.S. Army,” Barton said. “The advice and mentorship I received throughout my career have led me to where I am today. I believe no one makes it to this point in their career without making mistakes and getting second chances. As leaders we need to remember that in our approach with our Soldiers.”

Barton said those second chances lead to the overall success of the mission.

“I’m no better than anyone else,” he said. “I believe the success of the individual leads to the success of the team.”

Barton urged his fellow Illinois National Guard members to remember they are ambassadors.

“No matter your reason for serving, as a Guardsman you volunteer to be an ambassador,” he said. “When you put on the uniform, you are an

ambassador to your country, the United States Army, your unit in which you serve and the community from where you come, and lastly to your name. Some are only as good as what their name is and that should mean a lot.”





# Leading the Way

## TAG recognizes USPFO team for hard work during 1st Army IG Inspection



Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General for the Illinois National Guard took some time to recognize outstanding employees for the Illinois United States Property and Fiscal Office Apr. 14, for their roles in an overwhelmingly successful First Army Inspector General inspection. The inspection, verifies compliance with United States Code by verifying the accounts and records of the property and fiscal officer are properly maintained and provides feedback on areas where processes can be improved.

The following Soldiers and civilian employees were presented TAG coins for their roles in making the inspection an overwhelming success:

From Supply and Services, Sgt. Donald Schoonover in the Material Management Branch, Sgt. 1st Class Nathan Muder in Warehouse Operations and Staff Sgt. Keith Sapp in Ammunition Supply Point Operations. From the Comptroller section, Ms. Kirsten Wright, Ms. Emily Doersam and Ms. Brooke Selvaggio. From the Data Processing Center, Mr. Robert Lewis and from Purchasing and Contracting, Mr. Lars Romang.

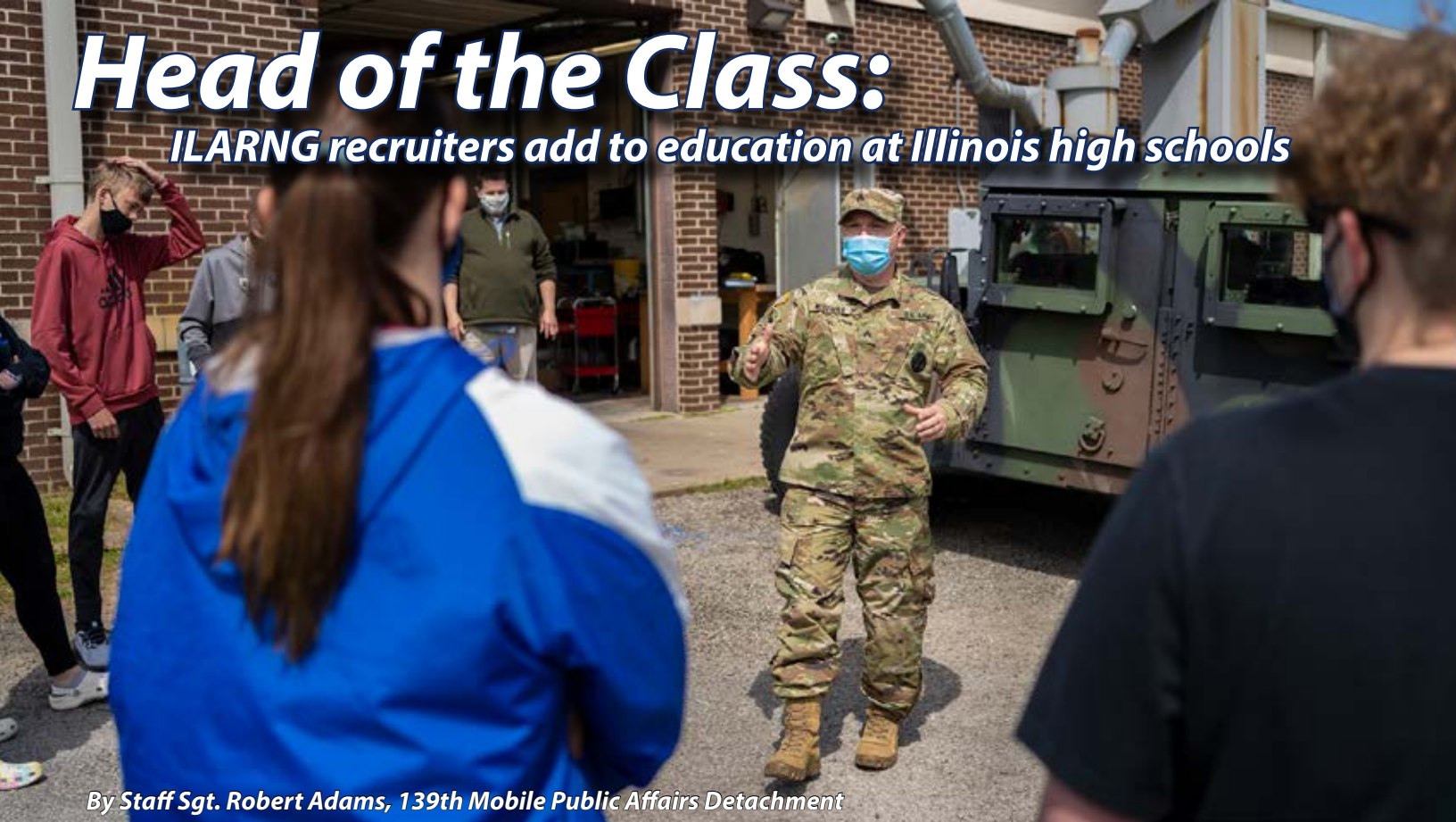
Each employee contributed in a manner that greatly improved the processes for the USPFO, many of whom were leads in their positions for the first time.





# Head of the Class:

*ILARNG recruiters add to education at Illinois high schools*



*By Staff Sgt. Robert Adams, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – The Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion is reaching beyond lunchroom displays and promotional items, and becoming part of the educational process in Illinois high schools and colleges.

“It is a mutual benefit between the learning institution and Illinois National Guard recruiting,” said Sgt. Maj. Chad McDannald of Franklin Illinois, the battalion’s operations sergeant major. “We have specific presentations that teach students about leadership, how to plan and obtain goals, financial planning classes and how the Guard can benefit them in all those areas.”

They also will bring in military equipment and teach the students about the equipment, allowing them to put hands on some equipment they may have only seen in photos or on film before.

Sgt. Steven Wiseman of Marion, Illinois, took an up-armored Humvee to Elverado High School in Elkhart, Illinois, on April 14 to teach a class on the vehicle.

“The feedback we have had from these kinds of classes has been very positive,” said Wiseman. “Along with the positive feedback from the students, I have also been able to set up appointments with four students to come into my office and talk to me about joining the Army National Guard.”

Wiseman said this is the third time he has brought Army equipment to a high school.

“Every time has been a good experience

and has been a great community outreach,” he said. “This has such a positive effect on recruiting because it’s in person and tangible for the students.”

Neil Hargis, the principal of Elverado High School, said it helps the students’





education because it helps expand their horizons. Whether or not they are interested in military service, getting the equipment and Soldier in front of the students helps them visualize.

"When they see something like the Humvee in person they can think to themselves, is that something I can envision myself working on," said Hargis. "Maybe even is that something I can envision myself driving or using in some



battalion has done well despite COVID-19, "For us to continue to be the powerhouse the recruiting and retention battalion has been over the past two decades, we really need to get into the schools," McDannald said.

Recruiters find that going beyond the sales pitch and being value-added to the educational curriculum helps them recruit and does the community a service - a win-win for the

## **"They fight for the country and it's something to respect."**

kind of military action."

Having the equipment and Soldier there in-person brings military service closer to home for the students, Hargis said.

Auna McClure, an Elverado High School student, said she had never experienced something like this before. "It was a really good learning experience," said McClure. "It was cool to learn how difficult it is to get in and out of a Humvee."

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges to people and organizations all around the world and Illinois Army National Guard recruiters are no exception. While the



recruiter and the school.

"Getting out in front of the students, especially during COVID-19 times is crucial and we have to continue to be creative to make that happen," Wiseman said.

For McClure, it was an opportunity to learn a little bit more about an organization she already holds

in high regard. "It's very honorable for people to serve in the military," said McClure. "They fight for the country and it's something to respect."



# A Lviv'ly Return:

## 33rd IBCT returns from Ukraine

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs



**URBANA, ILL.** – Approximately 165 Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team based in Urbana, Illinois returned this evening, April 30, from an 11-month deployment to Ukraine.



While in Ukraine, the unit formed “Task Force Illini” as the command element of Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine, which is responsible for training, advising and mentoring the Ukrainian cadre at Combat Training Center-Yavoriv, Ukraine to improve Ukraine’s training

capacity and defense capabilities. As part of U.S. European Command operations, the unit worked hand-in-hand with the Ukrainian Armed Forces, providing training and doctrinal assistance to the Ukrainian military personnel.

“The Illinois National Guard continues to play a vital role in defending our communities, state, and nation both here in Illinois and across the globe,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “On behalf of a grateful state, I am happy to welcome these brave men and women back home to Illinois. Thanks to their selfless work, families here and in Ukraine can enjoy increased safety and stability as they go about their day to day lives.”

Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant







General of Illinois and the Commander of the Illinois National Guard, stressed the importance of the unit's mission.

"The State of Illinois can be proud of the great work the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Soldiers did during this unique and vital deployment. They contributed to Ukraine's



long-term defense and helped reinforce international alliances and partnerships," Neely said.

Col. Clayton Kuetemeyer of Chatham, Illinois, commanded Task Force Illini. "Service in the Illinois National Guard gives ordinary Illinoisans the opportunity to do extraordinary work. Aside from being military professionals, our Soldiers come from many different backgrounds – college students, teachers, farmers, police officers - with experience that complements their skills for military advising

tasks. In Ukraine, they had unprecedented success in multinational partnering and training development, contributing to Ukraine's capabilities, and making an important impact at the international level," Kuetemeyer said.



Kuetemeyer also stressed the importance of the support of the unit's families and employers. "Often deployments are harder on our families and employers, who take care of things back here in Illinois while we are overseas. Without their sacrifice and service, we could not serve the nation."

The JMTG-U initiative has been ongoing since 2015. Task Force Raven from the Washington Army National Guard's 81st Stryker Brigade Combat Team

assumed command of the Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine mission on April 16.







# ***Rising to the Top:***

## ***Illinois Soldiers compete in State-level Best Warrior***

*By Spc. Kyle Odum 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, photos edited by Staff Sgt. Robert Adams, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*



**S**ix Illinois Soldiers and six non-commissioned officers (NCOs) took part in a grueling four-day state-level best warrior competition April 29th through May 2nd at Marseilles Training Center in Marseilles, IL.

The competition consisted of hand grenade qualification, call for fire, weapons familiarization, M4 rifle qualification, defense lanes, medical lanes, radio communication, nighttime land navigation, a written







examination, patrol lanes, an appearance board, and a 12-mile ruck march to cap it off. Sgt. Colt Aldrich of Mazon, Illinois, a combat medic with the 709th Area Support Medical Company, took home first place in the NCO category, while Spc. Avery Caraker, of Elkhart, Illinois, a human intelligence collect with Co. D, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion, took home first place in the Soldier category.







# 230 Years of Democracy: Polish Constitution Day

By Tech Sgt. Brian Ellison, 126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs



Guests from the Illinois National Guard, including Maj. Gen. Mark Jackson, Deputy Commander of Operations for First Army, Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph Cistaro, and members of the 144th Army Band participated in the wreath laying ceremony alongside Polish dignitaries at the Gen. Tadeusz Kościuszko memorial in Chicago. The Illinois National Guard has partnered with the Polish military since 1993 and has co-deployed multiple times with them to combat areas in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 as part of the State Partnership Program.





# Worthy of a Chef's Kiss: Pekin Soldier retires after more than 30 years of service

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, ILL. – More than three decades after initially enlisting in the U.S. Army to give back to the country that has given so much to his family, Lt. Col. Michael Legler, of Pekin, Illinois, retired from the Illinois Army National Guard.

"Both my parents were born and raised in Germany," Legler said. "They both had to flee from East Germany some years after the war. I guess that's what inspired me to enlist in the Army - among other things: I wanted to give something back to the United States."



Friends and family joined Legler as he was recognized for more than 33 years of military service, including 28 years in the National Guard, during a retirement ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, April 30.

"I may have hung up the uniform, but my service and commitment to Soldiers and their families will continue," Legler told a group of family and friends gathered at the Illinois Military Academy for a retirement ceremony. "I was extremely lucky to serve for 33 years, but I get to continue to work on behalf of our troops and their families."

Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, thanked Legler and his family for their many years of service and commitment.

"Today a long career ... is celebrated with family and friends. There is nothing more you could ask for. You have done a great deal for this organization," Zerbonia said. "To his family, thank you for letting us borrow him for 30 plus years and letting him do what he loves. We know he had to miss a lot of things as we all do, but he missed them because he loves you and wants to protect this great nation."

Legler enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1986 as a food service specialist, serving in Germany and at Fort Riley, Kansas.

"Prior to enlisting in the Army, when I was still in high school, I worked in a banquet facility," he said. "When I took the ASVAB, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, I scored pretty high and my recruiter told me I could serve as anything."

Legler said he's always enjoyed cooking and decided that's what he wanted to try in the military.

"After my active duty service, as a civilian, I worked as a certified chef," he said.

The Plainfield, Illinois, native used his enlistment in the Army to get out on his own and subsequently earn money for college. It was shortly after his second enlistment he earned a Green to Gold discharge to attend college through the Reserve Officer Training Corps program at Kansas State University. The Green to Gold discharge allows service members to be released from active duty early so they can enroll in an Army Senior ROTC program. During this time, Legler served concurrently as a program cadet in the Kansas Army National Guard.

In 1993, Legler received his commission as a second lieutenant, serving as an Armor Platoon Leader and Detachment Commander of 2nd Battalion, 635th Armor Regiment.

"There is something really cool about being part of a crew where the weapons system weighs 60 tons," Legler said. "It was a great experience and I think my biggest regret about leaving the Kansas National Guard is the Illinois Army National Guard doesn't have tanks."

In 1997, following a move back to Illinois, Legler joined the ILARNG, branching as a Transportation officer, and then later as a Chemical officer.

Legler served with the 1244th Transportation Company, based in North Riverside, Illinois, and

later as the Commander, 1644th Transportation Company, based in Rock Falls, Illinois. He's also served in the then-404th Chemical Brigade, headquartered in Normal, Illinois and later in the 44th Chemical Battalion, based in Bloomington, Illinois, during which he transitioned to the Chemical Corps branch, serving as battalion's training officer and later as the executive officer.

Legler, who has served as a traditional Guardsman throughout his career, was hired as a dual-status technician in 2009, serving in the domestic operations branch in the Illinois Army National Guard's Operations and Training directorate (G3).

Legler moved to the Joint Staff when it was formed and was assigned to the strategic planning directorate (J5).

He deployed three times during his military career, from 2006-2007 as the coalition transportation operations officer with the 377th

and who have remained a part of my life throughout my career," he said. "I am looking forward to supporting you and your families in my civilian role as you continue doing the important work of defending our nation and our communities."

Although Legler has hung up his uniform, he looks forward to his continued service to members of the Illinois National Guard and their families in his civilian role as the Director of State Family Programs, Illinois Army National Guard, a position he's held since 2020.

"The mission of the Illinois National Guard's Family Programs is to support the families of service members and the service member as well," he said. "The goal is to make it as easy for the service member to continue serving by addressing the issues which may come up from time to time. We work to connect the family and the service member to resources available, which they may not know exists."

Legler said, in his experience, the majority of service members leave the military before they reach the 20-year mark because the family got tired of sharing him or her with the military.

"Family support is incredibly important," he said. "Without the family's support service members feel pulled in two directions - the duty of military service and commitment to the family."

Legler said he wouldn't have been able to continue serving in the military if his wife and family wasn't supporting what he was doing.

"Military service takes a toll on family. You will miss important events," he said. "But if the family doesn't support the service, you won't have a service member for long in my opinion."

Legler offered a last piece of advice.

"Whatever job you take, leave it better than you found it," he said. "Make things better and make improvements."



Theater Sustainment Command, based at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait; in 2012-2013 as a member of the Bilateral Embedded Support Team (BEST) A-10 to Afghanistan; and in 2019 as Commander, BEST A-23, to Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan.


Legler thanked his friends and family for their support over the years.

"Thank you to my wife, Krista, my children Casey and Christian, and granddaughter Sophia," he said. "I have missed birthdays and other events, and you have sacrificed a father with no say in the matter. I can't go back and recapture that time, but we won't have to worry about any additional missed time."

Legler also thanked his fellow Soldiers in the Illinois National Guard.

"I am lucky to have people like you in my life





# ***Invitation From the Top:*** ***2020 State and Region IV NCO of the Year Meets*** ***with Governor***

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

Staff Sgt. Anthony Miller, of Glen Carbon, Illinois and 2020 State and Region IV Best Warrior was invited to the Governor's Office in May to speak about his experience. Miller was joined by his father, Brian. Miller and Illinois Governor JB Pritzker discussed the rigors of the Best Warrior Competition and the merits of competing in an event like it. Before departing, Gov. Pritzker presented Miller with a challenge coin from the governor's office and a gubernatorial proclamation.





# ***Here Comes the Cavalry!***

## ***106th Cavalry returns home***

***By Staff Sgt. Katie Grandori and Spc. Kyle Paneto, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment***







Soldiers of C Troop, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry were welcomed home after 11 months by their families early in May. The Soldiers were part of Task Force Bayonet, assigned to the East Africa Response Force (EARF) in support of Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). The Illinois National Guard Soldiers conducted security operations, force protection and provided security force assistance in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in the Horn of Africa. The unit also conducted training with U.S. allies in the region and were part of an international effort to help bring more stability to the Horn of Africa.







# ***Celebrating a hero*** ***Illinois Soldier helps Massachusetts Guard honor a WWII*** ***hero by celebrating 100th birthday*** *by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**CHICAGO** - How does a lifelong Chicago resident end up getting drafted for military service during World War II from California and then end up serving during the war in the Massachusetts National Guard?

To hear 100 year old Hillard Dominowski tell the tale, it seems by a stroke of dumb luck.

U.S. Army Pfc Hillard Dominowski, who was held as a Prisoner of War during World War II, celebrated his 100th birthday May 6 and the Illinois National Guard was on hand to present him with some

mementos, including a certificate of appreciation and the Commander's Challenge Coin from Maj. Gen. Gary Keefe, the Adjutant General of Massachusetts and a 26th Yankee Division Association Challenge Coin from Brig. Gen.

(MA) Len Kondratiuk, National Commander of the 26th Yankee Division Association.

"When I was a prisoner, I never thought about dying," Dominowski told Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Director, Public Affairs Office, Illinois National Guard, and a former member of the Massachusetts National Guard, who made the







presentations. "I was never wounded. Sure, I was knocked on my can a couple of times. All my life I believed someone was watching over me."

Dominowski said he's had a good life. "Like anyone, we had a lot of good things and some bad," he said.

The newly minted centurion bragged about his early travels in his youth, often riding the rails, hopping trains to wherever he decided to get off.

He said he had tried to get into the Army on numerous occasions, but was deemed 4-F, unfit for military service, due to heart murmurs. However, on one trip to San Diego, California, to visit his brother, he laughed and said he stayed just a little too long – Uncle Sam had found him and drafted him.

So began the story of the young man from Illinois who was drafted in California, and who after 10 days the Army allowed him "to



get his affairs in order" would begin his trip to the East Coast and his association with the Massachusetts National Guard.

Dominowski said despite the fact he had been declared 4-F, a doctor during his military physical declared he would "be alright." He then took the exam to be an aircraft mechanic, but again the heart murmurs would play a role when the military said he wouldn't be able to fly in military aircraft due to his physical makeup. "That's when they put me in the infantry," he laughed.

Dominowski was assigned to the 101st Infantry Regiment, 26th Infantry Division (the Yankee Division) comprised of the U.S. Army and the Massachusetts Army National Guard. He served in campaigns in Northern France, the Rhineland, and Central Europe. Dominowski was captured as a Prisoner of War by the Germans and true to his character – he stood up to his captors.

"During an interrogation, I gave them my name, rank and serial number," he said. "They asked why I, who obviously had a Polish name, was fighting against them. I told them I wasn't Polish, I was an American. I don't know if that was the dumbest thing I've done."

Dominowski said it was nothing for him to fight during his younger years.

"I'd fight for no reason – I'd win some, I'd lose some," he said. "When I took basic training, I fought with a paratrooper. He beat the stuffing out of me. I said that was enough, I fought my last fight. He and I became the best of friends."

Dominowski said sometimes it's good to talk about the war, but other times, silence is golden.

"Sometimes I don't want to remember," he said.

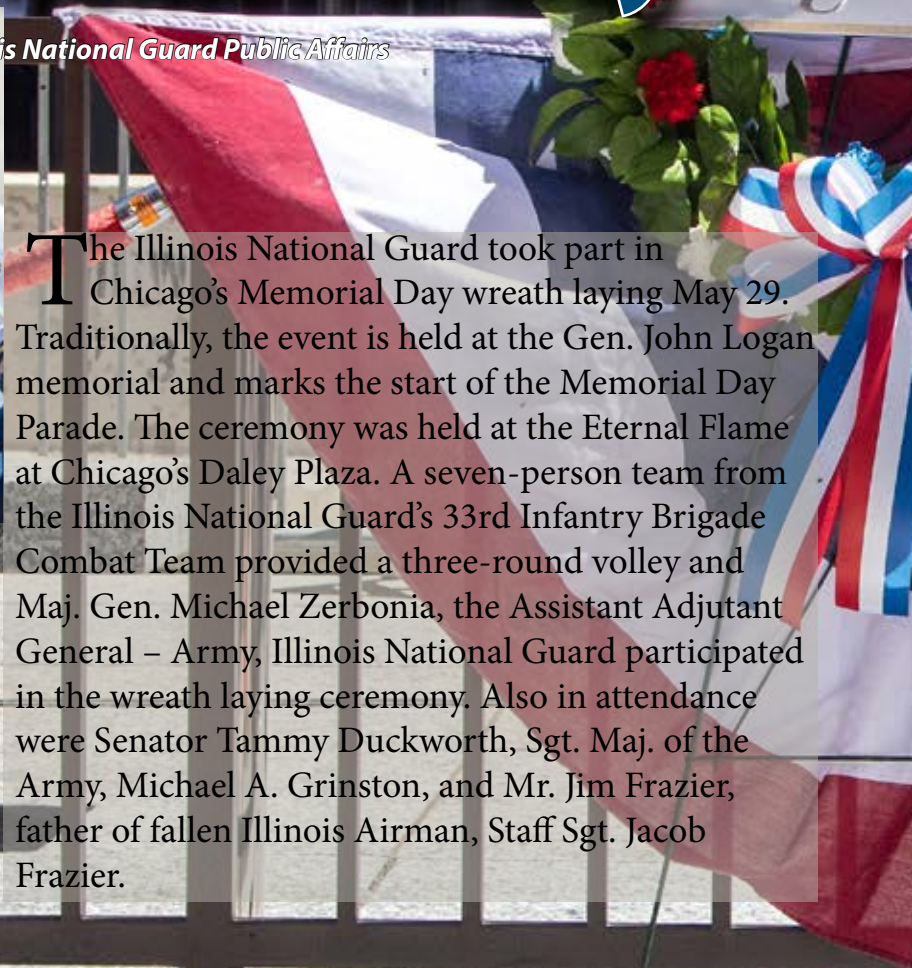
Dominowski, who didn't get promoted to Private First Class until he returned to the United States, mainly because of what he described as his passion for trouble, was awarded the Prisoner of War medal for his time as a POW. In addition, the World War II hero was also awarded the Silver Star and three Bronze Stars. 🏆





# Chicago Memorial Day

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



The Illinois National Guard took part in Chicago's Memorial Day wreath laying May 29. Traditionally, the event is held at the Gen. John Logan memorial and marks the start of the Memorial Day Parade. The ceremony was held at the Eternal Flame at Chicago's Daley Plaza. A seven-person team from the Illinois National Guard's 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team provided a three-round volley and Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, the Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard participated in the wreath laying ceremony. Also in attendance were Senator Tammy Duckworth, Sgt. Maj. of the Army, Michael A. Grinston, and Mr. Jim Frazier, father of fallen Illinois Airman, Staff Sgt. Jacob Frazier.









# THIS DAY IN HISTORY

**1 March**



**Sgt. Simone Robinson**

2009: Sgt. Simone A. Robinson, 21, of Dixmoor, Ill., died March 1 at Brooke Army Medical Center, San Antonio, Texas, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near her security post on Jan. 17 in Kabul, Afghanistan. She was assigned to the 634th Brigade Support Battalion of the Illinois Army National Guard, Crestwood, Ill.

**4**

**Famous Guardsman: Maj. Gen. John A. Logan**

Major General John A. Logan began his first term as an Illinois Senator on March 4th, 1871. Logan served in the Mexican War as a Second Lieutenant with the 1st Illinois Volunteer Infantry. Logan served and seen combat throughout the Civil War and by the end had risen to the rank of Major General. After the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, Logan commanded the Grand Review of the Army in Washington. Logan also aided in the establishment of Memorial Day in 1866.

**15**



**Sgt. Robert M. Weinger**

2009: Sgt. Robert M. Weinger, 24, of Round Lake Beach, Ill., died March 15 a result of wounds sustained in Kot, Afghanistan, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. Weinger was transported to Jalabad, Afghanistan, where he later died. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Woodstock, Ill.

**15**



**Sgt. Christopher Abeyta and Spc. Norman Cain**

2009: Spc. Norman L. Cain III, 22, of Mt. Morris, Ill., and Sgt. Christopher P. Abeyta, 23, of Midlothian, Ill., died March 15 a result of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near their vehicle in Kot, Afghanistan. They were assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Woodstock, Ill.

**17**



**Staff Sgt. Ivory Phipps**

2004: Illinois Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Ivory L. Phipps, 44, of Chicago, Ill., died March 17, in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds sustained from a mortar attack. Sgt. Phipps was assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company, Illinois Army National Guard, Paris, Ill.

**19 The 130th Infantry capture Bridge**

1945: The Japanese mined the Bauang Bridge to stall the American advance on Baguio, the Philippine summer capital. The bridge was a major line of communication for the Japanese in the Baguio sector. Once engineers succeeded in disarming the explosives on the bridge, the 130th Infantry attacked enemy forces in the nearby town of Bauang, seizing the bridge. This was a key stepping stone in the 33rd Division's drive to capture Baguio.

**25 Illinois prepares for war**

1917: The 1st, 5th, and 6th Illinois National Guard received notification of activation and organized in preparation for service. The 1st, 5th, and 6th Illinois began duty serving the state, providing security for vital state infrastructure.

**29**



**Staff Sgt. Jacob L. Frazier**

2003: Illinois Air National Guard Staff Sergeant Jacob L. Frazier, 24, of St. Charles, Ill. assigned to the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron (182d Airlift Wing) in Peoria, Illinois. He was killed by suspected former Taliban during an ambush on his reconnaissance convoy at Geresk, in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan.



# April

4

## Collins Addresses the officers of the 130th before the battle of Baguio

1945: As the main assault on the Philippine summer capital at Baguio neared for the 33rd Division, Colonel Arthur S. Collins Jr. of the 130th Infantry addressed his officers. The memorandum read:

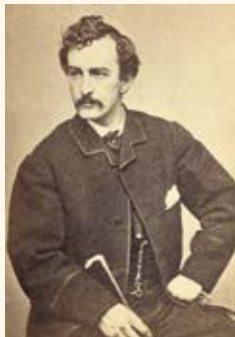


"In the upcoming attack on Baguio, I intend to push the Jap wherever and whenever possible twenty-four hours a day. Owing to the nature of the terrain, we will be almost forced to attack in column, and when a unit is held up in a daylight attack, battalion commanders will see to it that reserve company commanders are in a position to locate the enemy strongpoints and make plans to flank them, or seize them during the hours of darkness. It is believed that this continuous pressure on the Jap will keep him off-balance and will in the long run materially reduce the number of casualties."

27

## 8th Cavalry assists in hunt for Booth

1865: After shooting President Lincoln on April 14, John Wilkes Booth had fled into Maryland with conspirator David Herold. The enormous manhunt involved the 8th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry under Colonel John F. Farnsworth. Booth's planned escape route took him through sparsely populated areas where little to no railroad or telegraph lines existed. On April 15, the day of Lincoln's death, Booth had his broken leg mended by Dr. Samuel Mudd. Mudd later received a life sentence for his treatment of the fugitive Booth. On April 25, after having traveled by horse and boat, Booth and Herold arrived at the farm of Richard H. Garrett in Port Royal, Virginia. The 2 men were housed in the tobacco farm, which Federal Soldiers surrounded the following day.



29

Sgt.  
**Landis Garrison**  
2004: Sgt.  
Landis W.  
Garrison,

23, of Rapids City, Ill., died April 29 of an accidental shooting in Abu Ghraib, Iraq, of non-combat related injuries. Sgt. Garrison was assigned to the 333rd Military Police Company, Illinois National Guard, Freeport, Ill.

# May 13

Only  
**Illinois unit to serve in Vietnam activated**

1968: The 126th Service and Supply Company received mobilization orders for service in Vietnam. The Quincy based unit began overseas service on May 18 as an attachment of the 23rd Supply and Transportation Battalion of the Americal Division. The duties of the 126th included issuing food, clothing, fuel, equipment, and vehicles to units that operated in the combat zone.

10

Sgt.  
**Lukasz D. Saczek**  
Sgt. Lukasz D. Saczek, 23, of Lake in the Hills, Ill., died May 10 in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained from a non-combat related incident. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, based in Woodstock, Ill.



18

Sgt. 1st  
Class  
**William D. Chaney**

2004: Sgt. 1st Class William D. Chaney, 59 of Schaumburg, Ill. died May 18, in Landstuhl, Germany from complications after surgery. Chaney was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, Chicago, Ill.



23

Spc.  
**Jeremy L. Ridlen**

2004: Spc. Jeremy L. Ridlen, 23, of Paris, Ill., died May 23 in East Fallujah, Iraq, from small arms fire during an ambush of his military convoy. Ridlen was assigned to the 1544 Transportation Company, Paris, Ill.





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