

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

PRAIRIE SENTINEL

VOLUME 24

**Deployed Units Home in
Time for Holiday Celebrations**

WINTER 2025

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

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March 24, 2025



Team,

Over the past few weeks there have been a lot of changes within the federal government including the U.S. Department of Defense. Each of you likely have an opinion about these changes. As a member of the U.S. military your opinion is important. However, your opinion is subordinate to the civilian authorities placed above you. These authorities were put in power by the citizens of the U.S. through free and open elections.

Every Soldier and Airmen in the Illinois National Guard took an oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic" and to "bear true faith and allegiance to the same."

We will follow the lawful orders of the President, who derives his powers from the U.S. Constitution. And, when in state status, we will follow the lawful orders of the Governor of Illinois.

When we "bear true faith," we are pledging to have trust and confidence in the U.S. Constitution and when we swear "allegiance," we are committing to remain loyal to the Constitution.

So, how best to do this as a service member?

As individual service members I encourage you to filter out the noise and focus on what you can do to help the Illinois National Guard increase its readiness and exceed the military standards.

What can you do to make the Illinois National Guard more accountable to our fellow service members and the U.S. taxpayers?


What can you do to make us more lethal? If an enemy decides to start a fight, we must win. Building a championship team starts with each of us training hard and exercising self-discipline and commitment.

As the Commander of the Illinois National Guard, my responsibility is to build the best team across the 50 states, 3 territories and district. As a member of the team, ask yourself what you can do to make us a lethal force that is ready to fight tonight.

Leaders of the organization must focus on training and mentoring our Soldiers and Airmen - regardless of their race, sex, or background - so we have the best of the best prepared to be the future leaders of our organization.

I'm going to concentrate on making the Illinois National Guard the best that it can be. I trust you will do the same.

Always Ready, Always There!


RODNEY C. BOYD
Major General, ILARNG
The Adjutant General



Soldiers and Airmen with the Illinois National Guard board a C-130H Hercules in Peoria, Illinois, Jan. 15, for mobilization to Washington, D.C. The Guardsmen activated in support of security operations for the 60th Presidential Inauguration. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer)

Approximately 140 Illinois National Guard Members Activated for Presidential Inauguration Security

Story by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Approximately 140 Illinois National Guard members deployed on federal orders to Washington, D.C. to support security operations for the

60th Presidential Inauguration Jan. 20.

"Supporting the presidential inauguration is a great opportunity for the Illinois National Guard to be part

of history and represent the state of Illinois," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "Our Soldiers and Airmen are highly trained, and I have full confidence in their abilities to support the local and federal agencies as needed."

Approximately 110 Soldiers and 30 Airmen from the Illinois National Guard were activated to support the inauguration.

The Illinois National Guard force included 100 Military Police Soldiers from the 933rd Military Police Company, based in Fort Sheridan, and about 30 Security Forces Airmen from the 183rd Wing based in Springfield, the 126th Air Refueling Wing based at Scott Air Force Base, and the 182nd Airlift Wing based in Peoria. These troops conducted site security in support of the federal task force.

There were also a few service members the 5th Civil Support Team (CST), based in Bartonville, and the 126th Air Refueling Wing, based at Scott Air Force Base, providing specialized support in Washington, D.C.



Illinois Army National Guard soldier, Spc. Abigail Jones, right, and Sgt. Denise Jaimes, 933rd Military Police Company stand vigilant in support of the 60th Presidential Inauguration in Washington, D.C., Jan. 20.



Airmen from the 182nd Airlift Wing who recieved recognition for visiting the OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois in Peoria, Illinois, during Dec. 2023. The Airmen are all from the 182nd recruiting team and volunteered their time to pass out toys and lift the spirits of sick children during the holiday season. (U.S. Air National Guard graphic by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus)

Airmen from the 182nd Airlift Wing Lift Spirits During Holiday Season

Story by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

While the holidays can amplify feelings of joy for some, they can also exacerbate feelings of loneliness, fear and anxiety for others. Either way, it seems to be the case that they often have a way of magnifying whatever emotions already reside in individuals.

For U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. Brandon Smith, an aircraft maintenance officer with the 138th Fighter Wing in Tulsa, Oklahoma, last Christmas was not a celebration of familial bliss as planned. The Smiths had every factor which should have made for a joyous holiday season: A newborn baby, leave for the holidays and a trip to see family in Pontiac, Illinois.

That is, until the Smiths' newborn daughter began to develop signs of congestion and a cough, which led to a doctor's visit in Pontiac, where she tested positive for Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection (RSV). What should have been a holiday of family, togetherness and joy suddenly became one of fear and anxiety as the Smiths took their newborn to the OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois to receive more extensive care.

They were scared about their baby and had a million thoughts and anxieties. But what the Smiths could not have anticipated was the Airmen from the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, Peoria, Illinois, who visited and passed out stuffed

animals to the children in the hospital over the Christmas holiday.

The Smiths newborn recovered, and they returned home after the holiday season. What lingered with them—more than the fear, more than the anxiety, more than the million alternate possibilities—was the compassion of the Airmen of the 182nd Airlift Wing.

"I want to thank the Airmen of the 182nd Airlift Wing who took the time out of their day during this holiday to walk around room to room at the hospital and extend that compassion to families who, like us, were in a time of need," said Smith. "We were stranded in a hospital out of state over the holidays, scared to death about our baby, and those Airmen who wanted to show some compassion by visiting and passing out stuffed animals meant so much to us, as I'm sure it did to many others."

The selfless service, wholly voluntary and out of the goodness of their hearts, of the 182nd Airmen brightened up an otherwise dark, scary holiday for families with children in the Peoria Children's Hospital.



U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. Brandon Smith, an aircraft maintenance officer with the 138th Fighter Wing, Oklahoma Air National Guard, holding his daughter at the OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois in Peoria, Illinois, in Dec. 2023. Smith's family was visited by Airmen from the 182nd Airlift Wing who volunteered to pass out toys to children in the hospital. (Photo courtesy of 2nd Lt. Brandon Smith)

A note to all, but especially Airmen and veterans: The holidays can be a dark time for many reasons. Reach out to your loved ones, coworkers and Wingmen and provide as much light as possible this holiday season.

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD WHY I SERVE

Sgt. 1st Class Katie Grandori



Sgt. 1st Class Katie Grandori of the 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment began her career with the Arkansas Army National Guard before eventually transferring to Illinois.

She has served since 2011, is pursuing a law degree, and has deployed to Guatemala and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"I joined the National Guard right out of high school because I wanted to get out of Arkansas and see more of the world. I especially enjoy serving in the National Guard during natural disasters and other emergencies in my home state. Getting to serve in my community is so meaningful to me."

2nd Lt. Tamera Pratt

Since enlisting in 2019, 2nd Lt. Tamera Pratt of the 333rd Military Police Company has embraced adventure, physical challenges, and opportunities to push herself in exciting new ways.

Some of her most rewarding experiences include hands-on training in law enforcement tactics, self-defense, and firearms.

"As a National Guard member, I play a vital role in supporting local communities, especially during natural disasters or emergencies. Being able to help people in times of need — whether through disaster relief or community service — brings me a deep sense of fulfillment and pride."



Sgt. 1st Class Heather Heelan



Sgt. 1st Class Heather Heelan, 333rd Military Police Company, has been a Guardsman since 2008 and currently serves as a Military Police Soldier.

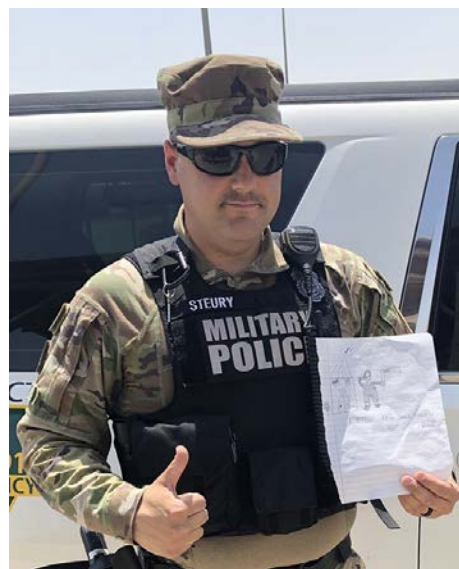
She has deployed to Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2015 and Puerto Rico in 2018, and she supported the presidential inauguration mission in 2021. She is a platoon sergeant and helps

to develop and mentor Soldiers into strong future leaders.

"I wanted to do something that was not only thrilling but also meaningful and a way to give back to my community. The Guard was perfect because I could still be home and have a civilian career."

Beyond her military service, Heelan takes great pride in being a role model for her son, nieces, and nephews. For her, serving in the Illinois Army National Guard is not only about personal growth but also about honoring the sacrifices made by Soldiers and their families.

2nd Lt. Ethan Steury



2nd Lt. Ethan A. Steury, 233rd Military Police Company, Illinois Army National Guard, has served since 2008, including a 2021 deployment to Kuwait.

"I joined at the end of my senior year of high school," said Steury.

"A friend joined before me and convinced me to join. I didn't

have any direction or purpose after high school. Joining the military gave me a purpose. And since getting married and having kids, that has motivated me to stay in the military."

Illinois Air National Guard Selects Outstanding Airmen of Year



Maj. Gen. Dan McDonough, the Assistant Adjutant General - Air of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, presents the award for Illinois Air National Guard Outstanding Airman of the Year to Senior Airman Hannah Sundararajan of the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria. The winners are selected based on their superior leadership, job performance and personal achievements.



Maj. Gen. Dan McDonough, the Assistant Adjutant General - Air of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, presents the award for Illinois Air National Guard Outstanding Noncommissioned Officer of the Year to Tech. Sgt. Jacob Speicher of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Scott AFB. The Illinois Air National Guard selects its top enlisted members from a pool of nominees representing the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Scott AFB, the 182d Airlift Wing, Peoria, and the 183d Wing, Springfield.



Maj. Gen. Dan McDonough, the Assistant Adjutant General - Air of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, presents the award for Illinois Air National Guard Outstanding Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year to Senior Master Sgt. Alexander Mercer of the 183d Wing, Springfield.



Maj. Gen. Dan McDonough, the Assistant Adjutant General - Air of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, presents the award for Illinois Air National Guard Outstanding First Sergeant of the Year to Senior Master Sgt. Brett Miller of the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria.



Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment, based in Chicago, and deployed to Camp Kosciuszko in Poland visit Poznan School 46.

Soldiers with Chicago-based Finance Unit Arrives Home after Overseas Deployment

As 2-year-old Alina Ward took in all the camouflage uniforms in the hotel conference room, she suddenly saw a familiar face.

"Daddy!" Alina called out as her father, Capt. Cameron Ward, stepped up to the podium. Ward, the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard's 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment, wasn't home for nearly half of his young daughter's life, but Alina knew who her father was.

The approximately 25 Soldiers of the Chicago-based unit gathered with their families on Feb. 2 in Oak Brook

to celebrate the accomplishments of the unit during its 11-month long deployment to Poland. It was the last event of the unit's reintegration training scheduled about 90-days after the unit returned just before Thanksgiving. They deployed in January 2024 and were deployed for about 11 months.

"Families, thank you for your support of your Soldier and our organization," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard.

"They could not accomplish their mission without it."

And the small unit accomplished a lot with the support of Alina and the rest of the 1863rd's families.

"This was a unit built on Soldier care," Williams said. The unit processed transactions for over 3,000 Soldiers who were missing entitlements across European Command fixing those issues and getting the troops paid. "That is true Soldier care and it relieved stress on the Soldiers and their families," Williams said.

The Soldiers also disbursed

millions of dollars to Special Operations Command personnel to ensure mission success, Williams added. "The bottom-line is these Soldiers excelled in their mission and we all should be very proud."

Ward said the team hit the ground running in Europe, splitting into three teams at Camp Kosciuszko, Forward Operating Site Powidz, and Forward Operating Site Zagan in Poland. The unit's Soldiers traveled to eight or nine locations, including in Romania and Lithuania, to support military financial operations in support of Operation European Assure, Deter, and Reinforce in January.

"We are incredibly proud of this team," Ward said when the unit returned in November. "They put in a lot of hard work and learned a lot which they spread to other Soldiers in the unit."



While deployed to Poland, Soldiers with the Chicago-based 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment were able to visit schools in their areas of operation to showcase their military equipment during the students' show and tell. Approximately 25 Soldiers with the unit deployed in January 2024 and returned to family and friends just before Thanksgiving.

Ward said the 1863rd maintained disbursing operations

"Our military pay team at Camp Kosciuszko assumed full responsibility for in-processing active-duty Soldiers arriving to U.S. Army Garrison-Poland," said Sgt. 1st Class Connie Huff, the 1863rd's first sergeant, when the unit returned.

Ward said the unit had a few notable events throughout the rotation.

"Our detachment's noncommissioned officer strength increased as one of our Soldiers was promoted to sergeant and one to staff sergeant," he said. "Sergeant Lachin Khasanov, disbursing manager, and Staff Sergeant Richard Nieves, disbursing agent, were each promoted to their current ranks."

Ward said the unit's disbursing teams supported a number of operations with sizeable currency exchanges and

cashing treasury checks to support various missions in the U.S. European Command area of responsibility.

"Sergeant Calista Roberts created a strong working relationship with the Germany Military Pay Center of Excellence. This relationship with the 21st Theater Sustainment Command allowed the 1863rd to receive additional classes on military pay to expand services in this area."

Huff said the military pay and disbursing teams pushed out of their respective operating sites to offer services to surrounding sites across USAG Poland.

"Our team at Powidz conducted site visits to Forward Operating Site Torun every Thursday to issue Eagle Cash Cards," she said. "The team in Zagan conducted weekly rotations to the six operating sites within their area of operations to assist with military pay and issue Eagle Cash Cards."

Huff said Eagle Cash Cards allows



Soldiers serving in Poland line up to receive Eagle Cash Cards from Forward Operating Site Powidz's finance team. Approximately 25 Soldiers from 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment, based in Chicago, deployed to Poland in early January and returned home in November to family and friends.



Spc. Daria Tereshchenko, Sgt. DeJuan Patterson, and Sgt. Lachin Khasanov, all deployed with the 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment, based in Chicago, complete the 18.6 mile Norwegian Foot March with 30 lbs at Forward Operating Site Powidz. While deployed to Poland, several of the unit's Soldiers were able to participate in the Norwegian Foot March, the Luxembourg March, and the German Armed Forces Badge for Military Proficiency. Approximately 25 Soldiers deployed with the 1863rd in January 2024 and returned home to family and friends in November.



Staff Sgt. Steven Yalda, 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment, based in Chicago, verifies cash amounts prior to funding his cashiers during the unit's 10-month deployment to Poland.

Soldiers to purchase items at the Army Air Force Exchange Service's rodeo which travels to the forward operating sites throughout the far west side of Poland. The rodeo only accepts the Eagle Cash Cards as payment.

"Most rotational Soldiers deploying to Poland arrive without the card and are unable to purchase necessary

items from AAFES," she said. "The traveling disbursement teams were largely able to alleviate the issue."

Ward said the 1863rd's Soldiers also took advantage of volunteer opportunities as well as opportunities to take online classes outside of their normal duty.

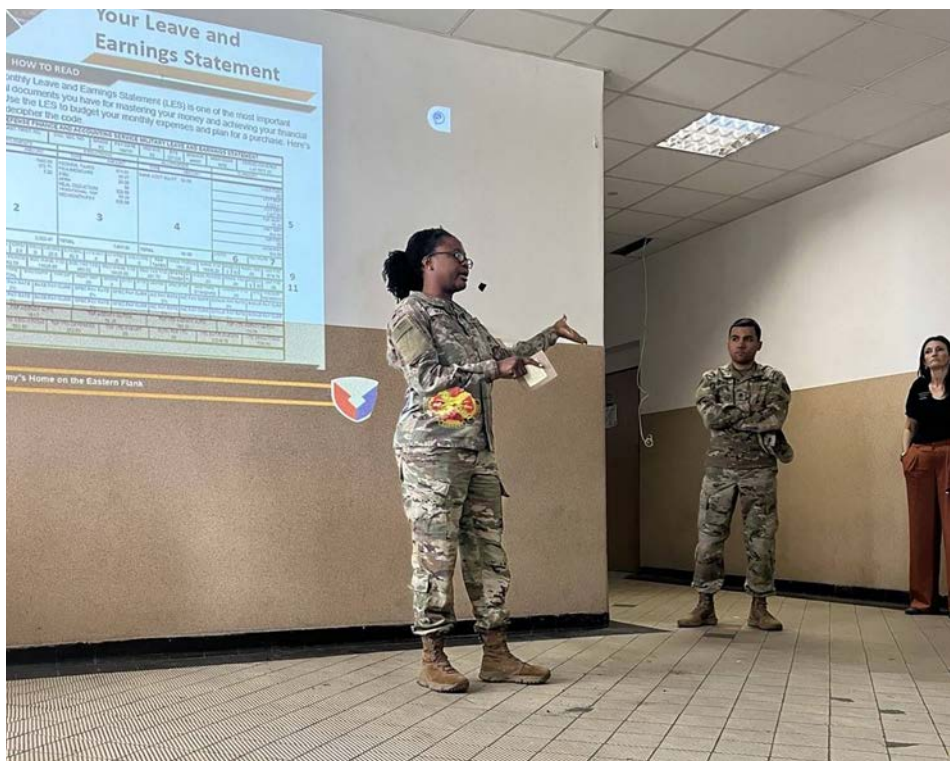
"We had a team visit a local orphanage and Soldiers visit a local school to learn about the Polish Constitution," he said. "Out of the 24 Soldiers who deployed, 14 took online college classes in efforts to complete a bachelor's degree."

Soldiers also took advantage of opportunities to participate in additional military training.

"We had a number of Soldiers who completed the German Armed Forces Badge, the Norwegian Foot March, and the Luxembourg March," Ward said.

USAG leaders were impressed with the 1863rd FMSD's performance and three Soldiers accepted offers to return to Poland on Active Duty for Operational Support orders.

Staff Sgt. Richard Nieves, disbursing manager, accepted the



Spc. Abiodun Mogaji, 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment, based in Chicago, conducts a class on how to read a leave and earning statement at Forward Operating Site Zagan during the unit's deployment to Poland.



Capt. Cameron Ward, Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard's 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment, addresses his Soldiers and their families, honoring their sacrifice and thanking them for a successful mission to Poland.

position of noncommissioned officer in charge at FOS Zagan.

"In this position, he will assist with logistically planning and garrison liaison with the rotating units," Ward said.

Sgt. Robert Chromniak, military pay chief at FOS Zagan, will become the noncommissioned officer in charge at Camp Karliki.

"His ability to speak fluent Polish was instrumental to the unit's success at FOS Zagan," Ward said. "U.S. Army Garrison Poland considers him a huge asset and will use him not only as the noncommissioned officer in charge for one of their remote sites, but as a liaison to our Polish counterparts."

Spc. Alexis Roberts, military pay technician at Camp Kosciuszko, will serve in the garrison's in-processing office.

"Her ability to learn quickly and identify new processes to expedite

the link between Camp Kosciuszko's in-processing office and finance office has earned her a new role as well," he said. "I have no doubt the three Soldiers will represent the 1863rd and Illinois National Guard well in the U.S. European Command."

This mission was the first overseas deployment for the 1863rd.

The 1863rd is a relatively new unit, having been organized on Sept. 1, 2018. The 1863rd received its federal recognition on Dec. 18, 2020. While this is the first overseas mission for the unit, the 1863rd was activated by the state of Illinois in April 2020 to operate community testing sites in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Soldiers, be proud of your service and accomplishments and cherish the comradery and memories made while serving something greater than yourselves," Williams said.



Soldiers with the 1863rd Finance Detachment gather in formation to be praised and congratulated on their successful deployment to Poland during the unit's official 'Welcome Home' ceremony Feb. 2 in Oak Brook. The Soldiers deployed in early January 2024 and returned home following the 11-month deployment. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Mallory Sinkhorn, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office, Illinois Army National Guard)



The family of Brig. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, Illinois National Guard, pen on his new rank at the Peoria Air National Guard Base, Peoria, Illinois Nov. 27. McDonough oversees the command and operations of nearly 3,000 Illinois Air Guard personnel, ensuring combat readiness across Scott Air Force Base, Peoria, and Springfield. His leadership includes managing mission-critical operations, logistics, and personnel development to meet United States Air Force requirements.

ATAG - Air, Brigadier General Daniel R. McDonough Receives Second Star During Promotion Ceremony

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Brig. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough was promoted to the rank of Major General at the Peoria Air National Guard Base, Peoria, Nov. 27.

As the Assistant Adjutant General - Air for the Illinois National Guard, McDonough oversees the command and operations of nearly 3,000 Illinois Air Guard personnel, ensuring combat readiness across Scott Air Force Base, Peoria, and Springfield. His leadership includes managing mission-critical operations, logistics, and personnel development to meet United States Air Force requirements.

During the ceremony, he expressed his gratitude for the unwavering support of his family, mentors, and colleagues.

"This is beyond anything I could have ever imagined," McDonough

said. "It started with a dream that I could fly a jet in my hometown. I never would have thought I'd one day be wearing two stars."

With a career spanning decades, McDonough's achievements are extensive. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Aviation Administration from Indiana State University and graduated from the Academy of Military Science in May 1987. His assignments have taken him from Peoria, Illinois, to commanding missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, showcasing his expertise and commitment to excellence.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General for Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard spoke on McDonough's extraordinary commitment to his

country.

"Today, we are promoting someone of extraordinary character," Boyd said. "He has committed his life to making this country and the Illinois National Guard so much better. This is a special moment for Dan and his family. You don't get to this level of achievement without the unwavering support of your loved ones. There are ballgames, plays and family events that we sometimes miss, but at the end of the day, our military families always have our back. We thank Dan and his family."

An accomplished pilot, McDonough has logged more than 5,600 flight hours, including time in aircraft such as the T-37, F-16A/B, and C-130 Hercules. His leadership has been recognized through numerous

awards, including the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal, and the Air Force Combat Action Medal.

Despite his achievements, he attributes his success to his faith, family and everyone who has supported him throughout his career.

"I look out into the crowd and see family, friends and people who have shared this journey with me, and I'm so touched by that," McDonough said. "I didn't do this on my own. I want to thank God for looking over me and blessing me with his grace. To family, friends and those fortunate enough to serve this great nation, my wife Cindy, the twins and I are truly humbled that you chose to share this special occasion with us. It's an honor to continue to serve and to share this event with you."



The family of Brig. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, attend his promotion ceremony at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Nov. 27.



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General for Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, gives remarks during the promotion ceremony for Brig. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria Nov. 27.



Above, Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General for Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Brig. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, Illinois National Guard stand at attention at McDonough's promotion at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Nov. 27.



At left, the 182nd Airlift Wing funeral honors team post the colors during the promotion ceremony for Brig. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Nov. 27.

Illinois National Guard General from Geneva, Illinois, Assigned to New Position in Korea

Brigadier General Justin Osberg Will Be Promoted to Major General

Illinois Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Justin Osberg of Geneva, Illinois, has been selected as the Deputy, Combined Rear Area Coordinator, Combined Forces Command, U.S. Forces Korea, United States Indo-Pacific Command.

General Osberg's new assignment means that he will be promoted to major general making him a "two-star" general. He will be responsible for the Korean rear area under the 2nd Infantry Division/Republic of Korea – U.S. Combined Division. The 2nd Infantry Division deters aggression and maintains peace on the Korean Peninsula; and if deterrence fails, "Fight Tonight" in support of the U.S.-Republic of Korea Alliance. General Osberg will also coordinate with the U.S. 8th Army.

"I am incredibly proud to have an Illinois National Guard officer serve in this vital position in Korea," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "This assignment demonstrates how the Illinois National Guard is a force for good in our communities, our state, and on the world stage."

General Osberg was appointed as the Director of the Joint Staff for the Illinois National Guard in February 2024 overseeing the Illinois National Guard's domestic operations and international relationships. He previously served as the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General - Army. He has had a long and distinguished career in the Illinois Army National Guard holding key command and staff positions including command of the Chicago-based 108th Sustainment Brigade, which has since been redesignated as the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade.

General Osberg is also a combat veteran with two tours in Iraq and one tour in Afghanistan where he served as a key advisor to coalition

forces including the Illinois National Guard State Partnership Program partner, Poland. He joined the Army in 1993 as a CH-47 Medium Helicopter Mechanic with the Illinois Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment and now has nearly 32 years of service. He attended the Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School and received his commission in August 1997 as an Army Signal Corps Officer.

In his civilian career, he is a Senior Manager for Ernst & Young, LLP where he is responsible for consulting company executives in change management.

"I am incredibly grateful to both my family and to my civilian employer for their support of my military career," Osberg said. "Without the support of both, I could not continue to serve my state and nation for so long."

Maj. Gen. Boyd said that Brig. Gen. Osberg is a great example of how a traditional Illinois National Guard Soldier can excel in both military and civilian careers. "It takes commitment, the support of families and the support of employers. Being part of the Illinois National Guard can also enhance family life and civilian careers in addition to the education and financial benefits of service," General Boyd said. "I am personally grateful for General Osberg's advice, friendship of many years and for the example he has set for the 13,000 Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen."

General Osberg was awarded the



Illinois Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Justin Osberg has been selected as the Deputy, Combined Rear Area Coordinator, Combined Forces Command, U.S. Forces Korea, United States Indo-Pacific Command.

Legion of Merit twice and the Bronze Star Medal twice. He has numerous other awards and decorations including the Polish Army Medal (Bronze) awarded by the Polish Armed Forces. He was also awarded the Combat Action Badge meaning he engaged the enemy in direct combat.

General Osberg is a native of Arlington Heights, Illinois. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Finance from the University of Illinois and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Illinois. He lives in Geneva, Illinois, with his spouse, Jessica and has three daughters, Chloe, Ava, Juliana, and a son, Evan. General Osberg and his family are planning a promotion ceremony in Illinois sometime later this year.

Filipiak assumes responsibility as 33rd IBCT Senior Enlisted Leader

Story and Photo by Spc. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office

The Illinois Army National Guard's 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team marked a significant milestone during a Change of Responsibility Ceremony Dec. 8 at the Urbana Armory in Urbana.

Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly of Chicago relinquished his duties as the brigade's senior enlisted leader to Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Filipiak of Marseilles, symbolizing the seamless transition of leadership and the enduring strength of the unit.

Col. Seth Hible, Commander of the 33rd IBCT, praised Command Sgt. Maj. Kelly's service alongside him and commended the leadership and dedication he brought to the brigade.

"This is bittersweet. We've known each other about 20 years," said Hible. "He is experienced, he's professional, and I knew that he understands the Soldiers. I have dreaded this moment for a few years now, but it's important that he moves forward to his next job, which he needed to do. I encouraged that. I'll miss the car rides. I'll miss the discussions on how we make the brigade better and about leadership development."

As Kelly began his role as the new Illinois Army National Guard State Command Sergeant Major, Hible welcomed Filipiak to his new role, acknowledging the fresh perspective he will bring to the brigade.

"I'm looking forward to him pushing me forward even though he was born the year that I joined the Army," Hible said with a laugh. "I'm looking forward to seeing where we can step forward for the rest of my command as we continue setting the brigade up for success. I believe that you'll listen, you'll advise me, and you'll tell me, 'Hey sir, that just doesn't

work,' which I have always valued in the past. Sgt. Maj. Filipiak, welcome to the new position, and I'm looking forward to that same professionalism from you as well."

Kelly, reflecting on his tenure, expressed gratitude for the trust placed in him and his deep admiration for the unit's Soldiers and leaders.

"It is a tremendous honor to stand

Your dedication, professionalism, and willingness to embrace challenges have been remarkable. Serving as your brigade Command Sergeant Major has been the greatest privilege of my life. This has been the best assignment of my 35-year career, working alongside some of the finest leaders and Soldiers in the world."

Incoming Command Sgt. Maj.

Filipiak expressed his enthusiasm and commitment to building upon the strong foundation set by his predecessor.

"It is my honor to be standing here in front of you today. The 33rd has been my home, and I'm glad to be back," Filipiak said. "A lot has changed since I was the first sergeant here, but the philosophy of the 33rd Brigade endures. My leadership approach will focus on mastering the basics, ensuring every Soldier knows their job, and giving every Soldier a voice at the table. Communication is key — my phone is always on, and my door is always open. We're all in this together."

Filipiak brings extensive experience to the role. He emphasized the importance of

accountability, communication, and steady leadership at every echelon, noting that success depends on active involvement and honest feedback from all levels of the organization.

"Sgt. Maj. Kelly, thank you for your confidence in me. Our interests and goals are aligned, and I look forward to bringing a fresh perspective at the brigade level," Filipiak said. "I'm excited about getting out, seeing everyone, and pushing this brigade forward. Together, we will shape our efforts for an uncertain future, ensuring the 33rd IBCT remains ready, resilient, and always moving forward."



Col. Seth Hible, Commander, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team passes the brigade guidon to Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Filipiak, the brigade's incoming senior enlisted leader during a Change of Responsibility Ceremony Dec. 8 at the 33rd's Headquarters in Urbana.

here as we mark a significant moment in the transitional leadership within the 33rd IBCT," Kelly said. "Colonel Hible, thank you for placing your trust in me as your Command Sergeant Major. Your leadership has set the example and inspired not only me but countless others to rise every day and be better Soldiers."

He also recognized the critical role of the noncommissioned officer corps:

"To the NCOs: you are the backbone of this organization and the Army. Never underestimate the impact you have. Take the initiative, be bold, and always lead from the front.



Col. Beth Roxworthy, Commander, Chicago-based 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade, passes the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Troops Battalion guidon to Lt. Col. Brad Yakle, incoming battalion commander, during a change of command ceremony at the Northwest Armory in Chicago on Nov. 3.

34th Division Sustainment Troops Battalion Honors Leadership During Change of Command

Story and Photos by Spc. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office

Lt. Col Mark Williams, of Chatham, who oversaw the transition of his unit while also deploying two subordinate units, relinquished command of the Illinois Army National Guard's 34th Division Sustainment Troops Battalion to Lt. Col Brad Yakle, of Springfield, at the Northwest Armory in Chicago on Nov. 3.

"Mark's been here since July of 2022, so a little over two years in command and a lot has happened in this in this organization since he

assumed command," said Col. Beth Roxworthy, the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard's 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade, the battalion's higher headquarters.

The battalion transitioned from the 108th Special Troops Battalion to the 34th Division Sustainment Troops Battalion. The battalion deployed the 633rd Theater Gateway Personnel Accountability Team to Kuwait and oversaw its successful return. It

also deployed the 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment to Poland. The 1863rd will return from deployment soon.

Roxworthy praised William's energy and enthusiasm throughout his command of the battalion.

"I will say that the best days in the commander seat are the days that you get to do re-enlistments and give awards and promotions," Williams said. "Those are by far the best times that you're ever going to have because

you're recognizing Soldiers for their accomplishments."

Williams left "three little nuggets of wisdom" with his Soldiers. "...Take care of your family, take care of your health, and take care of your sanity and in that order. You can't be mentally prepared unless you're physically prepared, and you can't be physically prepared unless you're comfortable at home, right? And so your family is the most important thing that you have in your life and you should cherish them and take care of them because everything in life is easier when you know that your family is safe and comfortable at home."

Williams will continue his career as the Joint Force Headquarters contracting officer as a traditional Guard Soldier and the deputy of the construction facilities management office as a full-time technician.

Roxworthy said Yakle is "going to be an amazing coach and mentor to all of us on training management."

Yakle has several years of experience as an Active Guard Reserve officer and will help smooth the transition as the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade's forward element returns to Illinois, Roxworthy said.

"I'm really looking forward to their reintegration home that way they can get back into their civilian lives and their family," Yakle said. "We will achieve the most when we have a good cohesive team and are all on the same page. So reintegrating folks in back into their lives and into the unit, is going to be a priority and something that I look forward to."

Yakle rose to the rank of sergeant first class before commissioning as an officer.

"It tremendously affects my leadership," said Yakle. The prior service time gave me the exposure, the experience and the confidence to get up in the front. I do better, I lead better when I know what I'm asking that subordinate to do. Having done those different positions, I think that helps me know the kind of the left and right limits of what you can ask of soldiers, what their jobs are. So it informs the decisions I make."

"I like training," he added. "I like planning training and I'll have some things that I can impart there. So together, I think we'll be able to do some good stuff. I'm looking forward to the hard work to having a lot of fun and getting a lot done."



Lt. Col. Mark Williams ensured the soldiers that they were in good hands with the incoming commander of the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Troops Battalion during a change of command ceremony in Chicago Nov. 3.



Lt. Col. Brad Yakle, incoming commander of the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Troops Battalion, expressed his gratitude and excitement for this new chapter in his life.



Soldiers with the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Troops Battalion listen as outgoing commander Lt. Col. Mark Williams and incoming commander Lt. Col. Brad Yakle address the formation during a change of command ceremony at the Northwest Armory in Chicago on Nov. 3.



34th IDSB Soldiers Receive Warm Homecoming Following Return from Overseas Deployment

Nearly 300 Soldiers from the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade and the 433rd Signal Company received warm welcome homes in Chicago and Springfield following a successful deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. The unit deployed in January and returned home in time to spend the holidays with friends and families.



*Photos by Barb Wilson and
2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois
National Guard Public Affairs Office*



34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade Supported Historic Missions in Middle East

Chicago-based Brigade Provided Logistics to Combat Troops and Humanitarian Missions

While most Americans read about events in the Middle East in the news last year, nearly 300 Soldiers of the Illinois Army National Guard's Chicago-based 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade (IDSB) and 433rd Signal Company were there supporting U.S. military logistics and communications missions throughout the region.

The units' Soldiers, who returned to Illinois in November, gathered with their families Feb. 2, in Oak Brook to celebrate their accomplishments during their 11-month deployment.

"You were deployed during a tumultuous time in the Middle East," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, at the units' "Welcome Home Ceremony" in Oak Brook, Illinois. The units had Soldiers operating in 11 different nations and



Colonel Eric Smith, Forward Commander of the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade, gave a sincere and inspiring speech that resonated with everyone in attendance.

the 34th IDSB headquarters provided command and control over nearly 30 subordinate units including four

battalions.

"You executed missions critical to our national security," Williams said. "Welcome home and job well done. You exceeded the requirements of the mission." The unit supported seven major missions including the humanitarian aid mission to those caught in the war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip and combat missions against terrorist operations throughout the region.

Williams also thanked the Soldiers' families for their support and sacrifices. "We can't do this without you. Period," he said.

Col. Eric Smith, the Commander of the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade, called the welcome home ceremony, "the final act of a long journey. One that began 28 months ago" as the unit prepared to deploy, deployed, returned home, and completed reintegration training.

While overseas, the unit helped "hundreds of thousands of innocents caught in the crossfire of warring nations," supported multiple major multi-national training exercises and supported anti-terrorism operations, Smith said. "The fight doesn't happen without logistics. My pride for your achievements is overflowing. I am most impressed with your personal growth, your tenacity, and your dedication."

"I'm in awe of your determination to succeed and your willingness to help others succeed," said Command Sgt. Maj. Heather Blakeman, the Command Sergeant Major of the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade.

The 34th IDSB headquarters, with slightly more than 250 Soldiers, earned 18 Meritorious Service Medals, 95 Army Commendation Medals, 102 Army Achievement Medals, and had 44 Soldiers promoted during the deployment, Blakeman said.



34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade Soldiers assemble into formation in front of their family and friends. They come together for a proper welcome home after 11 long months away from their friends and families. The 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade Headquarters Company and the 433rd Signal Company deployed to Kuwait in January 2024. (Photos by Spc. Mallory Sinkhorn, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office)



Singing our National Anthem to start the Coming Home Ceremony for 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade is their very own Sgt. Leianna Sullivan. Sgt. Sullivan moved the crowd emotionally by preforming a beautiful rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner. (Photos by Spc. Mallory Sinkhorn, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office)

Two Soldiers completed college degrees while deployed, one earning an associate's degree and the other earning a master's degree. Sixteen completed professional military education requirements.

The 433rd Signal Co., with only about 40 Soldiers, most in their teens and early 20s, succeeded beyond expectations, Blakeman said. "They had little rank and limited experience" when they started the deployment but had a determination to succeed, she said.

The 433rd Signal Co.'s Soldiers earned five Army Commendation Medals and 67 Army Achievement Medals, including 39 "impact" awards for individual achievement, and three certificates of achievement. The unit's Soldiers earned 30 college hours and one certification.

The Army Combat Fitness Test pass rates for both units also "went through the roof," Blakeman said. Dozens of Soldiers participated in 5-kilometers races and the Norwegian foot march – an 18.6-mile march with a ruck full of gear. The 1st Theater Sustainment Command's 'Best Squad' Team, which consisted of four Soldiers from the 34th IDSB and one Soldier from the 13th Armored Corps Sustainment Command, placed

second in the Army Central Best Squad Competition despite only having two weeks to train.

The units' Soldiers are now all Veterans. When Col. Smith was out with some of his Soldiers after hours in civilian clothes at a local establishment, a fellow Veteran bought a round of drinks. The colonel asked how he knew they were in the military. He shared the Veteran's response during the ceremony.

"Of course you are service members. You are a bunch of misfit, raggedy-ass SOB's with tight haircuts," the Veteran told him. "You are the guardians of the gate. Thank you, brothers."



The 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade's Command Sergeant Major Heather Blakeman, explains the numerous achievements and tasks completed by her Soldiers during the unit's deployment.

At right, the first sergeant of the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Sgt. Lewis Collins congratulates Staff Sgt. Timothy Allen on his promotion to sergeant first class.



Soldiers with 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade stand in formation during the unit's 'Welcome Home' ceremony following an 11-month deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

Carpentersville Soldier First to Direct Commission Under Rebooted Program

Story by Dutch Grove, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Cameron Paulson of Carpentersville, Illinois, received a direct commission to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant Feb. 19 during a ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Most often Soldiers commission through a traditional source like Officer Candidate School (OCS) or Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), but Paulson commissioned directly from the rank of Sergeant First Class through the rarely used direct commission program, which was dormant for a number of years.

"There was a revision to the regulation, which added back direct commission as a commissioning source for Basic Branches in 2019," said Maj. Jaclyn Haffer, the Illinois Army National Guard Officer Strength Manager. "Direct commission is a nominative process to provide an alternative officer producing source to those candidates who are outstanding leaders."

Direct commission candidates must meet eligibility requirements like achieving the rank of Staff Sergeant, must have earned a bachelor's degree, and must have a security clearance among other requirements.

Paulson said he thought a lot about becoming an officer throughout the 14 years he served as an enlisted 13J Fire Control Specialist.

"My former Fire Direction Officer told me about the direct commission process and said I met all the requirements," said Paulson. "So, I decided to go that route rather than a traditional commissioning source to spend more time with my unit instead of months in training."

While Paulson still must complete Field Artillery Officer basic course in the near future, he said he's looking forward continuing his career down this new path.

"Every officer I have talked to raves about how being an officer opens more doors throughout your career and gives you the responsibility to mold the careers of other Soldiers."



Cameron Paulson of Carpentersville, Illinois, returns his first ever salute as an Illinois National Guard Officer to Sgt. 1st Class Jeffery Panttila during a ceremony where Paulson received a direct commission to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant Feb. 19 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield. (U.S. Army photos by Staff Sgt. Kierra Harris, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, Illinois Army National Guard)

Paulson asked Sgt. 1st Class Jeffery Panttila to be his first salute. Panttila said he has known Paulson since his first day in the unit 14 years ago.

"He works really hard and he's one of the smartest people I've ever met in my life," said Panttila. "One of the great things in the military is you get to grow. Now Lieutenant Paulson will take his wealth of knowledge from being a senior non-commissioned officer to the officer corps."

Col. Brian Gerber, the Senior Army Advisor to the Illinois National Guard, officiated the ceremony. He congratulated Paulson and his wife Coralie. He advised Paulson that being an officer is a journey the pair must embark on together.

"This is going to change your life," said Gerber. "Our traditions are different as a profession. You're leaving the NCO corps and becoming a lieutenant. Remember, it's not about you, it's about the Soldiers who you are going to lead."



Coralie Paulson punches 2nd Lieutenant rank into her husband Cameron's chest during a ceremony where Paulson received a direct commission at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Mundelein Soldier Promoted to Colonel

Story and Photo by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

More than 27 years after initially enlisting in the Iowa Army National Guard, and 20 years after commissioning as a second lieutenant, the Illinois Army National Guard's Staff Judge Advocate was promoted to colonel during a ceremony Dec. 8 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, in Springfield.

Jason Humke, of Mundelein, Illinois, was joined by family, friends, and fellow Soldiers as he became the newest colonel in the ILARNG.

"This promotion is a testament on what you have done in your career," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "With only 23 colonels in the Illinois Army National Guard, it is a huge deal to pin on the rank."

Williams thanked Humke's family for their support throughout his career.

"It's a long way from Mundelein to the gates at Camp Lincoln," Williams said. "It's a long way to travel and that shows your support for Jason and his service."

Humke, a traditional Illinois National Guard member, serves as an assistant Lake County State's Attorney as a civilian.

"Our Citizen Soldiers, those who serve as traditional members of the National Guard, have professional careers outside of serving in uniform," Williams said. "They perform in their professional careers and then flip a switch, put that uniform on, and come serve your country."

Williams said it is amazing to watch traditional Guard members navigate those two things.

"I appreciate what you have done for 27 years. I appreciate you splitting the line and figuring out how to be highly successful on the civilian side and still do this," Williams said. "You got there by giving sage advice to commanders throughout your career."

Humke has held key positions throughout his career, including tactical intelligence officer, intelligence officer, trial council, command



Robert Humke, son of newly promoted Illinois Army National Guard Col. Jason Humke of Mundelein, secures his father's new rank during a promotion ceremony Dec. 8 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield. Humke was appointed as the Illinois Army National Guard's Staff Judge Advocate in September.

Judge Advocate, deputy Staff Judge Advocate, and most recently, military judge.

He commissioned as a second lieutenant through the University of Nebraska's Reserve Officers' Training Corps program in 2004.

Humke thanked his family, including mother, Deb, wife, Amy, and children, Emily and Robert.

"One week after my 18th birthday, my mom went with me as I enlisted in the Iowa National Guard. There was a look of horror on her face, and that look has pretty much been on her face since," he said. "You've been with me since I got my first Class A uniform as a private, and together we tried to figure out how to sew the private chevron on - ultimately sewing it on

upside down," he said. "You have been with me step by step throughout my career and I'm so glad you're here today to see this."

Humke also thanked his wife and children.

"Amy you have been with me over the years as we figured out how to always be together even while I was deployed. I could not have done this without you," he said. "For my children, who wanted to see their dad get promoted, this is for you."

Humke has deployed three times during his career, including to Operation Desert Spring as an infantry team leader, to Afghanistan in 2008-2009 with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and to Kuwait, in 2014.

ILARNG Officer Strength Manager Promoted to Major

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

The Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Strength Manager was promoted to major during a ceremony Nov. 25 at the Illinois Military Academy.

Born in Bad Tölz, Germany, Jaclyn Haffer entered the world destined for adventure and leadership. After graduating from Springfield High School in 2001, she enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in August 2002.

In 2004, she landed her first job as a federal technician in the Property Book Office. Shortly after, she transitioned to the Active Guard and Reserve program as an E-4 with the 3637th Maintenance Company. In 2007, she deployed with the unit from 2007 to 2008. Upon returning, she assumed the role of 88M School Training NCO for the 129th Regional Training Institute.

Haffer later attended Officer Candidate School (OCS), earning her commission as an officer in the Adjutant General Corps in 2016.



Maj. Jaclyn Haffer is administered the Oath of Office by her father Col. (ret.) Craig L. Lowman during her promotion ceremony Nov. 25 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.



Capt. Jaclyn Haffer is pinned by her daughters during her promotion ceremony to the rank of major Nov. 25 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.



Chicago Bears Salute Military Service

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the 41st Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, second from right, Spc. Nathaniel Johnson, the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior, left, and Senior Master Sgt. Nathaniel Bostic, 183rd Wing, join Chief of Staff of the United States Army, Gen. Randy George, for a photo before the start of the Chicago Bears 'Salute to Service' game at Soldier Field, Nov. 10. Boyd was recognized for his service as the military salute honoree of the game. George took part in the honorary coin toss and presided over the oath of enlistment for Future Soldiers during a break in the second quarter.





TAG visits Illinois Air Guard Wings

U.S. Air Force Col. Rusty Ballard, the commander of the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, presents an immersion brief to U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and other Illinois National Guard Joint Force Headquarters staff during a visit to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, Dec. 19. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus)



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Kevin Booher, left, 126th Maintenance Squadron, explains an inspection checklist to Illinois National Guard Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, Jan. 23, 2025. Boyd spent the day with the 126th Air Refueling Wing. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)



At right, U.S. Air Force Col. Tim Huchel, 126th Maintenance Group, commander, points to the banners celebrating the Groups yearly high mission capable rates to Illinois National Guard Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, Jan. 23. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)



U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the adjutant general, Illinois National Guard, speaks to Airmen from the 182nd Airlift Wing during a town hall question and answer event as part of his and other Illinois National Guard Joint Force Headquarters staff's visit to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, Dec. 19, 2024.



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami, Senior Enlisted Leader of the Illinois National Guard, held a town hall meeting and toured 183rd Wing facilities, Dec. 10. Through the town hall meeting, Boyd acquainted himself with the members of the 183rd and answered their questions on a variety of subjects. Accompanied by Wing leadership, Boyd and Salami toured 183rd facilities, making stops at the 217th Engineering Installation Squadron, 183rd Air Operations Group, 183rd Maintenance Squadron, including the T-10 test cell, and the 183rd Communications Squadron cyber range. The final stop on the tour was the new 183rd Civil Engineer complex, due to open in spring 2025.



Illinois Air National Guard Intelligence Planner Finds Purpose in Giving Back As Volunteer

Story by Staff Sgt. Paul Lauricella, 183rd Wing Public Affairs Office

Technical Sgt. Ben Campbell, an Intelligence Planner in the Air Component Operations Squadron (ACOS) of the 183d Wing, Springfield, IL, believes that his life has been carefully aligned to serve a greater mission.

Campbell dedicates his time out of uniform to assisting the city's unhoused population through his work with the Helping Hands Initiative, a non-profit which provides shelter, support, and housing for the unhoused in Springfield. His passion for service isn't born of obligation, it's a deeply personal mission shaped by his own struggles.

"I ended up on the streets at 18," Campbell recalls. "There were nights I'd sleep on benches because being at home wasn't safe." As a teenager, he faced a level of instability few could imagine. For Campbell, those experiences weren't just painful;

they were formative. His experiences formed a quiet determination to create change for others in similar situations.

Joining the Illinois Air National Guard marked a pivotal moment in Campbell's life. At the time, he was working three jobs when a coworker suggested the military. Campbell wasn't sure at first, but a recruiter's promise of education benefits and stability resonated with him. "That's how it started," he says. "By June 2014, I was enlisted."

As a coordinator for the Helping Hands Initiative, he organizes donations and hot meals for Springfield's unhoused community, a population he identifies with deeply. "There could be another me out there," he explains. "That's why I do it."

While The Helping Hands Initiative is most active during the winter months, particularly during

Thanksgiving, it is more than just a Holiday project – it's a year-round effort for Campbell. While the team provides hot meals and warm clothing during the holidays, Campbell ensures the initiative responds to needs as they arise. Whether redistributing surplus food or rallying his fellow Guardsmen for donation drives throughout the year, Campbell keeps the mission moving, a mission that he has been a part of for eight



Illinois Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Ben Campbell, an intelligence planner in the 183rd Air Component Operations Squadron, finds purpose in giving back as a volunteer in Springfield.



Illinois Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Ben Campbell volunteers his time to serve those less fortunate through the Helping Hands Initiative, a non-profit which provides shelter, support, and housing for the unhoused in Springfield.

years. "It's about dignity. It's about giving people what they need, not just what's convenient," Campbell says.

Looking ahead, Campbell is determined to pass his legacy of service on to his two daughters, ages nine and three. His eldest has already embraced the mission, crafting bracelets to sell and donating the proceeds to Helping Hands. Campbell considers it the ultimate measure of success to see his daughters grow up with a natural instinct to help others and make a difference.

In Springfield, where challenges like homelessness often go unseen, Campbell's work is a quiet but powerful reminder of the power just one person can have to shape the lives of others—not just of the need for compassion, but of the resilience and transformation that can emerge from the most difficult circumstances. As he says, "It's not about what you've been through, it's about what you do with it."

ILNG Flight Surgeon Promoted to Colonel

Dr. Timothy J. Williams of Byron, Illinois was promoted to Colonel in a ceremony at the Illinois State Military Museum on Camp Lincoln in Springfield Jan. 4.

Williams is a flight surgeon assigned to the Illinois National Guard's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 106th Aviation Regiment based in Peoria.

After earning a Bachelor of Science in Physician Assistant Studies from Des Moines University in 2004, Williams commissioned into the Illinois National Guard as a second lieutenant where he served his first

stint as the 106th's flight surgeon. He deployed to Fort Johnson, formerly Fort Polk, Louisiana in 2004 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Between 2007 and 2014 Williams completed medical school and medical residency. He also transitioned to the U.S. Army Reserves.

Williams returned to the Illinois National Guard, and his second stint as the 106th's flight surgeon in 2017 where he continues to serve.

Williams practices family medicine at OSF Saint Katharine Medical Center in Dixon, Illinois.

At right, Dr. Timothy J. Williams' son Carter, daughter Sadie and wife Tiffani pin Colonel rank on his uniform during a promotion ceremony Jan. 4 during a ceremony at the Illinois State Military Museum at Camp Lincoln.



Illinois Army National Guard Captain Honored with General Douglas MacArthur Award

Lt. Gen. Jonathan M. Stubbs present coins to seven Army National Guard Officers from the Missouri, Tennessee, Illinois, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Nebraska National Guards who were presented the General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award for exceptional leadership skills by Army Chief of Staff General Randy A. George. Each year since 1987, Gen. Douglas MacArthur Leadership Awards are presented to captains who demonstrate superior commitment to duty, honor, and country. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Daisy Broker, Mass Communication Specialist to the Director, Army National Guard)

Top-Ranked Warrant Officer Retires After 36 Years

Jeffery Coble of Plainfield says "It was an Honor to Serve" After Decades of Keeping Soldiers Equipped and Armed

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Jeffery Cobble of Plainfield joined the Army in 1986 as a fresh-faced 18-year-old.

"I loved America and wanted to serve," he said. "But back then I was also thinking that this was a good way to move out of my parents' house."

Now, 36 years after the Army helped launch him into adulthood, Cobble has retired with the top-rank achievable in the Army's Warrant Officer Corps. On Dec. 7, he retired from the military as the Senior Ordnance Ground Maintenance Officer for the Illinois Army National Guard's G4 (Logistics) Directorate during a ceremony at the Guard's headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

His 36 years of military service, 34 in the Illinois Army National Guard, included more than 16 months in Iraq (January 2005 to May 2006) as the Battalion Maintenance Technician for the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment.

Cobble spent his first two years in the active Army as a Light Wheeled Vehicle Mechanic in Germany. He joined the Illinois Army National Guard in April 1988 serving with C

Battery, 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery then based in Dixon. After 10 years as an enlisted Soldier, Cobble has been a Warrant Officer for the past 26 years.

Throughout his distinguished career, he has ensured Soldiers have had the equipment and ordnance needed to protect the citizens of Illinois and defend the United States of America. Lt. Col. Tim Barnhart, the Surface Maintenance Manager for the G4 (Logistics) Directorate, credited Cobble with kick-starting the Illinois Army National Guard's involvement in the Army Award for Maintenance Excellence Program. The Illinois Army National Guard has had great success in the Army-wide program winning multiple national awards in the last few years.

"It has helped increase our readiness and has been great for unit esprit de corps," Barnhart said.

While he has served in the Illinois Army National Guard, he and his wife, Erin, have enjoyed 28 years of marriage and have seven children: Josiah (26), Justus (24), Elianna (22), Denise (20), Adam (20), Michael (19), and Gideon (14). Erin has homeschooled all of their children.

He has also built a successful civilian career. He earned a Bachelor's of Science degree in Economics with a minor in Business Administration in 1986 from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. He then went on to become an elevator mechanic for 29 years and has been self-employed for the past 18 years.

"If you think of



Chief Warrant Officer 5 Jeffery Cobble gestures during his Dec. 7 retirement ceremony at the Illinois National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois.



Lt. Col. Tim Barnhart pins the Meritorious Service Medal on Chief Warrant Officer 5 Jeffery Cobble of Plainfield during Cobble's Dec. 7 retirement ceremony.

everything that goes into managing a business....and raising seven children...it makes Chief Cobble's military accomplishments all the more impressive," Barnhart said. "He is a true Citizen-Soldier."

Cobble's other military assignments have included unit maintenance officer for E Co., 634th Brigade Support Battalion based in Joliet from May 2006 to April 2012. He also served some time as E Co.'s Commander. He served as the Senior Ordnance Ground Maintenance Warrant Officer for Headquarters Headquarters Co., 634th Brigade Support Battalion from 2012 to 2016, the 108th Sustainment Brigade's Senior Ordnance Ground Maintenance Warrant Officer from 2016 to 2017 before being promoted to the Senior Ordnance Ground Maintenance Officer for the Illinois Army National Guard's G4 (Logistics) Directorate.

He was awarded a second Meritorious Service Medal upon retirement. Cobble echoed what a friend and retired colonel said when people thanked him for his service.

"He said 'It has been an honor to serve,'" Cobble said. "And it truly has been an honor to serve."



Gold Star Families place ornaments onto a tree in remembrance of the fallen Nov. 29 at the Decatur Civic Center in Decatur, Illinois. The event allowed Gold Star Families to come together to remember their loved ones.

Honoring Heroes

Gold Star Families Unite in Remembrance, Hope

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Gold Star families participated in the American Gold Star Families' Remembrance Decorating Event Nov.

29 at the Decatur Civic Center in Decatur.

The event allowed Gold Star Families to come together to remember the fallen.

Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Michael Graves, Region V Defense Readiness Specialist, assists with coordinating events with Gold Star Families.

"I think the Gold Star organizations do a great job providing support for Gold Star Families," Graves said. "They keep the names of the fallen alive in our formations and throughout the public."

Each November, the Tree Lighting Ceremony takes place. Family members of the fallen in attendance are given an opportunity to personally place their ornaments on the tree during the ceremony, and all other ornaments from across the U.S. are lovingly hung by those in attendance.

Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams Assistant Adjutant General - Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard highlighted the importance of coming together.

"As we light this tree today, and as we follow our holiday traditions at home, we do it with longing and love from our bereaved hearts," said Williams. "These lights are not a symbol of loss, but of life, of love and of hope. Thank you all for your courage and sacrifice. May your holidays be filled with light, and love, and hope."



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams Assistant Adjutant General - Army, Illinois National Guard, places ornaments onto a tree in remembrance of the fallen Nov. 29 at the Decatur Civic Center in Decatur.

Ceremonies Bring New Leadership to Groups, Squadrons Across Illinois Air National Guard



126th Operations Support Squadron, 108th Air Refueling Squadrons welcome new commanders

In a change of command ceremony, Dec. 8, at the 126th Operations Group, the 126th Operations Support Squadron and the 108th Air Refueling Squadron welcomed new commanders. Lt. Col. Mike O'Koniewski took over as the new 126th OSS commander and Lt. Col. Tony Meyers as the commander of the 108th ARS.



Coleman takes command of 217th EIS

Maj. John Coleman accepted command of the 217th Engineering and Installation Squadron (217th EIS) during a change of command ceremony Dec. 6, at the 183rd Wing in Springfield. Prior to accepting command of 217th EIS, Coleman served as the Director of Operations for the 217th EIS. Coleman has served honorably in the Air National Guard for 25 years.

Hurt takes command of 169th Airlift Squadron

The change of command ceremony for the 169th Airlift Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, in which U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Jeffery Herrmann relinquished command of the unit to Lt. Col. Jason Hurt at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, Nov. 2, 2024. The 169th squadron flies the C-130 aircraft which is capable of operating from rough, dirt strips and is the prime transport for airdropping troops and equipment into hostile areas. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Jay Grabiec)



Day becomes new commander at 169th ASOS

Lt. Col. John Day assumed command of the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron.



Keck takes command of 183rd AOG

Col. David Keck accepted command of the 183d Air Operations Group (183d AOG) during a change of command ceremony on Dec. 8, at the 183d Wing. Prior to accepting command of 183d AOG, Keck served as the Deputy Wing Commander for the 183d Wing. Keck honorably served 15 and a half years active duty Air Force and has served 9 years in the Air National Guard.



Fasig takes command of 182nd Maintenance

Col. Bruce Bennett relinquishes command of the 182nd Maintenance Group to Lt. Col. Randy Fasig Nov. 2. The 182nd Maintenance Group is comprised of several hundred Airmen proficient across 15 Air Force specialty codes providing maintenance and back shop operations for Peoria's fleet of C-130H3 Hercules aircraft. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Jay Grabiec)



Karas takes command of 264th Combat Communications Squadron

Lt. Col. Bridget Zorn relinquishes command of the 264th Combat Communications Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, to Maj. Eric Karas at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Nov. 2. The 264th Combat Communications squadron commander commands Airmen across multiple Air Force Specialty Codes into a top-tier expeditionary cyber team providing the rapid deployment of equipment and manpower needed to establish and provide self-supported, initial communications services in support of worldwide contingencies and state emergency operations. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Jay Grabiec)



Childers takes command of 182nd OSS

Lt. Col. Randy Fasig relinquishes command of the 182nd Operations Support Squadron to Lt. Col. Justin Childers at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, Nov. 2, 2024. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Jay Grabiec)

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd Delivers Keynote at 2025 Martin Luther King Scholarship Breakfast, Honoring Excellence and Resilience

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, served as the keynote speaker at the 2025 MLK Scholarship Oratorical Breakfast held at Rockford University in Rockford, Illinois, on Jan. 18.

Four high school seniors were awarded scholarships by the Mu Alpha Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity: Vydalis Cockrell, Jefferson High School; Kaleb Toliver, Fenton High School; Demetric Singleton, Hoffman Estates High School; and Noah Turnipseed, Hampshire High School.

The annual event, now in its 21st year, celebrates the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"This event represents the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity," said Anibal Vega,

President of the Mu Alpha Lambda Chapter. "It brings our community together, and the scholarships help African American men achieve their educational goals. We want to empower students to move forward with their aspirations."

Founded in 1906, Alpha Phi Alpha was the first intercollegiate Greek-letter fraternity established for African American men. Initially, the fraternity served as a study and support group for minority



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois, delivers an inspiring keynote address at the 2025 MLK Scholarship Oratorical Breakfast at Rockford University in Rockford, Illinois, on Jan. 18. Boyd shared his experiences of overcoming adversity and encouraged scholarship recipients to pursue their dreams while honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois, poses with the 2025 MLK Scholarship recipients during the MLK Scholarship Oratorical Breakfast at Rockford University in Rockford, Illinois, on Jan. 18. Pictured are Kaleb Toliver (Fenton High School), Vydalis Cockrell (Jefferson High School), Noah Turnipseed (Hampshire High School), and Demetric Singleton (Hoffman Estates High School). Hosted by the Mu Alpha Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the event celebrated the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and recognized the achievements of outstanding high school seniors.

students facing racial prejudice, both educationally and socially, at Cornell University.

Maj. Gen. Boyd, who became a member of the fraternity in college, spoke to the scholarship recipients about overcoming adversity and pursuing their dreams.

"You cannot plan for every setback, obstacle, or difficulty, but you can prepare yourself to face whatever comes your way," Boyd said. "Throughout my service in the military and as a member of Alpha Phi Alpha, I have found peers and leaders who inspire my personal resiliency. They helped solidify my commitment to my community."

"Bulldog" Warrant Officer Promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 5

Story and Photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Surrounded by friends, family, and fellow Soldiers, Amanda Lindsay of Springfield was promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 5 during a ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield Jan. 3.

Lindsay, who was selected the Senior Supply Services Officer for the Illinois Army National Guard in December 2023, has served in the U.S. Army and the Illinois National Guard for the past 33 years, enlisting in 1991 as a supply Soldier. She has deployed twice during her career, including a January 2024 deployment with the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade.

Lindsay was described as a bulldog, with a gruff exterior to ensure things are done to standard but with a soft interior when it comes to the developing, teaching, and coaching Soldiers.

"This organization is a better place because of what you've done for it," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black, the Command Chief Warrant Officer, Illinois Army National Guard. "Your talents are unmatched nationwide. I heard it overseas when we visited with the unit overseas

and I've heard it from Command Chief Warrant Officers from other states. I know I would never be standing here without your support."

After spending four years on active duty, Lindsay transferred to the Illinois National Guard in 1996 and became a federal technician in 1997. In 2006, she graduated from Warrant Officer Candidate School.

Throughout her years of service, Lindsay has progressed through key positions, including supply support activity and accountable officer for Company A, 634th Brigade Support Battalion; property accounting technician, Joint Force Headquarters; material management officer-in-charge, 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade; supply systems technician, JFHQ; supply support activity and accountable officer, U.S. Property and Finance Office; and command maintenance discipline coordinator.

"The bulldog analogy is spot on," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "You uphold the standards and are always teaching us as officers."

Williams said with only nine chief warrant officers five in the Illinois Army National Guard, it is very difficult to get promoted to the Warrant Officers Corps' top rank.

"This promotion is a testament to who you are and who you've been,"



Newly promoted Chief Warrant Officer 5 Amanda Lindsay thanks friends, family, and fellow Soldiers for their support throughout her 33-year military career during a promotion ceremony Jan. 3 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.



Kyle Camden, son of newly promoted Chief Warrant Officer 5 Amanda Lindsay, secures her new rank during a promotion ceremony Jan. 3 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.

Williams said. "As someone who develops, teaches, and coaches Soldiers, find the next you. Look to the chief warrant officers threes and fours and develop the next chief warrant officer five."

Lindsay said promotions aren't for the Soldiers' receiving them, but rather for their families, and for the Soldiers they serve with.

"When the Soldiers I was deployed with found out I was selected for promotion, their eyes lit up with excitement," Lindsay said. "So, this promotion is for those E-4s and E-5s and also for my family who has sacrificed everything to support me to this point. There have been missed birthdays and missed holidays, but they have supported me 100 percent."

Lindsay said she's been around the military for a long time, so many of the people who made her who she is have since retired.

"The Soldiers made me who I am," she said. "I enjoy working with Soldiers. I am blessed to be here today."



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, presents Staff Sgt. Francisco Orozco with an award for being the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Noncommissioned Officer of the Year at the recruiting battalion's Nov. 16 awards ceremony in Peoria.

Then Disqualified from Enlisting, now Illinois Army National Guard's Top Recruiter **Tattooed Overweight Metal Band Rocker Transforms into Soldier, Finds Love Behind Mask**

Story and Photos by Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

When Francisco Orozco first approached an Army National Guard recruiter in 2016, the recruiter "would not give me the time of day."

Orozco was overweight and had a neck tattoo. Both disqualified him from enlistment. The recruiter quickly dismissed him. He didn't see the potential behind Orozco. He just saw a big guy with a \$60 tattoo of the world with music notes emblazoned on his neck. He didn't see the Soldier ready to emerge.

Fast forward to today and Staff Sgt. Francisco Orozco is the Illinois Army National Guard's top recruiter. In fiscal year 2024 he recruited 35 Soldiers into the Army National Guard from the Schaumburg area and just two months into the new fiscal year and he's already made his yearly mission with 14 recruits so far.

"I almost did give up on the National Guard (in 2016)," Orozco said. Then he got a text from Matthew Serowka, a different Illinois Army National Guard recruiter. They had

a conversation about the benefits of the National Guard as well as the requirements to enlist. They talked about commitment. "He (Serowka) said that as long as I stayed committed and was willing to put in the work, he'd help."

At the time, Orozco was a 24-year-old bass player in a metal band called Iris and was about to become a father. The 2011 Prospect High School graduate was ready for a change. "I had to do a lot of work on myself," Orozco said. "It was time to get my life together."

He had never thought much about the military before walking into the Illinois Army National Guard's armory next to Chicago's Humboldt Park in 2016. He just knew he had to do something different – change the path he was on. The Illinois Army National Guard offered new opportunities. It offered the chance to go to college, to learn job skills, start retirement savings, to get into better physical condition, to travel some, and

to be part of something larger than himself. Still, not many saw the Army in Orozco's future. "It was a big shock to all my friends."

"He was one of the more motivated ones," said Serowka, who is now Orozco's first sergeant and leads the H Company "Honey Badgers" – the top-recruiting company in the state. "He came to drill with us as a guest for a year straight doing all the physical training," Serowka said. Between 2016 and 2017, Orozco shed 60 pounds. He paid \$1,600 for multiple laser treatments to remove the \$60 tattoo – neck tattoos are now waiver-able but were not back then. He studied for the ASVAB raising his score by more than 30 points so he could enlist as a combat medic (68W).

Orozco said he just needed direction and an opportunity. The Illinois Army National Guard provided both. He grew up one of five children in a single-parent household. His mother, Linda, did what she could to keep the family afloat, but Orozco

Staff Sgt. Francisco Orozco, the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion's "Noncommissioned Officer of the Year" holds the "Company of the Year" award presented to the H Company "Honey Badgers" at the battalion's annual award banquet on Nov. 16 in Peoria. The Woodstock-based unit enlisted 119 Soldiers into the Illinois Army National Guard in fiscal year 2024, with Orozco enlisting 35 Soldiers. The Illinois Army National Guard's recruiting cadre celebrated their successes, shared information, and enjoyed a night of comradery.



said he grew up without role models – people who would show him a way to success. People like Serowka and Command Sgt. Maj. Chad Mcdannald, the command sergeant major of the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion, became Orozco's mentors.

In 2017, he successfully enlisted. He has lost an additional 40 pounds since becoming a Soldier. His daughter, Mia, is now 8 years old and is "just like me," Orozco said.

Orozco's band Iris is no longer on the local metal scene. He doesn't have a lot of time to rock with the Thunderstick anymore.

But he does have someone to rock his world. He is engaged to Berwyn Fire Department Firefighter/Paramedic Fabi Amezcua. Both were combat medics in the Illinois Army National Guard's North Riverside-based 708th Medical Company

and met in 2021 when the unit was manning the COVID-19 testing site in Peoria for nearly five months.

While nostril swabs, snots, rubber gloves, and masks might not seem like the most romantic setting, both were serving their community during a time of need. Their love blossomed behind the personal protective equipment.

"She has been my greatest support system throughout my journey. Her unwavering encouragement and dedication inspire me daily," Orozco said. When he received the award as the Illinois Army National Guard's top recruiter in November, Fabi was right there with him. "I'm proud to celebrate this achievement with her."

Orozco does still strum his guitar now and then and plans to put a bit more time into it. However, now he is in the business of "transforming lives." He doesn't think of it as

recruiting. He and his team look at it as making people's lives better.

Mcdannald said that the one thing Orozco does very well is take care of people. "He works hard helping people through the entire process – before they enlist and after they enlist. He cares about those who he enlists and therefore they refer other potential Soldiers to him."

Orozco said many young men and women can relate to his lived experience. They can understand how the Army National Guard helped him. "I feel like I'm paying it forward," Orozco said. "The Illinois Army National Guard definitely changed my life, for the better."



The mobilized Soldiers stand at attention during the mobilization ceremony for the Illinois Army National Guard's 634th Brigade Support Battalion Forward Logistics Element, Jan. 20, at the Illinois Army National Guard's Readiness Center in Sullivan. The unit, with just over a dozen Soldiers, will support logistics for U.S. Army Europe and Africa.

'Small But Mighty' Unit Mobilizes to Support U.S. Army Europe and Africa

The Illinois Army National Guard's 634th Brigade Support Battalion Forward Logistics Element was activated on Jan. 20, at the Illinois Army National Guard's Readiness Center in Sullivan for deployment to Africa and Europe.

A forward logistics element (FLE) is a diverse team composed of an assortment of military occupation specialties to support the forward-deployed warfighter. The Sullivan-based unit only has about a dozen Soldiers but it will play a vital role supporting U.S. forces in Africa and Europe, said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard,

during the mobilization ceremony.

The unit is "small but mighty," Williams said. "Your mission is critical." The general thanked the unit's families for their support, which allows the Soldiers to focus on their jobs, and he challenged the Soldiers to take care of each other and to think about their legacy. "What will your legacy be? What will they say about you at the Welcome Home ceremony?"

Lt. Col. Allison Jacobs, Commander of the 634th Brigade Support Battalion, said the element's Soldiers were hand-selected for the deployment. "I have no doubt you will make us extremely proud." She said the Soldiers can be proud of their role supporting logistics. "Logistics win wars," she



Capt. Donald Tucker speaks to his Soldiers during the mobilization ceremony for the 634th Brigade Support Battalion Forward Logistics Element, Jan. 20, at the Illinois Army National Guard's Readiness Center in Sullivan.

said.

Capt. Donald Tucker will command the FLE overseas. The unit is likely to move around to different areas supporting U.S. military units in both Africa and Europe and will initially be divided with Tucker taking a team to Africa and 1st Sgt. Colton Love taking another team to Germany.

Tucker stressed the importance

of remaining “flexible to overcome obstacles” and meeting U.S. Forces logistical needs with “precision and adaptation, anticipating needs multiple steps ahead.”

The Soldiers are expected to return sometime next autumn.

Sullivan Mayor Mike Mossman and City Commissioner Doug Shook joined the families and friends to see off the unit. The rural south-central Illinois city of 4,400 people is known for its support of U.S. service members and veterans.



Something got the attention of 6-year-old Graham and 7-month-old Thatcher Tucker, sons of Capt. Donald Tucker and his spouse, Felicia, during the mobilization ceremony for the 634th Brigade Support Battalion Forward Logistics Element.



Stephen and Bonnie Tyler, the in-laws of Sgt. Jordan Probst, listen to Illinois Army National Guard Commander Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams speak during the mobilization ceremony for the Illinois Army National Guard's 634th Brigade Support Battalion Forward Logistics Element.



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, and Capt. Donald Tucker, Commander of the 634th Brigade Support Battalion Forward Logistics Element, display the State of Illinois Flag the unit will fly overseas and bring back to Illinois during the mobilization ceremony for the Illinois Army National Guard's 634th Brigade Support Battalion Forward Logistics Element, Jan. 20, at the Illinois Army National Guard's Readiness Center in Sullivan.

Retired Major General Provides Legacy of Service

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

On a cold, frigid day, with snow still blanketing the ground, a sense of warmth prevailed. Family, friends, and loved ones braved the biting air to attend a ceremony honoring the legacy of a leader — someone who devoted a lifetime to service, overcame adversity, and inspired countless others along the way.

Major General (Retired) William D. Cobetto, Chief of Staff for the Illinois Department of Military Affairs (IDMA) retired Jan. 21 at the Illinois Military Museum on Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois after a career spanning decades of dedicated service to the state and the nation.

Mr. Cobetto began his service as a member of the Illinois Air National Guard, culminating his military career as the Assistant Adjutant General – Air of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard. In this role, he commanded and supported more than 3,000 Airmen across Illinois' three major air bases, ensuring combat readiness and operational excellence.

After retiring from military service in 2015, he transitioned into a civilian career as a Commercial & Residential Loan Officer at the Bank of Hillsboro. In August 2019,



Maj. Gen. (Ret.) William D. Cobetto is presented with The Distinguished Service Medal by Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Commander of the Illinois National Guard, honoring Cobetto's exceptional service and dedication to the Illinois National Guard and the Illinois Department of Military Affairs.



Maj. Gen. (Ret.) William D. Cobetto celebrates his legacy of service alongside his wife, Kelly, during a ceremony honoring his decades of dedication to the Illinois National Guard and the Illinois Department of Military Affairs.

he returned to serve the Illinois Department of Military Affairs, first as the Legislative Liaison and later as the Chief of Staff.

"Mr. Cobetto has been an extraordinary asset to the Illinois National Guard, and we are certainly going to miss his contributions to our organization," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "He embodies what it means to serve."

Born in Hillsboro, Illinois, and raised in Taylor Springs, Illinois, Mr. Cobetto is a graduate of Hillsboro High School and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Aeronautical Administration from Saint Louis University. His dedication, leadership, and commitment to the mission have left an indelible mark on the Illinois National Guard and the Department of Military Affairs.

"I'm grateful for my wife, Kelly, our four children — Ashley, Jacob, Adam, and Emily — and to the extraordinary people I've had the honor and privilege to work with," Cobetto said. "I will never forget the memories I've shared with you all."

The Buzz From The Wings



At right, U.S. Air Force Major Anthony Mini, commander of the 182nd Communications Flight, promotes to the rank of Lt. Col. in Peoria, Illinois, Nov. 2, 2024. Mini is responsible for leading, supervising and supporting the management of the Air Force-provisioned portion of the Department of Defense Information Networks and Enterprise Information Environment mission area to meet mission readiness and warfighting capabilities. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Jay Grabiec)



At left, U.S. Air Force Major Jordan Parker, the staff judge advocate for the 182nd Airlift Wing, is joined by his family during his promotion ceremony in Peoria, Illinois, Nov. 1, 2024. As part of the Judge Advocate General Corps, Parker provides professional counsel and a full spectrum of legal capabilities to the Airmen in his unit. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Jay Grabiec)

At right, U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Bradley Wheeler, the human resource advisor for the 182nd Airlift Wing, gets promoted during a ceremony in Peoria, Illinois, Nov. 2. Chief Master Sergeant is the ninth, and highest, enlisted rank in the U.S. Air Force. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Jay Grabiec)



Hawcroft-Crouch retires as 182nd Airlift Wing's Airman and Family Readiness Program Manager

Story and Photos by Airman 1st Class Noah Hardin, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs Office

Kim Hawcroft-Crouch has been an integral part of the 182d Airlift Wing from April 5, 2015 to Dec. 31 in the role of the Airman and Family Readiness Program Manager.

Through her dedication to the wing she received the Air and Space Civilian Achievement Award. Her career in the military started long before her joining of the 182d Airlift Wing, she originally started with the Illinois Army National Guard as a Family Assistance Specialist.

During her 11 years of service "Kim has been an integral part of our team," said 2nd Lt. Brody Forbes, the officer in charge of the casualty search and recovery team. "She formed partnerships with unit leadership to enhance services for our Airmen and their families."

Kim has also been a key influence in numerous events and special initiatives on the base such as the annual Angel Tree, family events, back to school readiness events, and education and enrichment services for Airmen both in her personal life as well as her work-life.

During her career on base she provided over 5,476 consultations as well as more than 4,890 resource referrals and 299 program orientations. She hosted Yellow Ribbon program workshops and transition assistance programs to help airmen and their families to overcome hardships and difficulties as well as post-deployment reintegration and



Kim Hawcroft-Crouch, the 182nd Airlift Wing Airman and Family Readiness Program Manager, receives an award for Civilian Accomplishment at her retirement ceremony, at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, on Dec. 6. Crouch has been with the Illinois Air National Guard for 9 years as the Airman and Family Readiness Program Manager.

planning for retirement.

During her career, Kim had completed an 18 page Community Support questionnaire for the Department of the Air Force Strategic Basing Office which helped the 182d Airlift Wing to secure the selection for the new C-130J model upgrade for the

wing.

"She is a connector," said MSgt. Darrin Kessler, recruiting superintendent.

"Ms. Hawcroft-Crouch's distinctive accomplishments reflect great credit upon herself and the Department of the Air Force," said Forbes.



Kim Hawcroft-Crouch, the 182nd Airlift Wing Airman and Family Readiness Program Manager, poses for a picture with the 182nd Airlift Wing recruitment team at her retirement ceremony, at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, on Dec. 6.

After 27 Years, Officer Says Farewell to ILNG

Story and Photos by Spc. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office

After 27 years of dedicated and distinguished service, Capt. Clayton Riley of Sycamore, officer-in-charge of the Illinois National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion's North Region, officially retired during a ceremony held at the Illinois National Guard Sycamore Armory, Sycamore, Illinois, on December 6.

"Throughout his tenure, Riley set a standard of visionary leadership and unwavering professionalism," said 1st Sgt. Matthew Serowka, the first sergeant of Hotel Company, Recruit Sustainment Program. "As the North Region OIC, he provided critical strategic guidance and insight to senior leaders, helping shape the force and enhance the capabilities of subordinate commands. His profound commitment to mentorship and professional development left an enduring impact on those he led and supported."

"Captain Riley's contributions have not only strengthened the Illinois Army National Guard, but have also left a legacy that will inspire future members," said Brig. Gen. Justin Osberg, Director of the Joint Staff, Illinois National Guard. "He provided sound guidance and expertise, always striving to improve systems and processes. His leadership helped shape this organization in ways that will be felt for years to come."

Over the course of his career, Riley touched the lives of thousands of Soldiers, guiding them in their careers, civilian education pursuits, and personal development. His selflessness and commitment to service extended well beyond the formation. As Serowka noted, "He was an amazing resource for me and countless others. His presence as a leader, advisor, and mentor has been truly remarkable. There's no doubt we'll feel his absence, and we will do our best to fill the void he leaves behind."

Riley's own words reflect the collaborative spirit that defined his career: "This really isn't for me — my name's on it, but I only got through all of this because of everyone around me. It takes a village, and today's turnout shows the incredible network



Capt. Clayton Riley, officer-in-charge of the Illinois National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion's North Region retired after 27 years of service.

of friends, family, and colleagues who helped me along the way. I've learned so much from this organization and I'm proud of what we've achieved

together. Ultimately, my goal has always been to enable others to be successful, both in their careers and their personal lives."

His distinguished awards include the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, multiple Army Commendation and Achievement Medals, the Combat Action Badge, as well as numerous other federal and state-level commendations. His notable assignments spanned key roles such as North Region OIC, Brigade Logistics Officer, Operation Contract Support Section Chief, and Aerial Delivery Officer. He also served on missions abroad, including a tour with Task Force Rise in Huehuetenango, Guatemala.

With his retirement, Riley closes a chapter of exemplary service, leaving behind an organization stronger, more capable, and more cohesive than when he joined. As he embarks on the next stage of his life, he plans to enjoy more time with his wife Jodi, son Logan, and daughter Jillian. Riley was grateful for his time in the Guard and was glad to be a part of its Soldiers, mission, and legacy.



1st Sgt. Matthew Serowka, Hotel Company, Recruit Sustainment Program, presented Capt. Clayton Riley, officer-in-charge of the Illinois National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion's North Region a gift as Riley retired after 27 years of service.



‘Just Call Gina’

Gina Dickerson, left, of Springfield is shown with friends prior to her Dec. 12 retirement ceremony. She retired after supporting the Illinois National Guard’s Soldiers and Airmen for more than 37 years.

Dickerson Retires After Nearly Four Decades of Supporting Illinois Soldiers and Airmen

Gina Dickerson of Springfield retired on Dec. 12 after supporting the Illinois National Guard’s Soldiers and Airmen for more than 37 Years.

For the last 13 years, Dickerson has supervised the Defense Travel System section within the Illinois’ United States Property and Fiscal Office earning her the informal title of “DTS Guru” and her ability to fix problems in the sometimes-ornery system led to a common refrain for those who travel in the Illinois National Guard – “Just call Gina.”

Col. Brian Creech, the United States Property and Fiscal Officer for Illinois, said he would tell service members to go through their unit’s administrative staff before calling Dickerson. After all, one person shouldn’t be the primary go-to for a 13,000-member organization.

“I’ve been guilty of saying ‘Just call Gina, she’ll know how to fix it’ myself. And she would fix it,” said Creech, who presented Gina with the Illinois Military Medal of Merit in honor of her decades of service to the Illinois National Guard.

The truth is that Dickerson had been helping Soldiers and Airmen long before the Defense Travel System and she has seen the military transition through multiple systems. Gina began her civilian career with



Gina Dickerson is shown with Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, after Williams presented her with a photo of the Illinois State Military Museum signed by staff and leaders in the Illinois National Guard. Dickerson retired on Dec. 12 after supporting the Illinois National Guard’s Soldiers and Airmen for more than 37 years.

the Illinois Army National Guard in May 1987. Her plan was to stay one summer and see how she liked it. She stayed.

"Back then, all we worried about was sand-bagging (for floods)," Dickerson said. Then came Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990 and 1991. Then after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, "life really changed," Dickerson said.

Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, now the Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard and the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, recalled Dickerson and her team showing up at a unit demobilization site around 2003 or 2004 with her arms wrapped around these stacks of "old-school travel vouchers."

"Gina said 'Don't worry about it. We are going to take care of you.' And they did. I don't recall any of those hundreds of vouchers coming back for any corrections or revisions," Williams said. "They cared that deeply about our Soldiers."

Williams often asks Soldiers about what their legacy will be. "Gina's legacy will last for generations to

come," he said.

From 1987 to 2000 she worked in the Military Personnel Office performing a variety of duties. Among them was taking phone calls from family members of Soldiers who were deployed to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Gina would do her best to answer their questions, but even more so, she would serve as a trusted friend to these family members as they went through this difficult time.

Gina has a special place in her heart for those deployed in harm's way and their families. Her older brother, Michael Calandrino, was killed in action in 1969 during the Vietnam War.

Gina began working in the United States Property and Fiscal Office in 2000 where she continued her work supporting Soldiers and Airmen. She started in USPFO as a travel voucher examiner. In 2006, she was promoted to Financial Services Supervisor where she oversaw a complex financial operation that included travel vouchers, vendor payments, military pay, and technician pay. In addition, she was a key member of the Soldier



Gina Dickerson speaks during her retirement ceremony. Dickerson of Springfield retired on Dec. 12 after supporting the Illinois National Guard's Soldiers and Airmen for more than 37 years.

Readiness Process (SRP) team that would ensure that Soldiers' financial records were reviewed and validated prior to mobilizing in support of operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and many other locations around the world.

Over the last 13 years, Gina has worked as the Lead Voucher Examiner for the Defense Travel System along with managing the Government Travel Card program.

Gina played a pivotal role in leading the USPFO and the Illinois Army National Guard through a period of transformation as the organization evolved from a Ready Reserve in 1987 to the operational force it is today serving all around the world. She provided financial records support to thousands of Soldiers that participated in events following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and in the ongoing Global War on Terrorism. She was instrumental in implementing new financial systems that in many cases replaced legacy systems that were more than 30 years old.

"It means a lot knowing that I made a difference to individuals and to our service members," Dickerson said.

She lives in Springfield with her husband of 31 years, Mike. Her son, Derek, is a teacher at Washington Middle School.



Gina Dickerson smiles after the United States Property and Fiscal Officer of Illinois, Col. Brian Creech, presented her with the Illinois Military Medal of Merit in honor of her decades of service to the Illinois National Guard.

Illinois State Military Museum Holds Another Successful 'Christmas at the Front' Event



Museum volunteer Darin Gardner, depicting a World War I Soldier, looks outside a trench shelter. The Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield, which tells the history of the Illinois National Guard, held another successful "Christmas at the Front" event on Dec. 7. The event told the story of what it was like to be deployed during Christmas from the American Revolution to the Vietnam War with the museum's dedicated volunteers depicting Illinois National Guard Soldiers throughout history.



Lisa McLane of the Soldiers Aid Society Springfield talks to a museum visitor at the "Christmas at the Front" event on Dec. 7 at the Illinois State Military Museum.



Museum volunteer Rose Connolly, depicting a World War I nurse, sits in a shelter during the Illinois State Military Museum's "Christmas at the Front" Dec. 7.



Illinois Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Ben Whitlock, depicting a World War I Soldier, talks to another museum volunteer during the Illinois State Military Museum's "Christmas at the Front" Dec. 7.



Museum volunteer Shawn Riedell, depicting a World War I American medic, shows a piece of equipment to visitors.



Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Paul Golladay, depicting a Civil War Soldier, sits in front of a small fire.



Jim Kreiser, depicting a Revolutionary War Soldier, talks to museum visitors during the Illinois State Military Museum's "Christmas at the Front" event Dec. 7. The event told the story of what it was like to be deployed during Christmas from the American Revolution to the Vietnam War with the museum's dedicated volunteers depicting Illinois National Guard Soldiers throughout history.



Illinois State Military Museum volunteer Richard Schachtsiek, depicting a Civil War Soldier, talks to museum visitors during the museum's "Christmas at the Front" event Dec. 7.



Transformation complete - Sgt. 1st Class Seanna Talbert waits to pin her new Warrant Officer rank during her appointment ceremony Dec. 13 in Normal. Once pinned, Talbert became the newest Illinois Army National Guard Warrant Officer.

Illinois Army National Guard Welcomes Talbert as its Newest Warrant Officer During Ceremony

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Surrounded by family and friends in a small ceremony at Heartland Community College in Normal, Illinois Dec. 13, Sgt. 1st Class Seanna Talbert was appointed to Warrant Officer (WO1) after completing Warrant Officer Candidate School (WOCS).

"Today is a big milestone for her," said Lt. Col. Matthew Dodsworth. "I first met Talbert at the 108th Sustainment Brigade, now known as the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade

(DSB). She's a fantastic leader, and I'm excited to see what she accomplishes as a warrant officer."

Talbert was born in Sterling, Illinois, and enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in April 2012 during her senior year

of high school. She currently serves as a human resources technician for the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. In this role, she is the brigade's technical expert for human resources and a leader, trainer, and advisor to over 1,500 officers and enlisted personnel.

Her previous Active Guard

Reserve (AGR) assignments include senior Human Resources Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) and Enlisted Actions NCO. As a traditional, M-Day Soldier, she served as a physical therapy sergeant and a radiology specialist.

"I stand here with pride and gratitude as I accept the responsibilities of a warrant officer," Talbert said. "Throughout my career,

I've looked up to the warrant officers around me for their mentorship, knowledge, and guidance. I would not be here today without their wisdom and confidence in my abilities. To say that I'm grateful to be accepted into the cohort of warrant officers is an understatement."

Talbert resides in Bloomington, Illinois with her fiancé Ben.



Warrant Officer Seanna Talbert gives remarks during her appointment ceremony Dec. 13



Warrant Officer Seanna Talbert is administered the Oath of Office by Lt. Col. Matthew Dodsworth, Officer in Charge of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade during her appointment ceremony Dec. 13 at Heartland Community College in Normal, Illinois. She is a human resources technician for the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. In this role, she is the brigade's technical expert for human resources and a leader, trainer, and advisor to over 1,500 officers and enlisted personnel.

182nd CES Senior Leader leads teams in rebuilding homes for Navajo veterans as part of National Guard Bureau's Innovative Readiness Training program

Story by Tech. Sgt. Wynndermere Shaw, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs Office

Chief Master Sgt. Shawn Moore stands at the helm of a mission that goes beyond bricks and mortar - one aimed at honoring those who once changed the course of history.

As part of the National Guard Bureau's Innovative Readiness Training (NGB IRT) program, Moore and his team are engaged in rebuilding homes for members of the Navajo Indian Nation, including World War II veterans, in partnership with the Southwest Indian Foundation (SWIF).

The Navajo Indian Nation, with its proud history of service, occupies a revered place in the annals of military history. During World War II, when the United States faced a seemingly insurmountable challenge against the Japanese forces, the "Navajo Code Talkers" helped turn the tide of the war. Using their native tongue language to create an unbreakable code, these Navajo veterans ensured that U.S. forces could communicate securely and effectively. Their work was crucial in protecting American lives and securing victory over the Japanese.

The SWIF, using NGB IRT, is paying tribute to these heroes by rebuilding homes not only for Navajo veterans but also for the family members of those who have served, honoring their deep connections to military service.

"It was phenomenal getting immersed in their culture," said Moore, Senior Enlisted Leader for the 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard. "They wanted their houses to face to the East so they could see the sunrise in the morning. That's one of their spiritual beliefs."

This past Memorial Day, Moore undertook the renovation of a particularly meaningful home.

"I had the privilege to meet 107-year-old Marine Corps Cpl. John Kinsel Sr. "World War II Navajo Code Talker," said Moore.

After returning from the war, Kinsel used a team of horses and a trailer to haul timber from the



Airmen from the 144th Civil Engineer Squadron (CES), California Air National Guard (ANG); 154th CES, Hawaii ANG; 118th CES, Tennessee ANG; and Chief Master Sgt. Shawn Moore, the Senior Enlisted Leader, 182nd CES, Illinois ANG, in front of one of the homes they helped refurbish. Photo courtesy of Airman 1st Class Donnell Schroeter from the 377th Air Base Wing.

mountainside, cutting and shaping the wood by hand to build a home for himself and his wife. This same house, where his children were born, is now undergoing renovations to include modern amenities such as running water and an updated electrical system. Alongside the house, a couple of dilapidated structures remain on his property, including a firewood bin and a timber storage shed.

Although Kinsel's home project was led and funded by an organization outside of the NGB IRT, Moore and his team remained committed to showing their ongoing respect and admiration for the Navajo tribe.

"Our team had the day off, but everyone agreed to drive over 90 minutes away, to spend the day addressing the distressed structures that were not part of the renovation," states Moore. "Unfortunately, we were not able to get everything wrapped up on day one, so Lt. Cdr. Steve Vargas from the Navy SeaBees, Staff Sgt. Jan Atijera from the 142nd Civil Engineer Squadron and I went out to complete what we initially went there for."

After completing their work at

the Kinsel house, Moore shares an impactful memory when leaving.

"Kinsel was inside the house at the time and we were going to leave. We went inside to say goodbye to him and at 107-years-old, he saluted us," says Moore.

Throughout his time working for the NGB IRT, Moore led three rotations of Air National Guard units in the construction of another home in the same area as the Kinsel house. The 144th CES from Fresno, California, the 154th CES from Hawaii, and the 118th CES from Tennessee. Each one arrived on two-week rotations to continue the mission of honoring Navajo veterans through service and rebuilding efforts.

Moore and his team exemplified a commitment to honoring the legacy of the Navajo Code Talkers. Through their work rebuilding homes for the Navajo veterans and their families, they pay tribute to the enduring contributions they made during World War II. The NGB IRT mission Moore was a part of went beyond just construction. It safeguarded the memory of these heroes for generations to come.

Mahomet Soldier Rises to Sergeant Major in Illinois Army National Guard

Story and Photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Nearly 20 years after enlisting in the Illinois Army National Guard, Kyle Bishop of Mahomet, the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's operations noncommissioned officer, was promoted to sergeant major in a ceremony Jan. 24 at the brigade's headquarters in Urbana.

Bishop enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in July 2005 and has served two overseas combat deployments and multiple overseas training deployments.

"You don't get anywhere in a career by yourself," Bishop said. "I owe my being here today to a lot of people I've served with throughout my career."

Bishop shared a story about his first training officer – then captain, now Lt. Col. Brad Yakle.

"Attention to detail is key in everything we do," Bishop said. "And every time I submitted something, he would come back with corrections.

Looking back, he was preparing and developing us to be leaders."

"Today is a special day as we promote one of the 33rd's finest noncommissioned officers to sergeant major," said Maj. Spencer Ervin, the 33rd IBCT's operations officer. "He is a master of self-development as demonstrated throughout his nearly 20 years of service."

Ervin, who has served with him for more than 10 years, said Bishop is regularly sought out by officers and noncommissioned officers for his input.



Newly promoted Sgt. Maj. Kyle Bishop thanks friends, family, and fellow Soldiers during a promotion ceremony at the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's headquarters in Urbana Jan. 24.

"He is a consummate professional who places the mission first while balancing the needs of his Soldiers," Ervin said. "He teaches and mentors his young Soldiers to ensure their success. He also cares about their homelife and ensures they have the tools necessary to be successful in all aspects of their lives."

Ervin thanked Bishop's family, including wife, Brittany, and children Knox and Madden, for their support.

"We understand Kyle would not be in this position today without your support in the hardest of times and situations," Ervin said. "Thank you for that, and we ask you continue to support him in his service to this great nation."

Bishop offered advice to his fellow noncommissioned officers.

"If you do not have a noncommissioned officer mentor, get one," he said. "No one gets to where they are without a mentor. You will need someone to confide in throughout your career."

Bishop is a graduate of several training courses, including, Rappel Master, Air Assault School, Senior Gunner, and recently began the U.S. Army Sergeants Major course.



Brittany, Knox, and Madden Bishop, wife and children of newly promoted Sgt. Maj. Kyle Bishop join in the time honored tradition of tapping the new rank on the uniform during Bishop's promotion ceremony at the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's headquarters in Urbana Jan. 24.

'Results Driven Leader' from Illiopolis Retires After 27 years of Service

Story by Spc. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office

The Illinois Army National Guard bid farewell to one of its distinguished leaders, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Tim Milligan of Illiopolis, as he retired after a remarkable 27-year Army career.

"I'll speak for this entire organization, for all 10,000 of us. We are extremely grateful for all you have done," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, at the Nov. 1 retirement ceremony on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Williams reflected on the significance of legacy and the impact a Soldier's work has on the Army and those around them. He praised Milligan, describing him as brilliant, hardworking, and someone who connects well with others, consistently delivering outstanding results.

"He's a results driven leader," said Williams. "Warrant officers are technical experts and give advice to us to make decisions. When Tim gives advice to a senior leader, no matter what rank, the senior leader listens because he's earned that."

"Milligan you are just fantastic. You're going to be great at all that you do because of who you are and who you've always been and because you get the people part of it right. People are going to gravitate towards you. I wish you all the best. I'm super honored to be the one to get to see you out," Williams added.

Milligan enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1997 as a military police Soldier, serving in the 233rd Military Police Company in Springfield, Illinois. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks changed his career path and inspired him to serve fulltime. Milligan entered the Active



Chief Warrant Officer 4 Tim Milligan spoke to his fellow soldier and gave a few words of wisdom during his retirement ceremony was held at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois, On Nov. 1. Milligan thanked his family for all of the love and support they gave over his 27-year career and accredited some of his success to the encouragement and guidance he received from his peers and leadership over the years. (Photo by Spc. Justin Malone)

Guard and Reserve program in 2003 as a recruiter and served in a variety of different assignments as an enlisted Soldier.

In 2011, Milligan received his commission as a warrant officer and was selected to be the Resource Manager for the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion. He has served in a variety of assignments, including Chief of the Field Support Branch for the recruiting battalion, Human Resources Officer for the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) and the Illinois Army National Guard's Personnel Actions Branch Chief.

"I would like thank God for the blessings he has given me because without his hand on my life I would not be here," said Milligan, who grew up in Niantic, Ill. Milligan thanked his wife, Jessica Milligan, sons, Parker and Jackson, and the rest of his family for the love and support they gave over his 27-year career.

Milligan credited some of his success to the encouragement and

guidance he received from his peers and leadership over the years.

"I've had the honor to work with some of those amazingly talented people and I've been a part of some of amazing teams," Milligan said. "I never imagined myself being in those rooms and in those situations. A lot of those people and those moments had a major impact on my life. Some of the greatest people that are part of this organization sitting right here in this room."

Milligan echoed Williams' sentiments on the importance of the legacy that Soldiers create while serving.

"I believe that a person's legacy isn't defined by how you view yourself or how others

view you," Milligan said. "My hope is that what each of you here and those that I've worked with remember me as someone who loved God and loved people. And that when I left rooms, that people felt heard and they felt valued, and that I left it better than when I walked in."



Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black presents the Legion of Merit to Chief Warrant Officer 4 (ret.) Tim Milligan. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Stech, Recruiting and Retention Bn.)

Illinois Army National Guard's Top Recruiting Company is Fearless in Tough Market

'Honey Badger' Team Uses Culture, Soldier Care to Change Lives for the Better

Story and Photos by Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

The Honey Badger is an intelligent persistent creature that uses teamwork and tools along with thick skin and flexibility to thrive in a harsh environment.

But there is one characteristic that stands out in every Honey Badger: absolute fearlessness.

The housecat-sized mammal is known to take on rhinos, buffaloes, lions, and leopards. They eat venomous snakes for breakfast.

The Illinois Army National Guard's Woodstock-based H Co., Recruit Sustainment Program – The 'Honey Badgers' – seem to have taken on the traits of the unit's moniker. Led by 1st Sgt. Matthew Serowka, they were the top recruiting unit in the Illinois Army National Guard in fiscal year 2024. The Honey Badgers enlisted 191 Soldiers last fiscal year. The unit already has 44 recruits so far this fiscal year, and recorded its highest month on record in October with 26 recruits.

But Serowka doesn't worry about numbers. "I strictly do culture," he said. "I look after (our recruiters) personal and professional development." He describes his leadership style as being "weird."

"I believe in empowering them – getting them fully hyped, fully energized," he said. That energy was on full display at the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention annual awards banquet on Nov. 16. The 'Honey Badgers' took six out of the eight top Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion awards. After each name was announced, all the unit's noncommissioned officers erupted into pure joy – the kind of elation you see from the winning team when the final buzzer sounds during the championship game.

Except, there were no surprises – the winner's names were printed in the program:

- NGB Director's 54 and Recruiting and Retention NCO of the Year – Staff Sgt. Francisco Orozco, Hotel Honey Badgers (a Schaumburg-based recruiter.)



The noncommissioned officers of the Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion's H Company "Honey Badgers" celebrate as the Woodstock-based unit is named "Company of the Year" at the battalion's annual award banquet on Nov. 16 in Peoria.

- First Sergeant of the Year – 1st Sgt. Matthew Serowka, Hotel Honey Badgers.
 - Team Leader of the Year – Sgt. 1st Class Chad Wille, Hotel Honey Badgers.
 - Rookie of the Year – Staff Sgt. Chanc McEstes, Hotel Honey Badgers (a Crystal Lake-based recruiter.)
 - Readiness NCO of the Year – Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Booher, Hotel Honey Badgers.
 - Most Improved Company of the Year – Bravo Avengers (based in Chicago's Northwest Armory next to Humboldt Park.)
 - Retention NCO of the Year – Sgt. 1st Class Haley Westart, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (with its headquarters in Normal.)
- Staff Sgt. Chanc McEstes, the "Rookie of the Year," described the Honey Badgers as a big family who

support each other and love to spend time together. "We'll have events or team outings. It is very family oriented," McEstes said. "We'll text each other on the side or hang out and play video games together."

There will be long days at work every now and then, but when you genuinely like the people you work with and they support each other, it "really does make it a lot easier," McEstes said.

Sgt. 1st Class Chad Wille, the "Team Leader of the Year," hears a lot about how tough the recruiting market is and how much pressure recruiters are under to 'make numbers.' But he doesn't see it that way.

"Once you get in your groove, this job is amazing," Wille said. "This job allows so much autonomy. We can try new things and see what works and what doesn't work for their recruiting

style. You can get out into the public and educate them – and you can help a lot of people.”

Stress and fear of not making a quota doesn’t motivate this team. Making a positive impact on people’s lives is what motivates the Honey Badgers, Wille said. And they work as a team fearlessly to reach their goals. “The people who are very successful are very coachable,” Wille said. “Not everything is going to be perfect every day. Sometimes things don’t go our way.” Resilience skills and teamwork are vital to success.

Military Entrance Processing Stations see more medical issues than they used to and sometimes recruits can get held up in bureaucracy, Wille said. “But we are pretty good problem-solvers. We communicate a lot. We support each other. I might tell them what worked for me in the past. What actually works for them might be a little bit different and we help each other figure it out.”

Serowka said that the ability of the Honey Badgers to recruit their own recruiters has also helped the unit. “If you look at Hotel Company, about half the recruiters were recruited by me and the other half were recruited by (Sgt. 1st Class) Wille,” Serowka said.

Staff Sgt. Francisco Orozco, fiscal year 2024’s Recruiter of the Year with 35 enlistments, was originally recruited into the Illinois Army National Guard by Serowka. “It is really a team effort. It is nice being acknowledged for your individual efforts, but the team helped keep me motivated and I like to think I did the same for them,” Orozco said.

Wille recruited McEstes, the “Rookie of the Year” with 26 enlistments last year.

McEstes was serving with the Woodstock-based D Co., 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment when Wille offered to bring him on temporary active-duty orders with the Recruiting and Retention Battalion to see if he liked recruiting. “He shadowed a recruiter for six months and decided he wanted to give it a try. Once he got his chance, he just took off,” Wille said.

While Serowka and Wille love seeing their Soldiers get recognized for their accomplishments, they love seeing the team celebrate together even more. “When everyone has a common goal, individual success is for the team,” Wille said.



Master Sgt. Stephen Salefski lights the candle at the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action table at the beginning of the Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion’s Annual Awards Banquet on Nov. 16 in Peoria. The POW/MIA table ceremony serves as a reminder that there are those who cannot join in the celebration. The backdrop for the ceremony was a display showing the 34 Illinois National Guard members killed overseas since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, and Illinois Army National Guard State Command Sergeant Major Michael Kelly present Staff Sgt. Chanc McEstes with an award at the Illinois Army National Guard’s Recruiting and Retention Battalion’s annual awards banquet on Nov. 16 in Peoria. McEstes was the Illinois Army National Guard’s second best recruiter in fiscal year 2024 and was inducted into the “Minuteman Club” at the silver level. The Illinois Army National Guard’s recruiting cadre celebrated their successes, shared information, and enjoyed a night of comradery.

Illinois National Guard's Senior State Property Book Officer Retires After 27-Year Career

Story and Photo by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Keith Hildebrandt, who enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard following his graduation from high school in 1998, was honored for his 27 years of military service during a retirement ceremony Jan. 22 at the Illinois State Military Museum.

"I have known you almost your entire career," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "You are a consummate professional. I always tell Soldiers to be a good leader, take care of people, and find your replacement. And you certainly have done that."

Hildebrandt, who enlisted as a light-wheeled vehicle mechanic and served with the 233rd Military Police Company, spent the first 13 years of his career as an enlisted Soldier, graduating from Warrant Officer Candidate School in 2011. He was assigned as the Property Accounting Technician for the 65th Troop Command.

In 2014, Hildebrandt transferred to the United States Property and Fiscal Office where he held numerous positions including Property Examination Review and Compliance Team Chief, Property Book Team Chief, and Assistant State Property Book Officer.

Williams also thanked the family, wife Trish, and sons, Eli, Jack, and Lucas.

"I have to applaud the entire family for your support," Williams said. "We can't do it without you guys. It's hard enough to complete a 20-year career, let alone going above and beyond and serving 27 years without the support of the family."

Hildebrandt described his wife, Trish, as a great spouse and a great military spouse, recounting when he left for Warrant Officer Candidate School, their twin sons were



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard presents Chief Warrant Officer 4 Keith Hildebrandt, Illinois National Guard's Senior Property Book Officer, a certificate of service from the Chief of the National Guard Bureau during Hildebrandt's retirement ceremony Jan. 22 at the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield.

newborns, and when he left for the advanced course, their youngest son was three months old.

"You have always supported me in my goals and always took care of the home whether I was gone for schools, deployments, or annual training," he said. "You made it look easy, in part because of the great support structure always there to help us out."

Hildebrandt acknowledged the missed birthdays and holidays, away from his children.

"I am proud to see you grow up into strong young men," he said.

Hildebrandt comes from family where military service is a tradition.

"Military service on my mother's side dates back to the Revolutionary War, and both my grandfathers as well as an uncle and my brother have served in the military," he said. "I'm sure there have been breaks in service during that time, but with my retirement, it will be one of the few times no family member will be serving in the military."

Hildebrandt said he was extremely blessed and fortunate throughout his career.

"I was able to cut my teeth, prove my mettle, and made connections which I was able to make into a career," he said. "Each assignment opened the doors for a chain of events which led to new leaders teaching and mentoring me. I had fantastic leaders who helped me along my journey."

Hildebrandt has deployed overseas twice in his career. He deployed from February 2003 to May 2004 to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as the unit motor sergeant with the 232nd Corps Support Battalion. He again deployed to Iraq in March 2020 in support of Operation Inherent Resolve with the 232nd Combat

Support Sustainment Battalion as the battalion's property book officer.

Hildebrandt, who is also the Track and Field coach at Sangamon Valley Middle School in Illiopolis, likened his military retirement to the fourth lap in a mile run.

"The first lap is easy. The second lap, it's starting to get harder, but you're still going," he said. "The third lap is the hardest lap. You want to quit, your body is telling you that you're stupid, and then on that fourth lap, you can see the finish. I've made it to my fourth lap and I'm ready to celebrate."

Hildebrandt thanked great leaders, mentors, commissioned and noncommissioned officers that he's worked with throughout his career.

"You were able to take a small-town boy from Illiopolis and help me achieve my best," he said. "It has been said it takes a village and my village is strong. I would not be here without your support."

Arkansas Native Earns Promotion to Captain in Illinois Army National Guard

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office



Capt. Justin Lowe, a logistics officer with the Illinois Army National Guard, delivers remarks during his promotion ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters on Camp Lincoln, Jan. 31

Relocating to Springfield, Illinois, from Little Rock, Arkansas, may not have been what the young lieutenant initially envisioned for his family. Arkansas, a state rich in agriculture, outdoor recreation, and a deep-rooted love for the University of Arkansas Razorbacks, was where they considered home. Now, they are embarking on a new journey with a new family – the Illinois National Guard.

Justin Lowe, a logistics officer for the Illinois Army National Guard, was promoted to captain on Jan. 31 at Joint Force Headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

“He didn’t want a big ceremony or anything fancy,” said Lt. Col. Michael Barton, deputy logistics staff advisor. “Many of the individuals here today were around when he took a leap of faith coming from Arkansas. He was already a commissioned officer there but came here for a military technician position. He’s been an excellent addition to our field feeding platoon

and has taken on a tremendous amount of responsibility.”

Lowe transitioned to the Illinois Army National Guard in 2022, working as a military technician for most of his time with the organization. In 2024, he took a position as aide-de-camp to The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, assisting him with critical missions.

“I want to thank everyone here today for coming out to celebrate this moment with me and my wife,” Lowe said.

“Most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Cynthia, who has been with me through it all. When I first told her about this job opportunity, she was excited because she thought it would be in Chicago. Of course, it wasn’t easy to break the news that we would actually be about three hours south of Chicago. I’m grateful to everyone for trusting in my ability.”

Capt. Lowe and his wife, Cynthia, live in Springfield with their four children.



Capt. Justin Lowe smiles as his wife, Cynthia, pins his new rank insignia during his promotion ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters on Camp Lincoln, Jan. 31. Lt. Col. Michael Barton (left) stands by to congratulate Lowe on his promotion to captain in the Illinois Army National Guard.

“America’s most precious export to the world is freedom. You carry the burden to protect freedom all over the world on your shoulders.”

- Glenn Poshard, Former U.S. Congressman

Approximately 550 ‘Blackhawk Battalion’ Soldiers Mobilize for Overseas Mission

Story by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Approximately 550 Illinois Army National Guard from the Blackhawk Battalion, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, nicknamed the Blackhawk Battalion, headquartered in Marion, were joined by family and friends at mobilization ceremonies in various locations Feb. 8-9 as they prepare to deploy for an overseas mission to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

“You are trained. You are ready, and it’s time to knock this mission out of the park,” said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard.



Sgt. Evan Oliver, fire team leader and training noncommissioned officer for Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Effingham, with wife, Anna, was among the approximately 130 Soldiers from Company B honored at a mobilization ceremony Feb. 8 in Effingham. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Mallory Sinkhorn, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office, Illinois National Guard)



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, presents Capt. Andrew Klein, Commander, Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment with the Illinois state flag during the unit’s mobilization ceremony Feb. 8 in Effingham. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Mallory Sinkhorn, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office, Illinois National Guard)

Boyd was on hand at the ceremony honoring the approximately 130 Soldiers from Company B, based in Effingham, Feb. 8.

The battalion, which has units based in Marion, West Frankfort, Effingham, Litchfield, and Mount Vernon, will conduct additional training at Fort Bliss, Texas, before deploying to the U.S. Central Command. While overseas, the battalion will be headquartered in Jordan and will have Soldiers in 17 locations in seven countries in support of Operation Spartan Shield. The unit’s primary mission will be

securing and protecting U.S. and allied forces and will also include training with allies and partners in the region.

Boyd thanked the families of not only Company B’s Soldiers, but also the families of all the deploying Soldiers.

“Thank you for supporting these young warriors over the years and your continuing support during this deployment,” he said. “You are the reason these Soldiers can wear the uniform and serve this great nation.”

He asked three things of the Soldiers while they are deployed.

“Keep the lines of communications

open with your families. They will be worried about you. I ask the families to be patient. They're not always going to be able to call you right back, but they will contact you when they have time," Boyd said. "Take care of each other. You are only as strong as your weakest link.

"Support each other. Everyone won't have a great day every day, but collectively you will be successful on this mission. Each day you go out to do your job, give it 110 percent," he said. "And lastly make a personal goal and work to achieve it. Whether it's to improve your physical fitness, read a book, or take an online course. Fix something about yourself."

Capt. Andrew Klein, Commander, Company B, thanked the families of the Soldiers for stepping up to pick up the slack at home while their Soldier is deployed.

"I know the responsibilities don't go away even during deployments," he said. "I know the families will be picking up the slack more with their Soldier gone. Thank you for that."

Klein told the Soldiers being away from home won't be easy, but they are up to the task at hand.

"It's not going to be easy. There will be hard times and there will be challenges," he said. "Embrace those times with your friends on your left and right. Those will likely be the memories you take with you the longest following the deployment. You will look back at them the fondest."

State Rep. Brad Halbrook, 107th legislative district, thanked the families and Soldiers for the sacrifices they make because of the deployment.

"Operation Spartan Shield is taking you to one of the most violent places in the world," he said. "It takes a tremendous amount of courage to willingly deploy and takes character and patriotism. America is worth fighting for and defending. You are living proof of that profound truth."

Sgt. Evan Oliver, a fire team leader and training noncommissioned officer of Company B, has set two goals for his time away from family.

"During my free time I hope to work out more to keep myself motivated," he said. "I also plan to finish my bachelor's degree this summer."

Oliver took Boyd's advice about



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, addresses Soldiers and families during Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment's mobilization ceremony Feb. 8 in Marion. (U.S. Army photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office)

family to heart.

"My wife Anna is my biggest supporter," he said. "She constantly motivates and pushes me to do my best."

Oliver is already counting down the days until he is back with his loved ones.

"I'm looking forward to spending quality time with my family and taking my dogs on a nice long walk," he said.

Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, told the Soldiers and families at the Feb. 8 ceremony for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Marion, they have already answered the most sacred call to defend their nation and its citizens.

"You have already answered the most sacred call to serve, protect, and defend this nation and its citizens," said Williams.

"Each deployed mission has its own unique requirements, but it all starts with Soldiers willing to stand up and volunteer to leave their loved ones to serve something greater than themselves."

Williams told the families of the Soldiers at Company B in Litchfield, the battalion is ready for this mission, only because of the support structure of family, friends, and their communities.

"It takes a community; it takes a



1st Lt. Sean Harris, Commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Marion, addresses Soldiers during the unit's mobilization ceremony Feb. 8 in Marion. (U.S. Army photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office)

village to support a Soldier so they can go do what they are trained to do with a clear mind and peace of mind that everything is taken care of back home," he said.

Williams told the Soldiers they will bring back some of the greatest memories of their military career.

"This deployment will produce some of the greatest memories of your military career because you're serving something greater, and you're going to figure that out when you get over there. I promise you that," he said. "I ask all of you to think about when you're done with this mission, ask yourself what will be said about you and what you did for the unit, for your peers, comrades, and for your country?"

He asked the Soldiers to do three things during the deployment.

"Do more than is asked of you. Seize the opportunity to achieve greatness," he said. "Ask yourself what your legacy will be at the end of this mission. The Blackhawk Battalion has some of the richest history in the entire Army National Guard. Know your history and know what you represent."

Former U.S. Congressman Dr. Glenn Poshard, who serves on the Board of Trustees at John A. Logan College in Carterville, likened his service in the U.S. Army serving in South Korea in the mid-1960s to the Soldiers serving in the Blackhawk Battalion today.

Poshard, who joined the U.S. Army on his 17th birthday, served in Korea with the 1st Cavalry Division along the demilitarized zone.

"The DMZ was and still is one of the most volatile and dangerous places in the world," he said to the approximately 80 Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), based in Marion. "I went there to defend freedom where it was being challenged, some 10,000 miles from my home and family. You go today wearing the uniform of your country, the greatest country on the face of the earth to defend freedom in an equally volatile and dangerous place, the Middle East.

"To go there (South Korea) and wear the uniform of my country was then and remains today the single greatest honor of my life," he said. "America's most precious export to the world is freedom. You, the men

and women of the National Guard, carry the burden to protect freedom all over the world on your shoulders."

HHC Commander 1st Lt. Sean Harris said the unit stands as a testament to the true meaning of bravery and strength.

"We do not shy away from difficult tasks, or the challenges others may fear," he said. "We face them head on with unwavering resolve knowing that what we do is not easy, but it is necessary."

Harris, who joined the Blackhawk Battalion as a cadet in 2016, said their mission is not for the faint of heart.

"Our duty demands power, courage, and the ability to back with authority when others hesitate," he said. "We're not just Soldiers but the



Capt. Marcus Bellone, Commander, Company D, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Mount Vernon, addresses Soldiers during the unit's mobilization ceremony Feb. 8 in Marion. (U.S. Army photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office)



Soldiers from Company D, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Mount Vernon, stand in formation during the unit's mobilization ceremony Feb. 8. Approximately 550 Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, mobilized for a deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in support of Operation Spartan Shield. (U.S. Army photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office)



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, renders a salute to Company C 1st Sgt. Dylan Short, during the unit’s mobilization ceremony Feb. 9 in Litchfield. Approximately 550 Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, mobilized for a deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in support of Operation Spartan Shield. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Mallory Sinkhorn, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office, Illinois National Guard)

embodiment of resilience, and the driving force that pushes forward even when the path is uncertain. I became a Blackhawk because no matter the time, day, or weather, we’re always ready and I mean always ready to face whatever comes our way.”

Capt. Marcus Bellone, Commander of Company D, based in Mount Vernon, thanked the families during the Mount Vernon ceremony Feb. 8.

“Your sacrifice is immeasurable. You’ll keep the households running, celebrate milestones without your loved ones present, and bear the weight of worry,” he said. “Know your strength does not go unnoticed or unappreciated.”

His message to the Soldiers was simple.

“This deployment asks much of you. You’re trading



Soldiers from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Litchfield, stand in formation during the unit’s mobilization ceremony Feb. 9. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Mallory Sinkhorn, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office, Illinois National Guard)

your work boots for combat boots, and office chairs for Humvee seats," he said. "You're putting careers on hold, stepping away from family responsibilities, and venturing into the unknown. But you do so willingly, embodying the best traditions of the National Guard. As we deploy, keep in mind you carry with you the hopes and pride of your communities. Your service reminds us all that citizenship comes with responsibility, that freedom requires vigilance, and that ordinary people can rise to extraordinary challenges."

Bellone also thanked the Soldiers' employers, saying without their support, this mission would not be possible.

"Your flexibility and understanding make this service possible," Bellone said. "You are patriots in your own right, keeping the home fires burning so these brave men and women can focus on their mission."

State Sen. Terri Bryant, 58th Senate District, whose district includes the Mount Vernon area, told the Soldiers the people of Illinois support their mission.

"Please know the people of Illinois stand firmly behind you as you go forth and represent our state with honor and excellence," she said.

"To the families, please know your sacrifice is just as great and know you have our unwavering support."

Lt. Col. Edward Worman, Commander, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, said this deployment is the culmination of the Soldiers' dedication, sacrifice, and incredible effort they put forth over the past year.

"It is because of your hard work and commitment that we are ready for the challenges that lie ahead," he said. "Once again, our nation has called upon us to stand ready. I have no doubt that you will answer that call with the same courage, discipline, and pride that has come to define this unit."



Capt. John Kuhn, Commander, Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in West Frankfort, addresses Soldiers during the unit's mobilization ceremony Feb. 9 in West Frankfort. (U.S. Army photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office)

He thanked the families for their support.

"I understand this year will be difficult for you. There will be birthdays missed, holidays spent apart, and moments of uncertainty," he said. "Know your support is felt by each Soldier who wears this uniform. It is your strength and perseverance that will enable them to succeed and to thrive, even in the most difficult of circumstances. You are a vital part of this mission."

His message to the Soldiers is to take care of each other.

"While there will be hardships and moments of uncertainty, it will also be an experience that will shape you as Soldiers and as individuals," he said.

"We are brothers and sisters in arms and that bond will see us through any challenge."

He told the Soldiers they are mission ready.

"You are prepared. Not just in terms of skill, but also in heart and resolve," he said. "We are ready for whatever challenges may come our way, and I have no doubt we will accomplish our mission with the same determination that has defined the Blackhawk Battalion since 1809."

State Rep. Patrick Windhorst, 118th Legislative District, which encompasses the West Frankfort area, told Company A Soldiers that few Americans understand the sacrifices they and their families make when

You have already answered the most sacred call to serve, protect, and defend this nation and its citizens.

- Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General-Army & Commander, Illinois Army National Guard



Soldiers from Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in West Frankfort, stand in formation during the unit's mobilization ceremony Feb. 9. Approximately 550 Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, mobilized for a deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in support of Operation Spartan Shield. (U.S. Army photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office)

duty calls during the Feb. 9 ceremony in West Frankfort.

"As a result of that call, you stand here today, ready to protect me, my family, the people of Illinois, and the citizens of the United States," he said. "Your decision to serve your country was not made lightly. The courage, discipline, and commitment you demonstrate are a testament for the very best of our country. You represent the proud tradition of the Illinois National Guard – always ready and always there when your state or nation needs you most. I have no doubt you will carry out your duties with professionalism and excellence."

Col. Seth Hible, Commander, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), was a young Company A executive officer in 2002 when he deployed with the unit. He told the Soldiers it was an honor to stand in front of them as the company prepares to deploy.

"This mission is critical. But it is a mission that will change so I ask you to be flexible," he said. "You are part of a team. You are a well-disciplined, well trained cohesive unit that embodies the values of the Blackhawk Battalion, the 33rd IBCT, and the U.S. Army."

Hible urged the Soldiers to maintain contact with their families.

"You are not alone," he said.

"Support each other and look out for each other."

Hible said the deployment will help Soldiers build memories that will last a lifetime.

"Those memories will be forged in hardship, joy, and sweat," he said. "Cherish those memories."

He also urged the Soldiers to become better individuals.

"Find the means to better yourself. Set a goal, whether it's to take an online course, read a classic novel, or work to get your physically fit. The choice is yours," he said. "Take the time to improve yourself spiritually, physically, and mentally."

Hible told the Soldiers they carry the support of the brigade, their families, and community with them on the deployment.

"You are part of something greater than yourselves," he said. "You are part of a legacy that has served to defend this nation for generations. You are part of the oldest unit and regiment in the Illinois Army National Guard. You are prepared. You are ready. You are part of the greatest fighting force in the world. You are Blackhawks."

Capt. John Kuhn, Commander, Company A, West Frankfort, said the Soldiers have worked tirelessly to prepare for the deployment.

"The Soldiers are and have been physically and mentally tired, but they still continuously worked to meet the objectives and accomplish the mission," he said. "Because of that, they can accomplish any mission that lies ahead."

Capt. Justin Asbury, Commander of Company C, Litchfield, said the months ahead will test the Soldiers.

"There will be moments of doubt, loneliness, and difficulty, but through it all, you will have the Soldiers to your left and to your right," he said. "Lean on them, support one another. Some of the friendships you will form during this deployment will last a lifetime."

He told the Soldiers the deployment is an opportunity to learn, grow, and expand their understanding of military operations beyond the Illinois National Guard.

"You will quickly see just how much we work alongside partner nations and their militaries," he said. "I encourage you to be open-minded, embrace the experience, and take in as much as you can during this."

Williams paid tribute to the veterans at the ceremonies.

"You have passed the baton on to our younger warriors," he said. "I assure you; it is in good hands. Look at them! They're ready to go!"

'Family-first, Soldier-first' Leader Retires from Illinois Army National Guard after 26 years

Story and Photo by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Sgt. Maj. Chad Bell, of Morton, described as a "family-first, Soldier-first" leader, the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade's Operations Sergeant Major and Chief Operations Sergeant, retired after more than 26 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard during a ceremony Jan. 31 at The Barn at Bull Run Park in Morton.

"He's a family-first, Soldier-first leader," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General-Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "None of us who wear the uniform could do this without the support structure of family, friends, and community. It takes a village to support Soldiers so they can do what they love. Thank you to Tiffany and your children for your support. You can be proud of the service and accomplishments of one of the finest noncommissioned officers I have served with."

Bell enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1998 as a Motor Transport Operator, serving with the 1544th Transportation Company in Paris.

Williams, who has served with Bell for about 20 years, said he can personally attest to the accolades and leadership qualities Bell has demonstrated throughout his career.

"We can't do this career as an officer without the support of senior noncommissioned officers," Williams said. "Great senior NCOs willingly provide candor, and great officers have the humility and fortitude to accept it. Chad has always provided candor to me over the years, even when I didn't seek it out. Smart officers surround themselves with these kinds of senior NCOs and he embodied every part of that. I've seen it, witnessed it, and benefitted from it."

"Chad I personally valued and benefitted from your candor and advice over the years even at times when I didn't ask for it," he said. "I'm a better officer for it because I had the honor to serve with you and other great senior NCOs I've surrounded myself with throughout my career."

Williams said his watch words



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, State Command Sergeant Major, Illinois Army National Guard, presents Sgt. Maj. Chad Bell, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Operations Sergeant Major and Chief Operations Sergeant, with a certificate of retirement.

describe Bell as a Soldier and leader.

"My watch words are respect, credibility, and legacy. Earn the respect of those we lead. Ask yourself do you have credibility with your subordinates, peers, and superiors, and lastly ask yourself what your legacy will be," he said. "Chad, those who served with you respect you immensely, which has earned you credibility at all levels of the organization and ensured your legacy will live on through the Soldiers you led and mentored. I always say get the people part right in all you do. You've done that throughout your entire career. You're going to be fantastic in your next chapter."

Bell, who enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard just 11 days after his 17th birthday, said this past week has been especially hard.

"This past week has been hard for me. The final week of my military career," he said. "Sometime this past week it hit me. It's hard to believe.

What will it be like? How did I get this far? What will I do now? I remember the first week of basic training getting issued all that Army equipment the first time. That smell, the anxiety, and the drill sergeants."

Bell, who along with his wife, owns Blue Jay's Daycare Center in Morton, said he's been asked about what he will do with all his free time.

"Owning a business and raising six kids hardly provides any free time," he said. "It's time to take a knee, slow down and focus on my family. It's time to be home every night, every weekend. It's time to be present. My definition of fun is doing something with our children."

Bell said his military commitments have forced him to miss time with his family.

"I've missed birthdays, holidays, basketball and baseball games, and family reunions," he said. "I will never again be forced to miss an important event. Everyone who served in the

uniform has a similar story to tell, but those are the sacrifices we make.”

Bell thanked his family for their support throughout his career.

“Thank you, mom, and dad, for starting my career. I don’t know where I’d be if I didn’t join the Army,” Bell said. “I’m blessed to have supportive parents. You have stuck with me through good and bad times. I wasn’t always easy to deal with especially as a teenager.”

Bell also thanked his wife, Tiffany, and sons, Jordan, Jaxon, Jeter, and Justus, and daughters, Aubrey, and Jruw Ann.

“I always thought no one worked

harder than me until we had our sixth child. I quickly learned my wife, Tiffany, works harder than I,” he said. “She runs our daycare center, manages our home, ensures our kids are taken care of each day. She does it all, which is not easy with six growing children. You are truly an amazing person, amazing mother, and the best wife a man could ask for.

“To my children, you are so special to me, and I am so grateful God gave you all to me. I love watching you grow and learn about life,” he said. “I enjoy witnessing each of you grow into your own unique personality.”

Bell deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II from 2003-2005 with the 1544th Transportation Company, and again in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in

Afghanistan from 2008-2009.

Bell thanked his 1544th Transportation Company family, and said he will always remember the fallen Soldiers from the 1544th.

“We went to Iraq together. We went to Hell together,” he said. “Less than 24 hours into my first deployment to Iraq we lost a Soldier struck by shrapnel from a mortar round on his way back to the barracks after breakfast. That day changed our lives forever. The 1544th lost five Soldiers that deployment and 36 Soldiers received a Purple Heart. During every moment of silence we observe, I remember those five Soldiers – Sergeant Phipps, Specialist Ridlen, Specialist Lamb, Sergeant Morrison, and Specialist Cawvey. I will never forget them.”



Metzдорff Knighted into Order of St. George

Col. Paul Metzдорff (left), the Illinois Army National Guard’s Director of Personnel (G1), was selected for Knighthood in the U.S. Cavalry and Armor Association’s Order of St. George. Col. Metzдорff received the Silver Medallion after his knighting ceremony. He has been recognized for long and honorable service to Armor and Cavalry and for being among the “very best tankers and cavalrymen” among the association’s members. He is shown with 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Commander Col. Seth Hible, who administered the knighting during Army Guard’s Commander’s Guidance Seminar, Nov. 19-21, in Springfield.



Kelly Inducted into Order of Saint Maurice

State Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly (left) was inducted into the Order of St. Maurice at the Illinois Army National Guard Commander’s Guidance Conference on Nov. 21. Kelly was nominated by existing awardees and was selected by the Order of Saint Maurice Board at the National Infantry Association using a vigorous vetting process ensuring the future integrity of the honor. The Order of Saint Maurice is given to Soldiers and Civilians who have served the Infantry community with distinction, made a significant contribution in support of the Infantry, and represent the highest standards of integrity, moral character, professional competence, and dedication to duty. The 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Commander Col. Seth Hible presented the Order of St. Maurice to Command Sgt. Maj. Kelly.

Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Tyler Patterson Retires After 26 Years of Service

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

It had been more than a quarter of a century since he took the oath to defend the United States. Now, he sat in an auditorium filled with family, friends, and colleagues to celebrate his career. In the front row sat his wife, Stacy, and their young daughters. He and his family had sacrificed a lot to get to this point, but now it was time to create new memories.

Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Tyler Patterson retired Jan. 31 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Throughout his career, Patterson held multiple positions, including communications section chief, recruiter, and the Afghan Regional Security Integration Command S6 noncommissioned officer in charge. He was also promoted to team leader for Illinois Army National Guard (ILARNG) Kilo RSP Co., where he demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities and the ability to identify and solve problems.

"Sgt. 1st Class Patterson has a remarkable work ethic," said Maj. Tarah McClain, executive officer of the Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion. "His hard work didn't go unnoticed."

Lt. Col. Lance Frail, commander of the ILARNG Recruiting and Retention Battalion, expressed appreciation for Patterson's positive attitude and commitment to improving the organization.

"I'm extremely humbled and honored to be a part of this event," said Frail. "Not only do we need to thank Patterson, but we also need to thank his family. His wife, Stacy, and his five daughters have provided him with the support and love needed to be successful."

"I know he made an exceptionally long commute to work and may have missed family events, which was difficult for him. But their love and support helped him along the way. We can't thank them enough for the time they allowed us to have him within our organization. He's a phenomenal Soldier, but an even better person."



Sgt. 1st Class Patterson delivers remarks after receiving recognition for his service during a ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters on Camp Lincoln.

As a recruiter, Patterson enlisted his first Soldier into the National Guard on Jan. 14, 2005. Since then, he has enlisted countless Soldiers into the organization. In addition to recruiting, Patterson served as an information technology expert, helping to repair computers and phones for recruiters. He holds CompTIA Security+ and CompTIA Network+ certifications.

"I want to thank everyone who came out for my retirement ceremony," Patterson said. "I'm not a spotlight kind of guy, but I'm very grateful."

"To my wife, Stacy, and the kids—I know it wasn't always easy, but we made the best of it, and we knew there was a light at the end of the tunnel. The military doesn't totally define who I am. My legacy is my family, but my brothers-in-arms have made a major impact on my life throughout this journey. I appreciate your love and support."

Patterson, his wife, Stacy, and their five daughters reside in Barry, Illinois.



Patty and Tom Patterson, parents of Sgt. 1st Class Patterson, watch proudly as their son is honored during a ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters on Camp Lincoln.

Illinois National Guard Honors Most Notable Guard Member on Anniversary of Birth

Story and Photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

The Illinois National Guard honored its most notable militiaman and 16th President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, during a ceremony at his tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, Feb. 12, marking the anniversary of his birth.

Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, and Commander, of the Illinois Army National Guard, presented a wreath on behalf of President Donald J. Trump as part of the 91st annual American Legion Pilgrimage to his tomb.

"Our Guard members draw inspiration from Lincoln almost daily," Williams said. "Lincoln lived with such conviction and integrity that we are proud of him still today for what he led our country through."

"The deeds, the words, and the wisdom of Abraham Lincoln bring us inspiration and pride," he said. "On behalf of the 13,000 men and women of the Illinois National Guard, it is an honor to participate in this ceremony and celebrate a legendary human and courageous leader."

10 Facts About Abraham Lincoln

1. Lincoln is enshrined in the Wrestling Hall of Fame.
 2. Lincoln created the Secret Service hours before his assassination.
 3. Grave robbers attempted to steal Lincoln's corpse.
 4. John Wilkes Booth's brother saved the life of Lincoln's son.
 5. Lincoln is the only president to have obtained a patent.
 6. Lincoln personally test-fired rifles outside the White House.
 7. Lincoln came under enemy fire on a Civil War battlefield.
 8. Lincoln didn't move to Illinois until he was 21.
 9. Poisoned milk killed Lincoln's mother.
 10. Lincoln never slept in the Lincoln Bedroom.
- (Courtesy of History.com)



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, talks about Abraham Lincoln's legacy in the Illinois National Guard during the 91st annual American Legion Pilgrimage at Oak Ridge Cemetery Feb. 12.



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, places a wreath on behalf of President Donald Trump at President Abraham Lincoln's tomb during the 91st annual American Legion Pilgrimage at Oak Ridge Cemetery Feb. 12.

Illinois Army National Guard Gold Star Family Honored by Junior Blues Hockey Team



The family of Illinois Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Paul Smith was honored at the North American Hockey League game between the Springfield (IL) Junior Blues and the Janesville (WI) Jets in Springfield, Illinois, on Jan. 31. The grandchildren of Staff Sgt. Smith made the official puck drop for the game. Staff Sgt. Smith of Peoria, Ill. was killed in action on June 19, 2009 in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The Junior Blues also hosted the family of fallen U.S. Army Soldier Master Sgt. David Rawlings. The event was arranged by the Survivor Outreach Services, the official Army program designed to provide long-term support to Families of fallen Soldiers.



Above - the family of fallen Illinois Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Paul Smith, of Peoria.

Left - The Illinois Army National Guard's Military Funeral and Honors Team consisting of Spc. Kentrell Ceasear, Staff Sgt. Zachary Heath, Sgt. Deon Fairlee and Sgt. Chadd Boland presented the American Flag during the playing of the National Anthem.



The grandchildren of fallen Illinois Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Paul Smith watch the North American Hockey League game between the Springfield (IL) Junior Blues and the Janesville (WI) Jets in Springfield, Illinois, on Jan. 31. Smith of Peoria, Ill. was killed in action on June 19, 2009 in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The Junior Blues also hosted the family of fallen U.S. Army Soldier Master Sgt. David Rawlings. The event was arranged by the Survivor Outreach Services, the official Army program designed to provide long-term support to Families of fallen Soldiers.



The grandchildren of fallen Illinois Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Paul Smith make the official puck drop at the Springfield Junior Blues and Janesville, Wisconsin, Jets in Springfield Jan. 31. The Springfield hockey team honored the service and sacrifice of Smith and fallen U.S. Army Master Sgt. David Rawlings.



Airmen from the 375th Air Mobility Wing participate in the Warrior Airman Readiness training course on Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, Nov. 21. The WAR course reflects the Air Force's evolving approach to combat readiness by sharpening Airmen's skills in Tactical Combat Casualty Care, weapons handling, radio communications and combat movement.

Airmen Conduct Warrior Readiness Training



U.S. Airmen from the 375th Air Mobility Wing provide Tactical Combat Casualty Care and move Staff Sgt. Caleb Sonnier, a radar airfield and weather systems technician with the 375th Operations Support Squadron.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Gabriel Waggoner, a weather journeyman with the 375th Operations Support Squadron, stands watch while participating in the Warrior Airman Readiness training course.

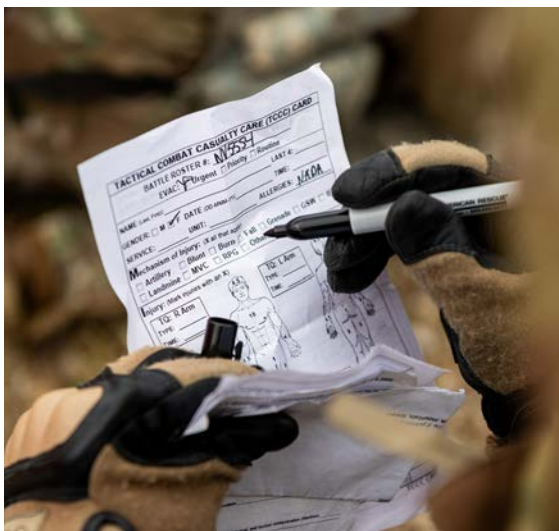


U.S. Air Force Maj. Natasha Vaughn, chief of pharmacy operations with the 375th Medical Support Squadron, re-equips a combat helmet to Staff Sgt. Caleb Sonnier, a radar airfield and weather systems technician with the 375th Operations Support Squadron.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Natasha Vaughn, chief of pharmacy operations with the 375th Medical Support Squadron, gives Tactical Combat Casualty Care to Staff Sgt. Caleb Sonnier, a radar airfield and weather systems technician with the 375th Operations Support Squadron.

(U.S. Air National Guard photos by Tech. Sgt. Wynndermere Shaw)



U.S. Air Force Maj. Natasha Vaughn, chief of pharmacy operations with the 375th Medical Support Squadron, writes on a Tactical Combat Casualty Care card during the Warrior Airman Readiness training course, Nov. 21



1st Lt. Brian Slavenas

NOV 2

2003: Illinois Army National Guard 1st Lt. Brian Slavenas, 30, Genoa, Ill. was killed Nov. 2 of wounds sustained when his aircraft was shot down near the town of Fallujah, Iraq. 1st Lt. Slavenas was assigned to Co. F, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation in Peoria.



Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Wehrly

NOV 3

2005: Army Sgt. 1st Class Kyle B. Wehrly, 28, of Galesburg, Ill., died in Ashraf, Iraq, on Nov. 28, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near his HMMWV during patrol operations. Wehrly was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery, Macomb.



Spc. Ashley Sietsema

NOV 12

2007: Spc. Ashley Sietsema, 20, of River Grove, Ill., died in Kuwait as a result of injuries suffered in a non-combat single vehicle accident while transporting Soldiers. She was assigned to the 708th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), North Riverside.



Spc. Brian A. Wright

DEC 6

2005: Spc. Brian A. Wright, 19, of Keensburg, Ill., died in Ramadi, Iraq of wounds sustained when his HMMWV struck a mine during combat operations. Wright was assigned to the 135th Engineer Company, Lawrenceville.



1st Lt. Jared Southworth

FEB 8

2009: 1st Lt. Jared W. Southworth, 26, of Oakland, Ill., died Feb. 8 in Helmand, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment of Marion.



Staff Sgt. Jason Burkholder

2009: Staff Sgt. Jason E. Burkholder, 27, of Champaign, Ill., died Feb. 8 in Helmand, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment of Marion.



Sgt. Jessica Housby

FEB 9

2005: Sgt. Jessica M. Housby, 23, of Rock Island, Ill., died Feb. 9 in Route Golden, Iraq, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near her convoy. Housby was assigned to the 1644th Transportation Company, Rock Falls.



Sgt. Schuyler Patch

FEB 24

2009: Sgt. Schuyler B. Patch, 25, of Galva, Ill., died Feb. 24, in Kandahar, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, Kewanee.



Sgt. Scott Stream

2009: Sgt. Scott B. Stream, 39, of Mattoon, died Feb. 24, in Kandahar, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, Effingham.



THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Member of ambushed Illinois unit awarded the Distinguished Service Cross

NOV 4 1918: On patrol along the edge of deep woods in St. Maurice, France, a German machine-gun nest opened fire on soldiers of Company A, 132nd Infantry. The squad immediately took cover and returned fire. Sergeant Samuel E. Casaga crawled forward under deadly exchanges of small arms fire and flanked the enemy nest. Despite the extreme danger he managed to get close enough to capture a member of the gun crew, and took the prisoner back to American lines. For his sudden show of courage and tenacity in executing his attack, Casaga received the Distinguished Service Cross.

Severely wounded, Illinois Soldier remained on duty to complete task

NOV 8 1918: Sergeant Fred T. King of Headquarters Detachment, 149th Field Artillery worked tirelessly with a repair crew under intense enemy shell fire near Bulson, France to mend a damaged telephone line. An incoming shell exploded directly in their vicinity, killing 5 of the Soldiers and wounding 13, including him. When the thick shower of dirt and smoke had cleared he discovered blood loss from a wound. Nevertheless, King remained on the field to repair the downed line. After he had successfully established telephone contact with the battery, he allowed himself medical treatment. For his determination and courage under fire Sergeant King received the Distinguished Service Cross.

Famous Guardsman: Samuel T. Busey

NOV 16 1835: Shortly after his birth in Greensville, Indiana, Samuel T. Busey moved with his parents to Urbana, Illinois. Before the Civil War he worked on the family farm, as well as in a local store. By 1862, Busey had joined the Army and become a Second Lieutenant in a recruiting office. Soon he was elected captain of a volunteer infantry company he had raised. Shortly thereafter Busey rose through the ranks to Colonel of the 76th Illinois Volunteer Infantry. Though noted for his brave conduct under fire throughout the war, his most distinguished act of service came on April 9, 1865 in the final assault against Fort Blakely, Alabama. Busey single-handedly climbed into the rebel fortress, and though seriously wounded, engaged an enemy gun crew in hand to hand combat. He killed one, wounded two, and took the gunnery officer and his staff prisoner. Busey mustered out of service in August 1865 as a brevet Brigadier General. His post war life included founding the Busey Bank in Urbana, and serving as the city's mayor and chairman of the Urbana Board of Education.

182nd Tactical Air Support Group first Illinois Air Guard unit activated for Operation Desert Shield

DEC 7 1990: President George Bush Sr. called

on Illinois Governor James R. Thompson to activate thirty-one members of the 182nd Tactical Air Support

Group for service in the Persian Gulf. The Peoria based unit of the Air National Guard deployed to the Middle East for 180 days. They acted as a liaison between the Army and Air Force coordinating air to ground tactical operations.



Black Hawk War

DEC 20 1832: Illinois Governor John Reynolds commissioned Abraham Lincoln a Captain in the 31st Regiment of Militia. In 1860, Lincoln biographer John L. Scripps wrote, "...not since any success in life which gave him so much satisfaction as having served his country as a captain." Lincoln enlisted three times in the Illinois Militia during the Black Hawk War.

Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion rushed at full speed into the first U.S. tank battle of World War II

DEC 22 1941: Poorly equipped, but desperate to slow the Japanese offensive in the Philippines, Company B of the 192nd Tank Battalion from Maywood, Illinois hurried to Lingayen Gulf on Luzon. The 194th Tank Battalion followed close behind. The two battalions had a paper strength of 108 tanks, however only five were serviceable enough to be sent to meet the invasion. The first tank in the column narrowly missed colliding with one of the fifty enemy tanks that met them near Lingayen Gulf. In total, the Japanese landing force included 50,000 infantry, 100 tanks, and 106 artillery pieces. Four out of five of the American tank shells did not explode, meaning that the two units fled almost immediately after arriving on scene. This was the first U.S. tank battle of World War II. It ended with the loss of one American tank and its crew. All the tankers became prisoners of war, sent on a forced march that the U.S. press dubbed, "The Bataan Death March," and suffered from the brutality of the Japanese for the last three years of World War II. Roughly half survived.

***66th Infantry Brigade received an official sendoff
from Governor George Ryan for
Operation Enduring Freedom***

2002: The first group of the 66th Infantry Brigade to mobilize for Operation Enduring Freedom received an official sendoff from Illinois Governor George Ryan. He said, "The President has called you to duty, and without hesitation you have answered the call like so many patriots before you. You are men and women who believe so strongly in your country, your freedoms and the American way of life, you willingly take up arms to defend your country. You are truly citizen soldiers, sons and daughters of Illinois. All of us are thankful for your sacrifices. It's not easy leaving your homes and your families behind, but it is a sacrifice you make in the name of freedom, to ensure your sons and daughters and neighbors can live without fear." The 66th made up a contingent of Task Force Santa Fe, a National Guard force of 2,100 Soldiers from Kansas, Illinois, and Kentucky.



Famous Guardsman: Simon Bolivar Buckner

1914: At the time of his death on January 8, 1914, Simon Bolivar Buckner was one of the last remaining Confederate General. Buckner graduated 11th in his 1844 West Point class. Wounded in the Mexican War, he resigned from the Army in 1855 and moved to Chicago to help with the family real estate business. There he joined the Illinois State Militia as a major. Governor William Henry Bissell appointed Buckner to the position of Adjutant General of Illinois on April 3, 1857. In 1860, he became head of the Kentucky State Guard, his native state. In 1861, he refused a commission in the Union army, and fled south to take a commission as a Brigadier General. At the Battle of Fort Donelson, Tennessee in February 1862, he became the first Confederate general to surrender an army. Buckner turned over command of the fort to his West Point classmate, Ulysses S. Grant. He received a promotion to Major General shortly after his release in an August 1862 prisoner exchange. Following his defeat at the 1862 Battle of Perryville he held a variety of commands. Promoted to lieutenant general in 1865, he served as the Chief of Staff under General Kirby Smith for the remainder of the war. In 1887 he became the 30th Governor of Kentucky. After 4 years in this office he ran unsuccessfully for Vice President.



Illinois National Guard responds to Trucker Strike

1974: The Governor called out the Illinois National Guard to patrol the highways in hopes of stemming violence during a nationwide trucker's strike that left two drivers dead and hundreds of thousands of workers unemployed. The HHC, 232nd Supply and Service unit responded along with several other units. The truck drivers went on strike due to the rising cost of gasoline during the oil crisis. The strike lasted eleven days.

Did you Know?

That the Illinois National Guard was mentioned in the lyrics to the 1970's song "Convoy." Here is the Stanza:

By the time we hit that Chi-town
Them bears was a-getting; smart
They'd brought up some reinforcements
From the Illinois National Guard

There's armored cars, and tanks, and jeeps
And rigs of every size
Them chicken coops was full'a bears
And choppers filled the skies

***Soldiers of the 130th Infantry made an unusual
discovery during the Battle of Luzon***

1945: In the fighting for the Philippine summer capital of Baguio, Company C of the 130th Infantry unearthed hidden Japanese treasure on the road to Rosario. Led by 2nd Lieutenant Charles W. Holland, the patrol discovered \$70,000 pre-war Philippine silver coins buried in a ditch. The fleeing Japanese stashed the money there in the hopes of retrieving it later. Ultimately it required six trucks to remove all of the confiscated money. The City of Baguio happily received it from the surprised Soldiers.



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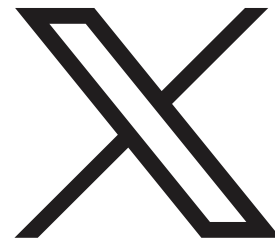
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