

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD  
**PRAIRIE SENTINEL**  
VOLUME 29



***Back Where It All Began for 97-Year Old Veteran***

*Page 40*

***233rd Military Police  
Company 'War Pigs'  
On a Critical Mission***

*Page 10*

***Airmen Honor  
Veterans at St. Louis  
Honor Flight***

*Page 32*

***American Revolution  
in the Midwest***

*How Parts of the War  
Were Fought in Illinois*

*Page 104*

**APRIL-MAY 2026**

# ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

Click on a title to jump to the full story

## IN EVERY ISSUE

### Take it from the Top

p. 6

*Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd honors the legacy of those who have donned the uniform in our nation's fight for freedom*

### Remembering Our Fallen

p. 74

*Remembering our Fallen Heroes who died in service to our nation.*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

### Aviation Soldiers Mobilize for Mission

p. 8

*Soldiers from Detachment 5, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 245th Aviation Regiment, based in Springfield, mobilized for a mission to support U.S. Southern Command Counterdrug Operations.*

### 233rd MPs Head to Alaska

p. 10

*Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and other senior leaders honored approximately 70 Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's Springfield-based 233rd Military Police Company as they deploy to Alaska to protect critical missile sites in the tundra.*

### McDonough Retires After 40 Years

p. 12

*Maj. Gen. Dan McDonough, the former Assistant Adjutant General – Air of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, couldn't possibly list his accomplishments over his almost 40 years of distinguished military service.*

### Honoring 42 Years of Service

p. 14

*Maj. Gen. DK Carpenter retires after distinguished career.*

### What Drives our Best Warriors?

p. 16

*Winners of the Illinois Army National Guard's 2026 Best Warrior Competition Explain Their Motivation*

### Transformational Leadership

p. 20

*Over the course of a 27-year career, Chief Master Sgt. Marlon Burton built a leadership philosophy centered on faith, humility, education, and transformational leadership*

### Airman Earns Distinguished Flying Cross with "C"

p. 22

*Capt. Nick Lopez, 906th Air Refueling Squadron, pilot, the Distinguished Flying Cross at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 26, 2026. Lopez received the Distinguished Flying Cross with a "C" device for his quick actions during recent combat operations.*

### Officer Receives Maj. Gen. Logan Patriot Award

p. 23

*Illinois Army National Guard Major Karen Hernandez received the Major General John A. Logan Patriot Award during Chicago's Memorial Day*

### Miller Gets 'Big Stick' as New CSM of RRB

p. 24

*The 'big stick' is a reminder of the Command Sergeant Major's role as Chief Enforcer of standards and discipline within the Recruiting and Retention Battalion*

### MPs Undergo Training Ahead of Mobilization

p. 26

*Soldiers with 233rd Military Police Company underwent intensive deployment training ahead of mobilization for mission in Alaska.*

### Honoring 33 Years of Service

p. 28

*The Illinois Army National Guard celebrated the storied career of Command Sgt. Maj. Chad Mcdannald, a man known to "turn that mindset into a grind-set" for thousands of Soldiers over 33-plus years of military service.*

### Soldiers Step Up During IWQ Course

p. 30

*Soldiers from multiple units in the Illinois Army National Guard conducted and received training for the latest Individual Weapons Qualification (IWQ) course at the Marseilles Training Center.*

### Airmen Honor Vets Following Honor Flight

p. 32

*Airmen from the 126th Air Refueling Wing gathered at St. Louis Lambert International Airport to honor heroes from the past as they returned from our nation's capital aboard an Honor Flight.*

### Comptroller Flight Selected Best in Air Guard

p. 35

*The 183rd Comptroller Flight, 183rd Wing, was selected as the Air National Guard Financial Operations Office of the Year for fiscal year 2025.*

### Philippine Consulate, ILNG Honor Filipino Vets

p. 36

*Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd joined the Philippine Consul General, April 10, to award Congressional Gold Medals to Filipino Veterans of World War II.*

### Salute to Southwestern Illinois Honoree

p. 39

*Lt. Col. Emily Audrain, 126th Medical Group, was honored at the 2026 Salute to Southwestern Illinois Annual Dinner for her work, both in the Illinois National Guard and her community.*

### A Promotion to Colonel

p. 39

*Col. Tony Meyers, acting Commander of the 126th Operations Group, was promoted to the rank of colonel.*

### Back Where it All Began 77 Years Ago

p. 40

*A 97-year-old veteran took a tour of the Illinois Army National Guard Armory in Sycamore where his military service started in 1949.*

### Two Graduate Accelerated Officer Candidate School

p. 42

*Two Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers were commissioned after completing the 57-day Accelerated Officer Candidate School at Fort McClellan, Anniston, Alabama.*

### Career Center Students Visit 183rd Wing

p. 44

*Students from the Springfield Capital Area Career Center visited the 183rd Wing for an inside look at mission-ready career fields and military operations.*

### Honoring Two Decades of Military Service

p. 46

*Master Sgt. Michelle Lynn Johnson retired from the Illinois Army National Guard, concluding a distinguished career spanning more than two decades.*

**First Sergeant Honored for Military Service p. 47**

*The Illinois Army National Guard recognized the 25-year career of 1st Sgt. Gary T. Cunningham during a retirement ceremony April 9.*

**Senior Ground Maintenance Warrant Retires p. 48**

*Chief Warrant Officer 5 Jeffrey Garrett was honored for his 36 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard during a retirement ceremony.*

**New Rank for New Commander of 183rd AMOS p. 49**

*Col. Matthew Cain promoted to the rank of colonel in a ceremony at the 183rd Wing.*

**Soldier Pins on CWO 5 p. 50**

*An Illinois Army National Guard senior Aviation leader was promoted to the rank of Chief Warrant Officer 5 and inducted into the Order of Saint Michael.*

**CHOP North 2026 p. 51**

*More than 50 Airmen across 13 units from the Air National Guard Region V, which includes Illinois, participated in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) High-intensity Operational Preparedness (CHOP) North.*

**65th TCB OIC Promoted p. 52**

*Lt. Col. Spencer Ervin, the 65th Troop Command Brigade's Officer in Charge, was joined by family, mentors, and fellow Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers as he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel.*

**LCA Cadets visit 183rd Wing p. 54**

*Twelve cadets from Lincoln's Challenge Academy visited the 183rd Wing in Springfield on April 11 for an immersive tour designed to introduce them to a range of military career opportunities.*

**ILNG Leaders Meet with Delegation from Portugal p. 55**

*Leaders from the Illinois National Guard met with a delegation from new State Partnership Program country of Portugal during a recent Washington D.C. visit.*

**On the Train Track to Success p. 56**

*ILARNG RRB's Company L "Locomotives" has a new conductor at the helm, ready to lead them down the track to success as the unit's first sergeant.*

**Belvidere Officer Retires After 25 Years p. 58**

*Lt. Col. Bernadette Bland, a veteran of two overseas deployments and multiple domestic emergency missions was honored for 25 years of selfless service during a retirement ceremony in May.*

**232nd CSSB Soldiers Return from Deployment p. 60**

*About 70 Soldiers from the 232nd CSSB were welcomed home by family and friends following a 10-month deployment to Poland.*

**126th ARW Weekend Roundup p. 62**

*From a change of command to awards to engineer work on the Wing's running track ahead of the U.S. Air Force's new physical training standards, the 126th Air Refueling Wing has a busy May weekend.*

**Exploring a Military to ISP Career p. 64**

*The Illinois State Police Recruitment Bureau hosted a Military to ISP Career Exploration event to connect service members and civilians with career opportunities in law enforcement.*

**Superior Performer at U.S. Air War College p. 66**

*An Illinois Army National Guard officer was recognized as a Superior Performer at the U.S. Air War College (AWC) for Academic Year 2026.*

**SIUE Engineer Students visit Maintenance Squadron p. 67**

*Engineering students from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville visited the 126th Maintenance Squadron's jet shop, April 23, getting an up close look at the inner workings of a KC-135 Stratotanker jet engine.*

**Colonel Honored for Transformative Service p. 68**

*Col. Sarah Smith of the Illinois Army National Guard was awarded the Legion of Merit on May 2 in recognition of her exceptionally meritorious service and transformative leadership as the State Judge Advocate.*

**126th CES Travels to Japan for Training p. 70**

*The 126th Civil Engineer Squadron traveled to Yokota Air Base, Tokyo, Japan, to complete hands on training not typically available to them during Drill weekend, and at the same time experience the Japanese culture.*

**Water, Fuel Maintenance Squadron Trains in Japan p. 75**

*The 126th Water and Fuel Systems Maintenance shop traveled to Japan to train with the 374th Water and Fuel Maintenance Squadron in May.*

**Illinois Soldiers Compete for Regional Best Warriors p. 76**

*Sgt. Bryson Williams and Spc. Samuel McEnroe competed at the Region IV Best Warrior Competition Fort Custer Training Center in Michigan.*

**Crew Served Weapons Qualifications p. 82**

*Soldiers from the 44th Chemical Battalion participated in a crew-served weapons qualification at Camp Atterbury, Indiana.*



**Commissioning Ceremonies Net 10 New Officers p. 84**

Senior Illinois National Guard leaders recently administered the oath of office to newly commissioned second lieutenants including 10 who will serve in the Illinois Army National Guard.

**33rd IBCT Leaders Brief Unit's Readiness p. 86**

Leaders from units within the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team briefed senior leaders from the Illinois Army National Guard on unit readiness, training plans, and missions.

**Aviation Students Visit 126th Air Refueling Wing p. 88**

St. Louis University aviation students visited the 126th Maintenance Group for a familiarization of the wing's mission.

**Welcome to the Army Team p. 89**

MaryJane Allen recently enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard.

**Religious Affairs Workshop p. 89**

The workshop is designed to strengthen Religious Support Team readiness to conduct religious affairs across the spectrum of military operations.

**Soldiers, Units Recognized for Outstanding Efforts p. 90**

Soldiers and units were honored during a recent awards ceremony highlighting excellence in readiness, training and retention.

**Celebrating Chicago's Polish Constitution Day p. 92**

Soldiers from the Illinois National Guard participated in the Polish Constitution Day and Flag Raising Ceremony in Chicago.

**Honoring a Repatriated World War II Veteran p. 94**

Illinois Army National Guard Chaplain (Maj.) Monte Bowers presided over the funeral of World War II veteran Staff Sgt. Paul Gregg, who was buried in Arcola recently.

**30 Years of Distinguished Service p. 96**

After three decades of dedicated service to his community, state, and nation, Lt. Col. John Dwyer retired from the Illinois Air National Guard on June 1.

**Fini Flight of Air Guard Career p. 97**

Maj. Dan Petrella, 108th Air Refueling Squadron pilot, completes his Illinois Air National Guard career with a final flight.

**Undercover Colonel p. 98**

126th ARW Commander Goes 'Undercover' to Learn More About Tools in Comptroller Flight.

**24 Years of Military Service p. 99**

Sgt. 1st Class Frank Treto was honored for his more than 24 years of military service and leadership during a recent retirement ceremony.

**Reay Achieves Chief Master Sergeant p. 100**

Chief Master Sergeant Donald Reay was promoted to his new rank during a ceremony at the 182nd Airlift Wing.

**Celebrating 29 years of service p. 102**

A random telephone call on a June afternoon in 1997 led to a nearly 29 year career for Sgt. 1st Class Scott Sassenbury.

**American Revolution in the Midwest p. 104**

Many American Revolutionary War events outside of the 13 colonies helped defeat the British, including in parts of Illinois and Indiana.

**Freedom 250 p. 112**

Highlighting Illinois National Guard events which helped secure, preserve, and celebrate America's independence.

**• U.S. Formally Enters World War I p. 112**

**April 6, 1917:** Congress votes to declare war on Germany and the United States formally enters World War I. A month earlier, the Illinois National Guard's 33rd Division was inducted into federal service to prepare for war.

**• Abe Lincoln Serves in Black Hawk War p. 114**

**April 7, 1832:** Abraham Lincoln is elected Captain of the 31st Illinois Regiment during the Black Hawk War.

**May 27, 1832:** Illinois Governor John Reynolds calls for more than 1,000 mounted volunteers after Sauk leader Black Hawk crosses the Mississippi River into Illinois. Among those volunteers was a 23-year-old Abraham Lincoln.

**• Lincoln Asks for Volunteers for Civil War p.116**

**April 15, 1861:** President Abraham Lincoln issued his Proclamation calling for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the southern rebellion. Nearly 260,000 Illinois troops answered the call.

**• 33rd Division Liberates Baguio, Philippines p.118**

**April 27, 1945:** The 33rd Infantry Division liberates Baguio, Philippines from the Japanese during World War II. Baguio was the Philippines' second largest city and its summer capital.

**• 106th Cavalry Regiment Heads to Europe p.119**

**May 5, 1945:** Soldiers from the 106th Cavalry rescue King Leopold of Belgium and his family from German Soldiers.

**June 29, 1944:** The Illinois Army National Guard's 106th Cavalry arrives at Utah Beach in Normandy, France.



**• Illinois Troops Activated for 1846 Mexican War p.121**

*May 11, 1846: Congress declares war against Mexico, the start of the Mexican-American War. Soldiers from the Illinois Militia were called into service.*

**• Quincy Unit Heads to Vietnam p.122**

*May 13, 1968: The Soldiers of the Illinois Army National Guard's Quincy-based 126th Supply and Services Company are mustered into federal active duty for service in Vietnam. It would be the only Illinois Army National Guard unit activated for the Vietnam War.*

**• Illinois Militia becomes Illinois National Guard p. 124**

*May 18, 1877: The Illinois State Militia was officially redesignated as the Illinois National Guard by the State of Illinois.*

**• Howe Earns Medal of Honor at age 14 p.125**

*May 19, 1863: Musician Orion P. Howe, Company C, 55th Illinois Regiment, a 14-year-old drummer boy whose father and brother were in the same regiment, volunteered to fetch the much needed ammunition during heavy fighting at Vicksburg, Mississippi.*

**• 170th Fighter Squadron Arrives in Illinois p. 126**

*May 24, 1946: The 305th Fighter Squadron was reconstituted and redesignated as the 170th Fighter Squadron and allotted to the Illinois Air National Guard in Springfield. Today, it is known as the 183rd Wing.*

**• OCS Shapes Future Leaders p.127**

*June 1, 1957: The Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School was established at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.*

**• 33rd IBCT Soldiers Head to Afghanistan p.128**

*June 14, 2008: The 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's Headquarters and Headquarters Battery and Battery B of the 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery mobilize for service in Afghanistan. The 33rd IBCT deployment would be the largest single unit deployment of an Illinois National Guard unit since World War II.*

**• 10,000 Mobilize for Mexican Border War p. 130**

*June 18, 1916: President Woodrow Wilson mobilizes the National Guard for the Mexican Border War. Illinois responds with six infantry regiments, a cavalry unit, and engineer, signal corps, artillery, and field hospital units.*

**Proud New American p. 131**

*Spc. Edna Carreno Shares Journey to U.S. Citizenship through Military Service.*

**5th CST Conducts External Evaluation p. 132**

*The Illinois National Guard's 5th Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team conducted an External Evaluation May 7 at the Peoria Civic Center.*

**Remembering the Sacrifice on Memorial Day p. 134**

*The Rochester, Illinois, community gathered May 25 at the Rochester Cemetery to pay tribute to the men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of freedom.*

**Three Soldiers graduate from SMA p. 136**

*Three Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers graduate from the U.S. Army's top noncommissioned officer academy.*

**Memorial Day Events in Chicago p. 138**

*Illinois National Guard Soldiers joined service members, civic leaders, veterans, Gold Star families, and members of the community during the city of Chicago's Memorial Day wreath laying ceremony at Daley Plaza on May 23.*

**Aviator Earns MacArthur Leadership Award p. 142**

*Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ethan R. Connor of Huntley, Illinois, a UH-60 pilot with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, has been named a recipient of the General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award.*

**BG Fonseca Selected for Dual Hat Role p. 144**

*Brig. Gen. Jorge Fonseca, the Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff, has been selected for the dual-hat assignment as the Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.*

**126th ARW Hosts Air Force Academy Cadets p. 145**

*U.S. Air Force Academy cadets visited the 126th Air Refueling Wing at Scott Air Force Base, giving future officers an inside look at logistics, maintenance, and mission readiness across the Total Force.*

**Decatur Soldier Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel p. 146**

*The hard work and dedication of newly promoted Lt. Col. Russell Hayes was celebrated during a promotion ceremony at the Illinois National Guard Armory in Urbana May 29.*

**'Rockstar' Warrant Officer Retires p. 148**

*Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jennifer Rosa's 25 years of military service was celebrated with family, friends, and fellow service members at a retirement ceremony at the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's headquarters in Urbana June 5.*



# Take it From the Top:

*Senior Leaders' Corner*

## America's Independence is Owed to Those who Donned the Uniform in Fight for Freedom



***Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard***

To the Soldiers and Airmen of the Illinois National Guard:

**A**s we approach America's 250th birthday, we should reflect on the immense legacy of the force we represent. For the Illinois National Guard, our story is not just a part of American history; it is the very fabric of it.

To achieve the excellence required of us in the future, we must look back at the milestones that define our character, our resilience, and our unwavering commitment

to the mission. Our past is the foundation upon which we build the readiness of tomorrow. Our heritage of leadership began long before the modern era.

On May 27, 1832, when Governor John Reynolds called for mounted volunteers during the Black Hawk War, a 23-year-old Abraham Lincoln stepped forward, and by April 7, he was elected a Captain in 31st Regiment Illinois Militia. Decades later, as President, he issued his Proclamation on April 15, 1861, calling for volunteers to preserve the Union. Nearly 260,000 Illinois troops answered that call, including young heroes like 14-year-old Cpl. Orion P. Howe of the 55th Illinois Infantry, who earned the Medal of Honor for his bravery in 1863. This legacy of answering the call was formalized when the Illinois State Militia was officially redesignated as the Illinois National Guard on May 18, 1877, later establishing its headquarters at Camp Lincoln in Springfield on July 6, 1886.

When global conflicts arose, Illinois stood at the forefront of the fight and the push for equality. During the calls for service in World War I starting on March 25, 1917, the 33rd Infantry Division was activated, and with it the "Fighting" 8th Infantry Regiment. The 8th Infantry was redesignated as the 370th Infantry Regiment and would fight with the French during World War I. They were the only African American regiment to serve that started with an all-black officer corps, bringing vital veteran experience from the Spanish-American War and the Mexican Border War of 1916.

The legacy of these pioneering Soldiers was permanently honored on October 17, 1970, when the Washington Park Armory was renamed for General Richard L. Jones, a decorated veteran of both World Wars and the first commander of the integrated 178th Infantry Regiment.

Throughout World War II, our units demonstrated unparalleled resolve across

multiple theaters. Arriving in the Philippines on November 20, 1941, Company B of the 192nd Tank Battalion engaged in the first tank battle of the war and endured grueling years as POWs after defending the islands against impossible odds. In Europe, the 106th Cavalry arrived at Utah Beach on June 29, 1944, proved critical in protecting St. Vith during the Battle of the Bulge that December, and ultimately rescued King Leopold of Belgium in May 1945. Meanwhile, the 33rd Infantry Division fought valiantly through the Pacific, liberating Baguio, the Philippines' second-largest city, in April 1945.

Following the war, our aviation units firmly established our presence in the skies with the organization of the 169th Fighter Squadron and the redesignation of the 170th Fighter Squadron in 1946, building upon the deep roots of the 108th Observation Squadron which received federal recognition in 1927.

This unwavering dedication continued seamlessly through the latter half of the 20th century and into the Global War on Terror. During the Korean War, over 8,500 personnel from the 44th Infantry Division answered the call starting in September

1951, and the Quincy-based 126th Supply and Services Company distinguished itself as the sole Illinois Army National Guard unit activated for Vietnam in May 1968. On September 11, 2001, we immediately activated 288 members for Operation Noble Eagle. The ensuing years saw immense sacrifice and service, from the 1544th Transportation Company completing over 1,200 missions in Iraq and losing five brave Soldiers, to the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's historic 2008 mobilization to Afghanistan – our largest deployment since WWII – where they trained 60,000 Afghan troops and sacrificed eighteen of their own.

Beyond the battlefield, our excellence is proven globally through strategic alliances. Our State Partnership Program with Poland, established on July 14, 1993, remains one of the nation's most robust, with our forces co-deploying on every Polish rotation to Iraq and Afghanistan from 2003 to 2020. Expanding our global footprint even further, we were proud to establish a second State Partnership between the Illinois National Guard and the military of Portugal last year in 2025, a move that reinforces our role in international security and

interoperability.

When natural disasters threaten our homeland, we remain the first line of defense, evidenced by the activation of over 7,600 service members during the 1993 Great Flood and the deployment of 1,400 personnel to support the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Whether it is an aircrew from the 182nd Airlift Wing becoming the first U.S. aircraft to land in Iran in 22 years to deliver earthquake relief in 2003, or developing future leaders at the Officer Candidate School established in 1957, our mission remains focused on impactful service.

As we look toward the next 250 years, remember that you are the stewards of this history. The excellence we strive for in future multi-domain operations is fueled by the exact same spirit that drove those who stood in these formations before you. We must know our history intimately, not merely as dates and facts, but as a tactical blueprint for resilience, leadership, and victory. By standing on the shoulders of the giants who forged the Illinois National Guard, we ensure that we remain Always Ready, Always There for our state and our nation.



# Illinois Army National Guard Aviation Soldiers Mobilize for Southern Command Mission

About seven Soldiers from Detachment 5, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 245th Aviation Regiment, based in Springfield, mobilized May 4 during a ceremony at the Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport, Springfield, for a mission to support U.S. Southern Command Counterdrug Operations.

“Today marks the shift from preparation to action,” said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Michael Maroon, Detachment 5 Commander. “You are capable and you are ready.”

Prior to the ceremony, Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard met with the Soldiers and family members to express his appreciation.

“Thank you to the families for their support of our Warriors. Without your support, we are not able to do what we do while wearing this uniform,” he said. “Thank you to the Warriors for accepting this mission. I look forward to hearing about the things

you accomplished when you return.”

Set in the terminal at the airport bearing the name of the Illinois National Guard’s most famous member, Capt. Abraham Lincoln, and with the replica of the Lincoln Memorial in the background, family, friends, and fellow Soldiers gathered to bid farewell to the deploying Soldiers.

“It is an incredible privilege to watch our Soldiers go out the door and do the job they signed up to do,” said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. “But they can’t do it without the support of family members. It’s important to understand what our family members are doing and the sacrifice they make to hold down the household during a deployment.”

Detachment 5, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 245th Aviation Regiment has a proud history of service. In 1991, unit members landed the first C-12 in liberated



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, front row, center, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, met with the Soldiers from Detachment 5, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 245th Aviation Regiment, prior to the mobilization ceremony May 4 at the Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport in Springfield. The Soldiers mobilized in support of the U.S. Southern Command. (U.S. Army photos by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)

Kuwait. In 2007, the unit deployed to Balad Air Base in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, followed by Afghanistan in 2010 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. In 2014 and 2019, the unit continued its mission with deployments to the Horn of Africa.

"This unit has a phenomenal history as you heard," Williams said. "How cool is it that of all the states and territories with a C-12 unit, ours was the first to land in Kuwait after it was liberated? This unit deploys constantly. We are going on six and a half years since their last deployment which is the longest stretch the organization has had without a deployment post 9/11."

Williams told family and friends Detachment 5 is full of experience.

"They are well trained and well versed in their duties," he said. "What you do on this deployment is always a representation of our communities, our organization, the U.S. Army, and the United States of America. This is part of your legacy, for your team, your legacy in the unit, and as individual members. I know you will go out and do an excellent job."

Maroon said the mobilization ceremony marks the first page of the next chapter in the unit's history.

"Today we begin writing the next chapter of this unit's proud history guided by its legacy," he said. "Each Soldier you see here is an important part of our team. Every role is essential. Every task performer

directly contributes to our unit's success."

Maroon said Detachment 5 is ready for its mission.

"We have trained for this," he said. "We have prepared for the uncertainty which comes with deployment and the demands of our mission. I have great confidence in this team because I have seen the standard they set every day."

Maroon reminded the Soldiers of his three guiding points for the deployment.

"First, do the right thing," he said. "Make good choices both on duty and off duty. Your actions during deployment not only reflects on this unit, but the Illinois National Guard and the U.S. Army."

"Second, do everything to the best of your ability," he said. "Pursue excellence as a standard in everything you do. Execute every task with precision. Don't be afraid to make a mistake but learn from them."

Maroon urged the Soldiers to take care of each other.

"Look out for one another," he said. "Speak up when you see something isn't right."

Maroon thanked families and loved ones for their support and sacrifice during the deployment.

"Your sacrifice doesn't go unnoticed," he said. "Your support at home enables this mission to happen. I am grateful you are here and I remain committed to taking care of your loved ones while away on this deployment."



**Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, and Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black, Command Chief Warrant Officer, Illinois National Guard, present Chief Warrant Officer 5 Michael Maroon, Commander of Detachment 5, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 245th Aviation Regiment, with the state of Illinois flag which will accompany the unit on its upcoming mission to the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility.**



**Chief Warrant Officer 5 Michael Maroon, Commander of Detachment 5, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 245th Aviation Regiment, addresses Detachment Soldiers, family members, and friends, during the unit's mobilization ceremony May 4 at the Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport in Springfield. About seven Soldiers are deploying to the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility.**



The “War Pigs” of the Illinois Army National Guard’s Springfield-based 233rd Military Police Co. salute during the unit’s mobilization ceremony, June 7, on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

## ‘War Pigs’ from Springfield-based MP Company Mobilize 70 Soldiers For Critical Mission in Alaska

**Story By G. Alejandro Valdes**  
**Illinois National Guard Public Affairs**

**Photos by Spc. Charlie Michaels**  
**404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade**

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and other senior leaders honored approximately 70 Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard’s Springfield-based 233rd Military Police Company as they deploy to Alaska to protect critical missile sites in the tundra.

Boyd challenged the Soldiers to better themselves during the deployment and to stay in touch with their families. “Come back a better person,” he said during the June 7 mobilization ceremony at Camp Lincoln. “Whether it is improving your physical fitness, taking an online course, or reading

a good book. Whatever it is, come back a better person.”

1st Lt. Colin Kehoe will lead a platoon of 233rd MP Co. Soldiers through the deployment. He said the deploying Soldiers dubbed themselves the “War Pigs” by popular vote. Rumor has it that soon after the moniker was voted on, a feral and very rare aqua-colored pig with orange polka dots wandered into the unit’s bivouac area. Rather than eat the critter, they adopted “War Pig” and the entire platoon shouts his name whenever his squeal is heard.

Kehoe said the mobilized Soldiers, and their colorful mascot, have prepared for more than a year for this protection mission. They conducted 94 drills, two annual trainings, site visits, recons, various skill and certification courses, leadership schools, and many hours outside of military training to get

ready – and they are now ready.

Capt. Alan Maxwell, the Commander of the 233rd, underscored how important the mission is to our national defense. “Fort Greeley plays a vital role in our nation’s defense and strategic security. It is in one of the most challenging environments in the world, it serves as a key component of America’s ability to detect, deter, and defend against emerging threats.” Protecting the capabilities of this strategically vital site now rests with the War Pigs, he said.

While the moniker and mascot might be new, the 233rd Military Police Co. has a long history of answering the call of our nation and state. Before it became a military police unit, it deployed as an Infantry unit during the Spanish-American War, World War I, and World War II. After it became the 233rd Military Police Co., it



**1st Lt. Colin Kehoe will lead the approximately 70 Soldiers of the 233rd Military Police Co. on its deployment to Alaska where the Soldiers will protect infrastructure critical to the security of the United States of America. He stands with War Pig, the element’s mascot, during the company’s mobilization ceremony, June 7, on Camp Lincoln in Springfield. All sorts of rumors are swirling around as to how War Pig managed to enlist, but the straight facts are that the 233rd Military Police Co. is answering our nation’s call again as it has for more than 130 years.**

deployed to Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm in November 1990, earning a Meritorious Unit Citation. In February 2003 it deployed to Iraq where it earned a Valorous Unit Award. It deployed to Afghanistan in 2016 and to Kuwait in 2021. It has also played a key role in multiple domestic emergency activations.

Col. Jessica McPherson, Commander of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, said that skills they built during the lead-up training will serve them well during the mission. “You have spent countless hours preparing for the challenges ahead. You have honed your skills, built strong bonds with your fellow Soldiers, and developed the discipline and resilience that are the hallmarks of our profession,” she said. “You are ready. I have



**Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, addresses the deploying “War Pig” Soldiers and their families during the June 7 deployment ceremony for about 70 Soldiers of the 233rd Military Police Co.**



**1st Lt. Colin Kehoe will lead the approximately 70 Soldiers of the 233rd Military Police Co. on its deployment to Alaska, displays the State of Illinois Flag with Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, during the unit’s June 7 mobilization ceremony on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.**

every confidence that you will carry out your duties with honor and distinction.”

Both McPherson and Boyd thanked the families as they prepare to support the Soldiers during the deployment. “I want you to know that our support does not end with this ceremony,” McPherson said. “We stand with you now, through

your mobilization, and long after your mission is complete. We are one team, one family, united in purpose to protect this great nation.”

“War Pigs” are known for their toughness and adaptability and are expected to thrive in the tundra, as the unit has thrived wherever they have been sent over the past more than 130 years. 🐷



**U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, left, presents U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough with the State of Illinois Distinguished Service Medal during a ceremony at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, June 6, 2026. The award recognized McDonough’s achievements in guiding over 1,100 worldwide deployments and orchestrating the unit’s conversion to C-130J aircraft. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer)**

# Maj. Gen. Dan McDonough of Peoria Retires after Nearly Four Decades of Military Leadership

Maj. Gen. Dan McDonough, the former Assistant Adjutant General – Air of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, couldn’t possibly list his accomplishments over his almost 40 years of distinguished military service.

He commanded the Illinois Air National Guard from May 2022 through December 2025 and just during those three years the list is extensive:

- Guided more than 1,100 worldwide deployments.
- Played a pivotal role in Air Defender 23, the largest trans-Atlantic NATO deployment in history.

- Oversaw the conversion of the 182nd Airlift Wing to C-130J aircraft.

- Activated a new Contingency Response Group.
- Under his guidance, the 126th Air Refueling Wing achieved the top mission capability rating for the U.S. Air Force’s KC-135 fleet earning a “benchmark” readiness inspection rating.

- His strategic oversight saved the U.S. Air Force billions of dollars in cost savings and resource realignment.
- Etc., etc., etc.....

For all this, he was awarded the Defense Distinguished Service Medal at his June 6 retirement ceremony at Peoria’s 182nd Airlift Wing and had

his name permanently entered in the U.S. Congressional Record by U.S. Rep. Darin LaHood for his “lasting impact on Peoria, Illinois, and the United States of America.”

But if you ask General McDonough what his greatest accomplishments were, his answer can be summed up in one word: people. “My greatest accomplishment is ... watching the people that are coming up behind me,” he said.

Two people are particularly high on that list of accomplishments for both him and his wife, Cindy – their daughter, Kelly, and son, 2nd Lt. Danny McDonough. The siblings spoke last during the retirement

ceremony.

"He showed Danny and I what a meaningful life looks like," said Kelly, who is a speech and language pathologist and is engaged to marry Army Ranger 2nd Lt. Ben Hunnius.

2nd Lt. McDonough is in flight school learning to become a military pilot like his father. He said his father never pushed him toward military service or in any other career direction, but rather just said to "Do something that makes you happy." Turns out, following in his father's footsteps as a C-130 pilot with the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing makes 2nd Lt. McDonough happy. That, and his fiancé, Claire Vickerman.

"As a kid, Dad was my hero," 2nd Lt. McDonough said. "The values you lived throughout your career were inspiring," he told his father.

The general said that his children didn't choose to be part of the military but still shared in the burdens of military service. Of his two children, "one has joined the military, and one is going to marry into the military," he said. "So, that ain't on me. That's on you guys!"

While the general might not have pressured his children in any career direction, he might be applying a little pressure on them as adults. Twice he mentioned grandchildren in his remarks. "But you probably should wait until after you are married," he said.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, said Maj. Gen. McDonough is a personal friend dating back to when both were serving as Assistant Adjutants General and Commanders of their respective components in the Illinois National Guard. When Maj. Gen. Boyd became The Adjutant General, he asked if Cindy would let her husband continue on as the commander of the Illinois Air National Guard.

"I know the respect you command when you walk into a room," Maj. Gen. Boyd said. The room on June 6 was the main hanger and it was standing room only, with many others joining via livestream.

Maj. Gen. McDonough asked

his friend and wingman, Col. (ret.) Tim Stumbaugh, to serve as guest speaker during the ceremony. Maj. Gen. McDonough was "operationally focused but takes care of all of his people" throughout his career, Stumbaugh said.

That career started with a rejection. The active Air Force would not allow young Dan McDonough, a recent college graduate, to join as a pilot and fill his ambition to fly airplanes. "That was by the grace of God. He had a plan," McDonough said. But that plan still involved flying airplanes. Rather than join the active Air Force he enlisted in the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing as an aircraft maintainer.

Soon, with the help of mentors at the 182nd, he was able to get a pilot slot and a ticket to flight school. He would fly three aircraft during his career, the OA-37 Dragonfly, the F-16 Falcon, and the C-130 Hercules. He would also lead Airmen on several combat missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He had over 700 hours of combat time in the cockpit. He commanded a squadron in combat

four times.

McDonough said that he was never driven to move up the career ladder but rather looked at every job "as my final destination." As a pilot, he was just amazed that he was able to fly military aircraft and get paid for it.

"I got to do a lot of cool things. I got to fly some cool airplanes ... I got to see the world in that airplane. It was absolutely amazing," he said. "What do you miss? It's the people. It's the relationships - people just doing great things."

"And at every level of leadership, people that are doing great things and taking on that role and being leaders at every level," he said. "That is by far my greatest accomplishments."

He told those still in uniform not to be in a hurry. "Enjoy the ride. It is an incredible blast," he said. "Your career plan and the Air Force career plan might not line up, but you'll eventually get there and things will work out. Be happy with what you do. ... Make every day count. Leave your mark on this place — and leave it better than you found it." 🇺🇸



**Retired U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough addresses attendees from a podium during his retirement ceremony at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, June 6, 2026. McDonough spoke about his adult life spent wearing the uniform, expressing gratitude toward family members, friends, and fellow military personnel. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer)**



# Honoring 42 Years of Service

## *DK Carpenter Retires After Distinguished Military Career*

**U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Donald K. Carpenter, director of the Lightning Sustainment Center, F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program Office, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, gives a speech during his retirement ceremony at the 182nd Airlifting Wing in Peoria, Illinois, May 2, 2026. Carpenter served previously in the U.S. Navy and has served in the military for 42 years. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Wynndermere Shaw)**

Members of the Illinois Air National Guard, distinguished guests, family, and friends gathered on May 2, 2026, at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria to honor the 42-year military career of U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Donald "DK" Carpenter.

The ceremony marked the official retirement of a leader whose dedicated service spanned more than four decades, beginning as an enlisted U.S. Navy mechanic in 1983 and culminating as a major general overseeing the global sustainment of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program. The choice of the 182nd Airlift Wing for the event was deeply symbolic, as Carpenter spent a significant portion of his career serving with the unit in Peoria, rising from an enlisted MSgt C-130 flight engineer to a key officer in the wing's leadership following his commissioning in 1997.

"Major General Carpenter was a great innovator who helped drive positive change within the Illinois National Guard and throughout the U.S. military," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "He retires from a military that is more effective because of his contributions."

Brig. Gen. Steve Rice, the Assistant Adjutant General - Air of the Illinois National Guard, "grew up" with General Carpenter in the 182nd Airlift Wing where both served as enlisted Airmen and then officers. "DK has great energy and enthusiasm that he brings to work every day. Nobody who knows him is surprised by how far he went in the military. We would be surprised if he just relaxed in retirement. It isn't really the way he is built," Rice said.

A defining moment of the

retirement ceremony was the presentation of the Defense Distinguished Service Medal. U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Gregory Masiello, the program executive officer of the F-35 Lightning II Joint Program Office, formally presented the prestigious award to Maj. Gen. Carpenter. The medal recognized Carpenter's exceptional leadership during his final assignment as the director of the Lightning Sustainment Center for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program Office at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio.

In this capacity, he was responsible for the readiness of more than 1,300 F-35 aircraft across the U.S. Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and international partners, managing a global sustainment footprint essential to national security.

Maj. Gen. Carpenter's extensive military journey was forged through multiple deployments to Europe and Southwest Asia, including a tour in Operation Iraqi Freedom and two tours in Afghanistan as a maintenance squadron commander. Before his national-level roles, he served as the commander of the 183rd Wing in Springfield, Illinois, and subsequently as the Director of Logistics, Engineering, and Force Protection for the National Guard Bureau.

Maj. Gen. Carpenter remarked that his future involves "sitting on the porch and drinking coffee," and finally being able to finish a workout without rushing off to a meeting. As far as future employment time will tell.

Beyond his operational and command responsibilities, Carpenter brought a wealth of civilian and military education to the force. A native of Mclean, Illinois, and an Eagle Scout, he holds a Bachelor of Science in Aviation Management from Southern Illinois University



**U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Gregory Masiello, the program executive officer of the F-35 Lightning II Joint Program Office, presents the Certificate of Retirement to U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Donald K. Carpenter, director of the Lightning Sustainment Center, F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program Office, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, during Carpenter's retirement ceremony at the 182nd Airlifting Wing in Peoria, Illinois, May 2, 2026. Carpenter served previously in the U.S. Navy and has served in the military for 42 years. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Wynndermere Shaw)**

Carbondale and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Management and Technology. He is also a certified Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt, a skill set he used to drive innovation throughout the National Guard.

Outside of his military duties, Carpenter is known for his dedication to personal fitness and his family. An avid enthusiast of CrossFit training, he is a frequent participant with CrossFit Nation, maintaining the same level of discipline in the gym as he did throughout his four decades of service. His athletic roots trace back to his time as a four-year wrestler at Olympia High School. A resident of Morton, Illinois,

Carpenter resides with his dog, Jet.

Maj Gen Carpenter has four children – Kylie, Kami, Kameron, and Chloe – who have supported his distinguished career through numerous assignments and deployments.

As he transitions to civilian life, Maj. Gen. Carpenter leaves behind a legacy of excellence and a profound impact on the readiness of the nation's air power. 🇺🇸

*Notice: This press release was developed with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence (Gemini Enterprise) for drafting and formatting purposes. The content was reviewed and verified for accuracy and appropriateness by relevant Department of War personnel prior to release in accordance with DoDI 5400.19.*

# What Drives the Best Warriors to be the Best Warriors?

## *2026 Winners of the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition Explain Their Motivation*

**By Sgt. Haesi Fanizzo**  
**139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment**  
**Illinois Army National Guard**

Why would these Soldiers volunteer to subject themselves to some of the most physically grueling, exhausting, and mentally taxing challenges that the devious minds of the Illinois National Guard's command sergeants major could conjure?

We asked the winners of the 2026 Illinois Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition, held March 26-29, at the Marseilles Training Area in Marseilles, Illinois.

This year Polish Territorial Defense Forces Soldier Mateusz traveled across the Atlantic to compete as part of the Illinois National Guard's 33-year State Partnership Program with the Polish military.

While Mateusz's rank and surname are omitted to comply with Polish TDF policy, Mateusz made a name for himself among his fellow competitors from the beginning of the competition. At the end, he was named the Illinois Army National Guard's 2026 Soldier of the Year.

The Illinois Army National Guard's Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, Sgt. Bryson Williams, came from much closer. Bryson hails from the Galesburg-based C Battery, 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment - part of the Peoria-based 65th Troop Command Brigade.



**Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, Illinois Army National Guard's State Command Sergeant Major, presents Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Bryson Williams with the Noncommissioned Officer of the Year award during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition at Marseilles Training Center, Marseilles, Illinois, March 26-29. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Haesi Fanizzo, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Illinois Army National Guard)**

"I wanted to prove to myself that I can do it," Mateusz said. "And if I can represent my country in this competition, I'm proud of it."

Williams said he was driven by the challenge of going up against a whole field of competitors, who had already risen to the top of their brigades - as well as internally

challenging himself.

"Going into the ruck, I knew it would come down more to mindset rather than physical capabilities," Williams said. "There were definitely moments where it got tough, but instead of thinking about how much was left, I flipped it and thought about how far I'd already come."



**Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, Illinois Army National Guard's State Command Sergeant Major, presents Polish Territorial Defence Force Soldier Mateusz with the Soldier of the Year award during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition at Marseilles Training Center, Marseilles, Illinois, March 26-29. Soldiers from the Polish Territorial Defence Forces were invited to participate as part of the Illinois National Guard's 33-year State Partnership Program with the Polish military. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Haesi Fanizzo, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Illinois Army National Guard)**

The 12-mile ruck march was the last event.

"The 2026 Illinois Army National Guard State Best Warrior Competition is designed to build tough, tenacious Warfighters by reinforcing mastery of the fundamentals – being brilliant at the basics," said State Command Sgt. Maj. Michael R. Kelly, the senior enlisted leader of the Illinois Army National Guard. "Competitors are tested on Army Warrior Tasks, weapons proficiency, land navigation skills, physical fitness, mental toughness, and resiliency, with a clear focus on the ability to shoot, move, communicate, and survive on the battlefield."

The competition started with an "unknown" distance run, in

full military gear with weapons. The Soldiers did not know the distance as a challenge to their mental and physical toughness. They weren't allowed to catch their breath during the rifle and shooting event, a test of their ability to fire accurately in combat. Similarly, the medical testing and the communications testing were conducted under combat-like duress. Then the competitors needed to quickly navigate through the brush, trees, and hills using only a compass and a map, during the day and in the dead of night.

On Day 2 they started day off with an "E3B" Physical Fitness Assessment - a rigorous, timed, 7-event combat-focused test. Key events include a 1-mile run, 30

dead-stop push-ups, 100-meter sprint, 16-sandbag lift (40 lbs), 50-meter water can carry, a 50-meter high crawl/3-5 second rush, and a final 1-mile run. Then came the "Mystery Event" where they were dropped by helicopter in the middle of the training area. There they were tested, again under duress, in multiple realistic and timed combat scenarios. This included figuring out where they were. Finally, they headed back to the barracks area. There they cleaned up just in time to face a board of six scowling command sergeants major and were grilled on their Army and combat knowledge.

Then, on day three, came the timed 12-mile march - with weapons, full combat gear, and 35-pounds in the ruck. Every Soldier made it through the competition, although each of them had some sore muscles and some had other minor injuries. There were 10 competitors, five vying from Soldier of the Year and five vying for NCO of the Year. A Soldier and NCO came from each of the Illinois Army National Guard's four brigades and two competitors came from the Polish Territorial Defense Forces, a reserve force like the National Guard in the U.S.

Michal, from the Polish Territorial Defense Forces, competed last year for Soldier of the Year and volunteered to compete again, this time for NCO of the Year. "In the last year I was participating in this competition, so I know a little bit about what to expect and what I might expect physically and mentally," he said. "But I decided to do it no matter what injuries or pains I have, to show the people that the Polish Soldier can go through even if he's wounded, injured, and feels great pain. And I also want to prove that my achievement of second place in last year's BWC wasn't



**Soldiers participating in the Illinois Army National Guard’s Best Warrior Competition receive final guidance prior to the unknown distance run. The three-day Best Warrior Competition is designed to challenge Soldiers’ mental and physical toughness while navigating events under combat-like duress. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. G. Alejandro Valdes, Joint Force Headquarters – Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**

a lucky shot, but instead is the consequence of doing something right.”

Illinois Army National Guard Spc. George Gonzalez of the Chicago-based 34th Division Sustainment Brigade was the runner-up in the Soldier of the Year competition and will compete in the Region IV Best Warrior Competition representing Illinois if Mateusz is unable. The regional competition is April 29 to May 3 at Fort Custer, Michigan.

“What made me want to compete is just my love of competition,” Gonzalez said. “It’s great to get out there and perform against other high-performing individuals. Competition breeds excellence.”

“I definitely had fun,” he added. “This event was a blast - highly recommend. I would do it again.”

Williams is happy to get a bit of a break before the regional




**Participants in the Illinois Army National Guard’s Best Warrior Competition participate in the rifle and shooting event at Marseilles Training Center, March 26-29. The rifle and shooting event tests Soldiers’ ability to fire accurately in combat. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Haesi Fanizzo, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Illinois Army National Guard)**



**Participants in the Illinois Army National Guard’s Best Warrior Competition participate in one of two one-mile run portions of the E3B Physical Fitness at Marseilles Training Center, Marseilles, Illinois, March 26-29. The E3B Physical Fitness Assessment is a rigorous timed, seven-event combat-focused test. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Haesi Fanizzo, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Illinois Army National Guard) Participants in the Illinois Army National Guard’s Best Warrior Competition participate in one of two one-mile run portions of the E3B Physical Fitness at Marseilles Training Center, Marseilles, Illinois, March 26-29. The E3B Physical Fitness Assessment is a rigorous timed, seven-event combat-focused test. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Haesi Fanizzo, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Illinois Army National Guard)**

competition. “I’m definitely happy to be done in the sense that it was a long, demanding competition and takes a lot out of you physically and mentally,” he said. “It feels good to finally take a step back and recover a bit. At the same time though, I enjoyed the challenge.”

“At the end of the day, it was one of those experiences where it’s hard while you’re in it, but you appreciate it a lot once it’s over,” he added.

Michal also felt bittersweet at the end of the competition. “I am happy that our competition has ended,” he said. “But I am unhappy that I have to leave behind this bond with the people I have met here.” 



**An Illinois Army National Guard Soldier is graded on dead-stop push-ups during the physical fitness assessment portion of the Illinois Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition March 27 at Marseilles Training Center, Marseilles, Illinois. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. G. Alejandro Valdes, Joint Force Headquarters – Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**

# The Power of Transformational Leadership

## Chief Master Sergeant Retires After 27 Years of Service

**Story by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche  
Joint Force Headquarters  
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs**

Military service has long shaped Chief Master Sgt. Marlon Burton's family story.

At his retirement ceremony, Burton's legacy could be seen across generations, from the family members whose service inspired him years ago to his own daughters, 2nd Lt. Amari Burton and Airman 1st Class Aubrey Burton, both assigned to the 182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron, who now continue the tradition of service in the Illinois Air National Guard.

For Burton, service was never simply about wearing the uniform. Over the course of a 27-year career, he built a leadership philosophy centered on faith, humility, education and transformational leadership — principles that



**U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Marlon Burton, the command chief of the Illinois Air National Guard, addresses the audience during his retirement ceremony in Peoria, Illinois, May 3. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer)**



**Chief Master Sgt. Marlon Burton poses for a family photo during his retirement ceremony in Peoria, Illinois, May 3. Burton retired after 27 years of service in the Illinois Air National Guard, leaving behind a family legacy that continues through his daughters currently serving in the organization. (Courtesy photo)**

shaped not only his military career, but his family as well.

After nearly three decades of service, Burton retired May 3, 2026 following a career that culminated as the Illinois Air National Guard State Command Chief, one of the organization's highest enlisted leadership positions.

"One of the things that I'm proud of is that I was able to leverage the military to develop my own leadership qualities," Burton said. "I was able to see good leadership, see what doesn't work, and create my own leadership style."

Burton's military journey began in 1998 after moving to Central Illinois from Chicago and learning about the Illinois Air National Guard through a coworker. Although his father previously served in the Army and encouraged him to consider military service, Burton initially planned to join active duty before ultimately deciding the Air National Guard was the right fit.

"I still had the desire to join the military for that camaraderie," Burton said. "I figured the military would help leverage my career."

That decision would shape the next 27 years of his life.

Throughout his career, Burton served in several positions including security forces Airman, base safety specialist, first sergeant, human resources advisor, mission support group superintendent and eventually State Command Chief for the Illinois Air National Guard.

"He has done a remarkable job representing the organization," said Maj. Gen. (ret.) Daniel R. McDonough, former Assistant Adjutant General - Air, Illinois Air National Guard. "Hopefully future leaders can take from the example he has set Airmen throughout the state."

Looking back, Burton said much of his leadership philosophy developed through years of



**U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Marlon Burton, right, the command chief of the Illinois Air National Guard, receives a Certificate of Retirement during his retirement ceremony in Peoria, Illinois, May 3. Burton said watching his daughters continue the family's military legacy became one of the most rewarding moments of his career. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer)**

observing both positive and negative examples of leadership.

"You have to put yourself in other people's shoes," Burton said. "If you can't recognize people and understand people, you're missing a huge piece."

Burton emphasized transformational leadership throughout his interview, describing it as helping individuals grow from their "real self" to their "ideal self" through mentorship, communication and understanding.

"When you know your people and you're helping them get to where they want to be, then you're also leading the mission the right way," Burton said.

That leadership style left a lasting impact on his daughters, who witnessed it firsthand both at home and through his military career.

"My dad has the biggest heart inside the home and outside," said 2nd Lt. Amari Burton, of the 182nd Airlift Wing. "As a leader, he cares for his people and puts 100 percent into everything he does for others. That same care and love was demonstrated in his role as a father."

Amari Burton said watching her father's career unfold directly influenced her own decision to join the Illinois Air National Guard.

"Seeing where the National Guard took my dad and his career,

I knew it would be good for me and would be a definite way to obtain my education," she said.

She added that seeing him serve in one of the Illinois Air National Guard's top enlisted leadership roles created a sense of pride and responsibility within their family.

"It set a higher standard for me to achieve in my military career," Amari Burton said.

Airmen 1st Class Aubrey Burton said her father's lessons extended far beyond military service.

"My father has taught me that humility, education and transformative leadership are all incredibly important," Aubrey Burton said. "He explained how important it is in the workforce to motivate followers and get

them genuinely excited about the work they are doing, and make a generational change," she said.

Chief Master Sgt. Marlon Burton expressed how helping younger Airmen navigate challenges involving military service, education, family life and civilian careers became one of the most rewarding aspects of his leadership journey.


"You don't necessarily have to look at the military as an obstacle," Burton said. "Leverage the military while you serve your country but also use it to empower yourself."

Faith also remained central throughout Burton's life and leadership philosophy. Burton credited God, prayer and faith for helping him balance military

service, civilian employment, education and family responsibilities.

"First God, always first," Burton said. "Faith in God and being blessed to serve in the military was foundational and fundamental to my growth.

Despite retiring from military service, Burton says his passion for mentorship and helping others will continue through youth mentorship and uplifting others.

"My whole journey has been predicated on people," Burton said. "I love interacting with and helping people. For me, it comes down to humility, education and transformational leadership. Those are my three foundational principles for what I do." 

## Lopez Earns Distinguished Flying Cross with "C"



U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Charles Bolton, left, 18th Air Force, commander, awards Capt. Nick Lopez, 906th Air Refueling Squadron, pilot, the Distinguished Flying Cross at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 26, 2026. Lopez received the Distinguished Flying Cross with a "C" device for his quick actions during recent combat operations. The 906th is an active duty squadron under the command and control of the 126th Air Refueling Wing. The Distinguished Flying Cross, the nation's highest honor for aerial achievement, is awarded to any officer or enlisted person of the Armed Forces of the United States for heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight. The "C" device was established to distinguish an award earned for exceptionally meritorious service or achievement performed under combat conditions on or after Jan. 7, 2016. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)

# Illinois Army National Guard Officer Receives Major General John A. Logan Patriot Award for military service, work with Chicago Veterans

Illinois Army National Guard Major Karen Hernandez received the Major General John A. Logan Patriot Award during Chicago's Memorial Day on May 23.

Hernandez is the Executive Director of Chicago Veterans and the Medical Logistics Officer for the Illinois Army National Guard's 34th Division Sustainment Brigade.

A respected advocate for veterans, women in leadership and minority representation, Hernandez has dedicated her career to empowering veterans through community engagement, mentorship, employment resources and advocacy.

Since enlisting in 2008 and commissioning as an Illinois Army National Guard officer in 2011, she has held key leadership roles supporting humanitarian missions, strategic operations and military medical initiatives both domestically and abroad.

Throughout her military and civic career, Hernandez has demonstrated a deep commitment to service and leadership development.

She served as Deputy Commander for the Illinois National Guard COVID Task Force Testing mission in 2020 and later deployed as a Field Hospital Commander overseeing medical support



**Illinois Army National Guard Maj. Karen Hernandez, right, Medical Logistics Officer, 34th Division Sustainment Brigade, was awarded the Major General John A. Logan Patriot Award during the Chicago Memorial Day wreath laying ceremony May 23.**

operations across Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, where her unit, the 709th Medical Company Area Support, earned the Meritorious Unit Commendation for exceptional service.

Beyond her military accomplishments, Hernandez has volunteered extensively with veteran and civic organizations throughout Illinois, served on

numerous advisory councils and mentorship initiatives, and remained active in her community through youth coaching and volunteer teaching. Guided by the values of integrity, compassion and selfless service, she continues to advocate for veterans while helping shape the next generation of leaders. 🇺🇸



Lt. Col. Lance Frail, Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion, passes the battalion's guidon to Command Sgt. Maj. Roger Miller as Miller becomes the next senior enlisted leader of the battalion during a Change of Responsibility ceremony March 25.

## Miller Gets the 'Big Stick' as Next Command Sergeant Major of ILARNG Recruiting and Retention Battalion

The Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion welcomed a new senior enlisted leader during a change of responsibility ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln, March 25.

Command Sgt. Maj. Chad M. McDannald relinquished his role to Command Sgt. Maj. Roger J. Miller during the traditional military ceremony, which was presided over by the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Lance Frail.

Under McDannald's leadership as the battalion's

senior enlisted leader, he was instrumental in mentoring and developing recruiters, fostering an environment of success. His guidance was a key factor in the performance of the state's top recruiters. His expertise in leading recruiting efforts was recognized previously when he was awarded the Expert Seven Badge and named Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of Strength Maintenance Advisory Group Four, consisting of seven states in 2017. At that time, all recruiters in his company met or exceeded their goals,

making it one of the top recruiting companies in the nation.

In a symbolic gesture representing the transfer of authority and responsibility, McDannald presented Miller with a large wooden stick. The "big stick" is a tangible reminder of the command sergeant major's role as the chief enforcer of standards and discipline within the battalion.

During the event, the battalion also recognized the vital support of the leaders' spouses.

McDannald's wife, Amy, was presented with a bouquet of red



**Command Sgt. Maj. Roger J. Miller is the new senior enlisted leader for the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion. The battalion held a Change of Responsibility ceremony on March 25 where Miller assumed responsibility for the battalion from Command Sgt. Maj. Chad Mcdannald. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Stech, Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Command)**



roses, and Miller's wife, Michelle, received yellow roses to thank them for their dedication and commitment to the battalion's community.

The ceremony's central event, a long-standing military tradition, is the passing of the organizational colors from the outgoing to the incoming command sergeant major. The colors represent the battalion's heritage and the transfer of responsibility for the unit's enlisted soldiers.

The event also included Miller's lateral appointment to command sergeant major. Miller enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1988 and has held numerous leadership positions. His service includes deployments to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom and in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Miller, who was named the battalion's 1st Sergeant of the Year in 2022, expressed his gratitude for the new role.

McDannald, the outgoing command sergeant major, thanked the battalion's soldiers for their dedication during his tenure.

The Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion is responsible for enlisting new soldiers and retaining current service members to ensure the Illinois National Guard remains ready for state and federal missions. 🇺🇸

**Left, Command Sgt. Maj. Chad Mcdannald holds the "Big Stick" for the last time before ceding it to Command Sgt. Maj. Roger J. Miller during the Illinois Army National Guard's Change of Responsibility ceremony on March 25 on Camp Lincoln in Springfield. During the ceremony, Mcdannald relinquished responsibility for the battalion to Miller. Mcdannald is retiring. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Stech, Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Command)**

# Springfield-Based 233rd Military Police Company Prepares for Deployment to Alaska

**Story and photos by  
Sgt. David Ervin**

## **404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade**

Soldiers assigned to the Illinois Army National Guard's 233rd Military Police Company prepared for a deployment to Alaska as the unit continues training to maintain readiness and support mission requirements.

Approximately 70 Soldiers of the Springfield-based unit are slated to deploy in June where they will protect anti-ballistic

missiles critical to the defense of United States. In March the unit underwent intensive deployment training at the Illinois Army National Guard's Marseilles Training Area.

During the training at Marseilles, Soldiers conducted patrols and rehearsed tactical movements as part of the unit's "Road to War" training. The exercise is designed to simulate real-world operational conditions and prepare Soldiers for potential deployments. In preparation for

the mission, Soldiers participated in a variety of training events designed to strengthen tactical proficiency, communication and teamwork. Training has included classroom instruction, battle drills, weapons qualifications and field exercises to ensure Soldiers are prepared to operate effectively in a range of operational environments.

"I volunteered for the deployment because it's an opportunity to gain experience and unlock benefits, but also to see new places and meet new people," said




Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Colton Peacock, assigned to the Springfield-based 233rd Military Police Company conducts bounding drills during "Road to War" training at Marseilles Training Area on March 11. The training is designed to improve combat readiness and tactical proficiency.

Spc. Lizbeth Olmeda, a Military Police Soldier assigned to the 33rd Military Police Battalion who volunteered to deploy with the 233rd Military Police Company. "It's something I didn't want to pass up."

Olmeda said the training leading up to the mission has helped build her confidence and readiness for the upcoming deployment.

"The training has been really engaging," Olmeda said. "I especially enjoy the field exercises because they give us the chance to apply what we've learned in a realistic environment."

As the deployment approaches, Soldiers of the 233rd Military Police Company remain focused on readiness, teamwork and mission success as they prepare to support operations in Alaska. 



**Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 233rd Military Police Company conduct room clearing operations during the 233rd's "Road to War" training at Marseilles Training Area, March 11.**



**Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Amanda Moberg, assigned to the Springfield-based 233rd Military Police Company leads a patrol during the 233rd's "Road to War" training at Marseilles Training Area on March 11. The training focuses on building combat readiness and improving small-unit coordination.**

# Illinois Army National Guard Honors Mcdannald for More Than 33 Years of Service

The Illinois Army National Guard celebrated the storied career of Command Sgt. Maj. Chad Mcdannald, a man known to “turn that mindset into a grind-set” for thousands of Soldiers over 33-plus years of military service.

“When I think of Mac, these words come to mind: creative, passionate, strategic vision, tenacity, elite communicator, motivator, collaborator, builder of teams,” 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 Mcdannald’s March 25 retirement ceremony on Camp Lincoln in Springfield. “He gets the people part right in all that he does, and at all times. He is a leader of people!”

Mcdannald, affectionately known as “CSM Mac,” enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard on November 2, 1992. His career was marked by leadership at every level, from his early days as an Infantry Team Leader during a 2000 deployment to Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Spring, to his ultimate role as the Command Sergeant Major for the Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

“I am here to tell you; he is one



**The Illinois Army National Guard celebrated the storied career Command Sgt. Maj. Chad Mcdannald, a man known to “turn that mindset into a grind-set” for thousands of Soldiers over 33-plus years of military service during his March 25 retirement ceremony on Camp Lincoln in Springfield. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Stech, Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion)**

of the best to ever do it,” Williams told Mcdannald’s family. “He has positively impacted the lives of thousands of people and that impact will live on for generations because of the qualities he has instilled in those that follow in his footsteps.”

For over 25 years, Mcdannald was a driving force within the recruiting battalion, where he was instrumental in shaping the future of the Illinois Army

National Guard. His leadership ensured the battalion remained a top-performing organization, and under his guidance, Illinois consistently ranked as a top-10 recruiting state nationwide. His career reflects a deep commitment to the force, having personally enlisted 189 Soldiers and overseen more than 8,000 enlistments.

“Ceremonies like today field strip the true lessons, and those are the days between the milestones,

the promotions, and the trophies," Mcdannald told the Soldiers packed into the auditorium.

"Days where nothing happens of significance, days where you question yourself. This is where setbacks exist. It happens ... most days in RRB are just like movin' dirt and committing to the process ... This is what builds you and what actually separates you. So I ask, do you still show up? Do you still do the work? Do you still hold the standard when there's no recognition attached to it? This is where it is decided - not on your best days, on your most ordinary ones ... just move the damn dirt, one day after another, no shortcuts, no excuses. Those


days will compound and one day you will look up and understand that it was a thousand or more uneventful days where you didn't quit that got you to where you are," Mcdannald said.

During the ceremony, Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, thanked Mcdannald in a letter for his critical role in the RRB's success. "You were instrumental in turning the RRB around when the team was experiencing hard times. Because of your efforts, the RRB is thriving and bringing in some of the best talent into our organization. I will be forever grateful to you," Boyd wrote.

In recognition of his exemplary career, Mcdannald was awarded the Legion of Merit. The award citation highlighted his "exceptionally meritorious service spanning 33 years" and his profound devotion to Soldiers, Families, and the mission. He was also awarded the Colonel Robert L. Manning Achievement Medal for his exceptional contributions to the Human Resources profession and the Adjutant General's Corps.

A leader known for his authenticity and a relentless commitment to developing others, CSM Mcdannald often joked about earning a "Doctorate in Grit." Those who served with him recognize this as a testament to his perseverance, adaptability, and leadership through uncertainty.

The Illinois Army National Guard also honored the support of his family. Mcdannald was joined by his wife, Amy; stepson, Carson; parents, Sheri and Terry McDannald; and other family and friends. His wife, Amy, was presented with a Department of the Army Certificate of Appreciation and the fictitious "Military Spouse Medal" from a "very grateful and occasionally difficult husband" for "her unwavering support and dedication" throughout her husband's career.

Mcdannald officially retired June 30. His leadership, mentorship, and unwavering dedication have left an indelible mark on the Illinois Army National Guard. 



**Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, presents Command Sgt. Maj. Chad Mcdannald with the Legion of Merit honoring Mcdannald's more than 33 years of service during a retirement ceremony March 25 at Camp Lincoln.**



Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers train in the simulated environment of the virtual shooting range in a training building at the Army National Guard training center in Marseilles, Illinois March 23. The training was part of an Individual Weapons Qualification course to help Soldiers build their weapons skills and eventually help train and assess other Soldiers in the use of military weapon systems.

## Illinois National Guard Soldiers step onto the range and step up to lead

**Story and photos by  
Sgt. Haesi Fanizzo  
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment  
Illinois Army National Guard**

Soldiers from multiple units in the Illinois Army National Guard conducted and received training for the latest Individual Weapons Qualification (IWQ) course at the Marseilles Training Center in Marseilles, March 23 to 25.

Soldiers gathered under the guidance of noncommissioned officers of the Illinois Army National Guard's Small Arms

Readiness and Training Section (SARTS), a part of the Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ), to hone their skills to use weapons and to eventually train and evaluate other Soldiers on the use of weapons in a field training environment.

"The IWQ course gives Soldiers the tools, hands-on experience and confidence to go back to their units as subject matter experts able to train others, enforce standards, and ultimately make their formations more lethal," said Staff Sgt. Jose Cortez, a SARTS instructor with the Illinois Army National Guard.

Soldiers participated in a variety of settings to train with M4 carbines. Training sessions were held in three different settings. The first was a training room with virtual targets and equipment designed to simulate the look, feel and movement of an M4 carbine. The second was a range used to fire live rounds and calibrate sights for the M4 carbine. The third and final setting was a qualification range with targets to assess proficiency with the M4 carbine.

"Getting back to basics is vital to unit readiness," said Illinois

Army National Guard Staff Sgt. David Heneisen, another SARTS instructor. "Our goal is to equip the students with efficient range operations while also sharing our experiences on what has worked and not worked in the past."


As Soldiers participated in the training, they also built confidence in their own skills.

"After being in the Army National Guard for twelve years,

this has been the most secure I have been in regard to zeroing my weapon and being comfortable with my weapon system," said Illinois Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Zachary VanMeter of the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 34th Division Sustainment Brigade.

On the final day of IWQ training, the SARTS instructors met with the class one last time to

share results, give feedback and conclude the course. At least one of the instructors put philosophy into words.

"I hate the phrase 'Slow is smooth, smooth is fast'," said Sgt. Chris Greuel, another Illinois Army National Guard SARTS instructor. "In reality, slow is slow and fast is fast. We're here to give the training and confidence to make up that gap." 



**Illinois Army National Guard Cpl. Steven Castaneda of the C/341st Military Intelligence Battalion, 65th Troop Command fires at targets at a qualification range at the Army National Guard training center in Marseilles, Illinois March 25.**



**Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers practice weapons handling and aiming in an equipment storage building near a firing range at the Army National Guard training center in Marseilles, Illinois March 23, 2026.**



**U.S. Army and Vietnam Veteran John Meier, returns his salute to the service members saluting him as he returns from his trip to Washington, D.C., as part of the Greater St. Louis Honor Flight, April 1, 2026, in St. Louis, Missouri. The flights are intended for men and women who served their country, giving them the opportunity to visit the memorials built in their honor. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)**

*A Long Overdue Welcome Home:*

## **Airmen Honor Veterans at St. Louis Honor Flight**

**Story and photos by  
Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison  
126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs**

Airmen from the 126th Air Refueling Wing gathered at St. Louis Lambert International Airport on April 1, to honor heroes from the past.

The 126th ARW Airmen were part of a group of service members, including Marines, Soldiers, and Coast Guardsmen, seeing off and welcoming home

veterans from the Greater St. Louis Honor Flight.

“It was neat to meet people who had served and are proud to have done so,” said Master Sgt. Rodney Rutenbur.

“I met a guy who saw my ‘Petroleum, Oils and Lubricants’ patch on my arm and said he was POL in 1968.”

Retired Master Sgt. Adania Lovern, with the 906th Air Refueling Squadron, brought her son, Antonio, with her to

honor the veterans of the Honor Flight. Antonio is a member of the Mascoutah Air Force Jr. ROTC.

“I wanted to show him that it’s not just active duty that is commemorated,” said Lovern. “We need to show respect to those who have come before us.”

The flight included more than 90 veterans from the Korean and Vietnam Wars. World War II and Marine Corps veteran Bob Schultz celebrated his 104th birthday. Schultz fought in every major



**U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Rodney Rutenbur, 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, and Master Sgt. Leslie Hamilton, 126th Medical Group, see off veterans as they get ready to take off for Washington, D.C. on board the Greater St. Louis Honor Flight, April 1, 2026, at St. Louis Lambert International Airport, St. Louis, Missouri.**

battle in the Pacific Ocean and survived several kamikaze attacks.

“I was so excited to shake his hand,” said Master Sgt. Leslie

Hamilton, a health systems technician with the 126th Medical Group. “I got to listen to the words he was sharing with me and to see

his smile.”

The Honor Flight is a nationwide nonprofit organization that brings veterans to Washington, D.C., for the day to visit the memorials built in their honor. Their mission states that they want to celebrate America’s veterans by sharing a day of honor in the nation’s capital. They want veterans to experience the honor, gratitude, and support they deserve.

Although it was a rainy day in the St. Louis area, it was a sunny day in Washington. They were greeted at Washington Dulles International Airport with a water cannon salute.

The veterans watched a flag-folding ceremony at the Lincoln Memorial and observed the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington Cemetery.

The 114th Greater St. Louis Honor Flight featured about 85 Vietnam veterans. They spent time at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial gathering name rubbings of their fallen brothers and sisters in arms who were killed in action during



**Members of the military who participated in seeing off the Veterans from the Greater St. Louis Honor Flight, April 1, 2026, at St. Louis Lambert International Airport, St. Louis, Missouri.**

the conflict.

After a long day that started for some at 1:30 a.m., the plane touched back down in St. Louis just after 9 p.m. However, the day of honoring and celebrating their service was not over.

As they stepped off the plane, uniformed service members stood on either side of the hallway in Terminal 2, saluting as they passed.

“When the veterans were being escorted down through the line of servicemembers saluting them and they voiced their ‘thank you’s’ with a returned salute,” said Master Sgt. Amber Sallee, maintenance support section supervisor, 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, “that melted my heart.”

“The Vietnam veterans have never gotten the acknowledgment they deserved,” said Lovern.

“When I came home from Vietnam we landed in San Francisco with no greeting,” said Navy veteran Fred Waldrop. “We were told not to look like veterans.”

Waldrop served as a carpenter in the Seabees, for the 1st and 26th Marines outside of Da Nang.

“The homecoming was over the top,” said Waldrop. “This time it was very moving with all the military and family being there.”

This homecoming included service members marching in front of the veterans in columns of two down the terminal, led by the St. Louis County Police Pipes and Drums, past their cheering family and friends until they reached the security exit.

Asked if she would do it again, Sallee said, “I submitted my volunteer application the following day. Giving back to that community is the least that we can do for their service to this country.” 🇺🇸



**U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Madison Niederbrach, 126th Retention Office Manager welcomes home U.S. Navy veteran Fred Waldrop after his trip to Washington, D.C. aboard the Greater St. Louis Honor Flight, at St. Louis Lambert International Airport, April 1, 2026, St. Louis, Missouri.**



**U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Nathaniel Davis, 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, talks with U.S. Air Force and Vietnam Veteran Jerry Garret after his return from Washington, D.C., as part of the Greater St. Louis Honor Flight, April 1, 2026, in St. Louis, Missouri.**

# 183rd Wing's Comptroller Flight Selected as Air Guard Finance Operations Office of Year

**Story by**  
**Tech. Sgt. Katherine Jacobus**  
**183rd Wing Public Affairs**

The 183rd Comptroller Flight, 183rd Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, was recognized as the Air National Guard Financial Operations Office of the Year for fiscal year 2025 due to excellence in travel processing speed, military pay processing, quality assurance processes, critical upgrade training completion and personnel development.

"This recognition really belongs to the entire team. Their dedication, professionalism, and teamwork are what made this possible," said U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Kathryn Lane, the superintendent of the 183rd Comptroller Flight.

Through the development of custom processing and tracking

software, the 183rd Comptroller Flight increased their speed of production by 56 percent and expanded the contribution of vital funds toward mission-critical priorities. This allowed the team to improve the timeliness of military pay processing by over 94 percent, dramatically enhancing accuracy and financial readiness for 183rd Airmen.

The 183rd Comptroller flight also safeguarded 1,747 taxpayer-funded hours and reinforced fiduciary compliance across the Illinois Air National Guard for the Civilian Pay Program while further implementing a semi-annual dual compensation audit to establish ongoing oversight.

In addition, the team processed over 150 reimbursement requests through the Wing's Cooperative Agreement, their substantial return strengthening state resources and underscoring the

wing's commitment to fiscal responsibility.

The flight did all of this while facing readiness challenges with several new team members, which required actively managing and executing annual training and personal development plans. Three members completed critical upgrade training led by the flight, which bolstered unit readiness and enhanced the flight's capability to fill potential deployment taskings.

"This award represents the effort, resilience and collaboration of the 183rd Comptroller Flight," said Lane.

The Air National Guard Financial Operations Office of the Year award reflects the 183rd Comptroller Flight's achievements in improving processes and developing Airmen, ensuring the unit remains mission-ready and fully capable of meeting evolving operation needs. 🇺🇸



The Air National Guard selected the Illinois Air National Guard's 183rd Comptroller Flight, 183rd Wing, Springfield, Illinois Financial Operations Office of the Year for fiscal year 2025. Airmen and civilian employees in the flight were lauded for their excellence in travel processing speed, military pay processing, quality assurance processes, critical upgrade training completion and personnel development.

# Illinois National Guard Commander, Philippine Consulate Honor Filipino World War II Veterans

The commander of the Illinois National Guard joined the Philippine Consul General Friday, April 10, to award Congressional Gold Medals to Filipino Veterans of World War II, commemorating the Philippines' Day of Valor, or *Araw ng Kagitingan*.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois, and Philippine Consul General Melanie Rita Diano presented the medals to Veterans and their families at the Philippine Consulate General in Chicago. The ceremony honored the Soldiers for their role in the war and marked the 80th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Philippines.

Those who received Congressional Gold Medals

included:

- The family of Sergeant Fernando A. Baylosis in honor of his service.

- Private Melecia B. Delizo, a World War II nurse aide. She also accepted the medal for her deceased husband Sergeant Pablo A. Delis.

- The family of 3rd Lieutenant Geronimo Vivit, in honor of his service.

*Araw ng Kagitingan* commemorates the fall of Bataan on April 9, 1942, and the bravery of Filipino and American Soldiers who defended the peninsula.

"It is an honor to join you here today to recognize the bravery, the selflessness, and the sacrifice of these heroes," Boyd said during the ceremony. "On behalf of the

13,000 dedicated Soldiers and Airmen of the Illinois National Guard... It is a great privilege to meet you."

The Illinois National Guard has deep historical ties to the Philippines. The Illinois Army National Guard's Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion, was in the Philippines when Japan invaded in 1941 and endured the subsequent Bataan Death March. Some also endured the infamous "Hell Ships" These were Japanese merchant vessels used during World War II to transport Allied prisoners of war.

"The 10,000 U.S. Soldiers, including the Tank Company, and our Philippine allies held the Japanese at bay until ordered to surrender on April 9, 1942," Boyd





said. "Around 70,000 American and Filipino troops were starving and sick from tropical disease." Boyd also recounted the role of Illinois' 33rd Infantry Division in liberating the islands near the

war's end. "In February of 1945, units from Illinois' 33rd Infantry Division landed in Luzon and began their drive through the Caraballo Mountains toward Baguio," Boyd

said. "Fighting alongside us were Filipino units. Reports after the war stated the Filipino units possessed 'excellent fighting spirit and a strong desire to push the Japanese out of their homeland.'"





The division's 130th Infantry Regiment had two Filipino units assigned to it. The joint forces captured Baguio on April 27, 1945.

Speakers at the event included retired Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba and Marie Silva Vallejo, author of "Dauntless."

Maj. Gen. Taguba is a highly decorated, Filipino-American veteran who retired from the U.S. Army in 2007 after 34 years of service. He is the son of a Philippine Scout who survived the Bataan Death March. Today, he is a leading advocate for Filipino veterans and serves as Chairman of the Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project.

Vallejo's book, "Dauntless: The 1st & 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiments, United States Army," tells the story of the Filipino-American Soldiers who formed these units in the U.S. after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

It details their top-secret

missions to penetrate enemy lines in the Philippines, providing vital intelligence to guerrilla forces and supporting the Allied plan to liberate the islands. The book is considered a definitive history of these units and their crucial, yet often overlooked, contribution to

the war effort.

The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest civilian honor awarded by the U.S. Congress.

"I am humbled to be here today to honor these heroes, and I am humbled to serve in their heroic shadow," Boyd said. 🇺🇸



# News and Notes



Lt. Col. Emily Audrain, 126th Medical Group, was honored at the 2026 Salute to Southwestern Illinois Annual Dinner for her work during the Salud en Tu Pueblo IRT 2025, as the Chief of Bioenvironmental Engineering, her work as an educator at Collinsville High School teaching science, coaching cheerleading and youth baseball not to mention her work with the Girl Scouts and serving on the local Khoury League baseball board.



Mrs. Stephanie Meyers, left, pins on Col. Tony Meyers', acting 126th Operations Group commander, colonel rank during his promotion ceremony at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 20. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)

## Back to His Military Roots

# 97-Year-Old Veteran Tours Sycamore Armory Where His Military Service Began in 1949

A 97-year-old veteran took a tour of the Illinois Army National Guard Armory in Sycamore, Illinois, where his military service started in 1949.

Don Swanson, of St. Charles, served in the Illinois National Guard from 1948-1949, before being drafted into the U.S. Air Force where he served from 1950-1953.

Swanson, who toured the Armory with his son, Michael, viewed some of the weapons used by Company A, 2nd Battalion,

122nd Field Artillery Regiment, and learned how the unit fits into the Illinois Army National Guard.

"The armory felt the same as when I was there in the late 1940s," Swanson said. "I was surprised at how well the building has been maintained."

Swanson, who served as the unit armorer under the Quartermaster assigned at the time, said he remembers the weapons vault housing only rifles during his time in the National Guard.

"It didn't have the weapons of today like the M240 machine gun, handguns, and grenade launchers," he said.

Swanson, who spent his post-military career as an electronics teacher at the high school and college levels, was impressed with the use of technology in today's weapons.

"I was most impressed with the electronics built into the Howitzer and the computer technology embedded into the vehicles onsite," he said. 🇺🇸



Former Illinois Army National Guard Soldier Don Swanson, of St. Charles, gets a tour of the Sycamore Armory by Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Allen, Readiness Noncommissioned Officer, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery Regiment and Staff Sgt. Chris Wiedmaier, Training Noncommissioned Officer.





**Maj. Madaline Cunningham, commander of the Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School, administers the oath of office to 2nd Lt. Roland Awinsune and 2nd Lt. Edward Eagleton during a commissioning ceremony April 18 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.**

## **Two Soldiers Complete Accelerated Officer Candidate School, Commission as Second Lieutenants in Illinois Army National Guard**

Joined by family, friends, and fellow Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers, Roland A. Awinsune, of Oak Lawn, and Edward R. Eagleton, of Peoria, commissioned as second lieutenants during a ceremony April 18 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

The two Soldiers were commissioned after completing the 57-day Accelerated Officer Candidate School at Fort McClellan, Anniston, Alabama.

"Today we celebrate not just what you accomplished, but what you are about to build," said Col.

Paul Metzдорff, Commander, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute). "This marks the powerful first step into the significant legacy you will create as an officer."

Metzдорff congratulated the newly commissioned officers for completing Officer Candidate School in 57 days.

"You have both conquered one of the most demanding and physical courses the U.S. Army offers, and you did it at an accelerated pace," he said. "That speaks volumes about your dedication and your potential.

Be proud of that accomplishment but understand it is merely the foundation."

Metzдорff told the two Soldiers today the real construction begins.

"As you build your careers, let these principles be your blueprints," he said. "First, build your legacy on servitude. Your rank is not a mark of privilege. It is a symbol of your profound responsibility to the Soldiers you lead. The most enduring legacies are built by leaders who genuinely care for their people and their families. Make them your priority and they will become the bedrock



**Newly commissioned 2nd Lt. Edward Eagleton has his new rank tacked on by Chief Warrant Officer 4 Daniel Lieber during a ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield April 18. Eagleton, who completed Officer Candidate School through the accelerated option at Fort McClellan, Anniston, Alabama, branched as an aviation officer in the Illinois Army National Guard.**

**Courtney Awinsune, wife of newly commissioned 2nd Lt. Roland Awinsune, places the new rank his uniform during a commissioning ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield April 18. Awinsune, who completed Officer Candidate School through the accelerated option at Fort McClellan, Anniston, Alabama, branched as a finance officer in the Illinois Army National Guard.**

of your success.”

Metzdorff reminded Awinsune and Eagleton actions speak loudly to those they will lead.

“Build your legacy with your actions,” he said. “Your character, both on and off duty, is the steel frame of your reputation. Lead by example in everything you do. Be the leader who is willing to do the hard work, who upholds the standard, and whose integrity is never in question. Your Soldiers will see this, and they will build their own standards on yours.”

Metzdorff told the newly commissioned officers a legacy is never built alone. He said it is built with a team.

“You will soon be partnered with noncommissioned officers who possess a wealth of experience. Build your legacy by empowering them,” he said. “Be the humble lieutenant who listens, learns, and trusts their platoon sergeant. A leader’s true strength is measured by the strength of the teams they cultivate.”

Metzdorff’s final principle he shared with the two new lieutenants was the choices they make will shape the legacy they leave as officers.

“Build your legacy with confidence. Do not fear failure for the worst decision is always indecision,” he said. “Trust your

training, take calculated risks, and act with a decisiveness that your position demands.

“As you step forward remember this day not as the end of something, but as the launchpad for a legacy built on service, courage, and the unwavering commitment to those you lead,” he said. “Go forth and write your legacy.”

Awinsune branched as a finance officer and will serve with Headquarters and Special Troops Battalion, 34th Division Sustainment Brigade.

Eagleton branched as an aviation officer and will serve with Company A, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment. 🇺🇸



# Capital Area Career Center visits 183rd Wing

Students from the Springfield Capital Area Career Center recently visited the 183rd Wing for an inside look at mission-ready career fields and military operations.

Led by the 183rd Wing recruiting team, the group toured the 183rd Civil Engineer Squadron, 183rd Maintenance Squadron, 183d Logistics Readiness Squadron, and the 217th Engineering Installation Squadron, gaining firsthand insight into the skills, teamwork, and opportunities that support the Wing's mission.





# Master Sergeant Michelle Lynn Johnson Retires After Distinguished Career

Master Sgt. Michelle Lynn Johnson retired from the Illinois Army National Guard, concluding a distinguished career spanning more than two decades as the Operations Noncommissioned Officer with the 634th Brigade Support Battalion.

Johnson enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard on Oct. 12, 1999, and over her career, she held multiple leadership and staff positions, including assignments with the Joint Force Medical Detachment, the 65th Troop Command, the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and the 634th Brigade Support Battalion. She also deployed in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel,

where she played a key role in mission success and operational readiness.

Her professional military education includes the Automated Logistical Specialist course, Master Leader Course, Financial Management Technician, Human Resources Specialist, and Battle Staff training. She earned a Bachelor of Science with a minor in Health Sciences from Kaplan University.

Johnson's awards and decorations reflect her dedication and service, including the Meritorious Unit Citation, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal (second award), Army Achievement Medal

(second award), Army Good Conduct Medal (fourth award), Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal (third award), National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Combat Action Badge, and the Armed Forces Reserve Medal with Silver Hourglass and "M" device, among others.

Outside of her military service, Johnson enjoys spending time with her family and supporting their activities.

Her career stands as a testament to leadership, professionalism, and commitment to the Illinois Army National Guard and the nation. 🇺🇸



Master Sergeant Michelle Lynn Johnson stands in front of her family and colleagues to accept her awards. Her career stands as a testament to leadership, professionalism, and commitment to the Illinois Army National Guard and the nation.

# Cunningham Honored in Retirement Ceremony at Illinois Military Academy

The Illinois Army National Guard recognized the distinguished career and service of 1st Sgt. Gary T. Cunningham during a retirement ceremony April 9 at the Illinois Military Academy.

Hosted by Lt. Col. Alison Jacobs, Counterdrug coordinator for the Illinois Army National Guard Counterdrug Task Force, the ceremony honored Cunningham's more than 25 years of military service. Family members, senior leaders and fellow service members gathered to celebrate his career and contributions to the state and nation.

Cunningham enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in November 2000 and served in both traditional and full-time capacities throughout his career. His assignments included roles as a unit supply noncommissioned officer, detachment readiness noncommissioned officer and counterdrug intelligence analyst. He concluded his full-time service as the Northern Illinois Region noncommissioned officer in charge, supervising 22 analysts and coordinating with more than 20 law enforcement agencies.

During his traditional National Guard career, Cunningham served with the 126th Maintenance Company and the 1844th Transportation Company. He deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2008 to 2009, where he served as a convoy commander conducting transportation and security missions throughout Iraq.

In August 2021, Cunningham was selected as first sergeant of the 1544th Transportation Company, a position he held until his

retirement.

Throughout the ceremony, Cunningham received multiple honors, including a certificate of appreciation from the President of the United States, a certificate of retirement from the Army chief of staff, and the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal for his sustained community service. He was also recognized with a formal retirement award for exceptionally meritorious service spanning his entire career.

Jacobs reflected on Cunningham's leadership and lasting impact during her remarks, highlighting his dedication to



**First Sgt. Gary Cunningham thanks friends, family, and fellow Soldiers for their support throughout his career during a retirement ceremony April 9 at the Illinois Military Academy.**

mission success and mentorship of Soldiers.

Cunningham also addressed the audience, expressing gratitude to his leaders, peers and family for their support throughout his career.



**Lt. Col. Alison Jacobs, Counterdrug coordinator of the Illinois National Guard's Task Force, presents 1st Sgt. Gary Cunningham with the Meritorious Service Medal during a retirement ceremony April 9.**

# Senior Ground Maintenance Warrant Officer Retires After 36 Year Career

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Jeffrey Garrett's 36 year career in the Illinois Army National Guard was honored during a retirement ceremony April 10 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

"When I think of Jeff, two things come to mind," said Col. Shawn Nokes, Director of Logistics, Illinois Army National Guard. "First, Jeff is a family man. From the first day I met Jeff, he talked about his mom, Cathy, wife, Christine, and his son, Jake, daughter-in-law, Kayla, and granddaughters, Stella and Chloe. Second, Jeff is a simple man. He tackles what is needed to be done, whenever it's needed. All ranks call him to seek guidance."

Nokes said Garrett has treated him the same way as a young lieutenant to the colonel he is today.

"I'm forever grateful for your friendship and mentorship," Nokes said. "You've had a great career. I'm a better officer because of you."

Longtime friend and fellow Illinois Army National Guard Soldier, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black, the Command Chief Warrant Officer, Illinois National Guard, thanked Garrett's family for their support throughout his career.

"We can't do all we do in these uniforms without family support," Black said. "This is a great day for you Jeff. We grew up together as kids in school and serving for 36 years together."

Garrett, the Illinois Army National Guard's Senior Ground Maintenance Warrant Officer, Joint Force Headquarters, enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1989 as a light wheel vehicle mechanic serving in the 204th Medical Company. He has served



**Col. Shawn Nokes, the Director of Logistics, Illinois Army National Guard, presents Chief Warrant Officer 5 Jeffrey Garrett with a certificate during a retirement ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln in Springfield April 10. Garrett retired from the Illinois Army National Guard after 36 years of service.**

as a dual status technician for 35 years.

Black said after he graduated from college, Garrett helped him apply for a federal job at Camp Lincoln.

"Our careers have blossomed since," he said. "We attended Noncommissioned Officer schools together, and after I became a Warrant Officer, Jeff followed."

Black said it's been amazing to serve alongside one of his best friends.

"I've been honored to serve alongside one of my best friends for all these years," he said. "I personally would not be in this

position without you and the Warrant Officer cohort."

Black emphasized the fact there are only nine Chief Warrant Officer 5s in the Illinois Army National Guard.

"To get to this level, to become a Chief Warrant Officer Five is amazing," Black said. "Your retirement is a loss for the organization, but I couldn't have done this without you."

Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard said that being a Chief Warrant Officer 5 is a testament to Garrett.

"It's not impossible to get promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 5," Williams said. "We have two sitting here today, but it's difficult to get promoted to that level."


Williams said when he became the Officer in Charge of the 108th Sustainment Brigade, he learned to depend on the warrant officers and senior noncommissioned officers to learn to be a logistician.

"When I became the Director of Logistics here at Camp Lincoln, I pulled together the warrant officers and learned the position," he said. "The roads come to an end for all of us in uniform. You've had a great career. Enjoy your time with your family."

Garrett thanked those he has served with over the span of his 36 year career.

"Thank you to those who groomed me and shaped me into what I am today," he said. "Without your leadership I wouldn't have gotten to where I am today."

He also thanked his family for their support.

"Family support is important for those serving in the military," he said. "I am so honored to have been able to serve 36 years. It's been a great career for me. I will miss a little bit but I'm going to enjoy retirement." 



**Chief Warrant Officer 5 Jeffrey Garrett thanks family, friends, and fellow Soldiers for their support and guidance during a retirement ceremony April 10 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield. Garrett retired from the Illinois National Guard after 36 years of service.**



### ***Cain Promoted to Colonel***

The Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard's 183rd Air Mobility Operations Squadron, 183rd Wing, was promoted to the rank of colonel in a ceremony at the 183rd Wing in Springfield. Newly promoted Col. Matthew Cain will replace Col. David Keck as the commander of the 183rd Air Operations Group. Cain is a command pilot with more than 3,800 flight hours, including more than 650 combat hours.

# Senior Aviation Leader Promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 5, Inducted into Order of Saint Michael

*Story and photo by  
2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche  
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

Family, friends, and fellow Soldiers gathered at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln, April 9 to honor the promotion of Chief Warrant Officer 5 Michael Maroon, recognizing nearly four decades of dedicated service to the Illinois Army National Guard and Army Aviation.

Hosted by Col. Jason Celletti, the State Aviation Officer of Illinois, the ceremony highlighted Maroon's 38-year career, which began when he enlisted in 1988 at the age of 17.

Maroon's career has spanned rotary and fixed-wing aviation, multiple deployments, and key leadership roles, including his current position as the State Senior Aviation Officer. Over time, he has accumulated more than 6,000 flight hours, including over 1,300 combat hours.

Throughout the ceremony, leaders emphasized Maroon's reputation as a quiet professional and dedicated mentor.

"He has done his entire career not making waves, but doing what's right to get the mission done," said Celletti. "Mike has always been about solving problems and taking care of Soldiers."

Celletti also reflected on Maroon's long-term impact on the formation, sharing a story from early in his own career.

"He took the time to teach a brand-new Soldier exactly what was going on and why," he said. "No lectures, no ego, just pure professionalism. I've seen that



**Chief Warrant Officer 5 Michael Maroon is pinned with his new rank by his wife, Deana, during a promotion ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, April 9, 2026. The pinning ceremony symbolizes the support of family throughout a Soldier's career.**

same mentorship for over 20 years."

Command Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black highlighted how rare it is to reach the rank of CW5.

"Out of thousands of Soldiers, there are only a handful of opportunities to make it to this level," Black said. "It's something you dream about, and it's a testament to everything he's done throughout his career."

Maroon's family played a central role in the ceremony, with his wife, Deana, pinning on his new rank of CW5. Leaders emphasized that the promotion reflects not only his service, but the support system behind him.


When addressing the audience, Maroon remained humble, focusing on his family and fellow

Soldiers.

"I can't say enough about my wife," Maroon said. "The toughest job in the Army is being a military spouse, and she's done it for 30 years. She's been the foundation of our family and my source of inspiration."

He also stressed the importance of mentorship and preparing the next generation of leaders.

"We have a responsibility to train and develop the next group of Soldiers and aviators who will carry on the mission," Maroon said.

During the ceremony, Maroon was also awarded the Order of Saint Michael, recognizing his significant contributions to Army Aviation and his leadership within the aviation community. 

# Multi-State Air Guard Units Train at CHOP North 2026

**Story By Airman Alec Martin**  
**Wisconsin National Guard**

More than 50 U.S. Airmen and 13 units from the Air National Guard Region V participated in exercise Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear, or CBRN, High-intensity Operational Preparedness, or CHOP, North 2026, April 15-22.

Emergency management exercises for Region V, including Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio, have been conducted for more than 20 years. This iteration of the exercise, CHOP North 26, was held at Volk Field Air National Guard Base in Wisconsin and focused on two major areas.

"We're focusing a lot more on our old school CBRN [training]," said Master Sgt. Steven Jefferies, the lead planner for CHOP North 26, assigned to the 183rd Wing in Springfield, Illinois. "So, it's more base defense emergency management planning and base

defense operations."

Another focus of CHOP North 26 is small team tactics. Working in teams mirrors realistic emergency management responses and allows members of each unit to become familiar with one another.


"The second part is the four-person team," Jefferies said. "That's down range CBRN where they go in, and they find a target, they go through all of their identifying and sampling, and then push [the results] out."

CHOP North 26 provides fine-tuned, realistic and cost-effective training for Region V Air National Guard units. Some types of training that were completed included hazard identification, manual plotting, equipment familiarization, decontamination operations, land navigation, combat skills, physical fitness and mental fitness.

The full-scale exercise and culminating event for CHOP North 26 took place at Fort

McCoy, Wisconsin, and included emergency operations center operations, CBRN control cell operations, reconnaissance teams for hazard identification, operations under limited communications, recovery after attack, site survey and assessment, close-quarters combat and individual mission command.

Security Forces from the 183rd Wing, Explosive Ordnance Disposal from the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, Wisconsin, and the 54th Civil Support Team in Madison, Wisconsin, supported the Airmen participating in CHOP North 26 with multi-capable training.

"Training like CHOP North is critical to national defense because you don't get training like this at home station," Jefferies said. "Events like this allow us to bring 17 wings together where we have the numbers to perform exercises and do training that we can't receive at our home station." 



**U.S. Air Force emergency management specialists, Air National Guard, practice land navigation during CHOP North 26, April 17, 2026, at Volk Field, Camp Douglas, Wisconsin. CHOP North 26 provides the opportunity for Airmen to come together and conduct multi-capability training. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mary Greenwood)**

# Peoria Soldier Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel

A graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger School and a former state recipient of the Gen. Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award was promoted to lieutenant colonel in a ceremony at the 65th Troop Command Brigade (TCB) headquarters in Peoria April 17.

Newly promoted Lt. Col. Spencer Ervin was joined by family, mentors, and fellow Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers. His mother, Emily Philpot, ceremoniously tacked on his new rank.

Ervin joined the Illinois Army National Guard in 2008 and has served in a variety of leadership roles throughout his career, including Commander, Troop C, 106th Cavalry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team training officer, Cavalry Regiment training officer, and executive officer and officer in charge of the 65th TCB.

"Today is a testament on what it means to lead from the front," said Col. Jason Carter, Commander of the 65th TCB. "This promotion to lieutenant colonel is a direct result of your hard work, work ethic, and leadership abilities within the organization."

Carter said getting promoted to lieutenant colonel in the Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) program is a math problem.

"With about 10,000 Soldiers serving in the Illinois Army National Guard, only about 750 of those Soldiers serve in the AGR program," he said. "Of those 750 AGR Soldiers, only 17 are lieutenant colonels. To get promoted you have to be in the right spot at the right time."

"Your career has been defined by the relentless pursuit of excellence and tactical mastery," Carter said. "We are looking forward to seeing you continue to progress."



**Newly promoted Lt. Col. Spencer Ervin, officer in charge of the 65th Troop Command Brigade thanks friends, family, and fellow Soldiers for their support during a promotion ceremony April 17 at the brigade's headquarters in Peoria.**

Ervin said he had many people to thank for their guidance throughout his career.

"Through these mentors, I've learned teamwork is the key to an organization's success," he said.

Ervin said noncommissioned officers are key to an officer's success as well.

"As officers we all have that noncommissioned officer we end up working together time and time again. The noncommissioned officer who sets the standards for other noncommissioned officers," he said. "For me that person is Sergeant Major Bishop. I've worked with him at the company, squadron, and brigade levels. What a ride it was to work

alongside a guy who can do it all and is technically and tactically proficient. He makes you want to strive to get better every single day."

Ervin offered guidance to the junior officers in attendance.

"Constantly strive to do your best. It matters," he said. "Hold yourself, your people and the organization accountable. Get stuff done. Don't get treed by a chihuahua. Lastly, when in doubt take a pause, stop, look, listen, and smell, and then develop the situation."

Ervin offered advice and guidance to his children.

"You are starting to know what it is to serve, and it's hard," he

said. "However in your toughest moments when you are cold, tired, and hungry, and you question why you ever wanted to serve, remember it's because you chose to do something beyond yourself. You chose to learn what it means to exercise loyalty, have a sense of duty, integrity, and honor in the service of our nation. Most of all you are learning what it means to be selfless. It's not about you. It's about the team. Apply that concept during your endeavors."

"Thank you for your patience and understanding that I'm not at home as much as other dads. When I hold you accountable, know I love you and one day you'll thank me," he said. "I look forward to seeing the men you've become. I've missed countless events and I'm sorry," he said. "It's truly hard to regret my decision, but know to be the best guy wearing this jersey demands all I have every single day."


Ervin said that doesn't change his love for all his children.

"Hopefully some day you'll understand the Army sending me to do whatever they need me to do is my way of loving you and providing for the family," he said.

Ervin thanked his wife, Iman Monla, for being the rock of the family.

"You are my top personal advisory, my sounding board, and the critical aspect to my entire support system," he said. "You are the rock of the family and the master of the personal calendar."

Lastly, Ervin thanked his mother, Emily Philpot, for the support she has provided throughout his life.

"You have given me a relentless drive to be more learned, and to persistently pursue additional education," he said. "You have instilled in me that knowledge is power in and out of uniform." 



**Off with the old...Emily Philpot, mother of newly promoted Lt. Col. Spencer Ervin, officer in charge of the 65th Troop Command Brigade, removes Ervin's major rank during a promotion ceremony at the 65th TCB's headquarters in Peoria April 17.**



**On with the new...Emily Philpot, mother of newly promoted Lt. Col. Spencer Ervin, officer in charge of the 65th Troop Command Brigade, tacks on Ervin's new rank during a promotion ceremony at the 65th TCB's headquarters in Peoria April 17.**

# Lincoln's Challenge Academy Cadets Visit 183rd Wing

**Story and photos by  
Staff Sgt. Paul Lauricella  
183rd Wing Public Affairs**

Twelve cadets from Lincoln's Challenge Academy visited the 183rd Wing in Springfield April 11 for an immersive tour designed to introduce them to a range of military career opportunities.

The visit focused on exposing the cadets to numerous careers available within the Air National Guard, including civil engineering, engine repair and maintenance and logistics readiness.

Throughout the day, the cadets interacted with Airmen across multiple disciplines and gained firsthand insight into the skills and responsibilities in each field.

A highlight of the tour was a live afterburner test of a General

Electric F-110 aircraft engine conducted inside one of the base's specialized "hush houses," facilities designed to contain noise while undertaking high-powered jet engine testing. The test offered cadets a rare and up-close demonstration of the precision involved in aircraft maintenance, which left a strong impression on the cadets.

In addition to technical demonstrations, the cadets met with recruiters from the 183rd Wing, who provided information on pathways to military service following the completion of their time at the academy. Recruiters discussed enlistment opportunities for education, job training, and personal development.

Lincoln's Challenge Academy is a voluntary program operated

by the Illinois National Guard that helps at-risk youth develop life skills and leadership. The program focuses on academic instruction, physical fitness, and character development, while providing participants with the tools to succeed academically and in the community.

The tour concluded with a question-and-answer session with Col. Shawn Strahle, the Commander of the 183rd Wing. Strahle fielded questions regarding military life and the opportunities that the Illinois Air National Guard provides compared to those offered in other branches. The visit concluded with an overview of career opportunities, service commitments, and educational benefits, reinforcing the Wing's mission to inspire the next generation of potential Airmen. 🇺🇸



Technical Sgt. Jacob Taylor, a member of the 183rd Maintenance Squadron, speaks with cadets from Lincoln's Challenge Academy about how the 183rd Maintenance Squadron Centralized Repair Facility repairs and maintains a range of aircraft engines April 11 at the 183rd Wing in Springfield. Lincoln's Challenge Academy, a program operated by the Illinois National Guard, helps at-risk youth develop life skills and leadership while pursuing a high school education.

# Illinois Guard Leaders Discuss Defense Cooperation with State Partner Portugal

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami, the Illinois National Guard's Command Senior Enlisted Leader, met with a delegation from our State Partnership Program country of Portugal in Washington, D.C. in April.

They discussed defense cooperation. The Portuguese Ambassador to the United States, Francisco Duarte Lopes and State Secretary of Defense Alvaro Castelo-Branco were among those in attendance.

There were also officials from the U.S. State Department and the Illinois Economic Development Corporation, who discussed opportunities for defense-sector industry within the U.S. and Illinois.



**Pedro Ferreira, Senior Commercial Advisor, U.S. Embassy Lisbon, U.S. Commercial Service, talks with Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, in the Portuguese Embassy in Washington, D.C.**



**The Portuguese Ambassador to the United States, the Honorable Francisco Duarte Lopes is shown with Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, along with Illinois National Guard Command Senior Enlisted Leader Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami and Sgt. Maj. Joaquim Jeronimo dos Santos Pincante, the Assistant of the Defense Attache to the Embassy of Portugal.**

# Albaugh Becomes First Sergeant of Company L

The Mattoon, Illinois-based Company L “Locomotives” of the Illinois Army National Guard’s Recruiting and Retention Battalion (RRB), has a new conductor at the helm, ready to lead them down the track to success as the unit’s first sergeant.

Newly promoted 1st Sgt. Keith Albaugh received his new rank during a ceremony April 10 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.

“This ceremony is about putting the right leader in the right position at the right time,” said Lt. Col. Lance Frail, Commander, Recruiting and Retention Battalion. “The Locomotives have one heck of a conductor who will lead them down the track.”

Frail said the unanimous reaction received by the audience at RRB’s recent state training meeting was an indication the decision by RRB’s command team made the right decision.

“The reaction was not by accident,” Frail said. “It is a testament about who you are, the leader you are and the noncommissioned officer you are.”

Frail said RRB’s command team has the utmost faith in Albaugh’s ability to accomplish the mission.

“We have the utmost confidence in your ability to serve in this role,” he said. “We have all the faith in your leadership.”

Albaugh said his faith and mantra has led him to this moment.

“My mantra is Isaiah, Chapter 6, Verse 80. Here I am, send me,” he said. “It is a reminder to be ready to serve, to step forward when called, and I’ll continue to carry that with me into this next role.”

Albaugh thanked his family, wife, Dr. Jenna Albaugh, and sons, Liam and Owen.

“This achievement is as much yours as it is mine,” he said. “Thank you, Jenna, for being my rock through the long days, missed moments, and all the sacrifices that



**Dr. Jenna Albaugh, and sons, Liam and Owen, the family of newly promoted 1st Sgt. Keith Albaugh, put new rank on his uniform during a ceremony April 10 at the Illinois Military Academy at Camp Lincoln in Springfield. Albaugh, who enlisted in the U.S. Army in 2000, was recently selected to serve as the first sergeant for Company L, Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion.**

came with our life. Your strength, resiliency, and support make it possible for me to serve the way I do. Boys, I hope some day you will understand when I say to you that you are my reason. Everything I do is to hopefully be a good example to you.”

Albaugh also thanked the RRB leadership for placing their trust in him to serve as Company L’s first sergeant. He also thanked the noncommissioned officers (NCOs)

he has served with throughout his 26 years of military service to mold and shape him into the Soldier he is today.

Albaugh enlisted as an infantry Soldier in 2000, serving on active duty in Alaska before transitioning into the Illinois Army National Guard in 2004, serving in Company A, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment before moving to Company B, 2/130th INF.

His first full-time position was



**Newly promoted 1st Sgt. Keith Albaugh, right, signs the Noncommissioned Officers Creed during a promotion ceremony April 10 at the Illinois Military Academy at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.**

as a supply technician in the logistics directorate, while continuing to serve with Company B as a traditional member of the Illinois National Guard.

In 2019, Albaugh became a recruiter with Company K, RRB, before transitioning to Headquarters, RRB in 2022 to become the interstate transfer and interservice recruiting NCO.


For the past three years, Albaugh has served as the Waivers and Operations NCO in RRB.

Albaugh said the promotion isn't about rank, it's about the responsibility he has to the Soldiers of Company L and their families.

"I have a responsibility to each of you, to be present, accountable and set the example every day," he said. "It's about fairness, consistency, and leadership that will put you and your families first without compromising our mission. Leadership is an action, not a position."

The RRB's new senior enlisted leader, Command Sgt. Maj. Roger Miller said under Albaugh's leadership, the waivers process has been improved.

"During Sergeant Albaugh's 30 months as a recruiter, he had 33 enlistments, with one loss," Miller said. "Since starting in waivers, he has worked 1,813 waivers. In fiscal year 2025, 70 percent of enlistments went through his office. To date, nearly 60 percent of the enlistment for this fiscal year has gone through his office."

"Leadership is built on what we be, what you know, and what you do," Miller said. "First Sergeant Albaugh is ready to lead from the front." 



**Newly promoted 1st Sgt. Keith Albaugh stands at attention during the reading of the promotion order during a ceremony April 10 at the Illinois Military Academy at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.**

# Belvidere Officer Retires from the Illinois Army National Guard After 25 Years of Selfless Service

**By Sgt. G. Alejandro Valdes**  
**Illinois National Guard Public Affairs**

The Illinois Army National Guard recognized the 25-year military career of Lt. Col. Bernadette Bland of Belvidere, a veteran of two overseas deployments and multiple domestic emergency missions, during a ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy Auditorium on Camp Lincoln in Springfield May 3.

She deployed twice in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. She deployed to Djibouti in 2001-2002 as a maintenance platoon leader in the 94th Maintenance Company and in 2014 she deployed to Kuwait as the Chief Supply and Services Officer for the 108th Sustainment Brigade. In 2005 she deployed as a member of Joint Task Force Katrina, providing humanitarian relief in the Gulf Coast region and in 2020 she was activated for the Illinois response to COVID-19. She has also served on numerous overseas training exercises including multiple missions to Africa and Europe.

"I went to Africa five times," she said. "What other part-time lets you do that?"

Bland's military career was an adventure from the start. Bland began her career by commissioning as an ordnance officer through ROTC at Lewis University in May 2001. Her first day of active duty after commissioning was Sept. 10, 2001. "The next day, of course, everything changed for everyone in the military," she said. "Eight days later I was in Djibouti (Africa)."

Djibouti was as hot as...well, Africa. And the U.S. military didn't have the military infrastructure



**Lt. Col. Bernadette Bland of Belvidere, a veteran of two overseas deployments and multiple domestic emergency missions, is shown with her sons, Sgt. Rob Bland and Kevin Bland, after her retirement ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy Auditorium on Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Ill on May 3, 2026. Bland served for more than 25 years including multiple overseas deployments and training missions. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Davanh Sanamixay, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**

there that they do today - for example, air conditioning. "It was hot and miserable for all of us and that was a leadership challenge. But as a unit we learned to 'embrace the suck' and became a tighter unit as a result," Bland said.

Years later, on a training mission with the National Guard in Botswana, Bland learned it can get cold at night in Africa. It was 20-degrees Fahrenheit - and the female tents had no heat. "I was cold, all the time," she said. That was until high winds blew away the female tents. "At that point

we were so close to the end of the exercise that the decision was made not to put the tents back up," she said. The females were dispersed throughout the camp for the remaining days. Bland was placed in a room next to the kitchen. "It was heated and for the first time during the exercise I could sleep."

Bland said the U.S. Army taught her to "Hunt the Good Stuff" long before it became part of the Army's official resilience training. She also learned to "listen to and actually get to know" her Soldiers.

“One of my Soldiers taught me how to weld,” she said. That was a highlight for her and the Soldier, who would often bring it up when they talked later.

Her career in the Illinois Army National Guard started at the 108th Maintenance Battalion where she served as the Personnel Officer, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment Commander and Logistics Officer. Further assignments included Host Nation Support Officer in the 108th Sustainment Brigade, Operations Officer of the 405th Brigade Support Battalion, Chief Supply and Services Officer of the 108th Sustainment Brigade, Support Operations Officer for the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion and several positions in Joint Force Headquarters culminating with her role as the Joint Logistics Officer for the Illinois National Guard.

“So, my first meeting with her, I fired her,” said Col. Tim Newman, the Joint Strategy, Plans, and Policies Officer for the Illinois National Guard. “I fired her and made her the service support operations officer. That means that instead of writing the orders she was managing all classes of supply except fuel and ammo.”

Newman said putting Bland in that position was a blessing as she was on top of her game and the top major of the 10 that were in his section.

Her awards and decorations include Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal, Armed Forces Service Medal, Humanitarian Service Medal, Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Meritorious Unit Commendation, many other federal and state awards and the Ordnance Corps Order of

Samuel Sharpe award. She is branch qualified in Ordnance and Logistics and holds a Bachelor of Science in Aviation Administration and a Master of Business Administration from Lewis University.

“It’s been great serving with you,” Newman said. “Your legacy of what you’ve done for the Illinois Guard lives in the Soldiers, officers, and NCOs that you’ve mentored, taught, and coached.”

Newman quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Do not go where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” He added that Bland has “left that

trail, and that can be seen in your son picking up the uniform and following in your footsteps.”

Bland lives in Belvidere, with her two sons; Kevin and Rob. Rob currently serves as a noncommissioned officer in the Illinois Army National Guard’s Rock Falls-based 1644th Transportation Company. Bland is an active member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, serving as the Post Commander of John Hugo Kaiser Post 1461 in Belvidere. 🇺🇸

*(This story was written with the assistance of artificial intelligence.)*



**Lt. Col. Bernadette Bland of Belvidere, a veteran of two overseas deployments and multiple domestic emergency missions, holds her Honorable Discharge from the U.S. Army with Col. Timothy Newman during her ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy Auditorium on Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Ill on May 3, 2026. Bland served for more than 25 years including multiple overseas deployments and training missions. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Davanh Sanamixay, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**

# 232nd CSSB Soldiers Return to Illinois after 10-month deployment to Poland

Approximately 70 Soldiers deployed with the Illinois Army National Guard's 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion were welcomed home by friends and family in April following a 10-month deployment to Poland.

Soldiers were reunited with friends and family at the airports nearest their homes of record.

While in Europe, the unit oversaw U.S. military logistics across multiple nations. 



Sammye Geer, wife of Illinois Army National Guard Maj. Drew Geer, captures the moment daughters, Gracee, Paislee, and Parker Geer hug their father after his April 14 arrival at the Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport in Springfield.



The family of Illinois Army National Guard Lt. Col. Dan Johnson, Commander, 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, wife Kristi, and daughters Kaitlyn and Bella, walk through Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport in Springfield April 14 after his arrival.



Ashley Broaddus, wife of Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Jason Turley, greets him during his April 14 arrival at the Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport in Springfield.



Adlynn Kirkpatrick, 10, hugs her father, Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Mathew Kirkpatrick, after his April 14 arrival at the University of Illinois Willard Airport in Savoy, Ill.

Below, Illinois Army National Guard Capt. Tucker Petersen plays with his 2-year-old nephew, Wade Petersen, after Capt. Petersen's April 14 arrival at the University of Illinois Willard Airport in Savoy, Ill.



Illinois Army National Guard Capt. Tucker Petersen talks with his 2-year-old nephew, Wade Petersen, after Capt. Petersen's April 14 arrival at the University of Illinois Willard Airport in Savoy, Ill. Capt. Petersen, a social studies teacher and track coach in Rossville, Ill., had his first conversation with Wade, who was not yet speaking when the Springfield-based 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion deployed in June 2025.



# 126th Drill Weekend Roundup



U.S. Air Force Col. Tony Krueger assumes command of the 126th Mission Support Group at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 3. The passing of the guidon is a military tradition symbolizing the passing of one command to another. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Ari Freeman)



126th Civil Engineer Squadron Airmen conduct a survey to certify track distance for updated PT requirements. This was an opportunity to train new Airmen on survey equipment at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 1. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sergeant Ces White)

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Natalia Valentine-Guzman of the 126th Civil Engineer Squadron structures team, paints a new finish line on the 126th Air Refueling Wing running track after a survey at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 1. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Joe Brakeville)



**U.S. Air Force Capt. Chris Fisher, left, 126th Contracting Office, contracting officer, is presented with a coin by U.S. Army Col. Brian Creech, Illinois National Guard Property and Fiscal Officer, in recognition of excellence in fiscal management at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 1. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sergeant Ces White)**



**126th Air Refueling Wing Quarterly Award recipients, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 3 2026. Quarterly award winners were Airman Category: SrA Jacob Earll - Maintenance Group; Noncommissioned Officer Category: Tech. Sgt. Joshua Walker – Mission Support Group; Senior Noncommissioned Officer Category: Senior Master Sgt. Moria Tart – Mission Support Group; First Sergeant Category: Master Sgt. Stephanie Paczesny - Maintenance Group; Company Grade Officer Category: Capt Jacob Curtis - Mission Support Group; Field Grade Officer Category: Major Daniel Carraway - Headquarters; and Civilian Employee Category: Ms. Linda Schuh, Headquarters. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Ces White)**



Illinois State Police troopers David Jacobs and Marivon Ampier pose with U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Michael Sklodowski in front of an armored vehicle during a Military to ISP Career Exploration event at the Illinois Army National Guard armory on Kedzie Ave. in Chicago, April 22. The event emphasized the shared mission of service between military personnel and law enforcement.

## Illinois National Guard hosts ISP Military Career Exploration Event in Chicago

**Story and photos by  
2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche  
*Illinois National Guard Public Affairs***

The Illinois State Police Recruitment Bureau hosted a Military to ISP Career Exploration event April 22 at the Illinois Army National Guard armory on Kedzie Ave, connecting service members and civilians with career opportunities in law enforcement.

The free event highlighted the similarities between military

service and careers within the Illinois State Police, while giving attendees the opportunity to engage directly with troopers, some of whom previously served in the military.

“Out of high school, I joined the military and served my country for five years on active duty. As an ISP Trooper, I have had the honor of serving my community for over 20 years,” said ISP Acting Academy Commander Richard Morris. “I have noticed a lot of similarities

between the military and the ISP. The camaraderie I have with my coworkers, the pride in wearing the uniform, and the satisfaction I feel from doing my job. Being a Trooper allows me to be a steward of my community. Every day, I get to help people, and I get to keep them safe. I can’t do that alone. I am one person. But with all of us working as a team, we can make a difference.”

Attendees moved through interactive displays and recruiting

tables, where ISP personnel answered questions about the hiring process, career paths, and daily responsibilities.

“Partnering with the ISP helps us connect with individuals who are already committed to service, and it strengthens our recruiting by reaching people who want to serve both their state and their communities,” said U.S. Army Sgt. Luigi Cabantog, a recruiter for the Illinois Army National Guard.

The event also outlined pathways for service members interested in becoming Illinois State Troopers, including options that allow qualified applicants with military experience to bypass certain college credit requirements.

The event was open to the public, encouraging both military and civilian attendees to explore opportunities with the Illinois State Police while reinforcing the shared mission of service, teamwork, and community protection. 🇺🇸



**Sergeant Tracy Lillard (Trooper Tracy) engages with attendees at a Military to ISP Career Exploration event at the Illinois Army National Guard armory on Kedzie Ave. in Chicago, April 22.**



**Illinois State Police troopers Vanessa Brooks, Genelle Jones and Sergeant Marcus Nettles engage with attendees at a Military to ISP Career Exploration event at the Illinois Army National Guard armory on Kedzie Ave. in Chicago, April 22.**

# Illinois Army National Guard Officer Recognized as Superior Performer at U.S. Air War College

Illinois Army National Guard Lt. Col. Justin Kramer of Glenwood City, Wis., was recognized as a Superior Performer at the U.S. Air War College (AWC) for Academic Year 2026 on April 22. This highly selective distinction is awarded to only 10 students annually – five per semester – from a class of 223 and is based on outstanding achievement and peer nominations from fellow students.

Kramer is currently a resident student at the Air War College, located at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, where he is preparing for high-level strategic leadership. In his civilian life, Kramer continues his service to the nation as a professional with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Health Administration.

The U.S. Air War College serves as the senior professional military education institution of the United States Air Force, focusing on developing leaders who can excel in joint, interagency, and multinational environments. While the institution is managed by the Air Force, the Department of Defense intentionally integrates high-performing leaders from all military branches, including the Army, to foster a truly interoperable joint force. For Army officers like Lt. Col. Kramer, this experience provides vital exposure to the strategic application of air, space, and cyberspace capabilities, ensuring that future senior leaders can effectively integrate ground combat operations with multi-domain support. This cross-pollination of expertise is critical for synchronizing joint task forces and advancing innovative solutions to complex national security challenges. Lt. Col. Kramer's recognition as a Superior Performer by a diverse, multi-service peer group underscores the



**Lt. Col. Justin Kramer**

high caliber of leadership within the Illinois Army National Guard and its commitment to excellence in the joint defense environment.

Kramer was selected as the Illinois Army National Guard Joint Force Headquarters Policy Officer as a traditional Guard member during the May Senior Leader Officer Centralized Personnel Management System selection board. 🇺🇸



Students from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville look on as U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Wil Clark, right, 906th Air Refueling Squadron, aerospace propulsion specialist, explains how the gas turbine engine is used to start the jet engines on a KC-135 Stratotanker at Scott Air Force Base, April 23.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Wil Clark, 906th Air Refueling Squadron, aerospace propulsion specialist, shows students from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, the hydraulic pump assembly on an F108-CF-100 trainer engine during a tour at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 23.

# SIUE Students Visit 126th Maintenance Squadron

Engineering students from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville spent time with the 126th Maintenance Squadron, jet shop, April 23, getting

to see the inner workings of a KC-135 Stratotanker jet engine. The SIUE students were seniors in a gas turbine class.



Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville students stand with U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Wil Clark, 906th Air Refueling Squadron, aerospace propulsion specialist, for a picture in front of a F108-CF-100 trainer engine Base, Illinois, April 23, 2026. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)



Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers from the State Judge Advocate's office were on hand to congratulate Col. Sarah Smith, who served the Staff Judge Advocate of the Joint Force Headquarters from 2017 to 2024, after she was awarded the Legion of Merit.

## Illinois Army National Guard Colonel Awarded Legion of Merit for Transformative Service as State Judge Advocate

Col. Sarah Smith of the Illinois Army National Guard was awarded the Legion of Merit on May 2 in recognition of her exceptionally meritorious service and transformative leadership as the State Judge Advocate.

The medal was presented by Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, at the Illinois National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield after it was approved by Lt. Gen. Jonathan Stubbs, Director of the Army National Guard.

Col. Smith, now the Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff as a traditional National Guard officer, served as the Staff

Judge Advocate of the Joint Force Headquarters from June 7, 2017, to September 9, 2024. During her tenure, her contributions fundamentally redefined the Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps in the State of Illinois. Serving as the Senior Legal Advisor to General Officers on complex legal matters, her guidance established consistent ethical standards and maintained a high level of integrity across the Illinois National Guard.

The Legion of Merit is one of the United States military's most prestigious decorations, ranking high in the order of precedence and just below the Silver Star for non-combat achievement. It is awarded to members of the Armed Forces who have

distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements. Typically reserved for senior officers in positions of great responsibility, the award signifies service that has had a significant and lasting impact on the mission, the organization, and the nation.

Beyond her military service, Col. Smith is a distinguished member of the Illinois judiciary. In her civilian capacity, she serves as a Circuit Judge in the Third Judicial Circuit for Madison County, where she was elected in 2018 after serving as an Associate Judge since 2015. Notably, she is the Presiding Judge of the Madison County Veterans Treatment

Court, a specialty court providing intervention and accountability for veterans involved in the justice system. Her civilian expertise as a judge and her history as a prosecutor and civil litigator have been foundational to her military successes.

Upon her initial assignment as State Judge Advocate, Col. Smith took decisive action to support service members by drafting legislation that allows military sexual assault survivors to obtain civilian orders of protection against their offenders. Working closely with the Governor's office and civilian entities, she significantly broadened the ability of survivors to access state benefits and protections.

Col. Smith was also instrumental in the drafting and

implementation of the Illinois Manual for Court-Martial. Dedicating numerous hours of her off-duty time, she guided this monumental undertaking to its final approval by the Illinois State Legislature. This accomplishment provided commanders with a vital, codified statutory basis for punitive action, enabling the capability to conduct courts-martial and maintain good order and discipline within the state.

During some of the state's most challenging domestic operations, Col. Smith provided critical legal oversight. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, she served as the representative for all civil-military responses, visiting numerous vaccination centers statewide to ensure strict compliance with Department of

Defense regulations. In May 2020, she quickly mobilized to Chicago in support of Civil Disturbance Operations. There, she briefed hundreds of responding Soldiers on the rules for the use of force and remained on-site to provide critical, real-time domestic operations legal advice to the Task Force Commander. Her dedication to leadership in the Armed Forces culminated in her selection for the prestigious Federally Employed Women (FEW) Award in 2023, an honor for which she was chosen over peers across both active and reserve components.

The official citation for her Legion of Merit reads: "For exceptionally meritorious service while serving as the Staff Judge Advocate of the Joint Force Headquarters from 7 June 2017 to 9 September 2024. Colonel Sarah Smith's exemplary leadership and unwavering commitment to the legal needs of service members profoundly transformed the JAG Corps. Her tireless dedication and innovative legal strategies not only improved the welfare of Soldiers and Airmen but also established a lasting legacy of integrity and excellence within the military community. Colonel Smith's accomplishments throughout her tenure are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon herself, the Joint Force Headquarters, the Illinois Army National Guard and the United States Army."

Col. Smith epitomizes the Army Values. Her meticulous technical expertise, selfless service, and absolute professionalism have set a benchmark for all officers, leaving a positive, enduring impact on the lives of countless civilians, Soldiers, and Families throughout Illinois. 🇺🇸

*(This release was drafted with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence.)*



**Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, congratulates Col. Sarah Smith after she was awarded the Legion of Merit.**



**U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jacob Mellenthin, 126th Structures, 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard of Scott Air Force Base, Illinois installs a new tire shredder at an entry control point on Yokota Air Base, Japan, May 6. Illinois Guardsmen are deployed for training to Japan. This opportunity is strategically designed to provide on the job training opportunities and host-nation cultural experiences that will ready the 126th CES Airmen to build or maintain bases during contingency operations any where in the world.**


## **126th Civil Engineer Squadron Deploys to Yokota Air Base in Japan for Training**

The 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois is known for its strategic capabilities to refuel aircraft anytime, anywhere. Often not seen are the guardsmen of 126th Civil Engineer Squadron that build or maintain the many physical facilities and grounds that support precision air power.

The 126th CES deployed for training to Yokota Air Base, Tokyo, Japan.

While in Yokota the 126th CES Airmen will integrate with the 374th CES supporting host nation

relationships and global operations.

“This trip will provide our engineers opportunities to complete hands-on training not typically afforded to them on drill weekends. Enhancing the overall readiness of our squadron and wing while simultaneously building relationships with our active-duty counterparts and allowing our members to experience Japanese culture,” said Capt. John Audrain, 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, Yokota DFT Troop Commander. 



Illinois Air National Guardsmen of the 126th Structures shop, 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, of Scott Air Force Base, Illinois and Airmen of the 374th Structures Yokota Air Base, Japan repair and replace tire shredders at an entry control point on Yokota May 6, 2026. Illinois Guardsmen are deployed for training to Japan. This opportunity is strategically designed to provide on the job training opportunities and host nation cultural experiences that will ready the 126th CES Airmen to build or maintain bases during contingency operations any where in the world. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Lang)



Left, U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Mateo Santana, left, electrical systems journeyman, 374th Civil Engineer Squadron, Yokota Air Base, Japan and Senior Airman Jacob Mass, electrical systems journeyman, 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, prepare to work at heights using a JLG scissor lift at Yokota Air Base, Japan May 6. Airmen from the Illinois Air National Guard traveled to Japan for training. The training is strategically designed to provide on the job training opportunities and host nation cultural experiences that will ready the 126th CES Airmen to build or maintain bases during contingency operations anywhere in the world. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Lang)



### ***'Dirt Boyz' Demolish Outdated Playground Equipment During Training in Japan***

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Todd Schulte 126th Pavements and Construction Equipment specialist of the 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, 126th Air Refueling Wing at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois operates a M318D, wheeled excavator fitted with a H120E performance hammer, to demolish an outdated playground at Yokota Air Base, Japan, where Illinois Air National Guard members are deployed for training. Several modern playgrounds have been installed on the base in recent years and once demo is complete a new fitness pad and cross fit center will be built in its place. This training opportunity is strategically designed to provide on the job training opportunities and host nation cultural experiences that will ready the 126th CES Airmen to build or maintain bases during contingency operations anywhere in the world. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Lang)

### ***Readying Equipment for the Day***

At right, Airman Joshua Anoke, 126th Engineering, 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, 126th Air Refueling Wing of Scott Air Force Base, Illinois readies all equipment for the work day at Yokota Air Base, Japan May 12. The Engineering team specializes in precision surveying, soils testing and computer aided drafting. Their workflow supports reconnaissance, map making and construction. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Lang)





### ***New Cross Walk Sign***

Senior Airman Jacob Maas, electrical journeyman, 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, 126th Air Refueling Wing stationed at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois and Senior Airman Nicolous Artura, electrical journeyman of 374th CES, Yokota Air Base, Japan, work to assemble a cross walk sign with LED flashing lights, May 11. The new sign will be more visible and improve school zone safety on the base, where members of the Illinois Air National Guard are conducting training. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Lang)

### ***Ensuring Compliance***

Members of the Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, 126th Air Refueling Wing based at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, perform a contract compliance walk thru of the on base trash incinerator alongside members of the 374th CES of Yokota Air Base, Japan, May 11. The ILANG members are deployed for training to Yokota. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Lang)



# Remembering Our Fallen

## APRIL

### **Sgt. Landis W. Garrison**

**2004:** Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Landis W. Garrison, 23, of Rapids City, Illinois, died April 29 of non-combat related injuries as a result of an accidental shooting in Abu Ghraib, Iraq. Sgt. Garrison was assigned to the 333rd Military Police Company based in Freeport.



## MAY

### **Sgt. Lukasz Saczek**

**2009:** Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Lukasz D. Saczek, 23, of Lake in the Hills, Illinois, died May 10 in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained from a non-combat related incident. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, based in Woodstock.



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

**2004:** Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class William D. Chaney, 59 of Schaumburg died May 18, in Landstuhl, Germany due to a non-combat related injury. Initial reports indicate that Chaney was medically evacuated from Iraq to Germany for surgery due to appendicitis. He died from complications after surgery. Chaney was assigned to the Illinois Army National Guard, Company B, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, based in Chicago.



### **Spc. Jeremy Ridlen**

**2004:** Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Jeremy L. Ridlen, 23, of Maroa, Illinois, died May 23 in East Fallujah, Iraq, of wounds sustained from small arms fire after a dump truck on the side of the road was detonated as his military convoy passed by and Ridlen and his fellow Soldiers engaged the enemy. Ridlen was assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company, based in Paris.



## JUNE

### **Spc. Brian Romines**

**2005:** Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Brian M. Romines, 20, of Simpson, Illinois, died June 6 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near his HMMWV. Romines was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery, based in Milan.



### **Staff Sgt. Joshua Melton**

**2009:** Illinois Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Joshua A. Melton, 26, of Carlyle, Illinois, died June 19 in Kandahar, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained when his vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, headquartered in Marion.



### **Sgt. Paul Smith**

**2009:** Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Paul G. Smith, 43, of East Peoria, Illinois, died June 19 in Kandahar, Afghanistan of wounds sustained when his vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry, based in Aurora.



# 126th Water and Fuel Systems Maintenance Deploys to Japan for Training Opportunity

The Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Water and Fuel Systems Maintenance (WFSM) shop, based at Scott Air Force Base, is deployed for training to Yokota Airbase, Japan in May.

"374th Civil Engineer Squadron is the active duty component of Yokota that oversees daily WFSM operations," said Tech Sgt Michael Griffith, 374th WFSM, supervisor.

"In accordance with Air Force standards, all of our various systems are tested regularly," said Griffith

"Backflow testing is not something we typically do on a drill weekend as guardsmen, but we are expected to be able to perform the task if deployed," said Tech Sgt. Chris Schrader, DFT Shop Supervisor, 126th WFSM.

"In layman's term the backflow device prevents the back flow of contaminants into the potable water supply," said Schrader, "the testing program ensures proper device function and protects the health and safety of all base personnel."

WFSM is tasked to install and maintain all base water and fuel systems, to include storage and distribution of potable water, liquid fuels, natural gas and waste water collection. 🇺🇸

**At right, U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Alex Reams, craftsman, 126th Water and Fuel Systems Maintenance, 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, stationed Scott Air Force Base connects test hoses to a back flow device under testing at Yokota Air Base, Japan. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Lang)**



**U.S. Air Force Tech Sgt. Chris Schrader, deployment shop supervisor, 126th Water and Fuel Systems Maintenance, 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, stationed Scott Air Force Base and Tech Sgt. Michael Griffith, supervisor, 374th Water and Fuel Systems Maintenance, 374th CES Yokota Air Base, Japan test a back flow device at Yokota May 8. Illinois Air National Guard members are deployed for training to Japan. This opportunity is strategically designed to provide on the job training opportunities and host nation cultural experiences that will ready the 126th CES Airmen to build or maintain bases during contingency operations any where in the world. (Photo was altered for security purposes) (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Lang)**





U.S. Army Soldiers helocast from a CH-47 Chinook, 3rd Battalion, 238th Aviation Regiment, during the Region IV Best Warrior Competition May 2, 2026, at Fort Custer Training Center, Mich. The Region IV Best Warrior Competition features competitors from Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

## Williams, McEnroe Represent Illinois National Guard at Best Warrior Region IV Competition

The Illinois Army National Guard’s Sgt. Bryson Williams and Spc. Samuel McEnroe had a good showing at the Region IV Best Warrior Competition, April 30 to May 3 at Fort Custer Training Center in Michigan.

Williams took first place in three of the 14 events and finished in the top tier of each event. McEnroe finished first in one event and was in the top tier throughout the competition. They were coached

by Staff Sgt. Harley Mamgren throughout the competition. Both Soldiers are from Galesburg-based Battery C, 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment and both live in Peoria.



U.S. Army Sgt. Bryson Williams, Illinois Army National Guard, runs out of the water after a swim event during the Region IV Best Warrior Competition May 2, 2026, at Fort Custer Training Center, Mich. The Region IV Best Warrior Competition features competitors from Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.



**Spc. Samuel McEnroe, Illinois Army National Guard, fires his M17 during the Region IV Best Warrior Competition April 30, 2026, at the Fort Custer Training Center, Michigan. The Region IV Best Warrior Competition features competitors from Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Tech. Sgt. Tristan D. Viglianco)**



**Sgt. Bryson Williams, Illinois Army National Guard, lifts a sandbag as a part of an expert physical fitness assessment during the Region IV Best Warrior Competition.**



**Soldiers ready themselves at the starting line prior to an expert physical fitness assessment during the Region IV Best Warrior Competition April 30, 2026, at the Fort Custer Training Center, Michigan.**



**Spc. Samuel McEnroe (right), and his sponsor U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Harley Malmgrem, both Illinois Army National Guard, walk to the start of an Army Warrior Task Lane during the Region IV Best Warrior Competition May 1.**



**Spc. Samuel McEnroe, Illinois Army National Guard, renders aid for an Army Warrior Task Lane during the Region IV Best Warrior Competition May 1, at Fort Custer Training Center, Michigan. The Region IV Best Warrior Competition features competitors from Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.**



**Above, Soldiers compete in a night land navigation event during the Regional IV Best Warrior Competition, April 30, at Fort Custer Training Center, Augusta, Michigan. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Daniel Garas)**

**Right, Sgt. Bryson Williams, 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment, Illinois National Guard, adjusts the front sight of his M-4 in preparation for the Advanced Rifle Marksmanship event, during the Regional IV Best Warrior Competition, April 30.**





**Spc. Samuel McEnroe, Illinois Army National Guard, proceeds after deploying smoke for an Army Warrior Task Lane during the Region IV Best Warrior Competition May 1.**



**Soldiers listen to instructions for the M-4 Advanced Rifle Marksmanship event, during the Regional IV Best Warrior Competition, April 30**



**U.S. Army Soldiers review their shot placement during the Region IV Best Warrior Competition April 30.**



**Above, Soldiers review their targets and calculate their scores for the M-4 Advanced Rifle Marksmanship event, during the Regional IV Best Warrior Competition, April 30, at Fort Custer Training Center, Augusta, Michigan.**

**Left, Spc. Samuel McEnroe, Illinois Army National Guard, runs as a part of an expert physical fitness assessment during the Region IV Best Warrior Competition April 30 at the Fort Custer Training Center, Michigan. The Region IV Best Warrior Competition features competitors from Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.**



Above, Senior Enlisted Leaders from the Illinois Army National Guard were on hand to support Sgt. Bryson Williams and Spc. Samuel McEnroe as they represented the Illinois National Guard at the Region IV Best Warrior Competition, April 30 to May 3 at Fort Custer Training Center in Michigan.



Left, Sgt. Bryson Williams and Spc. Samuel McEnroe represented the Illinois National Guard at the Region IV Best Warrior Competition.



# 44th Chemical Battalion Soldiers Participate in Crew Served Weapons Qualifications

Soldiers from the 44th Chemical Battalion participated in a crew-served weapons qualification at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, April 10. The CSWQ is designed to ensure a team can safely and effectively operate larger, more complex weapons systems. Soldiers qualified on the M2 machine gun, M240B squad assault weapon, M320 grenade launcher, Mk 19 grenade launcher.





# Illinois National Guard Leaders Welcome 10 New Second Lieutenants During Spring ROTC Commissioning Ceremonies

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, The Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, recently administered the oath of office to 17 new U.S. Army second lieutenants during two separate university ROTC commissioning ceremonies.

This surge in leadership marks a significant addition to the state's forces, as 10 of these newly commissioned officers have chosen to serve their communities and the nation within the ranks of the Illinois Army National Guard.

On May 15, Maj. Gen. Boyd presided over the Northern Illinois University ROTC commissioning ceremony in DeKalb, Illinois, where he swore in 10 officers, five of whom are joining the Illinois Army National Guard. These new leaders include 2nd Lt. Mark Branklin, an Infantry officer with a degree in Kinesiology; 2nd Lt. Joci Diane Hasson, a Medical Services officer with a double major in Vision Rehabilitation and Nonprofit and Nongovernmental Organization Studies; 2nd Lt. Owen Lagger, a Field Artillery officer with a degree in Meteorology; 2nd Lt. Zack Lagina, a Field Artillery officer with a degree in Marketing; and 2nd Lt. Joshua Van Den Broeck, a Logistics officer who graduated with a degree in History.

Earlier on May 8, Brig. Gen. Williams presided over the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville ROTC commissioning ceremony. Of the seven officers sworn in during that ceremony, five have joined the Illinois Army National Guard:



**Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, administers the Oath of Office to 10 new Army second lieutenants during Northern Illinois University's Army ROTC Commissioning Ceremony, May 15, in the Carl Sandburg Auditorium on the university's campus in DeKalb, Ill. Boyd is an NIU alumni receiving a bachelor's degree in Criminology from the university. The ROTC program commissioned 10 new Army second lieutenants, five of whom are joining the Illinois Army National Guard. Established in 1968, the NIU Army ROTC program has commissioned 715 officers into the U.S. Army. (U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**

2nd Lt. Gavynn Baer, a Medical Services officer with a degree in Speech Pathology and Audiology; 2nd Lt. Chase Hires, a Logistics officer with a degree in Business Administration and Supply Chain Management; 2nd Lt. Lannah Klaasen, a Logistics officer with a degree in the Science of Criminal Justice; 2nd Lt. KloeMae Malson, a Logistics officer with a degree in Business and Cyber Security; and 2nd Lt. Hayden Robinson, a Logistics officer with a degree in Business Administration.

These 10 new lieutenants bring diverse academic expertise and a commitment to service that ensures the continued readiness and capability of the Illinois Army National Guard. 🌸

*Notice: This press release was developed with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence (Gemini Enterprise) for drafting and formatting purposes. The content was reviewed and verified for accuracy and appropriateness by relevant Department of War personnel prior to release in accordance with DoDI 5400.19.*



**Illinois Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, The Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard administers the Oath of Office to five newly commissioned Illinois Army National Guard second lieutenants during Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville's Army ROTC Commissioning Ceremony, May 8, on the university's campus in Edwardsville.**



**Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, The Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, talks with 2nd Lt. Gavynn Baer, 2nd Lt. Chase Hires, and 2nd Lt. Hayden Robinson following the Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville ROTC Commissioning Ceremony, May 8. The three newly commissioned second lieutenants are among the 10 newly minted commissioned officers who will serve in the Illinois Army National Guard.**



**Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, points to Brig. Gen. Jorge Fonseca, the Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff, in the audience during Northern Illinois University's Army ROTC Commissioning Ceremony, May 15, in the Carl Sandburg Auditorium on the university's campus in Dekalb, Ill. Both Boyd and Fonseca are NIU alumni. Established in 1968, the NIU Army ROTC program has commissioned 715 officers into the U.S. Army. (U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**



Lt. Col. Lance Frail, Commander, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, and Command Sgt. Maj. Roger Miller, RRB, presented the RRB’s Referral Success Award to the leadership from 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment and 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry Regiment. The two units tied for the highest number of referrals for enlistment to RRB. The award was presented during the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Commander’s Readiness Update at Camp Lincoln April 28.

## 33rd IBCT Leaders Present Readiness Update to Illinois Army National Guard Leaders

Leaders from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) presented its Commander’s Readiness Update at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois, April 28.

As the 33rd IBCT aligns with the 38th Infantry Division, headquartered in Indiana, Division leaders were in attendance, including Brig. Gen. Joseph H. Gardner II, Commander, Brig. Gen. Andrew Stone, Deputy Commanding General for Operations, and Col. Mathew Handy, Chief of Staff.

The IBCT’s leadership briefed Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General-Army on training plans and missions in support of the Illinois National Guard and key partnerships.

Lt. Col. Benjamin Tooley from the Indiana Army National Guard briefed the ILARNG leadership on the 76th Mobile Brigade Combat Team’s (MBCT) transformation to a Mobile Brigade Combat Team (MBCT) as the 33rd IBCT prepares to transform from the IBCT to an MBCT.

During the afternoon briefing, Lt. Col. Lance Frail, Commander, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, and Command Sgt. Maj. Roger Miller, RRB, presented the RRB’s Referral Success Award to the leadership from 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment and 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry Regiment. The two units tied for the highest number of referrals for enlistment to RRB.





Senior leaders from the Illinois Army National Guard, along with senior leaders from the 38th Infantry Division, headquartered in Indiana, listen as unit leaders from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team provide its Commander's Readiness Update at Camp Lincoln.



Lt. Col. Benjamin Tooley from the Indiana Army National Guard briefed the ILARNG leadership on the 76th Mobile Brigade Combat Team's (MBCT) transformation to an MBCT.



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander, Illinois Army National Guard, discusses the Commander's Readiness Update with leaders from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team.



Col. Michael Kowalski, Commander, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, provides remarks to battalion leaders following the 33rd's Commander's Readiness Update to senior leaders of the Illinois Army National Guard at Camp Lincoln April 28.



**St. Louis University aviation students with 126th Maintenance Group Airman in front of a 126th Air Refueling Wing, KC-135 Stratotanker at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 28, 2026. The SLU students came to the Illinois Air National Guard unit for a familiarization of the Wing's mission. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)**



**U.S. Air Force 1st. Lt. William Scholl, 906th Air Refueling Squadron, pilot, discusses flying the KC-135 Stratotanker, with St. Louis University aviation students at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 28, 2026. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)**



**U.S. Air Force 1st. Lt. William Scholl, 906th Air Refueling Squadron, pilot, talks with St. Louis University, aviation students, Elizabeth Steffon and Lili Kramer, about a 126th Air Refueling Wing, KC-135 Stratocaster capabilities at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 28, 2026. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)**



## ***Welcome to the Illinois Army National Guard Team!***

Illinois National Guard Lt. Col. Linden Allen had the honor of swearing in his daughter, MaryJane Allen, who recently enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard. Her uncle, Maj. Tristan Allen, also joined them.



## **Religious Affairs Workshop Designed to Strengthen Readiness of Support Teams**

From left, Army Lt. Col. Vincent Lambert, Illinois Army National Guard chaplain, and Air Force Master Sgt. Jason Harden, National Guard Bureau Joint Chaplains Office senior enlisted leader, discuss tabletop exercises during a Religious Affairs Workshop (RAW) at the North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command headquarters, Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado, April 22, 2026. RAW was established to strengthen Religious Support Team readiness to conduct religious affairs across the spectrum of military operations. (Department of War photo by Blake Macias)




# Soldiers, Units Recognized for Excellence in Readiness, Training, Retention

The Illinois National Guard recognized outstanding Soldiers and units during a recent awards ceremony highlighting excellence in readiness, training and retention.

Awards presented included the G1 Personnel Readiness Excellence Awards, G1 re-enlistment mission success awards and G3 Training Readiness Awards, recognizing units such as the Headquarters 108th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, 6th Battalion,

54th Security Force Assistance Brigade and 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion.

Command Sgt. Maj. Brian Boyer was presented the Assistant Adjutant General Coin for Excellence, honoring a career defined by readiness, respect, credibility and legacy.

The April 30 ceremony highlighted the continued commitment of Illinois Soldiers to mission readiness and leadership across the force. 



**Lt. Col. Alison Jacobs and Command Sgt. Maj. Tisha Timan, Illinois Army National Guard, receive the G1 Personnel Readiness Excellence Award during a ceremony led by Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard, at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois. The award recognizes excellence in personnel readiness, including strength, vacancy management and medical readiness. (U.S. Army photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters – Illinois National Guard)**



**Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard, presents a coin to Command Sgt. Maj. Brian Boyer during an awards ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois. Boyer was recognized with the Assistant Adjutant General Coin for Excellence for his leadership and career contributions to readiness, respect, credibility and legacy across the force.**



Lt. Col. Benjamin Holman and Command Sgt. Maj. Brian Agle, Illinois Army National Guard, receive the G1 Personnel Readiness Excellence Award during a ceremony led by Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard, at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois. The award recognizes excellence in personnel readiness, including strength, vacancy management and medical readiness.



Lt. Col. Alex Dial and Sgt. Maj. Jeremy Turnbaugh, Illinois Army National Guard, receive the G1 Personnel Readiness Excellence Award during a ceremony led by Col. Mike Barton at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois. The award recognizes excellence in personnel readiness, including strength, vacancy management and medical readiness.



Col. Bradley Roach and Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph Cistaro, Illinois Army National Guard, receive the G1 Personnel Readiness Excellence Award during a ceremony led by Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard, at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois. The award recognizes excellence in personnel readiness, including strength, vacancy management and medical readiness.

# Illinois National Guard Soldiers Participate in Polish Constitution Day, Flag Raising in Chicago

The Illinois National Guard participated in the Polish Constitution Day flag-raising and Polish Parade in Chicago.

The Illinois National Guard has shared a State Partnership Program with the Polish military since 1993 and co-deployed with the Polish first to Iraq and then to Afghanistan for 17 consecutive years.

Joining the Polish Consulate in Chicago was Brig. Gen. Jorge Fonseca, the Director of the Illinois National Guard's Joint Staff, Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Vince Lambert, Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Noncommissioned Officer Sgt. Luigi Cabantog, and several Soldiers with Company B, Recruit Sustainment Program, based in Chicago.







Chaplain (Maj.) Monte Bowers, Brigade Chaplain for the 65th Troop Command Brigade of the Illinois Army National Guard, speaks at the gravesite of U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Paul Allen “Dusty” Gregg on May 11, in Arcola, Illinois. Gregg served with the historic 28th Infantry Division, a Pennsylvania National Guard unit known as the “Keystone Division” and the oldest continuously serving division-sized unit in the U.S. Army. As a member of Company H, 2nd Battalion, 109th Infantry Regiment, he participated in the 1944 invasion of France. Tragically, Gregg was reported missing in action on Dec. 18, 1944, in the vicinity of Fohren, Luxembourg, during the height of the conflict. The long-awaited identification of Gregg’s remains was made possible through DNA analysis by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Laboratory at Offutt Air Force Base on May 29, 2025.

## Illinois Army National Guard Chaplain Presides Over Military Funeral Honors for Repatriated WWII Veteran

**Story and photos by  
Cpl. Richard Blackwood  
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment  
Illinois Army National Guard**

After more than 80 years, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Paul Allen “Dusty” Gregg has finally returned home to Illinois.

On May 11, a graveside funeral service with full honors was held at the Arcola Township Cemetery to honor the life, service, and sacrifice of the World War II

veteran. The solemn repatriation and burial ceremony was presided over by Chaplain (Maj.) Monte Bowers, Brigade Chaplain for the 65th Troop Command Brigade of the Illinois Army National Guard. Soldiers from the U.S. Army Reserve’s 88th Readiness Division conducted the military funeral and honors, providing the final ceremonial salute to the repatriated hero.

During the service, Chaplain Bowers honored the fallen

Soldier’s legacy, stating, “In 1944, Staff Sergeant Gregg participated in the invasion of France as a member of Company H, 2nd Battalion, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. His bravery and commitment were evident as a combat infantryman.”

Gregg was born on Jan. 6, 1915, in Arcola, Illinois, to William Riley and Laura Gregg. He was raised in Garrett, Illinois, and attended Atwood High School, where he was recognized as an exceptional

athlete and served as the captain of the football team. Before his military service began, he worked at various restaurants in Arthur, Illinois.

He was drafted into the United States Army in 1941, marking the beginning of a distinguished military career that would eventually take him to the front lines of the European Theater.

He served with the historic 28th Infantry Division, a Pennsylvania National Guard unit known as the “Keystone Division” and the oldest continuously serving division-sized unit in the U.S. Army. As a member of Company H, 2nd Battalion, 109th Infantry Regiment, he participated in the 1944 invasion of France. Tragically, Gregg was reported missing in action on December 18, 1944, in the vicinity of Fohren, Luxembourg,

during the height of the conflict.

The long-awaited identification of Gregg’s remains was made possible through DNA analysis by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Laboratory at Offutt Air Force Base on May 29, 2025.

Following the service, the family expressed their profound gratitude for his return. As reported by WCIA 3 News, Gregg’s nephew, Tom Spencer, shared the family’s sentiment, noting that while many years have passed, the importance of this homecoming cannot be overstated.

“It’s a sense of relief and a sense of pride that he’s finally back home where he belongs,” Spencer remarked, reflecting on the generations of the Gregg family who waited for this day.

The final burial at Arcola

Township Cemetery allowed the community to lay him to rest with the honors he earned through his ultimate sacrifice. The combined efforts of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, the Illinois Army National Guard, the U.S. Army Reserve’s 88th Readiness Division, and the Edwards Funeral Home ensured a dignified homecoming for a Soldier who gave his all for his country. The military funeral honors served as a powerful testament to the military’s sacred promise to bring every service member home. 🇺🇸

*Notice: This press release was developed with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence (Gemini Enterprise) for drafting and formatting purposes. The content was reviewed and verified for accuracy and appropriateness by relevant Department of War personnel prior to release in accordance with DoDI 5400.19.*



The family of U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Paul “Dusty” Gregg listens as Chaplain (Maj.) Monte Bowers, Brigade Chaplain for the 65th Troop Command Brigade of the Illinois Army National Guard, speaks at the gravesite of Gregg on May 11, in Arcola, Illinois.

# Dwyer Retires from Illinois Air National Guard after 30 Years of Distinguished Military Service

After three decades of dedicated service to his community, state, and nation, Lt. Col. John Dwyer retired from the Illinois Air National Guard on June 1.

His 30-year military career reflects a profound commitment to duty, spanning across active duty in the United States Air Force, the Air Force Reserves, and the Air National Guard.

“John is a great example of how service in the Illinois Air National Guard can enhance and complement your civilian career and vice versa,” said Brig. Gen. Steve Rice, the Assistant Adjutant General – Air of the Illinois National Guard. “We are grateful for his decades of dedicated military service and for his continuing service to Champaign County.”

Beyond his military uniform, Lt. Col. Dwyer has been a steadfast public servant in civilian life. For the past 13 years, he has served as the Coordinator for the Champaign County Emergency Management Agency under the Champaign County Sheriff’s Office. In this capacity, he maintains the county’s emergency operations plan and coordinates disaster responses alongside local agencies, public safety departments, hospitals, the University of Illinois, and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency.

Lt. Col. Dwyer’s final military assignment was at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, where he served for 15 years as the Domestic Operations and Homeland Security Officer for the Air Staff, Headquarters Illinois Air National Guard. In this critical role, he coordinated state Air Guard members’ responses to major domestic events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest in Chicago, election support,



**Lt. Col. John Dwyer**

and severe weather emergencies. He was also instrumental in promoting mission-ready air packages and championed professional development by launching the Illinois Air National Guard’s first Company Grade Officer’s Workshop.

Originally from Woodville, Virginia, Dwyer graduated from Rappahannock County High School in 1992. He went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in biology with a chemistry minor from the Virginia Military Institute in 1996, commissioning into the Air Force that same month. Later in his career, he furthered his education by earning a Master of Public Health from the University of Illinois-Springfield in 2013. His early active-duty assignments included a tour at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico, where he served in leadership roles within the 49th Services Squadron. During this time, he deployed to Kuwait for over 120 days as a Protocol Officer for top military and civilian leaders. He later served as Commander of the Combat Support Flight at

Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska, overseeing a \$1 million budget and a team of over 110 personnel.

In 2003, Dwyer transitioned to the Air Force Reserves at Grissom Air Base, Indiana. During his eight-year tenure there, he made history as the first Air Force member to deploy to the Joint Personnel Effects Depot at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. In this solemn role, he managed the operations section responsible for inventorying and returning the personal effects of fallen and wounded service members, defense civilians, and embedded media from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Dwyer is deeply embedded in his community of St. Joseph, Illinois, where he has resided for 23 years. He serves as the Commander of the St. Joseph American Legion Post 634 and is an active member of the Post Honor Guard, providing funeral honors for fellow veterans. Lt. Col. Dwyer met his spouse, Carmine, in 1998 while both were serving on active duty at Holloman Air Force Base. Together they have two sons: Jacob, born in 2003 at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, and Caleb, born in Urbana in 2008. As he transitions into retirement, the Illinois Air National Guard and the surrounding community extend their deepest gratitude to Lt. Col. Dwyer for his 30 years of unwavering leadership and service. 🇺🇸

*Notice: This press release was developed with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence (Gemini Enterprise) for drafting and formatting purposes. The content was reviewed and verified for accuracy and appropriateness by relevant Department of War personnel prior to release in accordance with DoDI 5400.19.*



U.S. Air Force retired Lt. Col. Ed Petrella, left, 126th Air Refueling Wing, Maj. Dan Petrella's, father, and Lindey Petrella, Maj. Dan Petrella's spouse, and two twin boys watch as Petrella's aircraft is brought in after his final refueling mission in the Illinois Air National Guard at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 1, 2026. Ed Petrella retired from the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, in 2000. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)

## Petrella Takes Fini Flight of Air Guard Career



U.S. Air Force Maj. Dan Petrella, 108th Air Refueling Squadron, is doused in water after his final flight in the military by friends from the Illinois National Guard unit including Lindey, his partner, and two year old twin boys, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 3, 2026. Petrella is a second generation 126th Air Refueling Wing tanker pilot. His father Lt. Col. Ed Petrella retired the Wing, in 2000. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)



U.S. Air Force Maj. Dan Petrella, 108th Air Refueling Squadron pilot, reacts as he is sprayed by his twin two year old boys and Lindey Petrella, his wife, after finishing his final flight in the Illinois Air National Guard, May 1. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)

# 126th ARW Commander Goes 'Undercover' to Learn More About Tools in Comptroller Flight



**U.S. Air Force Capt. Courtney Pillischafske, right, 126th Comptroller Flight, budget officer, explains the capabilities of the new automated finance tools, to Col. Nick Henschel, 126th Air Refueling Wing, commander, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 16, 2026. Henschel spent part of the morning with the flight demoing the new tools. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)**



**U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Jacob Lider, right, 126th Comptroller Flight, NCOIC financial operations, works with Col. Nick Henschel, 126th Air Refueling Wing, commander's, on setting up lines of accounting for fiscal year 2027, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 16, 2026. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)**

# Illinois Army National Guard honors retiring Soldier for 24 Years of Service

The Illinois Army National Guard honored Sgt. 1st Class Frank Treto during a retirement ceremony recognizing more than 24 years of military service and leadership in the Illinois National Guard and the United States Army.

Hosted by the United States Property and Fiscal Office for Illinois, the ceremony recognized Treto's career of service, which began when he enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard on Jan. 26, 2002, as an infantryman.

Treto attended Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Benning, Georgia, and later deployed in support of both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He mobilized to Fort Polk, Louisiana, from July 2004 to August 2005 and deployed to Iraq from June 2006 to December 2007 during the National Resolution and Iraqi Surge phases.

Throughout his career, Treto served in multiple leadership and logistics positions across the Illinois Army National Guard. Following completion of the

Unit Supply Specialist Course in 2010, he served as a unit supply sergeant with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment. He later reclassified as a signal support systems specialist and served as a radio retransmission supervisor and training noncommissioned officer.


In November 2017, Treto became the supply sergeant for Charlie Troop, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, before being promoted to senior supply sergeant with the 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion in 2019. Since April 2022, he has served as the Supply Support Activity logistics manager for the United States Property and Fiscal Office at North Riverside under Joint Force Headquarters.

During the ceremony, Maj. John Tracy, supervisory logistics management specialist for the USPFO, and Col. Brian Creech, United States Property and Fiscal Officer for Illinois, provided remarks recognizing Treto's leadership, professionalism and commitment to Soldiers

throughout his career.

Treto received numerous awards and decorations during his military service, including the Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal with five awards, Army Achievement Medal with five awards, Army Good Conduct Medal with six awards, Combat Infantryman Badge, Air Assault Badge and the Illinois National Guard Lincoln Medal of Freedom with two awards.

As part of the ceremony, Treto was presented retirement certificates and letters of appreciation from the Illinois National Guard, the National Guard Bureau, the Army chief of staff and the president of the United States. His wife, Jenny Treto, also received a certificate of appreciation recognizing her support throughout his military career.

Treto is the Supply Support Activity logistics manager for the USPFO at North Riverside and resides in Plainfield, Illinois, with his wife and their three children, Ethan, Adrian and Liliana. 



Col. Brian Creech, U.S. Property and Fiscal Officer for Illinois, congratulates Sgt. 1st Class Frank Treto on his retirement after 24 years of service.



Maj. John Tracy, supervisory logistics management specialist for the USPFO, presents Sgt. 1st Class Frank Treto a certificate of retirement.

# 182nd Airlift Wing Promotes Donald Reay to Chief Master Sergeant

The 182nd Airlift Wing proudly announces the promotion of Donald Reay to the rank of Chief Master Sergeant, the highest enlisted rank in the United States Air Force. The promotion ceremony took place on May 2 at the Peoria Air National Guard Base.

Achieving the rank of Chief Master Sergeant is a significant milestone, as by federal law, no more than one percent of the Air Force enlisted force may hold this prestigious rank. Chief Master Sergeants serve as key leaders, senior enlisted advisors,

and mentors, bringing extensive operational experience and strategic insight to their units while advocating for the enlisted force.

“This milestone is a testament to our collective hard work, not just my own. As we move forward, my priority remains the readiness and health of this squadron; because a mission is only as resilient as the people who execute it,” said Chief Reay. “I want to ensure that Airmen are supported physically, mentally, and professionally, safeguarding the foundational

human element required to execute the Department of War mission.”

Chief Master Sergeant Reay’s promotion is a testament to his exceptional leadership and sustained record of excellence as an air transportation specialist with the 182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron. In this critical career field – whose members are proudly known as “Port Dawgs” – Reay has been instrumental in managing the safe and efficient movement of passengers, cargo, and equipment. His extensive expertise in load



**U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Donald Reay, air transportation specialist with the 182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron, speaks during his promotion ceremony to the rank of Chief master sergeant on May 3, 2026, at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois. Chief Master Sergeant is the highest enlisted rank a member can achieve in the U.S. Air Force.**



**The 182nd Airlift Wing Chiefs Council conducts an initiation ceremony for the newly appointed Chief Master Sgt. Donald Reay on May 3, 2026, at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois. Chief master sergeant is the highest enlisted rank a member can achieve in the U.S. Air Force.**

planning, cargo rigging, and aerial delivery operations has directly enabled the wing to execute its global mobility missions at a moment's notice.

"The rank of Chief demands an unwavering commitment to the welfare, professional development, and strategic utilization of our Airmen," said Maj. Samantha Norville, the commander of the 182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron. "Chief Reay doesn't just meet these expectations; he exceeds them every single day. He is a relentless advocate for his people and a mentor whose strategic foresight I trust implicitly. Having witnessed his dedication in the most demanding environments, I know without a doubt he will wear this rank with the incredible honor it deserves."

Throughout his distinguished career, Chief Master Sergeant Reay has been supported by his family, including his spouse, Jenny, and their child. During the ceremony, Chief Reay expressed his deep gratitude for their unwavering

encouragement and resilience, noting that their support at home has been the vital cornerstone of his military success.

In his new role as a Chief Master Sergeant, he will continue to leverage his vast logistical and law enforcement experience to guide the Airmen of the 182nd Airlift Wing and ensure the unit's highest levels of operational readiness. The 182nd Airlift Wing, a unit of the Illinois Air National Guard, operates the C-130 Hercules aircraft and is dedicated to providing tactical airlift and airdrop capabilities in support of state and federal missions worldwide.

*AI Disclaimer: This content was generated by Gemini Enterprise, a secure AI assistant optimized for Department of War (DoW) mission support within an Impact Level 5 (IL5) environment. All content is unclassified*



**U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Donald Reay, air transportation specialist with the 182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron, and his family put on his new rank of chief master sergeant on May 3, 2026, at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois.**

*U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Airman Noah Hardin*

# Random Telephone Call Results in 29-Year-Career for Soldier

A random telephone call from a military recruiter in June 1997 led to nearly 29 years of military service, and on May 21, family, friends, and fellow Soldiers gathered to celebrate Sgt. 1st Class Scott Sasenbury's retirement from the Illinois Army National Guard at the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield.

"In 1997, I received a phone call, which would ultimately be from a military recruiter," he said. "I knew I wanted to attend college after graduation but couldn't afford it. The Illinois Army National Guard offered me that opportunity. I've served as a Supply Soldier, armorer, a truck driver, and a property book noncommissioned officer."

Sasenbury, the Property Book Noncommissioned Officer in Charge for the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in June 1997 as a supply specialist.

Throughout his career, he has served in logistics and readiness roles across multiple units developing expertise in property accountability, sustainment operations, and unit readiness.

From 1997 - 2007, Sasenbury served as a supply specialist and armorer as a traditional Illinois National Guard Soldier. He deployed from 2004-2005 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In 2007, he began his service in the Active Guard and Reserve program as a detachment readiness NCO with 1344th Transportation Company, supporting operations in Cairo and later in Murphysboro. He later served as supply sergeant with 1344th Transportation

Company in East St. Louis and as Readiness NCO for both the 1344th and 1844th Transportation Companies.

Throughout his career, he has supported multiple large scale training operations including rotations through the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and the Korea Combat Training Center, Gangwon Province, Republic of South Korea, as well as three exportable combat training capability rotations.

Since 2019, he has served as the battalion property book NCO for the nearly 750 Soldiers serving in the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, overseeing large scale property book accountability and advising commanders on sustainment operations.

Maj. Rob Wright, the executive officer for the 232nd CSSB, said he first met Sasenbury almost nine years ago at the U.S. Army's Yakima Training Center, Yakima, Washington.

"Who would have thought we would cross paths at some point during our careers," Wright said. "In the short time I've served with Sergeant Sasenbury in the 232nd CSSB, there are two words I would use to describe him. Those are service and resilience."

"Resilience - He has overcome many challenges in his career. He



**Sgt. 1st Class Scott Sasenbury, property book Noncommissioned Officer in Charge for the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, thanks family, friends, and fellow Soldiers for their support throughout his nearly 29 years of service in the Illinois National Guard at a retirement ceremony May 21 at the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield.**

is a true inspiration to all who know and have served with him," Wright said. "And service - he's not done serving yet with his goal of continuing to serve in a different capacity."

Wright thanked Sasenbury's wife, Tiffany, for her support throughout his career.

"Tiffany, thank you for your support and thank you for allowing us to borrow him for all these years," said Wright.

Following retirement, Sasenbury will attend Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville



**Maj. Rob Wright, executive officer, 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, presents Sgt. 1st Class Scott Sassenbury, property book Noncommissioned Officer in Charge for the 232nd CSSB, during a retirement ceremony May 21 at the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield. Sassenbury retired after nearly 29 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard.**

to obtain his master's degree in social work with a goal of becoming a clinical social worker. He intends to continue his life of service by working with veterans and individuals in recovery, carrying forward the same commitment to people defined by his military career.

"The Army has given me a lot, including structure, responsibility, and a place to belong long before I really understood what any of that really meant," said Sassenbury. "It also gave me opportunities, challenges, and people in my life I wouldn't trade for anything."

Sassenbury said throughout his service the most important part to him was taking care of Soldiers.

"I learned a job, the rank, or the

uniform can't be the whole story of who you are," he said. "It's only part of what we do. Today I'm just a Soldier at the end of his career. Today, I'm Scott, someone shaped by this experience, but not defined entirely by it."

Sassenbury thanked the Soldiers and leaders he served with throughout his nearly 29 years in uniform.

"To the Soldiers I've worked with thank you," he said. "You made the long days worth it, and you reminded me each day why this work matters."


"To the leaders, thank you for the trust, patience, and when I really needed them, the course corrections," he said.

Sassenbury thanked his wife, Tiffany, for her support throughout his service.

"Thank you for putting up with everything which comes with this job," he said. "I wouldn't be standing here without your support."

Sassenbury said he's not leaving behind what he learned serving in the Illinois Army National Guard.

"I'm taking it with me, just in a different form. I'll be the same guy, just in a different role," he said.

"That spur of the moment decision to enlist in the Illinois Army National Guard has resulted in nearly 29 years of service. Looking back, I'd say the random telephone call worked out pretty well." 

# American Revolution in the Midwest:

## *How Parts of the War Were Fought in Illinois*

*Editor's Note: Spelling and punctuation in portions of George Rogers Clark's diary entries contained in this article were corrected to ensure clarity.*

As our nation marks its 250th anniversary, most of us remember what we learned in school about the American Revolution. Primarily our lessons focused on General George Washington and the Revolutionary War events that took place in the original 13 colonies. However, many events outside the 13 colonies helped defeat the British, including in parts of Illinois and Indiana.

Lt. Col. George Rogers Clark was born in Virginia and began his military career as a captain in the Virginia Militia. He led an expedition to what is today Kentucky to protect American settlements from Indian tribes. Years later, as the American Revolutionary War intensified, Clark sought approval of a plan from Virginia's Governor, Patrick Henry, to capture the British-held settlements of Kaskaskia, Cahokia and Vincennes in the Illinois Territory.

"George Washington and his Army were headquartered for the winter at Valley Forge when on January 2, 1778 Patrick Henry ordered George Rogers Clark to take command of Kaskaskia and recruit seven companies of 50 men each," said Adriana Schroeder, Command Historian of the Illinois National Guard.

Schroeder said Kaskaskia is where the Illinois National Guard was founded. She is conducting research to find evidence linking the Illinois Army National Guard's

2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, which is headquartered in Marion, Illinois, to Clark and the portions of the American Revolution that played out in Southern Illinois.

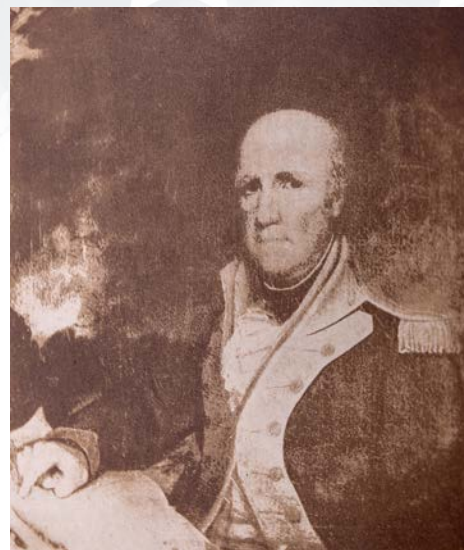
"Kaskaskia marks the spot where the Illinois National Guard began on May 9, 1723 under the French regime," said Schroeder. "That first muster happened when the area was French territory. The British wrested the area away from the French after the French and Indian War in 1763. Clark and his men defeated the British. Since the lineage of National Guard units are community-based, the one item needed to confirm the connection of the 130th Infantry to the militias Clark established in Kaskaskia and Cahokia during the Revolutionary War is a roster with the names of militiamen."

Clark was only able to raise less than four of the seven companies of men and set out for Kaskaskia from Louisville, Kentucky with 150 men on June 26, 1778.

"Clark documented everything in his diary and wrote letters to Henry and other acquaintances almost daily," said Schroeder. "As the group approached the Ohio River, they met a hunting party that had just left Kaskaskia and who offered to guide them. The group was within 3 miles of Kaskaskia by the evening of July 4."

In a letter to a friend Clark described how he took Kaskaskia and how the residents were misinformed about Americans and independence from Britain.

"We marched after night," wrote Clark. "I divided my little Army into two divisions. I ordered one to surround the town.



**George Rogers Clark, from a portrait painted by John Wesley Jarvis in the collection of Colonel R.T. Durrett of Louisville, Kentucky. As the American Revolutionary War intensified, Clark sought approval of a plan from Virginia's Governor, Patrick Henry, to capture the British-held settlements of Kaskaskia, Cahokia and Vincennes in the Illinois Territory.**

With the other, I broke into the fort, secured the Governor, in 15 minutes had every street secured, and by daylight had the whole disarmed. Nothing could expel the confusion these people seemed to be in, being taught to expect nothing but savage treatment from the Americans. I told them I was sorry to find they had been taught to harbor so base an opinion of the Americans and their cause and explained the nature of the dispute to them in as clear a light as I was capable of. They were now convinced it was a cause they ought to espouse."

After a few days of deliberation, the residents of Kaskaskia took the

Oath of Allegiance to America. It was the first step in Clark's plan to capture the Illinois country and the British western headquarters on behalf of the Continental Army. The next step in the plan was to take Cahokia, now called Cahokia Heights.

The Kaskaskians told Clark they could convince the residents of Cahokia to align with the American cause. Clark provided arms and equipment to the men and, not fully trusting them, put one of his captains in charge and sent them to Cahokia.

"These new friends of ours were so elated at the thought of the parade they were to make into Cahokia that they were too engaged in equipping themselves that it was night before the party moved," Clark wrote in his memoir. "It was late in the morning of the 6th before they reached Cahokia, detaining every person they met with. They got into the borders of the town before they were discovered."

With Cahokia secured, Clark turned his attention to Vincennes. He suspected a priest in Vincennes was "inclined to the American interest" and held great influence over the townspeople, so he sent for him.

"Clark and the priest met in Kaskaskia," said Schroeder. "The priest provided intelligence about the lack of British military presence in Vincennes, reported the governor was out of town for several weeks, and agreed to influence the residents to the American cause."

The priest left Kaskaskia on July 14 and returned in early August. The priest reported the people of Vincennes took the Oath of Allegiance to America in his church.

Clark dispatched Capt. Leonard Helm to take charge of Fort Sackville in Vincennes and named him Agent of Indian Affairs,

ordering him to win over Native American tribes to the American side of the war.

Over the next few months Clark made his post in Kaskaskia, regularly corresponded with the captains he put in charge of Cahokia and Vincennes, reenlisted most of his men, and turned his attention to plans of taking the British headquarters in Detroit.

"In December, Clark didn't hear from Helm for more than two weeks and grew suspicious that the British might have retaken Fort Sackville and may be planning to march on Illinois," said Schroeder.

During the winter as General George Washington settled in at Ford Mansion in Morristown, New Jersey, and struggled to solve the problem of feeding and clothing his Army, Clark sent out spies to get eyes on Fort Sackville and began to prepare his men to take back the fort and Vincennes.

"Clark passed out new colors, arms and equipment to the company in Cahokia and reunited them with the company in Kaskaskia," said Schroeder. "The women of Cahokia and Kaskaskia prepared food for the harsh winter and the pending march across the Illinois territory to Vincennes."

On January 29 a merchant traveling from Vincennes informed Clark that the Governor had returned with 800 British Soldiers, retaken Fort Sackville, and were to receive reinforcements from Detroit in the Spring. Clark and his men needed to move immediately.

"The season of the year being also favorable as the enemy could not suppose that we should be so mad as to attempt to march 80 leagues [275 miles] through [swamp] country in the depth of winter," Clark wrote. "Orders were immediately issued for preparations. Every order was executed with cheerfulness by every description of the

inhabitants."

Clark sent 50 men off to purchase a boat, fit it with artillery pieces, and hide out on the Wabash River north of Vincennes. He and 170 men began the march from Kaskaskia and Cahokia to Vincennes on Feb. 5.

Clark noted in his diary that weather conditions were wet, but not as cold as it could have been. Along the march the men slogged through water a few inches deep up to five feet deep. Clark wrote that spirits were high despite the conditions and that the men shot game and held cookoffs between the units.

"Along the way they built Pirogues, a flat bottom boat like a canoe, to ferry their equipment through the deeper waters," said Schroeder. "Some days it was icy. Some men fell through the ice and nearly drowned. For 18 days they slogged on, sometimes clinging to floating logs."

On Feb. 23 Clark and his men arrived at a place called Warriors Island where they could see Vincennes and Fort Sackville.

"Vincennes had partially flooded," said Schroeder. "Clark's men caught a local man who was hunting ducks. They took him prisoner, interrogated him for information, and sent him into town with a note for the residents."

In the note Clark explained he and his Army were determined to take back the fort. He advised citizens who were "friends to liberty" to remain in their houses and out of the way. His message for British loyalists was much different.

"Those (if any there be) that are friends to the King of England will instantly repair to the Fort and join his troops and fight like men," Clark wrote. "Every person found under arms on my arrival will be treated as an enemy."

Clark convinced the prisoner-turned-messenger that he had a

thousand troops with him and sent him off with the note.

"Clark and his men anxiously watched the messenger through a spyglass," said Schroeder. "They saw the streets start to stir and people started to gather in the square."

Schroeder said Clark and his men weren't sure what to make of the activity. They couldn't tell, but the townspeople were elated. Some went to the fort under the guise of bringing food to the prisoners and informed them of the impending attack. The townspeople began digging up weapons and black powder they had previously hidden when the British retook control months earlier. The King forbade citizens from possessing weapons or ammunition.

"Nothing had yet happened that the appearance of the garrisons being alarmed," Clark wrote.

"No drum nor gun. We began to suppose that the enemy already knew of us and was prepared. A little before sunset we moved and displayed ourselves in full view of the town. Crowds gazing at us. We were plunging ourselves into certain destruction. Or success."

The residents of Vincennes honored the oath administered to them by the priest the previous August and some joined Clark and his men. More than 100 Native American warriors who Helm had built relationships with also joined and by nightfall the fort was surrounded.

"The militia taunted the British," said Schroeder. "The British made several attempts to defend the fort by opening the door to fire their cannons, but each time Clark's men fired into the fort taking out several British each time."

The British surrendered the fort at 10 a.m. on Feb. 25. The other 50 men with the boat and artillery



**John Sanders, from a crayon portrait in the collection of Colonel R. T. Durrett of Louisville, Kentucky. George Rogers Clark's men caught Sanders who was hunting ducks near Vincennes, Indiana. They took him prisoner, interrogated him for information, and sent him into town with a note for the residents.**

pieces arrived two days later and the area was fully in American hands.

Clark ordered the artillery and some men to stay while the rest returned to Kaskaskia and Cahokia shortly after taking Fort Sackville and Vincennes.

"Since your first declaration and attachment for the American Cause, until the glorious capture of Vincennes, I had doubted your sincerity," Clark told the villagers of Kaskaskia on May 12, 1779.

"But in that critical moment you proved your faithfulness."

Clark asked them to remember their oath and be proud of their service.

"In a short time you will understand the American system, which you may think is strange in the beginning, but in the end you will find in it such peace and tranquility that you will bless the

day on which you espoused the American cause," Clark told them.

Clark proceeded to draft several planned attempts to march on Detroit, but was never able to enlist enough men.


"He remained busy trying to keep peace with Native American tribes in the Illinois territory until the end of the American Revolution," said Schroeder. "However, in the summer of 1780 Clark ordered American Forces to destroy the village of Saukenuk on Rock Island. That operation is considered the westernmost military operation of the Revolutionary War."

Schroeder said historical markers dotted in Kaskaskia, Cahokia Heights, Vincennes and Rock Island tell the stories and mark the locations of the westernmost events of the American Revolution as well as other early events involving the Illinois militia.

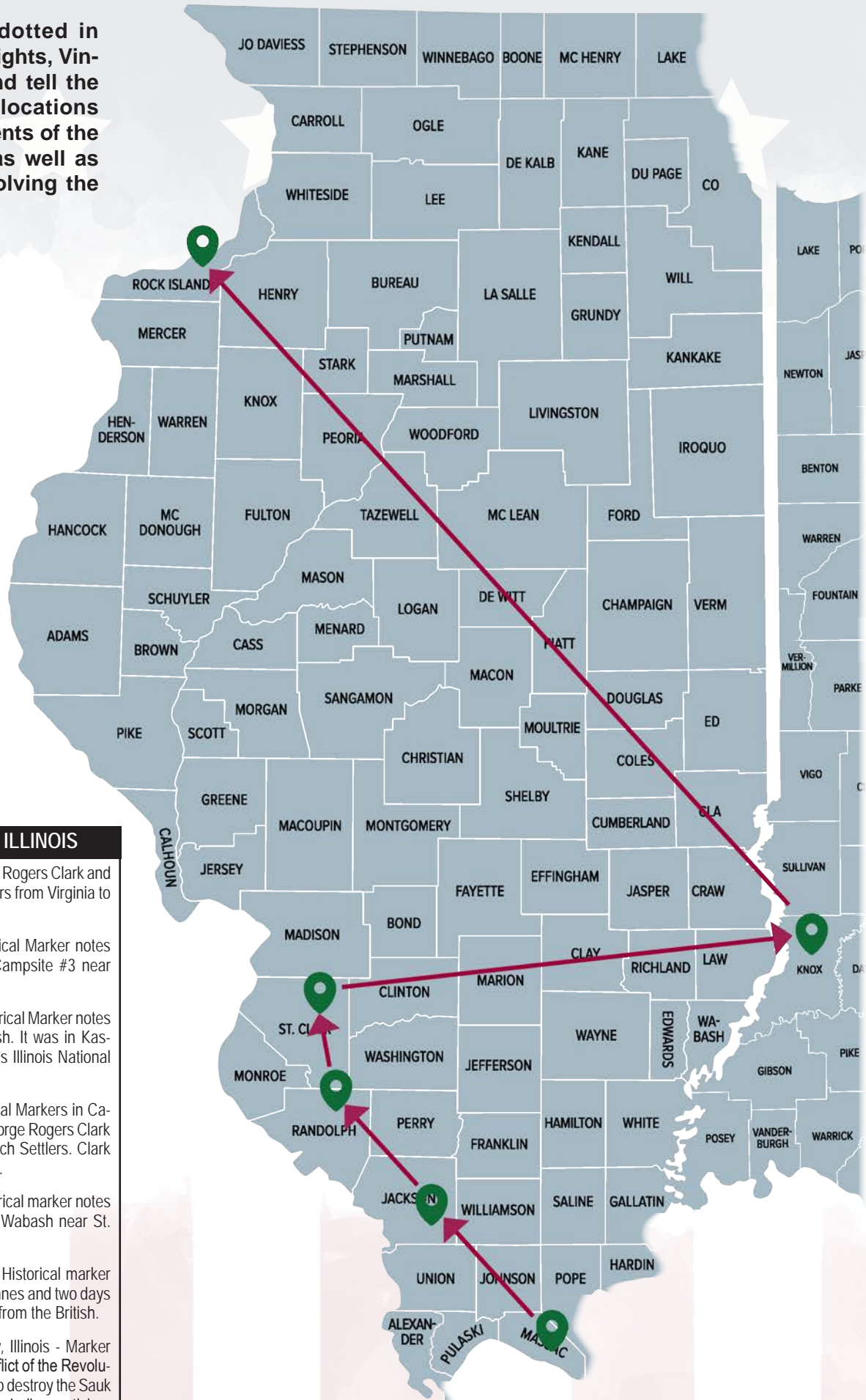
Schroeder said Clark recorded the name of only one member of the Kaskaskia militia in his diary and memoir, but that is not enough evidence to connect the Revolutionary militias to the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment.

"A full roster of all the enlisted men from Kaskaskia or Cahokia has not yet surfaced," said Schroeder. "Researchers will continue to search, but while the Soldiers names are unknown, the history and deeds of the militia from Kaskaskia and Cahokia is known."

She said it's understandable that most of the militiamen wouldn't have kept a diary, but she's grateful that Clark was a prolific writer.

"This is great because as we celebrate America's 250th we have actual events that happened real close to home," said Schroeder. "The American Revolution was not isolated along the east coast in the original 13 colonies." 

**Historical markers dotted in Kaskaskia, Cahokia Heights, Vincennes and Rock Island tell the stories and mark the locations of the westernmost events of the American Revolution as well as other early events involving the Illinois militia.**



**REVOLUTIONARY WAR IN ILLINOIS**

- June 30, 1778 - Massac County - George Rogers Clark and his men arrived at Fort Massac with orders from Virginia to capture the British outposts in Illinois.
- July 2, 1778 - Jackson County - Historical Marker notes the location of George Rogers Clark Campsite #3 near Murphysboro
- July 4-5, 1778 - Randolph County - Historical Marker notes the capture of Kaskaskia from the British. It was in Kaskaskia in 1723, the Illinois Militia (today's Illinois National Guard) was founded.
- July 6, 1778 - St. Clair County - Historical Markers in Cahokia Heights and East St. Louis note George Rogers Clark taking possession of Cahokia from French Settlers. Clark and his men spent the winter in Cahokia.
- Feb. 21, 1779 - Lawrence County - Historical marker notes Clark and his Army began to cross the Wabash near St. Francisville, Illinois.
- Feb. 23, 1779 - Knox County, Indiana - Historical marker notes Clark and his Army reached Vincennes and two days later, Feb. 25, recaptured Fort Sackville from the British.
- Summer of 1780 - Rock Island County, Illinois - Marker notes the location of the westernmost conflict of the Revolutionary War. Clark ordered an expedition to destroy the Sauk Indian village of Saukenuk in retaliation for Indian participation in the British attempt to capture Cahokia and St. Louis.

3 Virginia ft. *Private to Governor* *Del. to*  
In Council *Washington* *Jan 2. 1778*  
Lieut Colonel George Rogers Clarke

You are to proceed with all convenient Speed  
to raise Seven Companies of Soldiers to consist of  
fifty men each officered in the usual manner  
I amed most properly for the Enterprize & with this  
Force attack the British Post at Kaskasky.

It is conjectured that there are many pieces of  
Cannon & military Stores to considerable amount  
at that place, the taking & preservation of which  
would be a valuable Acquisition to the State.  
If you are so fortunate therefore as to succeed  
in your Expedition, you will take every possible  
Measure to secure the Artillery & Stores & whatever  
may advantage the State.

For the Transportation of the Troops from  
ions &c down the Ohio, you are to apply to the  
Commanding Officer at Fort Pitt for Boats &  
During the whole Transaction you are to take ex-  
pccial Care to keep the true Destination of your  
Force secret. Its Success depends upon this. Orders  
therefor are given to Capt. Smith to secure the Troops  
from Kaskasky. Similar Conduct will be proper in similar  
Cases.

It is earnestly desired that you show  
Humanity to such British Subjects and other Per-  
sons as fall in your hands. If the white Inhabitants  
at that Post & the Merchants will give undoubted  
Evidence of their attachment to the State for it is  
certain they live within its Limits & by taking the  
Oath prescribed by Law & by every other way & means  
in their power, let them be treated as fellow Citizens  
& their Persons & properties fully secured. Assistance  
& protection against all Enemies whether shall be  
afforded them & the Commonwealth of Virginia is  
pledged

Page 1 of the hand written letter to Lt. Col. George Rogers Clark from Virginia Governor Patrick Henry ordering him raise seven companies of Soldiers to attack the British post at Kaskaskia. (Courtesy of the Indiana State Historical Society)

*The  
Secret  
Orders*

Virginia Sc<sup>t</sup>.

In Council W<sup>m</sup>sburg Jan<sup>y</sup>. 2<sup>d</sup>. 1778

Lieu<sup>t</sup>. Colonel George Rogers Clark

You are to proceed with all convenient Speed to raise Seven Companies of Soldiers to consist of fifty men each officered in the usual manner & armed most properly for the Enterprize & with this Force attack the British post at Kaskaskia

It is conjectured that there are many pieces of Cannon & military Stores to a considerable amount at that place, the taking & preservation of which would be a valuable acquisition to the State. If you are so fortunate therefore as to succeed in your Expedition, you will take every possible Measure to secure the artillery & Stores & whatever may advantage the State.

For the Transportation of the Troops provisions &c down the ohio, you are to apply to the Commanding officer at Fort pitt for Boats, & during the whole Transaction you are to Take especial Care to keep the true Destination of your Force secret. Its success depends upon this. Orders are therefore given to Capt<sup>n</sup>. Smith to secure the two men from Kaskasky. Similar conduct will be proper in similar cases.

It is earnestly desired that you shew Humanity to such British subjects and other persons as fall in your hands. If the white Inhabitants at this post & the neighborhood will give undoubted Evidence of their attachment to this state (for it is certain they live within its Limits) by taking the Test prescribed by Law & by every other ways & means in their power, Let them be treated as fellow Citizens & their persons & property duly secured. Assistance & protection against all Enemies whatever Shall be afforded them & the Commonwealth of Virginia is  
pledged

**A typed version of Page 1 of the hand written letter to Lt. Col. George Rogers Clark from Virginia Governor Patrick Henry ordering him raise seven companies of Soldiers to attack the British post at Kaskaskia. (Courtesy of the Indiana State Historical Society)**

pledged to accomplish it. But if these people will not  
wade to their reasonable Demands, they must feel the  
miseries of War, under the direction of that Humanity  
that has hitherto distinguished Americans, & which it is  
expected you will ever consider as the Rule of your  
Conduct & from which you are to in no Instance to de-  
part.

The Corps you are to command are to receive the  
pay & allowance of a Militia & to act under the Laws  
& Regulations of this State now in Force as Militia

The Intendants at this Post will be informed by you  
that in Case they accede to the Offer of becoming Citizens  
of this Commonwealth a proper Garrison will be main-  
tained among them & every Attention bestowed to render  
them Commerce beneficial, the fairest prospects being  
opened to the Dominions of both France & Spain.

It is in Contemplation to establish a Post  
near the Mouth of this Cannon will be wanted to  
fortify it. Part of those at Kaskasky will be easily brought  
thither or otherwise secured as circumstances will make  
necessary.

You are to apply to General Hand for powder  
& Lead necessary for this Expedition. If he can't supply it  
the person who has that which Capt. Lyon bro't from  
Orleans can. Lead was sent to Hampshire by my  
Orders & that may be deliver'd you. Wishing you  
Success I am

Sir

Your Obedient Servant

P. Henry

pledged to accomplish it. But if these people will not accede to these reasonable Demands, they must feel the miseries of War, under the direction of that Humanity that has hitherto distinguished Americans, & which it is expected you will ever consider as the Rule of your Conduct & from which you are in no Instance to depart.

The Corps you are to command are to receive the pay & allowance of a Militia & to act under the Laws & Regulations of this State now in Force as Militia. The inhabitants at this Post will be informed by you that in Case they accede to the offer of becoming Citizens of this Commonwealth a proper garrison will be maintained among them & every Attention bestowed to render their Commerce beneficial, the fairest prospects being opened to the Dominions of both France & Spain.

It is in Contemplation to establish a post near the mouth of Ohio. Cannon will be wanted to fortify it. Part of those at Kaskasky will be easily brought thither or otherwise secured as circumstances will make necessary.—

You are to apply to General Hand for powder & Lead necessary for this Expedition. If he can't supply it the person who has that which Cap<sup>t</sup>. Lynn bro<sup>t</sup>. from Orleans can. Lead was sent to Hampshire by my orders & that may be deliver'd you. Wishing you Success I am

Sir

your hble Serv<sup>t</sup>.  
P. Henry

[Endorsed:]  
In Council  
Order To Lieut Clark  
to raise 7 companies  
and attack British  
at Kaskaskia—  
Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 1778

# Preserving Independence

## Congress Declares War on Germany

### *United States Formally Enters World War I*

**April 6, 1917:** Congress votes to declare war on Germany and the United States formally enters World War I. A month earlier, the Illinois National Guard's 33rd Division was inducted into federal service to prepare for war.

Throughout World War I, Illinois Soldiers fought the enemy while ignoring their hunger pains and the harsh cold, wet conditions. They dodged the ceaseless German artillery. They spent hours and sometimes days at a time wearing gas masks, desperately praying the enemy would run out of gas shells. The gas contaminated their food and water supplies. Sleeping was nearly impossible because gas masks restricted their breathing.

The 130th Infantry, 33rd Division slogged through these hardships while delivering victory for the good guys during battles across Europe including the Somme Offensive, the Meuse-Argonne, Lorraine, and Picardy.

From the official field orders of the 33rd Division: "Headquarters 15th October 1918, General Order No. 135. Officers, non-commissioned officers and Soldiers of the 29th and 33rd Infantry Divisions, United States. ...On the following days you pursued a stubborn advance which overcame all the enemy's counter-attacks; you compelled him to bring up in haste numerous re-enforcements which did not succeed in taking from you one inch of ground."

Commander of 130th Infantry, Colonel John V. Clinnin wrote in a letter to David Shanahan, Speaker of the Illinois House:

*"From Sept 26 until Oct 14 we held our positions under a constant and deadly artillery fire from guns of all calibers- [high explosive] gas and shrapnel poured in from the front and right flank... Well, I don't think hell could be such a bad place after being in this place.*

*This is the worst I have ever experienced. The gas and high explosives have kept us dodging shell holes and hugging the ground until I am afraid that if I were to hear*

*the rattle of the elevated railroad it would send me to the hospital with shell shock."*

In the previous days, the 33rd Division, including part of the 130th Infantry, had protected the western flank of the 29th Division, the fight had been difficult, and the men were exhausted. It rained incessantly for days. The fight continued on the 16th, the 130th continuing to serve with other elements of the 33rd Division on the flank of the 29th pushing the Germans north toward Bois de la Grande Mantagne. The enemy continued firing intermittently throughout the nights of Oct. 16



The 33rd Division holds the line during World War I.



**The 122nd Machine Gun Battalion, 33rd Division, holds the right flank at Meuse during World War I.**

and 17. The temperature plummeted, prompting a 33rd Division memo insisting every effort be taken to procure warm food, drinks, blankets, and clothing.

On Oct. 17, 1918, the 33rd Division still on the western flank of the 29th, made a notable advance through the Bois de la Grande Mantagne. The official history of the 130th reads, "The rain of the two preceding days continued with little interruption, as did the heavy shell and machine gun fire...the units in the main line of resistance spent the day improving their positions, a number of men being killed or wounded at their work."

The battle described in the 130th official history is the same battle where Pvt. LaFore Lock was grave-

ly injured at Verdun.

The 130th is the oldest unit in the Illinois National Guard with a proud and storied past, having fought in every war since 1812.

Freedom always comes at a price. For the Illinois National Guard, the cost during The Great War was 1,136 Soldiers killed or wounded in action. Battle casualties totaled 7,659.

Maj. Gen. George Bell Jr., Commander of the 33rd Division told the men of the Prairie Division as they returned home: "The Thirty-Third Division accomplished every task assigned to it. Not a single failure is recorded against it. Not a scandal occurred to mar the glory of its achievements. Duty to God, to country and to home, well done, is the highest standard

humanly attainable. The officers and men of the Thirty-Third Division did their duty superbly. Their deeds and the example which they set are imperishable. Illinois may well be proud of her sons, both the living and the dead."

**By the numbers:**

- The 33rd Infantry Division suffered nearly 1,000 killed and 5,871 wounded.
- The unit received 5,415 replacements.
- The Division is credited with nine Medals of Honor, one of which is displayed at the Illinois State Military Museum.
- The 33rd Division received more than 224 Distinguished Service Crosses, 143 Croix de Guerres from their French allies and 800 other citations for gallantry.





# Preserving Independence

## Illinois' most notable Guardsman serves in Illinois Militia during Black Hawk War

*Before serving as Commander-in-Chief during Civil War, Abraham Lincoln served as a Captain of Volunteers*

**April 7, 1832:** Abraham Lincoln is elected Captain of the 31st Illinois Regiment during the Black Hawk War.

**May 27, 1832:** Illinois Governor John Reynolds calls for more than 1,000 mounted volunteers after Sauk leader Black Hawk crosses the Mississippi River into Illinois. Among those volunteers was a 23-year-old Abraham Lincoln.

Once Illinois Governor John Reynolds had discovered the notorious Sauk Indian leader Black Hawk and his tribe had crossed the Mississippi River into Illinois, he called for more than 1,000 mounted volunteers on May 27, 1832.

Among those men was 23-year-old Abraham Lincoln. "Then came the Black-Hawk War; and I was elected a Captain of Volunteers -- a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since," Lincoln said in December 1859.

Lincoln's service in the Illinois Militia, today's Illinois National Guard, was not glorious. He was arrested twice and forced to carry a wooden sword as punishment. He fought thousands of insects, but not a single enemy warrior. His service in the war taught the young Lincoln effective lessons in leadership and an understanding of the daily life of a Soldier.

These lessons would be invaluable

nearly 30 years later when he served as Commander-in-Chief of Union forces during the Civil War.

The treaty between Black Hawk and both Governor Reynolds and Gen. Edmund Gains stated the "British band" (as Black Hawk and his followers were known due to their British affiliations) would stay in Iowa territory, west of the Mississippi River, and not re-cross the Mississippi into Illinois without permission of the Illinois governor or the president of the United States.

Black Hawk broke that treaty, forcing the call-up of Illinois Militia volunteers to serve with active Army forces operating under the command of Gen. Henry Atkinson. The mission was to drive the Indians back across the Mississippi. One hundred and forty-seven companies of volunteer Rangers and spies answered the governor's call to arms for the state.

A month before the call-up, Abraham Lincoln of New Salem enlisted on April 21, 1832, into the militia in Sangamon County. During Lincoln's initial service in the Black Hawk War, his fellow militiamen



voted him into command in a practice that consisted of two top candidates standing side by side, while the remaining militia members lined up behind their choice for captain. To Lincoln's surprise, he won by more than three quarters of the vote. However, Lincoln's new promotion came with the price of hardship, and new responsibilities.

Lincoln's men would be characterized today as "a handful." Mischievous and rambunctious, Lincoln's men tested their young captain's ability to enforce military discipline. One night, one of Lincoln's Sangamon County Soldiers

broke into the officer's quarters and stole the officers' liquor. The following morning, as the company began to move, hung-over Soldiers began to fall out one by one throughout the march. An investigation was initiated upon arrival into camp. Lincoln took responsibility for his men's infractions. He was arrested and forced to carry a wooden sword for two days, in place of his own.

Earning his men's respect was not easy. Upon the first order Lincoln gave his men, the response from a militiaman was "Go to the devil, sir!" The civilities between officer and enlisted was a bittersweet tug of war which eventually built a foundation of camaraderie between Lincoln and his men. He had proven himself as more than just one of them; Lincoln earned respect as their chosen leader.

But Lincoln made mistakes. He broke the general order forbidding the discharge of firearms within 50 yards of his camp. Again, he was placed under arrest and, again, Lincoln had to relinquish his real sword – this time for a day. These experiences, however, did not humiliate or discourage Lincoln. Rather, they shaped him, provided him with leadership skills, and the ability to implement discipline and corrective action with candor.

Lincoln proved he had the ability to maintain order when he saved the life of an innocent elderly Indian man who strayed into their camp helpless and hungry. The man held a letter from General Lewis Cass that commended him for his faithful services to the whites. However, Lincoln's men claimed the letter was a forgery and the old man was a spy. They wanted to make an example of him. The men, famished and frustrated from traveling without ample rations and equipment, were looking for any excuse to take out their frustration on the Indian and kill him. Lincoln did not relent to the demands of his



**Black Hawk was a Sauk leader and warrior. He earned his status as a war chief or captain leading raiding and war parties as a young man and then a band of Sauk warriors during the Black Hawk War of 1832.**

men saying firmly, "It must not be done." Their captain's stern words ended the confrontation, freeing the old man to continue on his way unscathed.

Whether stretching scraps for rations among his men or tussling in wrestling matches, Lincoln became acquainted with a lifestyle only known to the volunteer Soldier. He considered these experiences the character-building elements of his early life. He reflected on them fondly during his presidency, saying that although he saw virtually no combat or danger, he still considered his days in the militia one of his greatest honors. Lincoln faced many of the same challenges new officers face today. He wanted to be liked by his men. In Lincoln's case, a popularity contest literally put him in command. But Lincoln learned that being respected was more important than being liked. He made mistakes but earned the respect of his men. Ultimately it was his moral fortitude and his values that saved the life of an innocent civilian.

Despite the hunger and bug bites,


Lincoln re-enlisted. After the term had ended for the volunteers who had enlisted with him, Lincoln, jobless and without a family longing for his return, re-entered the service. This time he enlisted as a private in Capt. Elijah Iles' Company. He enrolled May 27, 1832, hours after he mustered out of his first unit.

During the Black Hawk War, re-upping was organized differently than it is today. Re-entering the service for Lincoln meant giving up his captain's rank. He was willing to do so to hold on to a lifestyle of kinship, camaraderie, and honor. He enlisted three consecutive times and considered the time he served to be some of his greatest and proudest moments. His service also granted him a land warrant in Iowa.

Prior to Lincoln's departure for the war, he was presented as a county candidate for the Illinois legislature. Serving in the war helped get both his name and personality out as he got to know men from around the state. After the capture of Black Hawk, the main body of militia returned to their homes by August and by September, 1832 a treaty ended hostilities in the state.

Although Lincoln's military service was not a story of combat and bloodshed, he had a higher role as Commander in Chief during the Civil War.

No doubt this job mentally taxed him as he sent neighbors, friends, and business acquaintances from Illinois into battle. The very first Union officer to die clerked for Lincoln. Lincoln mourned the loss of Elmer Ellesworth like a son as he lay in state in the White House.

As president during the Civil War, Lincoln commanded 156 Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiments (militia), two field artillery battalions, 17 cavalry units, and several independent batteries from the state of Illinois. 

# Preserving Independence

## Nearly 260,000 Illinois Soldiers answer Lincoln's call to fight for the Union

**April 15, 1861:** President Abraham Lincoln issued his Proclamation calling for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the southern rebellion. Nearly 260,000 Illinois troops answered the call.

When the U.S. Civil War broke out in 1861, Illinois volunteers answered President Abraham Lincoln's call. Nearly 260,000 Illinois Soldiers contributed to a total force of more than 2.2 million who fought to keep our nation whole.

Some served in other state militias once Illinois had met its initial quota. Illinois gave the third largest in numbers after New York and Ohio. Freedom always comes at a price. The cost for Illinois was nearly 35,000 Soldiers who perished from wounds and disease.

Strong ties still exist between the Illinois militia of the Civil War era and the Illinois Army National Guard units of today. The 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, headquartered in Urbana, carries the Civil War lineage of Company A, 8th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

The 130th Infantry Regiment, headquartered in Marion carries lineage of the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiments.

The 1544th Transportation Company in Paris carries the lineage of Company E, 12th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

The words, "carry lineage,"

are quite literal. These units carry battle streamers for the Civil War on their guidon or unit flags. It is military tradition that wherever the unit goes, the guidon or flag goes too. When these units deploy, they are taking the unit's history and a reminder of all the individual selfless sacrifice with them.

The most interesting accounts of the Civil War come from Soldiers' personal journals and handwritten letters home. Their journey was an unimaginable hardship.

Since the Global War on Terrorism and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, units typically know two years in advance of a mobilization and begin training and preparing their families months in advance. Illinois' Civil War militiamen and their families were not so fortunate. Families were torn apart at a moments' notice. Some families even fought on opposite sides of the war. It was a bleak reality for Soldiers to march into the unknown in a divided nation. They suffered disease, hunger, exposure to the elements, incessant marching, archaic medical care, and often a lack of proper equipment, clothing and shoes.

Col. Jacob Fry addressed the 61st Illinois Volunteer Regiment at Shiloh, "remember your state and do your duty like brave men."

The 59th Illinois fought in one of the bloodiest battles of the war at Stones River. Already

understrength from the battle of Pea Ridge, the unit lost 113 of 361 Soldiers at Perryville before arriving at Stones River, Tennessee. There they fought until they ran out of ammunition.

Pvt. Will Cromer of the 45th Illinois wrote of his experiences at the battle of Shiloh, "Twice during the night I awoke and could hear the groans and cries of the wounded lying out there on that bloody field. Some cried for water, others for someone to come and help them... God heard them, for the heavens were opened and rain came."

The exhausted troops tried to sleep on the wet, muddy ground after a hard day of fighting. The units became disorganized after the surprise Confederate attack that morning. Tangled amid the voices of the wounded was the constant booming of the guns from the ships in the river below them. As the sun rose the next day on the Shiloh battlefield, a sleep deprived Pvt. Edwin Payne of the 34th Illinois wrote, "No sooner had we begun to advance, than the swish of canister and the droning of musket ball began...and we began to realize that we were now earning our thirteen dollars a month."


Pvt. Charles Wills wrote in his diary in February, 1863 from the camp of the 103rd Illinois, "The prominent rumor to-day, and one in which there seems to be considerable stock taken, is

that Governor Yates has obtained authority from the general government to have several regiments from Grant's army returned to Illinois." However, the 103rd did not muster out until July 9, 1865, more than two years later.

After the battle at Gettysburg, the 8th Illinois Cavalry harassed the rebel forces to the Potomac. Maj. William Medill was mortally

struck by a confederate bullet. As he lay dying, he was not concerned about his family or friends. Instead in a final exhale of selflessness he exclaimed, "I am going to die without knowing that my country is saved."

Perhaps President Lincoln was thinking about the Illinois troops who fought so valiantly at Gettysburg when he wrote his

now famous speech. Lt. Marcellus Jones, a scout from the 8th Illinois Cavalry fired the first shot of the battle using a borrowed carbine. On Nov. 19, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address. He said, "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here." 



The 9th Illinois at Shiloh, Tennessee, on April 6, 1862 when the Confederate Army of the Mississippi struck at dawn. Some Union regiments fled in panic as Maj. Gen. U.S. Grant ordered his division commanders to hold at all costs. Sent to reinforce the Union left, the 9th was told "There is going to be plenty of fighting today; there must be no cowards." South of the Peach Orchard, the regiment was ordered to a tree-choked ravine, and found themselves in a race with Confederates for the same natural barrier. The 9th got there first. 'Plenty of Fighting Today': the 9th Illinois at Shiloh, a National Guard Heritage Painting by Keith Rocco, courtesy the National Guard Bureau.



Freedom 250

# Preserving Independence

## 33rd Division Liberates Baguio, Philippines

**April 27, 1945:** The 33rd Infantry Division liberates Baguio, Philippines from the Japanese during World War II. Baguio was the Philippines' second largest city and its summer capital.



On the lookout for Japanese snipers, a patrol of the 130th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Division, moves up Sesions Road in Baguio, Philippines, past the ruins of a market place on April 27, 1945. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)



The first vehicle crosses the newly installed bridge down the side of the mountain near Baguio, in the Philippines.



Freedom 250

# Preserving Independence

**May 5, 1945:** Soldiers from the 106th Cavalry rescue King Leopold of Belgium and his family from German Soldiers.

**June 29, 1944:** The Illinois Army National Guard's 106th

Cavalry arrives at Utah Beach in Normandy, France. The 106th had an outstanding record of service in the European Theater during World War II, leading Maj. Gen. W.H. Haislip to say "The 106th

Cavalry Group was more than once worth a division to the XV Corps. You always were assigned extremely important missions and accomplished them against great odds."

## 106th Cavalry Regiment deploys to Europe, rescues King Leopold of Belgium from Germans

The 106th Cavalry Regiment was inducted into federal service on Nov. 25, 1940, in Chicago.

By the time they reached Europe in the Spring of 1944, the unit had reorganized into the 106th

Cavalry Group Mechanized. The 106th Cavalry Group consisted of the 106th and the 121st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons along with a small headquarters, all from the Illinois National Guard.

The word "mechanized," meant they traded horses for jeeps, called Bantams, Armored Cars and light tanks. The men served as scouts. Whenever they found the enemy, the mission turned to engaging



King Leopold of Belgium with members of the 106th Cavalry Regiment. The 106th rescued the king from the Nazis in World War II.

them to find out their strength and position and report the information so that battle plans could be made. The capability to deploy rapidly and move faster than the enemy without detection was essential.

Both squadrons had a Headquarters and Service Troop and their own medical detachments. In combat, the reconnaissance troops, assault guns and light tanks all worked together as a team to support the other. These missions were extremely dangerous. The heavy German tanks could outfire the 106th. The 106th with their structure and equipment were meant to get in, get information and get out fast.

The 106th Cavalry group arrived on the coast of Normandy, France at Utah Beach on June 29, 1944, just three weeks after D-Day. Troop A of the 121st Squadron hit a mine in the English Channel and were rescued without loss of life. The 106th entered combat under VII Corps on July 4, 1944.

The harrowing record of this unit is incredible. Scouting ahead often led to many surprises. On Thanksgiving night in 1944 the 106th executed a delaying action against the 130th Panzer Division. The Germans were engaged in a coordinated attack aimed at cutting off Allied supply lines. The delayed action by the 106th gave the corps commander time to shift his forces to meet the threat and turn the Germans back.

In December, during the Battle of the Bulge, when the German offensive ruptured the front of the American 1st Army, elements were committed to defend selected transportation



**One piece of unique equipment used by the 106th Cavalry Regiment during World War II.**


bottlenecks in the path of the German advance. The 106th had a critical role in protecting the town of St. Vith, Belgium. After six days of tenacious defense, nearly surrounded by elements of two German Panzer armies, the 106th withdrew. The defenders of St. Vith prevented the Germans from resupplying, disrupted their timetable and bought time for the American 1st Army to consolidate its position on the flank of the German penetration.

That Spring, the 106th made a rapid advance into the Alps to rescue King Leopold of Belgium from Nazi German Officers. The Illinoisans stole a car and the German guards assumed it was a German staff car and let the men pass. The 17 Germans guarding the King did not resist. Fearful of the Russians, they surrendered to the Illinoisans. After an hour of photo taking with the king, his wife and three children, the party toasted with Cognac left behind by the Germans. Belgium awarded the

men with two medals each and kept in touch with them long after the war, and held a reunion in 1951 and in 1986 when the king toured the United States.

After the war, the 106th contributed to the multi-national military police force and patrolled the streets of Salzburg. The men were decorated with honors from the United States Army commanders, General Charles de Gaulle of France, and King Leopold of Belgium for their tenacity and vigor in pursuing their unique mission.

Maj. Gen. W.H. Haislip, XC Corps commander commented, "The 106th Cavalry Group was more than once worth a division to the XV Corps. You always were assigned extremely important missions and accomplished them against great odds." The price is always high for such dangerous missions.

The 106th suffered more than 700 casualties, including 197 killed and four missing in action. 



Freedom 250

# Preserving Independence

**May 11, 1846:** Congress declares war against Mexico, the start of the Mexican-American War. Soldiers from the Illinois Militia were called into service.

## President calls on Illinois Militia for service in 1846 Mexican War

### *4th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment captures Santa Anna's leg during battle of Cerro Gordo*

On May 11, 1846, Congress passed a declaration that stated, "By the act of the Republic of Mexico, a state of war exists between that Government and the United States."

President James K. Polk called on Illinois to support three Regiments of Infantry. The Soldiers received a monthly salary of \$15.50, were asked to serve for 12 months and were allowed to choose their own regimental and company officers.

At the Mexican Battle of Cerro Gordo in April 1847, Soldiers of the 4th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment nearly captured Mexican General Santa Anna.

In a letter dated Feb. 5, 1882, 2nd Lt. W. A. Tinney, 4th Illinois Volunteers wrote, "We stormed their fort and put the enemy to flight, taking about six thousand prisoners, and we captured Gen. Santa Anna's carriage, also his wooden leg, which I have in my possession."

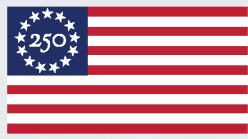
The leg resides in the collections of the Illinois State Military Museum at Camp Lincoln and after years of being on display, is getting some much-needed rest.



**Soldiers of the 4th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment captured the wooden and cork leg of Mexican General Santa Anna at the Battle of Cerro Gordo in April 1847.**



The sword presented to Col. H.B. Newby by the State of Illinois following the 1846 Mexican War. The sword is in the collections of the Illinois State Military Museum at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.



Freedom 250

# Preserving Independence

Weather  
Showers ending.

## THE QUINCY HERALD-WHIG

Sunday  
Edition

Vol. 135, No. 229.

Quincy, Ill., Sunday, August 17, 1969.—Seven Sections—Sixty-eight Pages.

Price, 20 Cents.

# For the 126th—a hometown salute



By **BILL BRADSHAW**

*Herald-Whig Staff Writer*

Yesterday was the day! The day Quincy has been planning the last month, and the day 200 men of the 126th Service and Supply Company and their families have waited for a year.

By all standards, Quincy's welcome for the 126th home from Vietnam was "a day not only of local but national and world significance." In remarks from the podium in front of the Lincoln-Douglas memorial in Washington Park, Rep. Paul Findley, R-Ill., told a crowd of 3,000 to 5,000 the ceremonies honored personally the 126th and symbolically, all men who have served and have sacrificed and died.

Governor Ogilvie told the returning 126th: "You, and the colleagues you left behind, more."

Over 200 flags of the City of Quincy flew along the parade route from Fourteenth down Maine to Washington Park, itself surrounded by the Stars and Stripes, to greet the more than 100 officers and men of the 126th.

Crowds lined Maine, flags waved and store windows displayed "Welcome Home, 126th," signs as Capt. Donald Keil and his men rode in open convertibles to the park.

Ogilvie and Findley arrived at 12:25 p. m., shook hands with Keil as they ascended the dias, greeted other political and military dignitaries, then Citations followed to five other officers and men of the

Army National Guard hand from Springfield played "The Star Spangled Banner."

Rodney Hinkamper, the American Legion's coordinating committee chairman for all the groups who joined together for the welcoming, introduced Paul Hensel, president of the Quincy Chamber of Commerce as master of ceremonies.

Introduced from the platform were Gen. Harold Patton, National Guard adjutant general, State of Illinois, and Mrs. Keil; Capt. and Mrs. Keil; Col. Robert D. Cowan, deputy assistant to chief of National Guard Bureau, Washington, D. C., and Mrs. Cowan.

Lt. Col. James R. Fulmer, snapped to attention as the 14th

Army National Guard hand from Springfield played "The Star Spangled Banner."

Rodney Hinkamper, the American Legion's coordinating committee chairman for all the groups who joined together for the welcoming, introduced Paul Hensel, president of the Quincy Chamber of Commerce as master of ceremonies.

Introduced from the platform were Gen. Harold Patton, National Guard adjutant general, State of Illinois, and Mrs. Keil; Capt. and Mrs. Keil; Col. Robert D. Cowan, deputy assistant to chief of National Guard Bureau, Washington, D. C., and Mrs. Cowan.

Lt. Col. James R. Fulmer, snapped to attention as the 14th

(Continued on Page 2A)

*The headline in the Quincy Herald-Whig, Aug. 17, 1969, saluting the 126th Supply and Service Company, based in Quincy, on their return from a yearlong deployment to Vietnam. The 126th was the only Illinois National Guard unit to be activated for service in Vietnam.*

## ILARNG's 126th Supply and Service Company only Illinois unit activated for service in Vietnam

**May 13, 1968:** The Soldiers of the Illinois Army National Guard's Quincy-based 126th Supply and Services Company are mustered into federal active duty for service in Vietnam. It would be the only Illinois Army National Guard unit activated for the Vietnam War.

1968 was a volatile year for the United States.

Americans endured the assassinations of Senator Robert Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and news accounts of American service members fighting, and dying, in a far-off country called Vietnam. While at home, Illinois National Guard leaders prepared plans for the security of Chicago

during the Democratic National Convention and to maintain civil control on college campuses.

On April 6, 1968, the 126th Supply and Service Company was called up by Governor Otto Kerner for riot duty in Chicago in response to Dr. King's assassination. Twenty-six men broke down rations at the Northwest Armory for other guard units on duty in the area, while the remainder of the company waited in reserve for possible deployment around the state. On April 11, the unit received a phone call from the Chicago Tribune notifying them the company was on a troop list for deployment to Vietnam.

A total of 20 Army National

Guard organizations from 17 states mobilized for Vietnam, this numbered 87 detachment and company-sized units. In all, 12,234 Army National Guard members served on active duty. Included in this number were the men of the 126th Supply and Service Company.

On May 13, 180 men and five officers mustered into federal active duty at the National Guard Armory in Quincy. On May 15, the advance party departed Quincy by convoy to Fort Carson, Colorado, with the main body following by train on May 18.

At Fort Carson, 21 Soldiers were transferred to Infantry units due to their job title. Since the unit

had recently converted from an ordnance company, the training it received at Fort Carson readied them for their new mission in Vietnam. The mission entailed receiving, storing, and issuing food, clothing, fuel, construction material, and big equipment items such as vehicles to units in the field.

On Sept. 16, the main body of the company flew overseas on two Air Force C-141s. After a few stops, the Soldiers landed at Da Nang, Vietnam on Sept. 18. They were welcomed by the warm Asian sun. It was 110 degrees that day. The next day they reached their destination at Chu Lai.

Assigned to the 23rd Supply and Transportation Battalion of the Americal Division, the 126th Company processed around 1,500 supply requests from over 100 units assigned in the Chu Lai area of operations. In addition, they controlled three helicopter refueling points and an additional one for fixed wing aircraft.

On June 8, 1969, the 126th Supply and Service Company received an alert re-deploying them to the United States as part of President Richard Nixon's 25,000-man withdrawal. The unit ceased operation on July 25 and on Aug. 8, boarded a C-141 for the long flight back to the United States. Around 50 families drove to Fort Leonard, Missouri where the Soldiers spent a week out-processing and debriefing.

On Aug. 16, 1969, the community of Quincy, Illinois, rolled out the red carpet to welcome their Soldiers home. The local television station broadcast the entire homecoming live and while official events ended late that afternoon, the newspaper recounts that the party continued into the night. The company was officially released from active duty on Aug. 19, 1969.

The lead story in the Quincy Herald-Whig on Aug. 17, 1969, began "Yesterday was **THE** day."

On Aug. 16, parade marshals where there at 8 a.m., the

townspeople began gathering at 10 a.m., and by noon more than 4,000 people were waiting to welcome home the 126th.

Among those in the parade were the boy scouts, Miss Quincy, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, two busses of veterans from the Soldier's home with three chaplains, politicians and several floats funded by local businessmen. More than 200 flags lined the parade route along Maine Street...from 14th street to Washington Park.

The 144th Illinois Army National Guard Band played in the parade, while the Quincy Park Band gave an hour-long concert. Welcome home signs adorned storefront windows. The town was filled with jubilation.

This was **THE** day. The 126th Supply and Service Company was finally home from a 13-month deployment to Vietnam. Cheers went up as the Soldiers appeared in over 100 open convertibles along the parade route heading toward the park.

A sight to behold, the park was decorated with the Stars and Stripes. There were many speeches that afternoon. General Harold Patton, the Adjutant General for the Illinois National Guard, Illinois Governor Richard Ogilvie and Col. Robert Cowan, Deputy Assistant to the Chief of National Guard Bureau and many others addressed the crowd.

"As distinguished as your service has been, it was not unexpected," Ogilvie said as he addressed the Soldiers and crowd. "The record of your fathers and grandfathers wrote before you has taught us that uncommon valor is indeed a common virtue among men of the National Guard."

After the speeches, awards and citations were presented. Most of the citations described heroic actions and illustrated to the large gathering how dangerous daily operations were for the Soldiers of the 126th.

During their deployment to


Vietnam, the 126th controlled a petroleum tank farm supplied from the port at Duc Pho. The Soldiers trucked gasoline 16 miles to the tank farm for storage. Convoys often came under fire from Viet Cong guerillas and sometimes the road was mined.

A couple of Soldiers in the unit were awarded the Bronze Star for heroic actions when convoys came under enemy fire, however the actions of Pfc. Larry Baxter from Pierce City, Missouri, earned him the Silver Star.

Baxter, an augmentee to the 126th from the 63rd Transportation Company, was driving a transport trailer carrying 5,000 gallons of gasoline through enemy fire on May 12, 1969. The trailer had been hit by an enemy rocket propelled grenade and exploded. Once his vehicle was disabled, Baxter could have easily jumped out to safety.

Realizing the immediate danger to the remainder of the convoy if he abandoned his vehicle and left the road blocked, Baxter completely disregarded his own safety and continued to drive the vehicle forward into the intense small arms fire. By maneuvering the burning vehicle over a small embankment, Baxter was able to leave an escape route open for the rest of the convoy to pass through the ambush. Critically wounded, Baxter sacrificed his life to assure an avenue of survival was available to fellow Soldiers. For his actions, Baxter was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

In part, his Silver Star citation reads, "His extraordinary heroism in close combat against a numerically superior force was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army."

The unit received a Meritorious Unit Citation (MUC) for its impeccable service to other units and numerous other awards were bestowed to the Soldiers of the 126th Supply and Service Company. 



Freedom 250

# Preserving Independence

## State Militia becomes Illinois National Guard

*Illinois Reserve Militia volunteers step in to replace National Guard units called into service*

**May 18, 1877:** The Illinois State Militia was officially redesignated as the Illinois National Guard by the State of Illinois.

The 1877 Military Code for the State of Illinois is the document that mentions but separated both the Illinois Militia and the Illinois National Guard.

The military code states, “all able-bodied male citizens of this State between the ages of eighteen and forty -five years, not expressly exempted by the laws of the United States...shall be subject to military duty and designated as the Illinois State Militia,” or sometimes referred to as the Unorganized Reserves. The document goes on to cite, “The active militia shall be designated as the “Illinois National Guard.”

Direction of these forces as well as the Illinois Naval Militia established by the General Assembly in 1893, was retained by the Adjutant General.

The name Illinois National Guard goes back to May 18, 1877 and was put into force before July

1, 1877.

The State Militia after 1877 existed only on paper until World War I. At the time the Illinois National Guard was gearing up for war overseas.

The Illinois Reserve Militia (IRM) was established to protect the state while the Guardsmen were in France fighting in World War I.


These men might be one year too old or too young to be drafted. Perhaps they could not see well enough, but they knew how to shoot a rifle. Unlike what the 1877 military code read, these men did volunteer. They were not paid, had to provide their own weapon and uniform, and answered to their military chain of command with the Adjutant General directing them around the state when they were needed. They were called out for flood duty and riot duty all around the state. After the war ended, they went home until World War II.

On Oct. 17, 1940, a federal act signed by the President authorized states to organize home guards to

replace the National Guard units called into service.

The Secretary of War might prescribe regulation for training and issue arms and equipment. These units could not be called into military service of the United States.

Once again, the IRM was inducted into state service on Feb. 28, 1941. Men aged 18 to 55 volunteered. The same rules applied. They volunteered, bought their own uniform, and used their own weapons. The IRM had seven regiments and an Air Corps of eight squadrons. Immediately they provided internal security for transportation centers, interstate bridges and vital war production centers throughout Illinois.

Other calls for the IRM included fires, tornadoes, train wrecks, and explosions. When the war was over, Chicago experienced an unprecedented transportation shortage, as all branches of the military were trying to get home at the same time. The IRM went to Chicago and helped to transport 12,000 service members home. 

# Preserving Independence


## Illinois National Guard's youngest recipient earns Medal of Honor at age 14

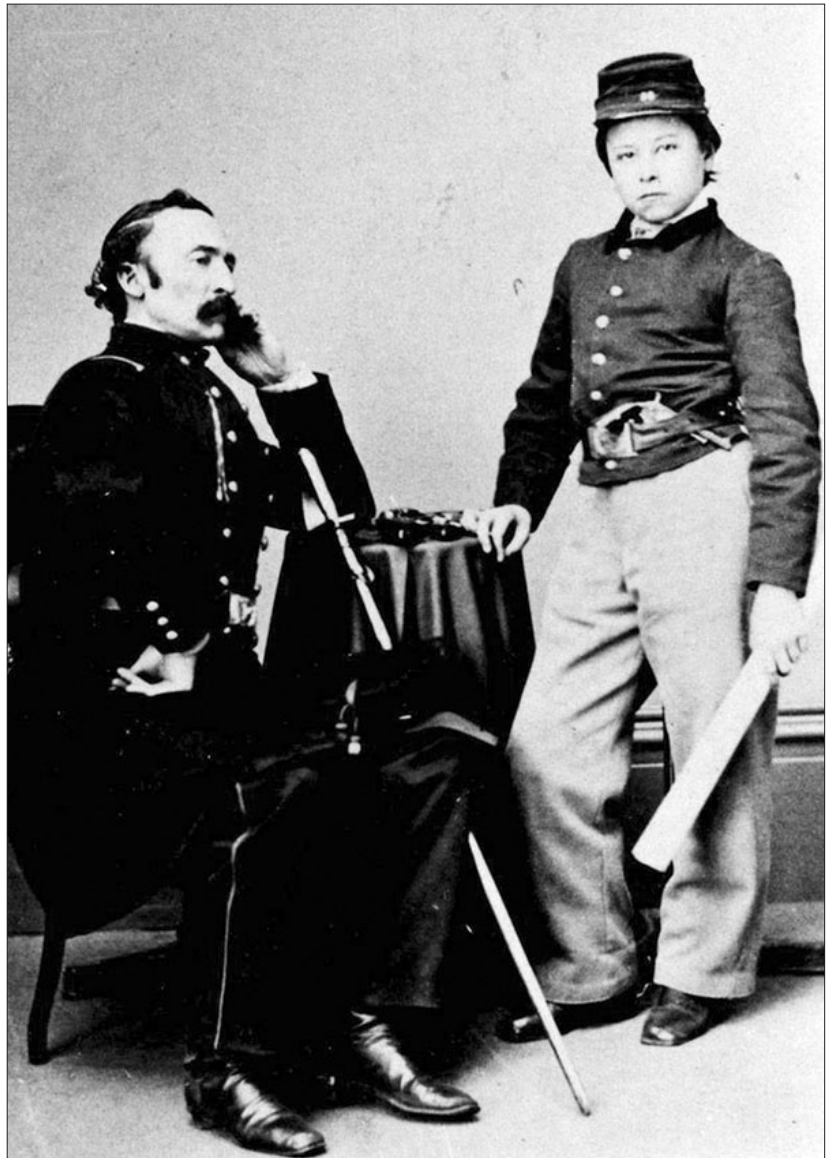
***Cpl. Orion P. Howe***  
***Company C, 55th Illinois Infantry***

**Date:** May 19, 1863 at Vicksburg, Mississippi

Heavy fighting at Vicksburg, Mississippi had largely depleted the ammunition of Company C of the 55th Illinois Infantry. Colonel Oscar Malmborg lost several runners in attempting to get resupplied. Musician Orion P. Howe, a fourteen year-old drummer boy whose father and brother were in the same regiment, volunteered to fetch the much needed ammunition. To the amazement of his comrades, Howe dashed through enemy artillery and small arms fire. Despite a severe wound that would affect him for the rest of his life, Howe successfully returned with the ammunition, and then reported directly to Major General William Tecumseh Sherman as ordered. He remains one of the youngest recipients of the Medal of Honor. The previous Illinois National Guard Armory in Waukegan was named after him.

**Citation:** A drummer boy, 14 years of age, and severely wounded and exposed to a heavy fire from the enemy, he persistently remained upon the field of battle until he had reported to Gen. W.T. Sherman the necessity of supplying cartridges for the use of troops under command of Col. Malmborg.

Howe is the Illinois National Guard's youngest recipient of the Medal of Honor. 



# Preserving Independence

## 170th Fighter Squadron allocated to Illinois Air Guard in 1946, inactivated with 2008 183rd Wing redesignation

**May 24, 1946:** The 305th Fighter Squadron was reconstituted and redesignated as the 170th Fighter Squadron and allotted to the Illinois Air National Guard in Springfield. Today, it is known as the 183rd Wing.

On May 24, 1946, in Springfield, the 305th Fighter Squadron was reconstituted and redesignated as the 170th Fighter Squadron and allotted to the Illinois Air National Guard.

On Sept. 30, 1948, Detachment C, 231st Service Group, 170th Utility Flight, 170th Weather Station and the 170th Fighter Squadron received Federal Recognition.

In December 1948, the fighter squadron received its first aircraft, the F-51 Mustang. In April 1949, the units moved to a small building at the entrance of the Capital Airport while waiting for the completion of its new hanger.


In May 1950, the squadron moved into its new hangar at Capital Airport. The project cost

\$1,200,000 and included a hangar with offices on the second floor, a paved aircraft parking area of 300,000 square feet, a warehouse building, armament, storage, repair facilities, and utility roads.

On April 9, 1951, the 170th Fighter Squadron was redesignated the 170th Fighter Bomber Squadron. In 1953, jet aircraft burst on the scene. The Mustangs were phased out with the arrival of the F-86 Sabre Jet. The F-84F Thunderstreak arrived on Feb. 2, 1955, phasing out the F-86. In 1957, a million-dollar

project added 2,000 feet of runway. A ramp, apron facilities and rocket storage space were also added.

In October 1962, the 170th Tactical Fighter Squadron was again reorganized, becoming a subordinate unit of the newly federally recognized 183rd Tactical Fighter Group. The squadron's lineage and history became synonymous with the 183rd Tactical Fighter Group, later redesignated the 183rd Wing.

The 183rd Wing is headquartered at Capital Airport in Springfield. 



The air crew of the 170th Fighter Bomber Squadron.



Freedom 250

# Preserving Independence

## Officer Candidate School Shapes Future Leaders


**June 1, 1957:** The Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School was established at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

The Illinois Officer Candidate School was first established at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois on June 1, 1957.

Since that time it has served as the primary commissioning source of new Second Lieutenants in the Illinois Army National Guard.

The School is staffed by qualified and experienced commissioned and noncommissioned officers serving in administrative, academic and

tactical capacities.

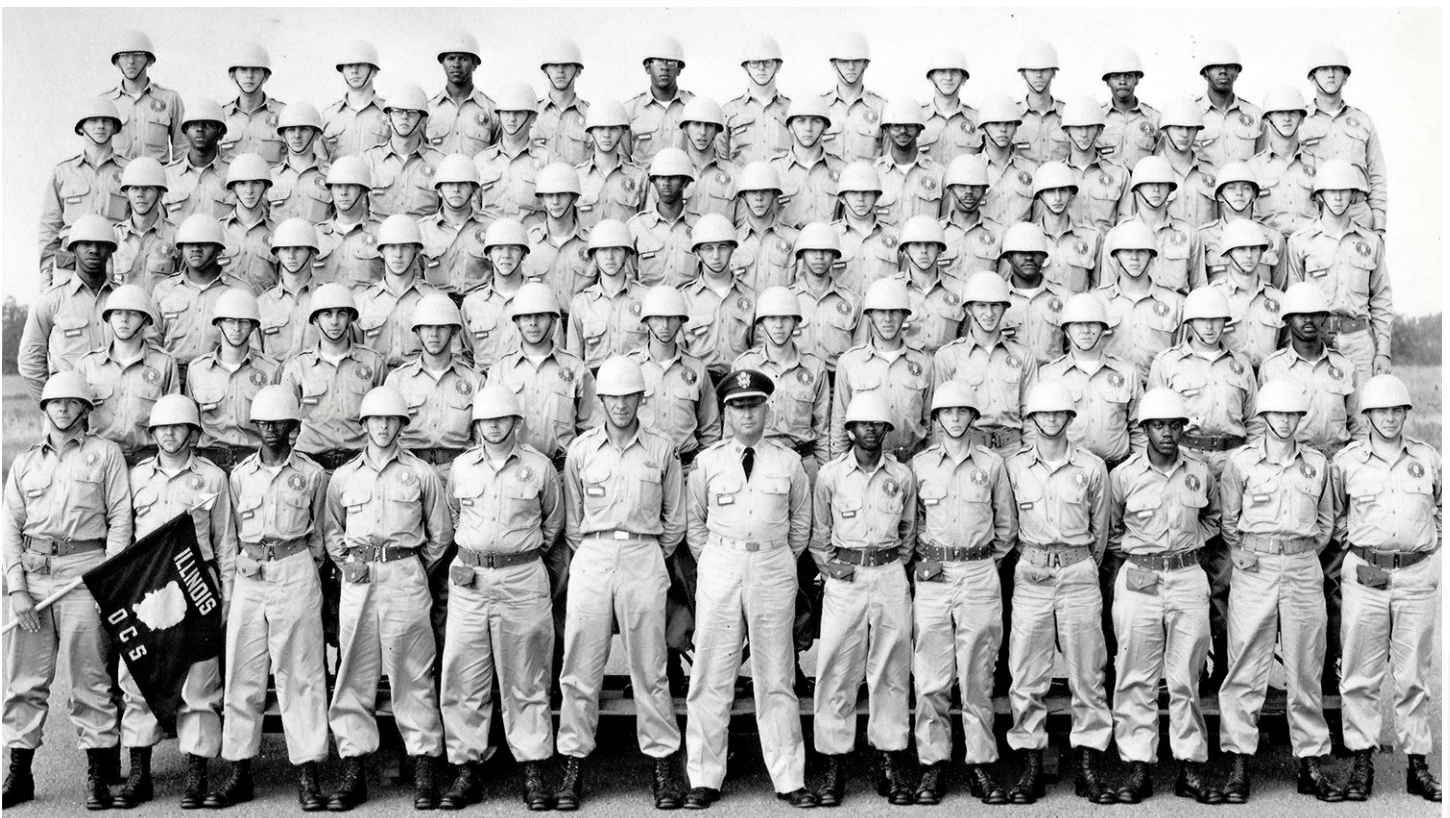
Today, future leaders attending Officer Candidate School must complete more than 660 hours of classroom and field instruction, must meet the commissioning standards of the U.S. Army, and be examined, and approved by a federal recognition board. 

“

*It doesn't matter why you made the decision to join or become a commissioned officer, it's about the Soldiers you're about to care for and lead. There is no greater responsibility than leading the greatest single resource in the United States of America and that is our service members.*

*Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General-Army and Commander, Illinois Army National Guard to the newly commissioned second lieutenants of OCS Class 70-35, Aug. 17, 2025*

”



The inaugural Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School class. The class graduated on July 22, 1958.



Freedom 250

# Preserving Independence

**June 14, 2008:** The 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's Headquarters and Headquarters Battery and Battery B of the 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery mobilize for service in Afghanistan.

The 33rd IBCT deployment would be the largest single unit deployment of an Illinois National

Guard unit since World War II.

The 33rd IBCT and two units from the 404th Chemical Brigade numbered around 3,000 Soldiers and formed the bulk of Task Force Phoenix VIII, commanded by ILARNG Brig. Gen. Steven Pl. Huber. Among the unit's many accomplishments was the training of 60,000 Afghan Soldiers

and conducting more than 500 missions.

Eighteen Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers would give their lives, half of Task Force Phoenix VIII's 36 American casualties. Two French, two Latvian, and three Afghan interpreters also gave their lives as part of the task force.

## 33rd IBCT Soldiers conduct largest single unit deployment since World War II in 2008

The deployment of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team was the largest single unit deployment into combat since World War II.

Twenty-eight units with the 33rd and two units from the 404th Chemical Brigade deployed in the Fall of 2008 to support Operation Enduring Freedom and formed Task Force Phoenix VIII. Many Soldiers trained and mentored forces of the Afghan National Army and Afghan Police Force. The emerging government of Afghanistan struggled to recover from almost three decades of conflict.

Many 33rd Soldiers were split from their original company when they arrived in Afghanistan, with the brigade helping to support 226 bases in the country.

The Soldiers helped build 12 medical clinics, 15 schools and repaired 14 civic or cultural centers. They delivered 2.7 million pounds of humanitarian assistance, dug 135 wells, and assisted with 19



**Combined Task Force Phoenix VIII's logo during the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Teams's 2008 deployment.**



**The 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, headquartered in Urbana, conducts the Transfer of Authority in Afghanistan during the unit's 2008 deployment.**

road projects.

The Soldiers conducted a variety of missions throughout all parts of Afghanistan including security operations, police mentoring duties, and embedded training team missions working to train the Afghan Army.

They trained 60,000 Afghan Soldiers in nine months at the Kabul Military Training Center. The 33rd conducted more than 500 missions and combined patrols with the Afghan Army and Afghan Police in a region near the Pakistan border the Taliban used for transportation from Pakistan into Afghanistan.


The 33rd delivered food, clothing, and medical supplies

to more than 75,000 Afghans. They mentored Afghan doctors and nurses. They help the Afghanistan National Army's Counter Narcotics find and later burn 11.2 tons of poppy seeds and discovered an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) factory.

Brig. Gen. Steven P. Huber, Commander, Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix VIII, said, "It has been an historic deployment and our imprint here will be lasting. Yet our mission has not been easy. We have suffered significant losses. We return home with a deep sense of loss and heartfelt sorrow.

"Phoenix VIII lost 43 Warriors, including two French, two Latvians, three Afghan

interpreters, 36 Americans from different components and states – 18 from Illinois. Our sorrow is only tempered by the deep pride in what we have done here and that we have known such great men and women who have given their all for the cause of freedom and the interests of our nations.

"We have been challenged here. I hope that each service member will reflect on the many positives that have taken place, along with remembering those difficult moments. Together, we have given the Afghan people an opportunity to secure themselves and govern their nation. We have improved their chances for a better future and a better way of life. You are each a hero and a part of history." 

# Preserving Independence

## 10,245 Illinois Soldiers Mobilize for Mexican Border War in 1916

**June 18, 1916:** President Woodrow Wilson mobilizes the National Guard for the Mexican Border War. Illinois responds with six infantry regiments, a cavalry unit, and engineer, signal corps, artillery, and field hospital units.

Since 1910, two groups fought a revolution vying for control of Mexico.

Violence intensified toward Americans when President Woodrow Wilson denounced the new revolutionary government in Mexico in 1913. In response, President Wilson sent 4,800 regular troops to defend the border.

In 1915, Mexico elected Veustiano Carranza to be its new president along with a new government. President Wilson recognized Carranza's constitutional government.

On March 9, 1916, Francisco "Poncho" Villa angered by Wilson's decision raided Columbus, New Mexico. Villa and his gang of 500 Soldiers killed 17


American citizens and destroyed parts of the town.

On June 18, 1916, the President mobilized the National Guard. Illinois responded with six Infantry regiments, a cavalry unit, and engineer, signal corps, artillery, and field hospital units.

Illinois National Guard units gathered, encamped, and trained at the state fairgrounds, dubbed "Camp Dunn" after the governor. Illinois troops left Springfield on June 28, 1916, headed for San Antonio, Texas. The Cavalry served separately at Brownsville, Texas.

A couple of small skirmishes were made with Villa's Soldiers across the border, other than that it remained quiet.

Illinois supported the three-and-a-half-month-long border campaign with 10,245 Soldiers and minimal loss.

As world tensions escalated towards a world war and the border fell silent, Wilson ordered U.S. troops home to prepare for the battlefields of France. 



Artillery in Action

Artillery in action during the Mexican Border War.

# Proud New American

## Soldier Seeks Better Opportunities in United States, Enlists in Illinois Army National Guard to Become Part of Something Bigger than Self

### *Spc. Edna Carreno Shares Journey to U.S. Citizenship through Military Service*

Spc. Edna Carreno is assigned to the Illinois Army National Guard's 1244th Transportation Company, 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 34th Division Sustainment Brigade.

In her civilian life, she is in hospitality management as a hotel supervisor.

She holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science and International Relations and is considering enrollment in the Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School.

#### *Her Journey in her own Words*

I am Spc. Edna Carreno, and I am originally from Colombia. Moving to the United States was a major change in my life, and like many immigrants, I came looking for better opportunities, stability, and a future where I could continue growing personally and



**Spc. Edna Carreno**



**Spc. Edna Carreno**

professionally.


In my civilian job, I have learned the importance of responsibility, teamwork, and leadership. At the same time, I wanted to challenge myself, serve my community, and become part of something bigger than myself. That is when I first learned about the National Guard. I heard about it through people who shared their experiences and the opportunities it offered, including education benefits, personal growth, and the chance to serve the country.

Joining the National Guard became one of the most important decisions of my life. It pushed me outside of my comfort zone and taught me discipline, resilience, and confidence. Through training and service, I discovered strengths

in myself that I did not know I had. The experience helped me grow not only as a Soldier, but also as a person.

One of the greatest impacts the National Guard had on my life was helping me through the process of becoming a United States Citizen. The process was smooth and I received support the entire way, from my recruiter, who always believed in me, to my drill sergeants, who pushed me and stayed aware of my naturalization process during Basic Training. Their guidance and encouragement made a huge difference and helped me feel supported throughout the journey.

One of the most unforgettable moments of my life happened one day before graduating from Basic Training, when I officially became a United States Citizen. My battalion organized a naturalization ceremony for all the Soldiers who were becoming Citizens that day. It was an emotional and very special experience because one day we became American Citizens, and the next day we graduated as American Soldiers. That moment represented sacrifice, hard work, commitment, and pride.

Looking back, joining the National Guard changed my life completely. It opened doors, gave me purpose, and helped me build a future that once felt far away. Today, I am proud of my journey, proud to serve, proud to call the United States my home, and proud to be an American Soldier. 

# 5th CST Conducts External Evaluation, Use Peoria Civic Center as Testing Site

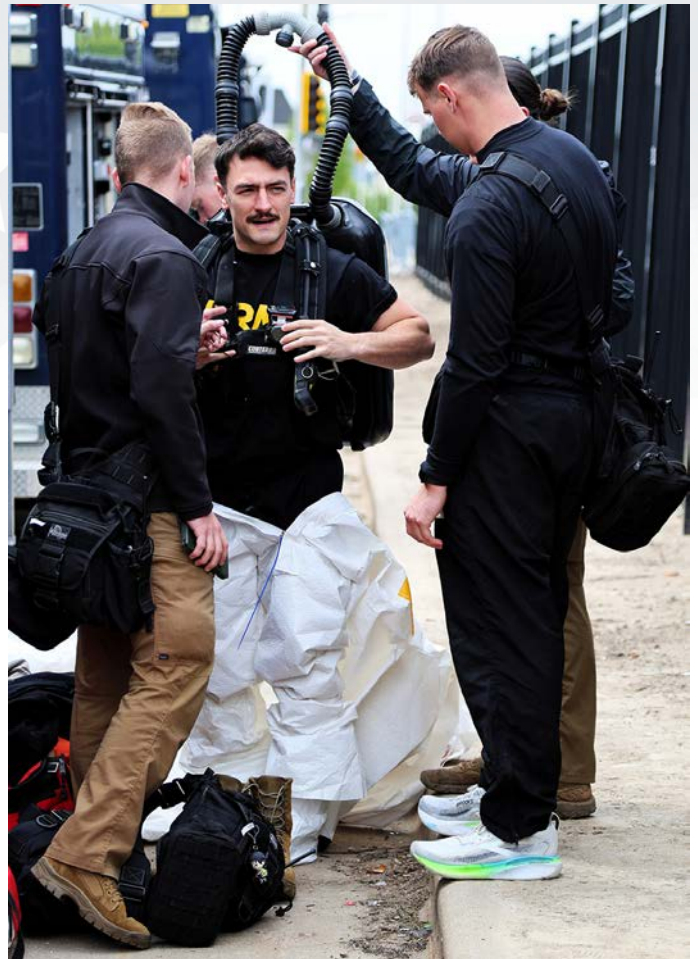
The Illinois National Guard's 5th Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team conducted an External Evaluation May 7 at the Peoria Civic Center. U. S. Army North (Fifth Army) conducted the evaluation.

The 22 Soldiers and Airmen are continually sharpening their skills and ability to assist civil authorities in the event of weapons of mass destruction attack. The Peoria-based unit is one of only 57 such units nationwide whose mission is to support civil authorities at a domestic Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) incident site by identifying CBRN agents/substances, assessing current or projected consequences, advising on response measures, and assisting with



appropriate requests for additional follow-on state and federal military forces.

Units can also provide immediate response for intentional and unintentional CBRN or hazardous material (HAZMAT) releases and natural or man-made disasters that result in, or could result in catastrophic loss of life or property. The full-time service members continually train with local, state, and federal first responders and agencies to protect the American public.



# Rochester Pauses to Remember Sacrifice During Memorial Day observance

**Story and photos by Barb Wilson  
Editor, Illinois VFW News**

The Rochester, Illinois, community gathered May 25 at the Rochester Cemetery to pay tribute to the men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of freedom.

“We are gathered to remember those who lost their lives in defense of our great nation and the ideals espoused in our constitution,” said guest speaker Col. Elizabeth Roxworthy, Chief of Staff of the Illinois Department of Military Affairs, and the J-5 Directorate for Strategy, Plans and Policy as a traditional member of the Illinois National Guard. “This marks our nation’s 250th anniversary. It is a monumental milestone, but we could not celebrate two and a half centuries of freedom without also honoring those who sacrificed their lives to birth, nurture, and advance our free republic.”

The ceremony, hosted by Rochester Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 11463, also featured a welcome address from Rochester Village President Stacia Munroe.

“I am honored to stand alongside so many who understand the meaning of service, sacrifice, and patriotism,” she said. “As we gather today with family and friends, it is important we remember this holiday exists. The freedoms we enjoy today did not come without a cost. It was courage, sacrifice, and devotion to something greater than oneself.

Roxworthy said as children, Memorial Day was viewed as the unofficial start of summer.

“As adults, we understand the true weight of today,” she said. “Today is a day to pause, to



**Illinois Army National Guard Col. Elizabeth Roxworthy, the Chief of Staff of the Illinois Department of Military Affairs and J-5 Directorate for Strategy, Plans and Policy, Illinois National Guard, delivers a keynote address during the Rochester, Illinois, Memorial Day observance May 25 at the Rochester Cemetery.**

reflect, and to remember the cost of freedoms that too many of us often forget or take for granted. The price of freedom, and the guarantee to live according to our individual choices and values, is paid by the men and women who step forward to serve our nation in uniform.”

Roxworthy said the Rochester community understands the cost of freedom deeply.

“We lost Cpl. James Palmatier in Iraq in 2005, and Cpl. James Chad Young in Afghanistan in 2010,” she said. “To the Gold Star families and friends of these two heroes and to the loved ones of all our fallen, thank you.”

“Thank you for your strength, your courage, and your selflessness,” she said. “Most of us who serve, do so with distinction,

proudly doing our part before returning to our civilian lives. But the rest served with extraordinary valor, giving their last effort and their final breath to preserve our liberty.”

In the 25 years since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, 256 service members from Illinois lost their lives serving our nation. Of those, 34 served in the Illinois National Guard.

“Behind every name etched into a stone monument and behind every folded flag is a story,” she said. “A son or daughter, a parent, a friend, a life interrupted and a future never fully realized. The fact we are gathered here freely is proof their service mattered and their sacrifice was significant.”

Behind every fallen service member is loved ones who must

carry on.

“There are families who bear the polarity of pride and grief at the exact same time,” Roxworthy said. “Their resilience deserves our recognition and support.”

Roxworthy said we must also recognize the families of service members who served and returned home.

“Just last year in 2025, more than 2,500 members of the Illinois National Guard were deployed outside of the United States,” she said. “They could not have focused so clearly on their mission without unwavering support at home. So beyond today and beyond this event, how do we truly honor our veterans, those who continue to serve, and those we have lost?”

She offered five ways to show support.

“First, we remember,” she said. “We speak their names, learn their stories, visit memorials, attend ceremonies, and teach our younger generations why this day matters.”

Roxworthy said we must support our veteran community.

“Reach out to a veteran in your community, listen to their experiences, and acknowledge



**Cadets from the Civil Air Patrol, Springfield Composite Squadron, post the colors during the posting of the colors at the Rochester, Illinois, Memorial Day observance at the Rochester Cemetery May 25.**

their service,” he said. “Support the organizations that provide assistance to veterans and military families.”

A third way to show support is to show up, said Roxworthy.

“We show up for military families, those who endure long separations, uncertain futures, and in some cases, unimaginable loss,”

she said. “Offering practical help, friendship, and community can make a world of difference.”

She said we must live in a manner to be worthy of their sacrifice.

“That means striving to be engaged citizens, contributing positively to our neighborhoods, and upholding the democratic values of our nation so many gave their lives to protect,” she said. “We must also commit to be participants in the cause of freedom. It takes all our effort to correct and clear the course of freedom for future generations.”

Roxworthy said that Memorial Day is not only about loss, but it is also about legacy.

“This day is about the legacy of courage, of sacrifice, and of a nation shaped by those willing to give everything for it,” she said. “For this legacy to persist for another 250 years, we must never forget those who served and sacrificed. We must honor them with our words, our time, and our actions. We must do all of this to be worthy of their sacrifice and of the freedoms they defended.”



**Veterans from the Inter-Veterans Burial Detail of Sangamon County salute during the posting of the colors at the Rochester, Illinois, Memorial Day observance at the Rochester Cemetery May 25.**

# Bezik Graduates from Sergeants Major Academy

## SMA Weimer Teaches Leadership Development Section to Class

Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Weimer visited the U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Academy (USANCOA) at Fort Bliss on May 11, 2026, to engage directly with the Army's next generation of senior enlisted leaders.

During the visit, SMA Weimer conducted a comprehensive Leader Professional Development (LPD) session with the resident students of the Sergeants Major Course (SMC) Class 76. Taking the time to connect at the ground level, he toured multiple classrooms, posed for group photos with the students, and presented a coin of excellence to a dedicated academy staff member in recognition of their outstanding performance and support to the institution.

In addition to his time with the resident course, SMA Weimer capitalized on the opportunity to conduct a face-to-face engagement with students from Distance Learning Class 51-006. These senior NCOs had recently arrived on ground at Fort Bliss to execute the Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT), the final culminating requirement to conclude their rigorous non-resident Sergeants Major Course curriculum.

While the visit featured the traditional hallmarks of a senior leader tour, the core of SMA Weimer's message was deeply introspective and demanding. He utilized the LPDs not just to impart institutional updates, but to challenge the future Sergeants Major to critically evaluate their internal motivation, readiness, and holistic health before stepping into the highest enlisted echelons of the operational force.

During each engagement, the Sergeant Major of the Army



**Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Maj. Thomas Bezik, the operations sergeant major for the 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, for graduating from the Army's Sergeants Major Academy, May 23, at Fort Bliss, Texas. A highlight from Sgt. Maj. Bezik's class was a leadership development section taught by Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Weimer.**

charged the NCOs to carefully reflect on seven vital questions, a rigorous self-assessment designed to gauge their true preparedness for the immense responsibilities that await them.

First, Weimer asked the NCOs to define their core motivation: "What is your 'Why'?" He followed this closely with a second, role-specific inquiry: "Why do you 'Want' to be a Sergeant Major?" These foundational

questions forced the students to look beyond the prestige of the rank and focus on the true purpose behind their continued service.

The third question brought the family unit into the leadership equation. Weimer asked, "What would your spouse or significant other say your response would be to those first two questions?" By asking if their internal motivations aligned with their partner's understanding, he highlighted

the indispensable role of honest communication and shared purpose in sustaining a successful, long-term military career.

Moving beyond purpose, Weimer introduced a 1-to-10 scale, noting that a score of five or below is a negative indicator to measure enthusiasm and holistic wellness. His fourth question asked: "On a scale of 1-10, how excited are you to get back to the Force as a Sergeant Major?"

The fifth and sixth questions focused entirely on readiness through wellness. He challenged the students to rate how "healthy" they will be upon returning to the

Force, explicitly defining health across three essential pillars: Physical, Mental, and Spiritual fitness. He immediately followed this by asking them to use the exact same scale to evaluate the overall health of their families. This segment underscored a fundamental Army reality: a leader cannot effectively sustain or care for an organization if they, or their support systems at home, are compromised.

The seventh and final question served as the ultimate litmus test for any senior NCO in the United States Army: "Are you ready to take an organization to combat as a

Sergeant Major?"

As the students of both SMC Class 76 and Distance Learning Class 51-006 prepare to graduate and disperse to units across the globe, SMA Weimer's visit served as a powerful reminder of the profound weight of their upcoming roles. The seven questions he left behind at Fort Bliss are not meant to be answered in a single afternoon, but rather to serve as a continuous guidepost as these senior NCOs prepare to lead, train, and care for the Army's formations in an increasingly complex world. 🇺🇸



### ***Sergeants Major Academy Graduates***

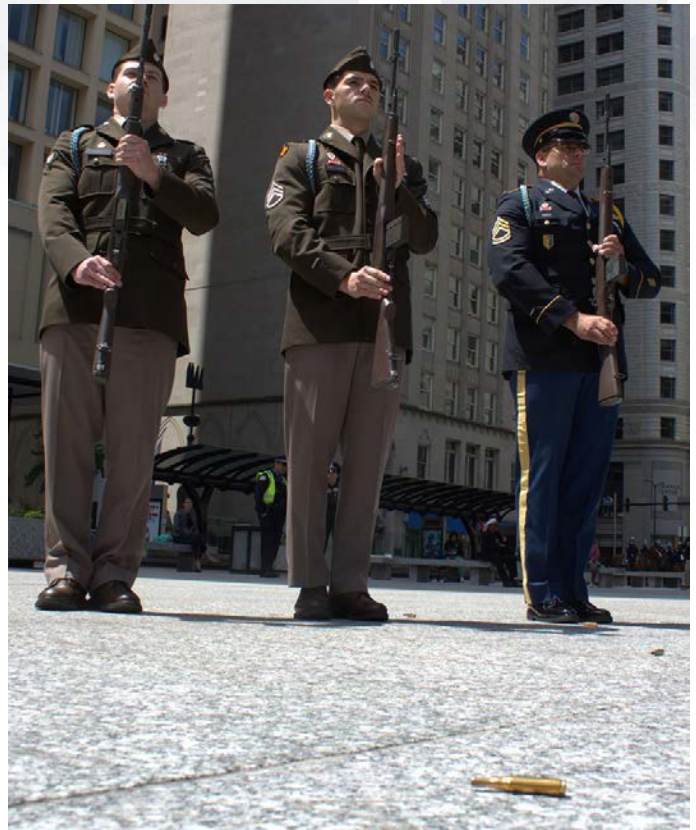
Illinois Army National Guard's Command Sgt. Maj. Gregory Triphahn and Master Sgt. Clinton Murphy graduated from the final phase of the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, on May 8. Triphahn is the command sergeant major of the 123rd Engineer Battalion. Murphy is the Retention, Education, Incentives NCOIC.

# Illinois National Guard Participates in Memorial Day Wreath Laying Ceremony in Chicago

Illinois National Guard Soldiers joined service members, civic leaders, veterans, Gold Star families, and members of the community during the city of Chicago's Memorial Day wreath laying ceremony at Daley Plaza on May 23.

The ceremony honored fallen service members and recognized the sacrifices made by military families through ceremonial wreath presentations, invocations, and participation from Chicago-area JROTC cadets. Musical support for the observance was provided by the 484th Army Band, U.S. Army Reserve, 88th Readiness Division. Illinois National Guard Soldiers from the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade also participated in the event alongside representatives from multiple branches of the U.S. Armed Forces.

**Spc. Richard Arnold, left, a squad designated marksman for Company B, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Staff Sgt. William Wallace, center, a squad leader for Company C, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, and Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Garza, a platoon sergeant with Company D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, present arms on May 23 in the Daley Plaza in Chicago. These soldiers performed a three-volley salute as part of Chicago's Memorial Day observance.**



**Jean Harris, support coordinator for Illinois Survivor Outreach Services and Gold Star stepmother of Sgt. Joshua W. Harris, one of 34 Illinois National Guard members who have died in service to our country since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, speaks during the city of Chicago's Memorial Day wreath laying ceremony at Daley Plaza in Chicago May 23. Harris emphasized the importance of honoring fallen service members and supporting their families.**



Jean Harris, support coordinator for Illinois Survivor Outreach Services, walks alongside a member of the U.S. Marine Corps carrying a wreath honoring Gold Star families during the city of Chicago's Memorial Day wreath laying ceremony at Daley Plaza in Chicago May 23.



Illinois Army National Guard Chaplain (Maj.) Jeffery Nelson, delivers the invocation during the city of Chicago's Memorial Day wreath laying ceremony at Daley Plaza in Chicago May 23. Nelson offered prayers in remembrance of fallen service members and their families.

*U.S. Army photos by  
Sgt. G. Alejandro Valdes  
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*




Four ceremonial wreaths stand at Daley Plaza in Chicago May 23, 2026, during the city of Chicago's Memorial Day observance. The wreaths honored the United States of America, the Armed Forces of the United States, Gold Star families, and POW/MIA service members.

# Honoring Those Who Served, Sacrificed All

The Illinois National Guard joined veterans, service members, and community organizations in downtown Chicago for the city's Memorial Day parade on May 23, 2026.

Members of the historic 8th Infantry Illinois National Guard Association participated in the parade while sharing the legacy of the "Fighting 8th," the nation's first African American-led infantry regiment. Illinois National Guard Soldiers also supported the event by assisting with transportation and honoring those who served our nation.

From the sounds of the marching band to the stories carried by veterans riding through the city streets, Chicago's Memorial Day observance served as a reminder that freedom is never free. 



**Retired Staff Sgt. Kenneth Hubbard of Chicago, a member of the 8th Infantry Illinois National Guard Association, displays the organization's colors during Chicago's Memorial Day parade on May 23, 2026. (U.S. Army photos by Sgt. G. Alejandro Valdes, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**



**Vehicles carrying members of the 8th Infantry Illinois National Guard Association drive through downtown Chicago during the city's Memorial Day parade on May 23, 2026.**



Members of the 8th Infantry Illinois National Guard Association wave to spectators while participating in Chicago's Memorial Day parade on May 23.



Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Odarrell Pennington of Chicago speaks with an Illinois National Guard Soldier prior to the start of Chicago's Memorial Day parade.



Participants ride in military vehicles during Chicago's Memorial Day parade on May 23, 2026, honoring the legacy of the historic "Fighting 8th" Infantry Regiment.



Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Odarrell Pennington of Chicago, a member of the 8th Infantry Illinois National Guard Association, poses prior to the start of Chicago's Memorial Day parade.



Illinois Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ethan R. Connor of Huntley, Ill., is shown on deployment in 2023. Connor, a UH-60 pilot with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, has been named a recipient of the General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award. He is one of only four warrant officers across the entire force — including the regular Army, National Guard and Army Reserve — to receive the honor. (Courtesy photo.)

## Illinois Army National Guard Aviator Wins Gen. Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award

Illinois Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ethan R. Connor of Huntley, Ill., a UH-60 pilot with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, has been named a recipient of the General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award.

The Department of the Army announced the recipients recently, recognizing Connor as one of only four warrant officers across the entire force — including the regular Army, National Guard and Army Reserve — to receive the honor.

The General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award recognizes company-grade and warrant officers who demonstrate the ideals of “Duty, Honor, Country.” The award is intended to promote and sustain effective junior officer leadership across the service.

“Chief Warrant Officer 2 Connor

embodies the very best of the Illinois National Guard and the timeless ideals of duty, honor and country,” said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “His selection for this prestigious national award is a testament to his unwavering dedication to our state and nation. We are incredibly proud to have him in our ranks.”

Since commissioning, Connor has set the standard for junior Army aviators. He played an instrumental role during the initial operational testing and evaluation of the UH-60V airframe in 2022. Following the fielding, he deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in support of the Crisis Response Task Force - Aviation under Operation Inherent Resolve.



Illinois Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ethan R. Connor of Huntley, Ill., is shown prior to conducting a flyover of a Chicago Bears football game.



**Illinois Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ethan R. Connor of Huntley, Ill., is shown at the Dubai Air Show in 2023. Connor was in charge of the movement of aircraft for the air show.**

As a flight lead and mission planner, Connor enabled his company to accomplish more than 600 missions, transporting 900 passengers and 80,000 pounds of cargo. His efforts contributed to the completion of more than 1,800 accident-free flight hours, with more than 500 hours flown in imminent danger locations. Because of his work ethic and maturity, Connor was unanimously selected early in his career as a pilot in command and was later chosen to serve as an instructor pilot.

“Strong leadership at the junior level is the foundation of our Army’s readiness,” said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. “Connor has consistently demonstrated the technical expertise, tactical proficiency and genuine care for his soldiers that we expect from our premier aviators. He sets the standard for others to follow.”

Beyond combat deployments, Connor’s influence has reached the international stage. He was essential to several national objectives, including:

- The movement of aircraft in support of the 2023 Dubai Air Show.
- Executing joint training missions with Italian Typhoon fighters.
- Conducting local community engagement missions and static displays to strengthen civilian-military relationships.

Additionally, his attention to detail contributed to his battalion achieving readiness scores of 89% and 91% during Aviation Resource Management Surveys.

Commanders at every level have praised Connor’s ability to motivate his peers and subordinates. Drawing on his experience as a prior-enlisted Soldier, he has fostered a culture of resilience and a mission-first attitude within his unit.

“To be selected as one of only four warrant officers across the entire Army is an extraordinary achievement,” said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black, Command Chief Warrant Officer of the Illinois Army National Guard. “Connor represents the quiet professionalism, technical mastery and selfless service that define the Warrant Officer Corps. His commitment to mentoring his crews and ensuring

mission success makes him truly deserving of this honor.”

“CW2 Connor has set himself apart through hard work and self-study,” said Col. Jason Carter, Commander of the 65th Troop Command. “CW2 Connor worked diligently as a pilot and mission planner, enabling mission success for his company. He has earned the respect of his subordinates, peers, and superiors alike through his leadership and ability to form a cohesive team.”

“He dedicates himself to his duty as a United States Army Soldier, excelling at his role as a physically fit, intelligent and honorable Army aviator,” said Lt. Col. Zachary De Groot, Commander of the 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment. “He continually strives to make his crew members know that they are part of an essential team whenever they crew an aircraft, and that every voice and opinion matters.”

Connor was grateful to his mentors.

“I’d just like to thank all my first line leaders and commanders for showing me what great leadership looks like and giving me the opportunity to become a better soldier and aviator,” Connor said. “Thank you to all the Warrant Officers that I have been able to learn from throughout my career. I have had great mentors and roll models, and I am extremely appreciative of everything they have shown and taught me during my time as an Army Aviator.”

He was especially grateful for his supporting family. “Most importantly, thank you to my wife Jackie for supporting me through this journey. Through 11 years and two deployments, she has always been there for me, and I wouldn’t be where I am today if it wasn’t for her support,” he said.

The couple have two boys, 2-year-old Cameron and 1-year-old Elliot. Connor will be formally recognized during an award ceremony sponsored by the Chief of Staff of the Army at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. 🇺🇸

# Illinois National Guard's Director of Joint Staff Selected for Key Army Intelligence Role

Brig. Gen. Jorge Fonseca, the Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff, has been selected for the dual-hat assignment as the Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence (USAICoE) at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. The assignment is effective June 1, 2026.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, praised the selection.

"Brig. Gen. Fonseca is an authentic leader of character who has had success leading large, multi-national, joint, dynamic, and complex organizations," Boyd said. "His extensive experience and leadership are a natural fit for this critical role. This appointment not only recognizes his exceptional capabilities but also strengthens the partnership between the National Guard and the active-duty Army, enhancing our nation's intelligence enterprise."

The assignment is an additional duty responsibility for Fonseca, whose primary duties will remain with his state assignment in Illinois. This "Dual-Hat" assignment will remain in effect through May 31, 2028. As the Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence, Brig. Gen. Fonseca will work under Maj. Gen. Richard "Rick" Appelhans, the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence and Fort Huachuca.

"It is an incredible honor to return to the Intelligence Center of Excellence – this time as the Deputy Commanding General. At every echelon, I have witnessed the decisive impact of well-trained intelligence professionals. To now come full circle and help shape the next generation of leaders at the schoolhouse that helped shape me is both humbling and deeply meaningful. I look forward to investing in our Soldiers, Civilians, and Families, and ensuring our Intelligence Corps remains ready to dominate in an increasingly complex and contested



**Brig. Gen. Jorge Fonseca**

information environment." Fonseca said.

A veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, Fonseca has a distinguished career of over 30 years. He has held multiple leadership roles across the Intelligence Community and law enforcement. He previously made history as the first commander of U.S. Army Garrison Poland. In his civilian capacity, Fonseca serves as a sergeant with the Illinois State Police.

The U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence is the Army's school for professional training of military intelligence personnel. At Fort Huachuca, Arizona, it leads, trains, and equips Army Military Intelligence personnel.

This selection underscores the Illinois National Guard's commitment to developing leaders who can excel at both the state and national levels, contributing significantly to the joint force. 🇺🇸

# 126th ARW Hosts Air Force Academy Cadets

The 126th Air Refueling Wing recently hosted U.S. Air Force Academy cadets at Scott Air Force Base, giving future officers an inside look at logistics, maintenance, and mission readiness across the Total Force. Experiences like these help strengthen the next generation of military leaders through mentorship and hands-on learning opportunities. 🇺🇸

At right, United States Air Force Academy Cadets and Cadre toured the 126th Air Refueling Wing including the 126th Air Logistics Readiness Squadron May 21.



Above, U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Damon Handegan, right, 126th Maintenance Squadron, non-destructive inspection shop, describes the NDI process to U.S. Air Force Academy cadets at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 21.

Right, U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Brian Gorge, 126th Maintenance Squadron, right, propulsion, explains the power of the F-108 jet engine with U.S. Air Force Academy cadets at Scott Air Force, Illinois, May 21.



*U.S. Air National Guard photos  
by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison*

# Decatur Soldier Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel

The hard work and dedication of newly promoted Lt. Col. Russell Hayes was celebrated during a promotion ceremony at the Illinois National Guard Armory in Urbana May 29.

Hayes, of Decatur, joined the Illinois Army National Guard Aug. 11, 2011, serving in Company B, 634th Brigade Support Battalion. In March 2012, he graduated from federal Officer Candidate School and was commissioned a second lieutenant.

"This is a significant milestone in the career of a truly outstanding officer," said Col. Paul Metzдорff, the Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff. "He has taken on every critical role we have asked of you."

Metzдорff said throughout those roles, Hayes has demonstrated exceptional leadership and unwavering dedication leading to the promotion.

"Of 1,023 officers in the Illinois Army National Guard, only 72 are lieutenant colonels," Metzдорff said. "Of the 101 commissioned officers in the Active Guard and Reserve program, only 16 are lieutenant colonels. This is a tremendous accomplishment to stand here today as you are promoted."

Hayes, the executive officer of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, has served in a variety of leadership and staff positions, including previously serving as the executive officer to the ILARNG Chief of Staff.

"In the Army, no one reaches the rank of lieutenant colonel alone," said Hayes. "I have been incredibly fortunate to serve alongside some of the greatest officers, noncommissioned officers, and warrant officers in the Illinois National Guard."

Metzдорff thanked Hayes'



**Newly promoted Lt. Col. Russell Hayes, his wife, Katelynn and mother Angie watch as Hayes' oldest son, Briggs removes the major rank from his uniform.**



**Angie Hayes, mother of newly promoted Lt. Col. Russell Hayes, places his new rank on his uniform during a promotion ceremony May 29.**

family, including wife, Katelynn, and two sons, Briggs and Crew.

“A successful military career is not accomplished alone. It is a team effort,” Metzdorff said. “A special thanks to his family, especially Kate and their two sons, for their incredible support.”

Metzдорff also thanked Hayes’ parents.

“Thank you for raising a son who has so honorably dedicated himself to a life of service,” Metzдорff said. “This promotion is thoroughly deserved. It is a recognition of past achievements, but also a testament to the immense confidence we as senior leaders have in you.”

Hayes also thanked his parents for their support.

“Today would not have been possible without you,” he said. “You have been at every game, every school event, military ceremony, and you continue that tradition with my boys. That commitment to our lives cannot be overstated. You gave me true values, resiliency, unconditional support and love that has allowed me to reach this milestone today.”

Hayes had a special message for his sons.

“No matter where the military takes me, it is the greatest honor of my life to be your father,” he said. “You will always be my motivation to be a better person, father, husband, and Soldier.”

Lastly, Hayes thanked his wife, Katelynn.

“Supporting a military member is an extremely difficult task,” he said. “I’ve missed too many milestones in our marriage, and you have continued to support me. Thank you for your encouragement and for keeping me grounded.” 🇺🇸

**Col. Paul Metzдорff, Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff, administers the oath of office to newly promoted Lt. Col. Russell Hayes, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team executive officer and officer-in-charge, during a promotion ceremony May 29.**



**Newly promoted Lt. Col. Russell Hayes delivers remarks to family, friends, and fellow Soldiers during a promotion ceremony May 29 at the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team’s headquarters in Urbana.**



# 'Rockstar' Chief Warrant Officer Retires After Successful 25 Years of Military Service

The year was 2000. The original I-Pod was introduced. Dial up internet was all the rage. The average price for a gallon of gas was \$1.52, MySpace didn't exist yet, and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jennifer Rosa enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard.

Rosa's 25 years of military service was celebrated with family, friends, and fellow service members at a retirement ceremony at the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's headquarters in Urbana June 5.

"Twenty-five years in any career doesn't happen by mistake," said Maj. William Troccoli, the 33rd IBCT's administrative officer. "Today is a special day and arguably one of the most important events in any Soldier's career - retirement."

Rosa enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in December 2000 as an intelligence analyst and later reclassified as a Human Resources Soldier. She has served in many capacities throughout her career, including her final position as the 33rd's Human Resources technician, a position she's held since 2018.

"She has truly come up through the ranks as a Soldier," Troccoli said. "She enlisted as a Private First Class, rising to the rank of Master Sergeant before receiving an appointment as a Warrant Officer in 2019. She is ending her successful career as a Chief Warrant Officer 3 in the largest brigade in the Illinois Army National Guard."

Troccoli said Rosa has been the muscle behind five large brigade mobilizations to the Middle East as well as numerous overseas training missions and state activations.



**Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jennifer Rosa, the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's Human Resources technician, thanks family, friends, and fellow Soldiers for their support throughout her 25 years of service with the Illinois Army National Guard during a retirement ceremony June 5 at the brigade headquarters in Urbana. (U.S. Army photos by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**

In 2026, Rosa received the Colonel Robert L. Manning award from the Adjutant General Corps' Regimental Association for her contributions and influence on the Corps' mission. Manning was the 29th Chief of the Adjutant General's Corps, Commandant of the Adjutant General School, Chief of Army Bands, and President of the Adjutant General's Corps Regimental Association. The AGCRA Achievement Medal was renamed after Manning in 2013 to recognize his significant contributions to the Association.

"The award was well deserved,"

Troccoli said.

He thanked Rosa's family, including her husband, Leosvaldo, daughter, Alana, and sons, Paolo and Sebastian, for allowing the Illinois Army National Guard to borrow Rosa for the past 25 years.

"To her parents, Sandra and David, Chief is a rockstar," he said. "I am sure you are very proud of her accomplishments."

Lt. Col. Russell Hayes, the 33rd's officer in charge and executive officer, also thanked Rosa's family.

"The military asks a great deal of our servicemembers, but it demands as much from our families," Hayes said. "From deployments, long training missions, and late-night telephone calls, our families keep the homefront secure. Thank you for your unwavering support and congratulations on having Jennifer back."

Hayes said Rosa has had a successful career.

"The Illinois Army National Guard has 9,950 Soldiers with about 10 percent of that serving in the Active Guard and Reserve Program," Hayes said. "Of those 49 rise to the rank of Master Sergeant. And only 22 Warrant Officers serve in the AGR program."

Hayes said Rosa is one of the best warrant officers he has worked with during his career.

"She embodies everything a Warrant officer is, a subject matter expert and a professional," he said. "It is safe to say she has had a positive impact on thousands of Soldiers during her 25 years of service."

Hayes thanked Rosa for her service.

“As you hang up the uniform and begin this next chapter of your life, know the impact you have had on Soldiers will be felt long after you walk out the door,” he said.

Troccoli said Rosa’s retirement on the eve of the 82nd anniversary of D-Day wasn’t by happenstance.

“This painting of the beach landings behind me here on the wall perfectly represents what the D-Day experience must have felt like for those Soldiers – the unknown, the fear, and above all else, the determination to accomplish the mission,” he said. “Chief as you approach the eve of your own unknown and fearful journey into retirement, I have no doubt you will do wonderful things as you step into your next chapter.”

Rosa said the ceremony wasn’t only a celebration of her military career, but it signifies the closing of one chapter and the beginning of another.

“The first chapter began before I was born,” Rosa said, noting her mother, Sandra Rivera served in the Illinois National Guard before transitioning to the U.S. Air Force active component in the early 1980s. “My father was active-duty Air Force before transitioning to the New York National Guard where he retired after more than 20 years of active service.”

Rosa noted the proximity of the Northwest Armory in Chicago and her participation in the Army JROTC in High School was probably part of the reason she enlisted in the Army.

“Even after attending JROTC camp in 1999 at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, I still enlisted in the Army,” she said.

She said despite Troccoli’s glowing review, her military career wasn’t perfect.

“I won’t say it was marred by imperfections, but marked by humanity,” she said. “There may have been some personal obstacles

that diverted attention but that’s just how it goes sometimes.”

Rosa pointed out that less than one percent of the U.S. population is actively serving in any component of the military.

“Of that one percent, less than 20 percent are women and less than 10 percent of women make it to retirement,” she said. “Based on those statistics, two one hundredths of a percent of the general population are women military retirees. I’ve been fortunate to know some of those women and now I’m honored to join them.”

Rosa said 25 years in any one organization is a long time.

“I don’t have the rest of my life

figured out yet, but I know there is a rest of my life,” she said. “I want the rest of my life to start as soon as possible.”

Rosa said people see one Soldier retire, but they don’t see the family who served alongside that Soldier. Rosa took the time to thank her family for their support.

“To my husband, my true north, thank you for every sacrifice, every adjustment, every time you carried the load so I could do my job. I love you,” she said. “To my children, I give you a compass as a reminder that while my military journey is ending, your journey is just beginning. Wherever life takes you, lead with courage and integrity.”



**Lt. Col. Russell Hayes, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team executive officer, presents a certificate of appreciation to Leosvaldo Rosa, the husband of Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jennifer Rosa, in honor of his support of his spouse during her military service during a retirement ceremony June 5 at the brigade headquarters in Urbana. Rosa retired from the Illinois Army National Guard after 25 years of service, the last seven years as a Warrant Officer.**

**THE PRAIRIE SENTINEL  
1301 NORTH MACARTHUR BOULEVARD  
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS 62702**

**DSN: 555-3569  
PHONE: (217) 761-3569  
FAX: (217) 761-2988**

**THE PRAIRIE SENTINEL IS THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ILLINOIS NATIONAL  
GUARD AUTHORIZED BY THE  
ADJUTANT GENERAL.**

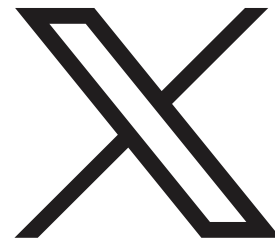
**DEADLINES:**

**STORY AND PHOTO SUBMISSIONS ARE DUE THE 1ST OF EACH MONTH TO  
NG.IL.ILARNG.LIST.STAFF-PAO@ARMY.MIL**

**CONNECT WITH THE ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD:**



<https://www.facebook.com/illinoisnationalguard/>



[https://twitter.com/IL\\_Natl\\_Guard](https://twitter.com/IL_Natl_Guard)



[www.il.ngb.army.mil](http://www.il.ngb.army.mil)

**DOWNLOAD THE NEW APP:**



**Apple App  
Store**



**Google Play**