

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

PRAIRIE SENTINEL

VOLUME 14

**A DREAM COME TRUE:
BRIG. GEN. ROBERTSON RETIRES AFTER
41 YEARS OF SERVICE**

**GRIDEX VI: ILLINOIS TAKES PART IN NATIONAL-
LEVEL TABLETOP**

**HOLIDAY REMEMBRANCE: GOVERNOR'S GOLD
STAR TREE LIGHTING**

HOLIDAY 2021

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

[Click on a title to jump to the full story](#)

FEATURES

Making the Grade p. 6

Former school teacher Mark Alessia is promoted to brigadier general.

Stepping Stones p. 8

LCA's Workforce Initiative gives cadets a step toward the future.

Keeping the Faith p. 12

Chaplain (Col.) Timothy Liable retires after 30 years continues to serve as Vicar General.

Prepping for the Worst p. 14

The Illinois Guard participates in GridEx VI.

A Dream Come True p. 20

Brig. Gen. William Robertson retires after 41 years of service.

STAPLES

Take it from the Top p. 3

The Illinois National Guard Senior leaders share their thanks in a holiday letter to the field.

Highlighting Diversity p. 4

Military service grants opportunity for U.S. citizenship.

This Day in History p. 40

Highlighting important dates in the Illinois National Guard's history and remembering our Fallen Heroes

PHOTO SPREADS

Welcome Home p. 10

The 1970th QM Co. returns from a year on the Southwest Border.

Armor Class p. 18

Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd joins the Polish Land Forces in Idaho for M1 Abrams training.

A Little Promotion p. 24

Jakob Little is promoted to master sergeant by his father, Maj. Gen. Eric Little.

Holiday Remembrance p. 25

The 182nd Airlift Wing travels to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to assist with transporting Afghan refugees.

A Date Which Will

Live In Infamy p. 28

Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia joins veterans at Elks Lodge 158 to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Pearl Harbor



PHOTO SPREADS (cont.)

For Their Honor p. 35

12 Soldiers earn their Honor Guard tabs at Funeral and Honors certification course.

From the Top p. 38

An Illinois Soldier is honored by the Chief of Staff for the U.S. Army at this year's Army-Navy football game.

Rare Air p. 39

Congratulations to the winners of this year's Airmen of the Year at each Wing.

NEWS

Legal Eagle p. 5

Col. Marty Green takes a position with Air Mobility Command.

Pleasant Hill Soldier makes first sergeant p. 19

Joseph "Jay" Arnold is promoted to first sergeant.

HQANG earns Air Force Outstanding Unit Award p. 26

HQANG Earns 3rd AOUA.

182nd AW earns Air Force Outstanding Unit Award p. 30

182nd AW Earns 10th AOUA.

LCA graduates 90 cadets p. 32

LCA class 50-21 celebrates graduation.

126th ARW earns Air Force Outstanding Unit Award p. 35

126th ARW earns 10th AOUA

Mechanicsburg Soldier presented Illinois Medal of Merit p. 37

Command Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Lester Edwards is honored for more than 40 years of service.

Chicago Soldier retires after 20 years of service p. 37

Maj. Aaron Tordy retires after 20 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard.

DeKalb Soldier celebrates more than 30 years p. 36

Col. Jose Jaques celebrates more than 30 years of service during his retirement ceremony.

Take it From the Top:

Senior Leaders' Corner

A Holiday Message from the Illinois National Guard's Senior Leaders

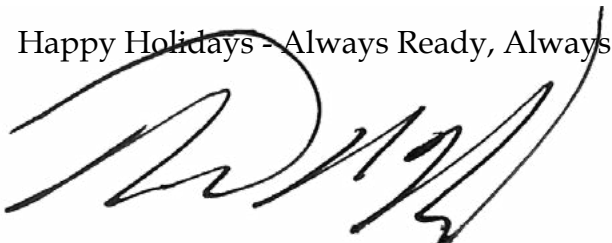
To the Soldiers, Airmen, Civilians, and Families of the Illinois National Guard and the Illinois Department of Military Affairs:

Thank-you for your extraordinary work this past year. The Illinois National Guard once again excelled. More than 1,600 of you helped administer almost 1.9 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. Over 1,000 of you provided security either in Washington, D.C. or our state capital. Over 450 deployed CONUS and OCONUS in support of our federal mission. Many more participated in exercises both in the U.S. and overseas. You kept your individual readiness up and helped the Illinois National Guard lead the nation in many categories in both the Army and Air Force.


We are grateful for each of you. Please continue to care for yourself and your teammates. The holidays can be difficult - rarely does reality match the idyllic scene of a Hallmark card. The Illinois Guard has high standards and strives to continually improve. It is important that we also embrace the imperfection of ourselves and others - it is what makes us human.

Take the time to check on your teammates. If you or one of our teammates are struggling, let the leadership know. There are resources that can assist. The Illinois National Guard senior leadership will be visiting as many units as possible over December and we look forward to talking to as many of you as we can.


Happy Holidays - Always Ready, Always There!




RICHARD R. NEELY, Major General, ANG
The Adjutant General for Illinois
Commander, Illinois National Guard




DENA D. BALLOWE, ARNG
Command Sergeant Major
Senior Enlisted Adviser - Illinois National Guard




PETER NEZAMIS,
Major General, ANG
Assistant Adjutant General - Air



JENNIFER I. AURORA,
Chief Master Sergeant, ANG
Command Chief Master Sergeant - Air



RODNEY C. BOYD
Brigadier General, ILARNG
Assistant Adjutant General - Army



MICHAEL R. BEHARY
Command Sergeant Major, ILARNG
State Command Sergeant Major

HIGHLIGHTING DIVERSITY

Citizenship through Service: *Military service offers a path to U.S. citizenship*

SPRINGFIELD, ILL.

- If you have service member(s) that are interested in becoming a U.S. citizen, they may be eligible to apply for naturalization under special provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). Typically under a period of peacetime, there is a requirement to have at least one year of honorable service to apply; however, since we are currently serving during a period of armed conflict the one year is waived. Just by completing Basic Military Training a service member may be eligible.

To apply applicant must complete Form N-400. Link to Form N-400: <https://www.uscis.gov/n-400>. The applicant must also complete Form N-426 with a wet signature by the first O-6 in the applicant's chain-of-command. <https://www.uscis.gov/n-426>. Mail the completed application and all required materials to:

USCIS
P.O. Box 4446
Chicago, IL 60680-4446

USCIS will review the application and conduct required security checks, which include obtaining the fingerprints of the applicant. Fingerprints can be done at an immigration office or in one of the following ways:

- If the applicant was fingerprinted for a previous immigration application, then



immigration will use these fingerprints, if available.

- If stationed abroad, the applicant may submit two properly completed FD-258 fingerprint cards and two passport-style photos taken by the military police or officials with the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. embassy, or U.S. consulate.
- If you have questions regarding your biometrics, the applicant can contact the Military Help Line at 877-CIS-4MIL (877-247-4645, TTY: 800-877-8339) or <https://militaryinfo@uscis.dhs.gov>.

Applicants are allowed to submit their fingerprints at an application support center before they file their Form N-400. Applicant needs to ensure they submit their A-Number and show their unexpired military ID card or Delayed Entry Program ID card.

USCIS will review the application and send it to a USCIS field office to schedule an interview for the applicant. The applicant can request an interview at a specific office in a cover letter attached to the initial application or leave the choice of location to USCIS.

The field office will schedule the applicant interview to review eligibility for naturalization and test the applicant's knowledge of English and civics. If USCIS find that the applicant is eligible for naturalization, they will inform applicant of the date you can take the Oath of Allegiance and become a U.S. citizen.

If you have any additional questions on the process, please reach out to Capt. Alexander Alderson at (217) 761-3070 or alexander.d.alderson.mil@army.mil.

Legal Eagle:

Illinois Air National Guard SJA begins new assignment at Air Mobility Command

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – An Illinois Air National Guard colonel recently began a three-year National Guard assignment with Air Mobility Command at Scott Air Force Base.

Illinois Air National Guard Col. John “Marty” Green, of Springfield, was selected following a nationwide application and selection process as the Air National Guard Assistant to the Staff Judge Advocate for Air Mobility Command.

As a civilian attorney, Green works as the vice president of the Illinois Certified Public Accountant Society in Springfield. He will serve in Air Mobility Command’s position as a traditional National Guard officer in addition to serving as the Illinois Air National Guard’s State Staff Judge Advocate.

“Air Mobility Command is part of our Illinois Air National Guard community and I feel very fortunate to be selected for this three-year assignment,” Green, a 24-year veteran of the Illinois Air National Guard, said.

Green, who has served as the Illinois Air National Guard’s State Staff Judge Advocate for the past 13 years, said he will advise and assist Air Mobility Command Staff Judge Advocate Col. Matthew Jarreau on legal matters pertaining to the Air National Guard.

“There are 37 Air Guard wings within Air Mobility Command, so the Air National Guard is intertwined in the Air Mobility Command mission,” Green said. “Those wings comprise

approximately 30 percent of the total Air Mobility Command operational units.”

Two of the 37 Air Guard wings are part of the Illinois National Guard – the 126th Air

Refueling Wing based at Scott Air Force Base and the 182nd Airlift Wing based in Peoria.

This is Green’s second national duty assignment. He previously served as the state headquarters’ liaison for the Air National Guard Judge Advocate Council.

He said the work he and Judge Advocates from the 54 other states and territories did during the early months of the pandemic highlighted the important work of the National Guard in providing support to civil authorities and ensured the National Guard

Airmen and Soldiers were operating within proper legal frameworks.

For the past 13 years Green has served as the ILANG’s State Staff Judge Advocate and has agreed to continue that role until the return of his replacement from an out-of-state assignment.

Green said the Air National Guard is intertwined in Air Mobility Command’s mission and he’s looking forward to the part-time, traditional Guard assignment.

“I’ve hit the ground running in the new assignment,” he said.

Green is married and has two college-age children.





MAKING THE GRADE:

Former school teacher promoted to brigadier general, says 'chance meetings' led to career in the National Guard

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

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –Mark Alessia of Sherman, who taught middle school mathematics and history for a half dozen years after graduating from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, was promoted to brigadier general on Saturday, Nov. 6, on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Brig. Gen. Alessia was appointed as the Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff in October and is responsible for the integration and coordination of Illinois National Guard capabilities in support of homeland defense and support to civil authorities. He has worked full-time for the Illinois National Guard since 2002.

“Brigadier General Alessia has had challenging, difficult assignments,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “Most recently, as Chief of the Joint Staff, he, along with (former Director of the

Joint Staff Major General) Mark Jackson, led us through the COVID-19 response.”

Illinois led the nation during the COVID-19 immunization mission, administering nearly 1.9 million doses throughout the state, Neely said. Alessia also helped oversee five civil disturbance missions. “It had been 52 years since the Illinois National Guard had

responded to a civil disturbance and then we had five in the span of one year.”

Alessia has excelled at each level of command including the Illinois Army National Guard’s Recruiting and Retention Battalion, the 106th Cavalry Squadron and the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. As

commander of the 33rd IBCT, he led the unit through a successful Joint Readiness Training Center rotation. The 33rd IBCT was also the second National Guard unit to support the Pacific Pathways exercise during Alessia’s tenure, Neely said. He also served as the Illinois



Army National Guard Chief of Staff prior to becoming the Chief of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff.

Alessia said “chance meetings and chance decisions” led to a successful career in the Illinois Army National Guard. He went down the wrong hallway when he was signing up for university classes and ran into an Illinois National Guard officer assigned to the university, who asked him how he was going to pay for school and if he had ever heard of the National Guard.

“At the time, I really didn’t know about the National Guard and what it was all about,” Alessia said. That conversation led to him enlisting in 1992 as an Infantryman in the Illinois National Guard and eventually staying in the Army’s ROTC program at the university. At the time, Alessia had no idea that this chance meeting would end up changing his entire life.

Alessia said he was humbled by the promotion to brigadier general and thankful for the officers and senior noncommissioned officers who helped mentor and coach him throughout his career. He served under Maj. Gen. Jackson’s leadership in multiple positions for over 29 years at the company, battalion, brigade and Joint Staff levels. Alessia referred to the importance of having mentors and leaders similar to Maj. Gen. Jackson that helped guide him throughout his career. He encouraged others to seek a mentor if they did not have one and also for others to make themselves available to mentor junior Soldiers and officers.

Alessia has deployed overseas three times; to Kuwait from 2000 to 2001, to Germany in 2002, and to Afghanistan supporting Polish Task Force White Eagle in 2009. He said

there were many “serious moments” during these deployments, but he is thankful for the camaraderie and the bonds developed with his fellow Soldiers.



He said he is forever grateful to Jennifer and their children; Max, Nate and Jasper, for their support of his military career. His parents, Ben and Mary, have supported “me in everything I’ve ever wanted to do,” he said, although Ben may have harbored some misgivings about his son’s decision to join the Army.

Ben was drafted into the Army during the Vietnam War and served in Europe, however, he left the military as soon as his enlistment expired.

Neely said the newly promoted brigadier general leads with honesty, intelligence and hard work.

“What many people don’t see is all the ‘what-if’ drills that Mark leads with the services as potential missions arise,” Neely said.

All that “war-gaming” helps ensure the Illinois National Guard is ready should any of those missions come to fruition and also ensures the Illinois National Guard can give civilian leaders a straightforward honest assessment of the National Guard’s capabilities, Neely said.



Alessia holds a bachelor of science degree in elementary education from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and a master of science degree

in adult and continuing education from Kansas State University. He is a distinguished graduate of the U.S. Army War College, where he earned a master of arts degree in strategic studies. He is a qualified Infantry officer, Chemical officer and Adjutant General Corps officer and has successfully completed assignments in each of these three branches.

STEPPING STONES:

LCA Workforce Initiative gives cadets a step toward the future

By Michael Camacho, Lincoln's Challenge Academy Public Affairs



RANTOUL, III. -Lincoln's ChalleNge Academy is reaching beyond academics and offering its cadets vocational job skills and certifications that can help put them on the path to a bright future.

"For nearly 30 years LCA has helped develop young men and women to be a better version of themselves with a focus on education and discipline," said LCA Director Michael Haerr of Eureka, Illinois. "And while we stay true to that, LCA is a life-skills program, not just a place to get a GED. If we can provide the skills and training they need to find employment and future careers, we can make a greater impact on who they can become."

Candy Arnold, LCA's placement department supervisor, said the Workforce Initiative provides cadets with training that helps them find employment and exposes them to different careers. The academy has been working with community partners such as Parkland College and GAF Roofing Academy to train and certify cadets in food handling, forklift operating, roofing and welding.

LCA is a program administered by the Illinois National Guard for Illinois youth ages 16-18 who have dropped out of high school. It begins with a 5-month residential life-skills program in a quasi-military environment on the academy's campus on the former Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois. The residential phase is followed by a year-long mentoring program.

This past week, five cadets with LCA's Class 56-21 attended the last of five introduction to welding classes at Parkland's Applied Technology Center in Champaign, Illinois. Of the approximately 90 cadets graduating from the academy's 5-month residential phase on Oct. 30, 20 will be starting employment in their communities using the tools and skills learned during their time as cadets in the academy.

Arnold said LCA has plans to provide training in certified nursing assistance, more advanced thermo-compressive welding; heating, ventilation and air conditioning; vehicle operation and more.

"We are continuing to expand what we offer. This gives cadets more ways to prosper once

they complete the program,” said Arnold. “The academy is a stepping stone. We want to do everything we can to get them ready for their futures and help them find their career paths.”

Arnold’s department helps cadets in the residential program find jobs, develop life plans, and explore career and secondary education paths. The department also teaches financial literacy and interview skills and helps cadets develop resumes. Placement also tracks the education and career achievement of graduates during the one-year post-residential program.

“Even within the last few classes since the workforce initiative officially started we have seen past cadets finding employment in the different trades and skilled labor,” Arnold said. “Being able to provide job skills training, both soft and hands-on, makes our cadets better suited for the workforce.”

Arnold said the GAF roofing class is one of the most popular vocational electives. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that jobs for skilled roofers will grow by 12 percent by 2028. Right now, roofers typically earn at starting wage of more than \$19 per hour.

“GAF Roofing Academy has been amazing to work with,” said Arnold. “Most of it is all hands-on and the cadets get to see what they can accomplish. They learn so much about roofing and receive a certification through GAF that makes them job-ready for a roofing company. We have several cadets who are looking into related fields and careers after



attending the roofing training.”

While the academy still helps its cadets acquire a GED, it is also helping provide a path back to high school for several cadets. The academy’s “credit recovery” program helps cadets recover high school credits lost when they dropped out. Seven cadets recovered enough credits to return to high school this month. One cadet recovered enough credits to earn her high school diploma from Urbana’s Regional Board of Education District 7.

“We are helping our cadets find their inner strength and a path to success that works for them,” Haerr said. “That might be the additional opportunities offered by a GED, it might be earning a high school diploma or it might be learning some valuable vocational job skills. This program is all about helping these young men and women find a path that works for them and helping them stay on that path. We believe in second chances.”

For more information on LCA’s Workforce Initiative and education opportunities please contact the LCA Admissions Department at 1-800-851-2166.

Welcome Home!

The 1970th QM Co. returns after a year on the border

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

Friends, family and senior leaders of the Illinois National Guard welcome home Soldiers from the 1970th Quartermaster Company based in North Riverside, Illinois, Nov. 5, 2021, during a ceremony at the North Riverside Armory. Soldiers of the 1970th returned from a nearly yearlong deployment in support of operations on the southwest border.

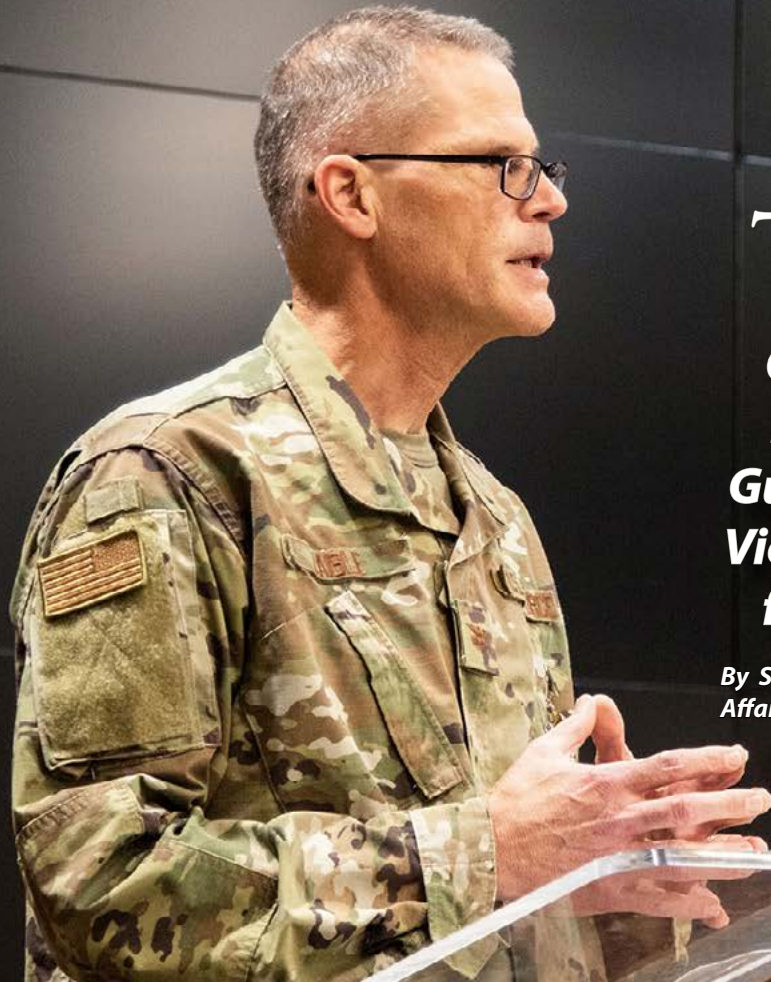




KEEPING THE FAITH

Chaplain (Col.) Jeffrey Laible retires from the Air National Guard, but continues to serve as Vicar General to the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA

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



SPRINGFIELD, Ill. - When Jeffrey Laible entered the Air Force Chaplain's Candidate program in 1985, he answered a calling, his calling, and the call to serve a greater good. Laible answered that calling for 36 years, retiring early in October.

"The book of Ecclesiastes says there's a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens," said Laible during his retirement ceremony. "It's my time now to open a new chapter in my life and make way for the next generation."

During his time in uniform, he climbed to the rank of colonel, starting after seminary and commissioning

into the Air Force Reserves in 1990 as a Roman Catholic chaplain. Early in his career, he served as a chaplain at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, and Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas. Before transferring to the Illinois National Guard's 183rd Wing in 1999, Chaplain Laible served as a chaplain recruiter and the Assistant Director for the Air Force Chaplain Candidate Program.

Maj. Gen. Peter Nezamis, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, Illinois National Guard, said that he was proud to have served with such a selfless leader.

"Jeff is the very definition of the





he said. "I love serving, but it's time. If I were 10 years younger, I'd keep going."

Laible said serving the Airmen and Soldiers of the Illinois National Guard and the reserves throughout his career has been his favorite experience.

Though he may be hanging up his uniform, Chaplain Laible will continue to serve those in uniform. In June, he was selected to be the Vicar General to the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA.

"I was sitting at home and the phone rang," Laible recalled. "The caller I.D. said 'Washington D.C.' and I thought, 'I should answer that.' It ended up being Archbishop Timothy Broglio and he asked if I would be his Vicar. I couldn't turn him down."

He reached out to his diocese in Peoria, Illinois, and they released him to serve as the Vicar General.

As the Vicar General, Laible serves as a sort of chief of staff to the Archbishop. He's responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operation of the Archdiocese in its service to 1.8 million Catholic servicemembers, veterans and their families worldwide.

Laible said he's excited to serve as the Vicar General.

"It's like being called by a four-star general and being asked to work for him," said Laible. "It's incredibly exciting. I'll be serving about 1.8 million Catholics in the armed forces, the veteran's administration, the embassy, and all of their family members, it's a great opportunity."

minuteman," said Nezamis. "Jeff entered the Chaplain Candidate Program in '85 and since his commission has traveled from California to Arkansas, to Germany and everywhere else serving the Air Force and his country, and he always came back to guide his own flock as an ordained priest here in Illinois."

After transferring to Illinois, Chaplain Laible served in various positions, including Wing Chaplain for the 183rd Wing. Chaplain Laible also served on the Joint Task Force while at the 183rd. Most recently, he served as the Air National Guard Assistant to the Command Chaplain, North American Aerospace Defense Command, and U.S. Northern Command, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado.

"It's not often you can say that someone touched servicemembers in every branch," said Nezamis. "Chaplain Laible did just that, though. After his first deployment in 2004, he deployed five more times to Germany between 2005 and 2011 to serve as chaplain to the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center."

Nezamis said during that time, he visited Landstuhl and was touched by Laible's dedication to everyone there.

"Jeff chose to go back multiple times to minister those at the hospital," said Nezamis. "He counseled the wounded Soldiers, Airmen, Marines, Sailors, and even Coast Guard Sailors and civilians. Through his ministry and chaplaincy he's touched hundreds, if not thousands of lives."

Laible said he's enjoyed serving, but it's time to go.

"It's been great and a wonderful experience,"



Prepping for the Worst: GridEx VI

The Illinois National Guard participates in national-level preparedness exercise.

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

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – It's mid-summer in the Midwest; soaring temperatures and oppressive humidity are the norm. Most people are used to it, and most of the time, the power grid can handle the increased load from millions of air conditioners droning through the heat.

As people go about their day a few rural co-op power companies start experiencing outages. It's nothing abnormal, just a small overload on the power grid. Then, it happens, for what seems to be an unknown reason, the area's largest supplier of power goes down, millions of people lose power. There hasn't been a storm, or an event that's caused the outage, but it's spreading from one part of the grid to the next. The power companies are scrambling to fix the issue, but the harder they work, the faster it seems the grid is failing, more cities, counties, and eventually entire states in the region lose power. There's no estimation for resolve as more and more areas of the grid fail.

As the Midwest begins to go dark, the same thing seems to be happening around the country. The outages last for days, then stretch to weeks. As things move forward, the power companies trace the original issue to a cyber-attack in a vulnerable part of the grid that spread to the rest of the region paired with physical attacks



on not just the electrical grid, but other utilities within the infrastructure.

It sounds like the plot of a Hollywood disaster-thriller, but this is what the scenario looks like for GridEx VI, a multi-agency, multi-state national exercise that is designed to bring together local, state, regional and national agencies to discuss and plan for events that

affect the United States' critical infrastructure.

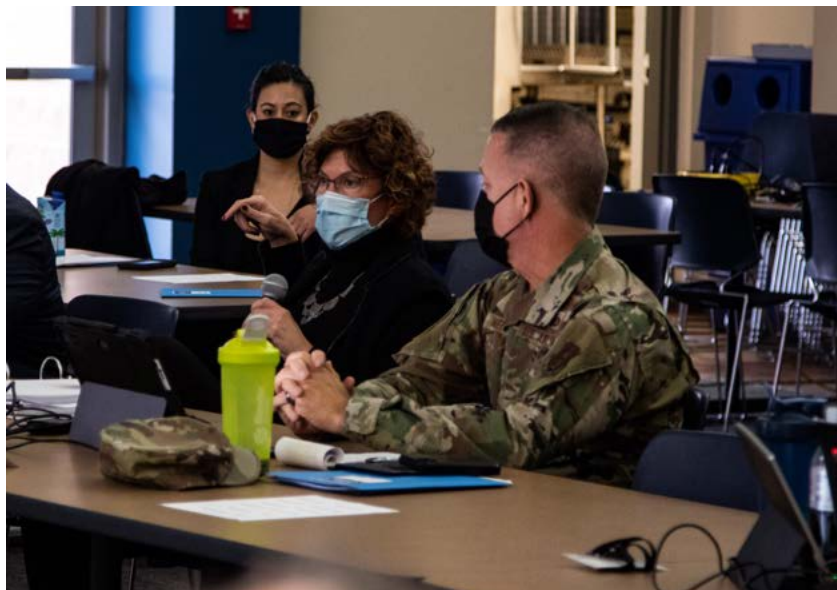
Initially conceived as a tabletop exercise to strengthen coordination between the electricity industry and government to prepare for a response to cyber incidents, the exercise





has grown to be the largest sector-specific functional exercise that simulates complex attack scenarios designed to overwhelm even the most prepared utilities and participant organizations to prepare for a potential real event or crisis. This year's GridEx had more than 700 planners take part nationally either in-person or virtually.

Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General for Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, said GridEx is impressive in the way it takes a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to examining what would happen



if there were a major outage on the country's critical infrastructure.

Though GridEx sounds like a super high-tech cyber exercise, Neely said it's more than that. It may have a distinct cyber feel and focus, he said, but it's also about physical attacks and the second and third order effects that losing part of the national grid could have.

"It's really an educational experience for all of the organizations involved," he said. "It's not just what we, as part of the Illinois Public Safety Team, would do, but what the other local and national agencies would do and where we have parallel lines of effort and where we all fit in the response."

Neely said Illinois was one of four states selected to join the fray at GridEx this year along with Pennsylvania, Utah and Connecticut. He said this year's exercise also included a slew of state and federal agencies both in-person and virtually across the country.

Dominick Saebeler, a fellow with the Information Institute of Trust at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, and an observer, controller and trainer for the exercise said the whole idea of practicing together is a "big thing."

"You've got to get together and learn what you don't know," he said. "The worst things are the things we don't know we don't know and the best way to find what those things are is to throw the ball out and see if you can figure them out and strengthen where your weaknesses are."

Saebeler said exercises like this give teams an opportunity to test what they have in plans and scrutinize what they're doing with no impact to the "real world." He said the two-day exercise isn't really the end of the discussion.

"GridEx is really more than



these two days. The days here with other organizations like the Illinois Commerce Commission, the Department of Homeland Security and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency give the teams an opportunity to collaborate and take what they learn back to develop better plans.”

James Harmening, Director of Cybersecurity and Risk Management at the Illinois Commerce Commission, one of the regulatory bodies for the publicly owned utilities companies, says it’s natural for the ICC to be involved in an exercise like this.

“During any declared emergency, we have a liaison that sits at IEMA for the duration,” said Harmening. “That liaison can go directly to the commercial utilities and share information back and forth and this exercise is a prime opportunity to test our liaisons and get the right processes in place in case something does happen.”



Harmening said even though we learn from what we do after a response, it’s always good to practice for the “what ifs.”

“In exercises like this, the rules are more flexible, scenarios come fast and you have the opportunity to respond to changing situations on the fly and include those changes in your planning process.”

Harmening said having the opportunity to network with other partners was also one of the major benefits of having exercises like GridEx.

Alicia Tate-Nadeau, Director of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, said exercises like GridEx are critical for the state. She said it allows the state to take a whole of government approach when responding to an event.



“During a response, it’s not just IEMA or the National Guard,” she said. “It’s all of the state, federal, local and county organizations that respond too. Events like this are critical to exercise our plans and build relationships with the other organizations that are part of the response.”

Tate-Nadeau said building the working relationships is the most critical aspect of an event like GridEx.

“It’s like we always say, the last thing you want to be doing during an emergency is handing out business cards,” she said. “All of this is about relationships and understanding who has what capabilities and when they can be brought to bear and where there are gaps and seams are so we can close them.”

Tate-Nadeau said large-scale exercises

like this allow organizations to see how their plans come together at a multi-echelon level. She said it's not just understanding the things happening at the local and tactical level, but where your plan fits within the federal government's response as well. She added GridEx

demonstrates the cascading events of a large-scale grid outage and how to better use critical resources to reduce additional missions.

Tate-Nadeau expressed gratitude to the local, state and federal organizations for their support throughout the exercise.

"If we learned anything from COVID, it's that none of us do it alone," she said. "For all that we do, the men and women of the National Guard are a huge part of it. Looking back at the last three years with the longest flood in Illinois history coupled with COVID right on its heels, the Illinois National Guard has been there every step of the way helping the state and the citizens of Illinois and the state is thankful for our men and women in uniform."

Col. Shawn Strahle, the Chief Information Officer and director of Information Technology for the Illinois National Guard said he was humbled and



impressed Illinois was selected to participate in this year's GridEx.

"We put our packet together in August with IEMA leading the charge and were one of the four states selected to take part, it's quite an achievement," he said. "I think it's important for us to

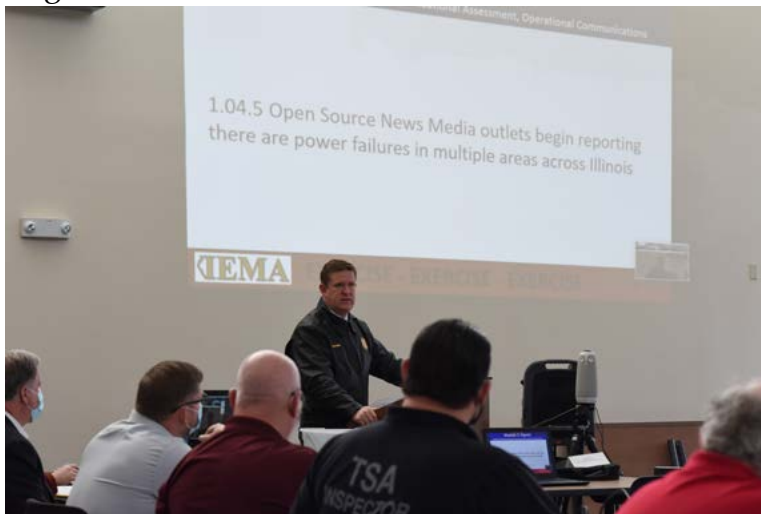
participate in exercises like this. Illinois has more nuclear reactors than any other state and much of the electric and gas cross our state, so it's great we're here participating in such a quick order."

Neely added the tabletop exercise highlights how the Illinois National Guard fits in with state and federal response plans, but also magnifies those shortfalls and things that may not have been planned for.

"Sometimes

when you plan you make assumptions, but those assumptions may not be correct when something happens," he said. "You can't just wave your hand and expect to have what

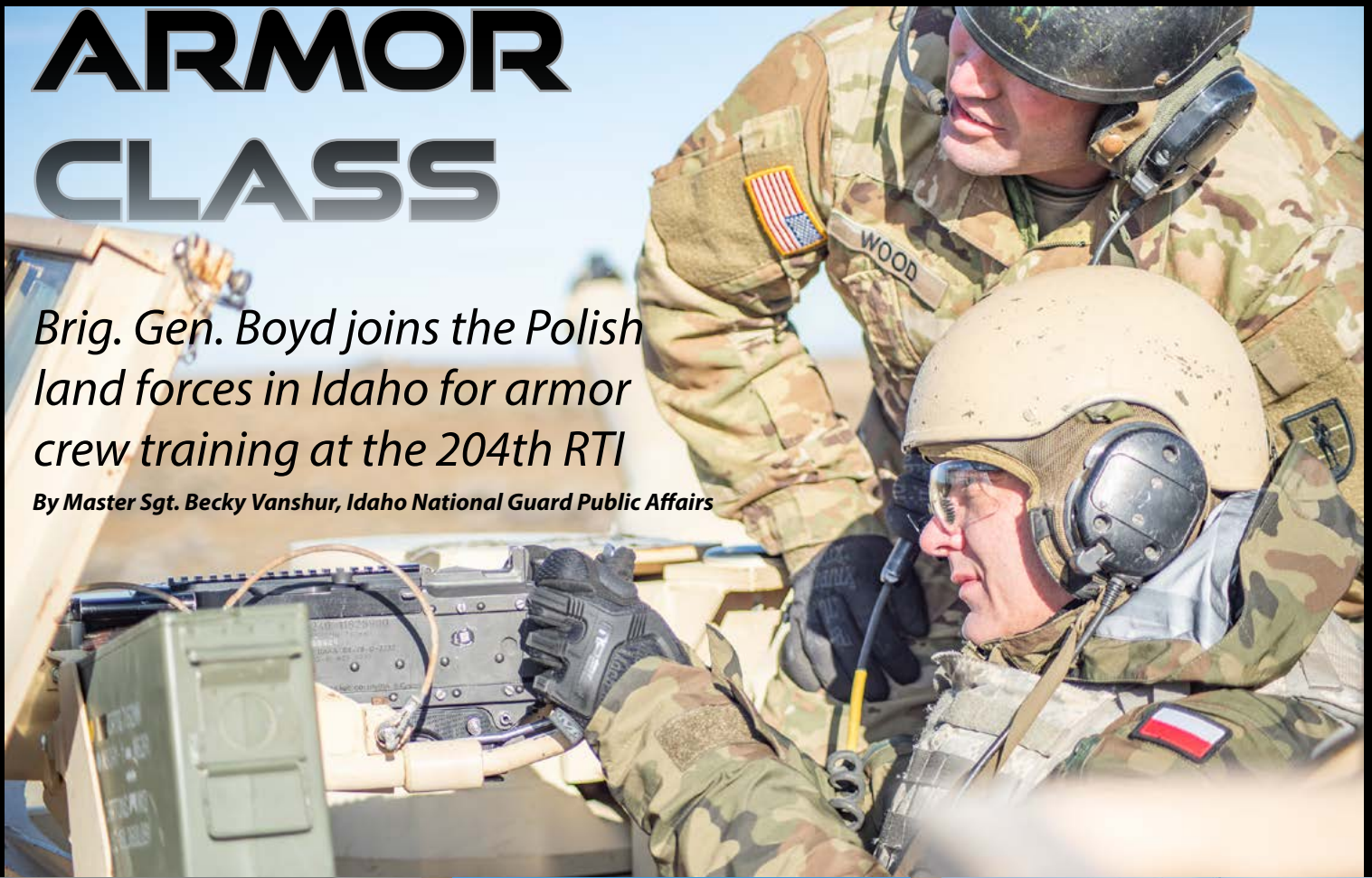
you need. This is an opportunity that I'm grateful we have. It lets us exercise with our partners both locally and nationally to not only see what they have, but to showcase the tools we can bring to the fight as well."



ARMOR CLASS

Brig. Gen. Boyd joins the Polish land forces in Idaho for armor crew training at the 24th RTI

By Master Sgt. Becky Vanshur, Idaho National Guard Public Affairs



Brig. Gen. Rodney C. Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, Illinois National Guard, travelled to Idaho's 24th RTI with Polish soldiers to attend M1 Abrams tank training in October and November to observe best practices. The Idaho Army National Guard's 24th Regional Training Institute at Gowen Field, specializes as an armor training schoolhouse, delivering curriculum to U.S. military armor students. During the visit, schoolhouse instructors and armor experts provided training and insight as Poland transitions to new armor, like the M1 Abrams tank.



Pleasant Hill Soldier pins on first sergeant diamond

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Joseph “Jay” Arnold, of Pleasant Hill, Illinois, a Soldier in the Illinois Army National Guard, was promoted to first sergeant Nov. 8 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Arnold, who most recently served as the Senior Instructor for the 129th Regiment’s Officer Candidate School, is the first sergeant of Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Effingham.

Arnold told his fellow noncommissioned officers to remember taking care of Soldiers is a leader’s job.

“Today has me thinking of probably the most important line of the NCO creed,” Arnold said.

“My two basic responsibilities uppermost in my mind is the accomplishment of the mission and the welfare of my Soldiers. Taking care of Soldiers. That’s our job,” he said.

Arnold said throughout his career, there have been five noncommissioned officers who were crucial to his development as a leader.



“One taught me to be fearless in supporting my Soldiers and to challenge authority to keep our superiors’ promises to them,” Arnold said. “Another taught me that taking care of Soldiers doesn’t end after the final formation and that sometimes that’s when it matters most.”

He said he was also taught to look for innovative and caring ways to train, motivate and inspire Soldiers and that being excellent at administrative tasks is part of being a leader.

“Master Sergeant Julie Baglin, 129th RTI, taught me that being excellent at your job and the day-to-day administrative tasks goes a long way in taking care of Soldiers,”

Arnold said. “I urge each of you to think back on your careers and identify five NCOs who have had a similar effect on you.”

Arnold thanked his wife, Beth, for her support.

“I can’t thank you enough for everything you’ve done to help me the last 15 years plus,” he said.

Arnold enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves in 1992 as a Psychological Operations Specialist, then transitioned to active duty where he served from 1994 to 1998. In 2006, Arnold enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard as an infantryman. Since enlisting in the ILARNG, Arnold has served in several leadership positions, including fire team leader and squad leader with Company C, 2-130th Infantry Regiment, based in Litchfield.



A DREAM COME TRUE

Brig. Gen. William "Robbie" Robertson Retires Where it All Began in Peoria



By Senior Airman Wynndermere Shaw and Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

PEORIA, Ill. – Tiny hands reach to grab the control wheel while his eyes dance around the flight deck, filling with wonder. Control panel switches are just within fingertip's reach. He can't see over the dash, but the boy imagines what it might feel like to soar through the air. He is in love with the dream of flying.

This is how Air Force Brig. Gen. William P. Robertson described his first time sitting in the flight deck of a C-47 Skytrain while on a base tour as a young child. Robertson would go on to command the 182nd Airlift Wing for 13 years, then serve as the Chief of Staff for the Illinois Air National Guard. He retired on Nov. 11, Veterans Day, after serving as the Air National Guard Assistant to the Commander, 12th Air Force (Air Forces Southern) since November 2018.

Most recently, in addition to his duties for 12th Air Force, Robertson played an integral

part in setting up the Air Force's first joint task force at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina in 2019. The task force's first mission was to help manage the flow of military medical personnel and equipment to some cities hit hardest by COVID-19. While the effort was led by 9th Air Force and Northern Command, Robertson was "offered up" by then 12th Air Force Commander Maj. Gen. Andrew Croft to then 9th Air Force Commander Maj. Gen. Chad Franks.

"They really needed someone who had experience with the emergency response request process and working with local and state agencies. The National Guard are the experts within the DoD in that area," Robertson said. He had led the Illinois Emergency Management Agency for several months under former Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner. "General Croft thought I was





the right officer with the right experience at the right time to help that effort.”

While his experience with the Air Force’s joint task force helped put a cap on a long and successful military career, Robertson admits that he’s still adjusting to life out of uniform. “The military and the National Guard have been such a huge part of my life, so retiring has been a little surreal.”

After more than 41 years of military service, Robertson looked back on his journey and legacy. Inspired by his father who served as an armorer on the North American P-51 Mustang in the Air National Guard, Robertson enlisted on June 7, 1980, at the age of 20 as a security policeman with the 182nd Tactical Air Support Group.

“I always looked to my father as a really good leader, teacher, mentor and warrior,” said Robertson. “My dad really was the guy that



I looked to for a lot of advice. He was just an outstanding leader.”

That apple didn’t fall far from the tree.

After serving in roles including weapons and tactics officer and chief of current operations, Robertson was selected to be the 182nd Operations Group commander. During his tenure, the unit conducted a monumental Operation Iraqi Freedom deployment of six aircraft and more than 350 wing personnel to a bare base in Minhad, United Arab Emirates. In late December 2003, the C-130s flew in earthquake relief supplies to Iran, making Peoria’s C-130s the first U.S. aircraft to land in Iran since 1981.

Robertson became the 182nd Airlift Wing commander in 2004, serving in the role for



an unprecedented 13 years. He led the wing to six outstanding unit awards and the first Consolidated Unit Inspection “Outstanding” rating that Air Mobility Command had given in 17 years.

Robertson’s journey to the top began with a decision to cross-train from the Security Police to the flying world in 1983. He originally planned to be a Peoria police officer as a traditional Guardsman, but others suggested he fly as a pilot in the Air National Guard.

“It was one of those things where the chips just fell into place and all of the sudden ‘Hey, there’s this big dream out there that you’ve always wanted to fly,’ and that door kind of just opened up for me,” said Robertson.

There was work that needed to be done to reach his dream, but that didn’t stop him. He

strove to finish his 4-year college degree at Bradley University in the ambition of being a pilot. "I crammed two years of college into a year and a half. The next thing I know is I was off

to officer school, and then I was off to pilot training," said Robertson.

After being a pilot for 34 years, Robertson has more than 4,800 flight hours and has flown eight different types of aircraft, including the T-41 Mescalero, T-37 Tweet, T-38 Talon, OA-37B Dragonfly, C-26 Metroliner, AT-38B Talon, F-16 Fighting Falcon and C-130 Hercules.

"It truly became a commitment for me," said Robertson.

His command pilot career isn't the only thing Robertson cherishes from serving in the Air National Guard. He also gained a great military family.



"The Guard's family, and that's how it is. It's generation after generation serving," said Robertson. "You meet a whole melting pot of Americans, and they all are going for the same

thing: the defense of the county, community and state. We are all here for the same reasons."

Robertson's daughter, Staff Sgt. Elizabeth Robertson, enlisted in the Air National Guard with her father by her side.

When looking back on all of those years, Robertson said he appreciated the great teammates alongside him and was grateful for their support throughout his career. "What an honor and privilege it is to serve your country," he said.



Illioapolis Soldier promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 4

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Illinois Army National Guard Soldier Keith Hildebrandt, of Illioapolis, was promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 4 in a ceremony Dec. 2, at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

“This is a very important moment for you,” Col.

Brian Creech, of Petersburg, U.S. Property and Fiscal Officer (USPFO) for Illinois said. “This promotion is well deserved and I look forward to your continued service.”

Hildebrandt, the State Property Book Officer for USPFO, enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1998 and spent about 13 years and an enlisted Soldier and non-commissioned officer before commissioning as a warrant officer in 2011. As an enlisted Soldier and NCO, Hildebrandt served as a unit supply sergeant in multiple units in the ILARNG.

“I appreciate your trust in me as the property book officer,” Hildebrant, who manages all the federal property in the state, told Creech.



Hildebrandt thanked his parents for their support.

“You’ve always supported me and Patricia every time I leave,” Hildebrandt said. “It takes a burden off me because I don’t have to worry about anything.”

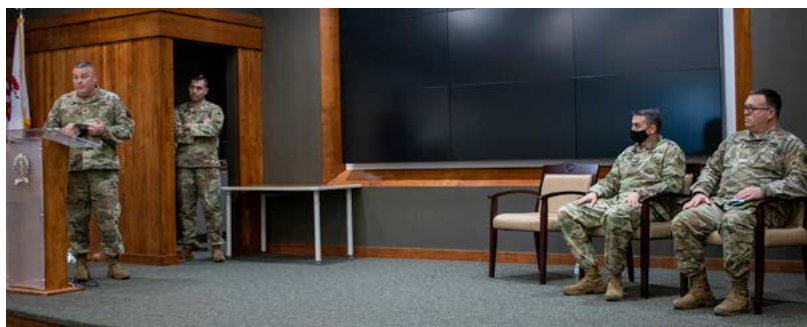
He also thanked his wife, Patricia, and sons.

“You’re the rock of the house because things magically get done around the house,” he said. “Nothing happens without what you do. It allows me to focus on things here.”

Hildebrandt offered advice to

fellow Soldiers.

“I have been blessed to have great leaders



and blessed to have great people work for me, but I’ve had a great group of peers and colleagues to support me. I hope I’ve done the same for you,” Hildebrandt said. “We’re all leaders at some level of this organization. Trust your Soldiers. Empower them, give them the mission, give them the work and then take a step back and let them do the job. Let them succeed. Check on them to make sure they’re on the right path and then back off again.”

Hildebrant reminded that Soldiers have leaders as well.

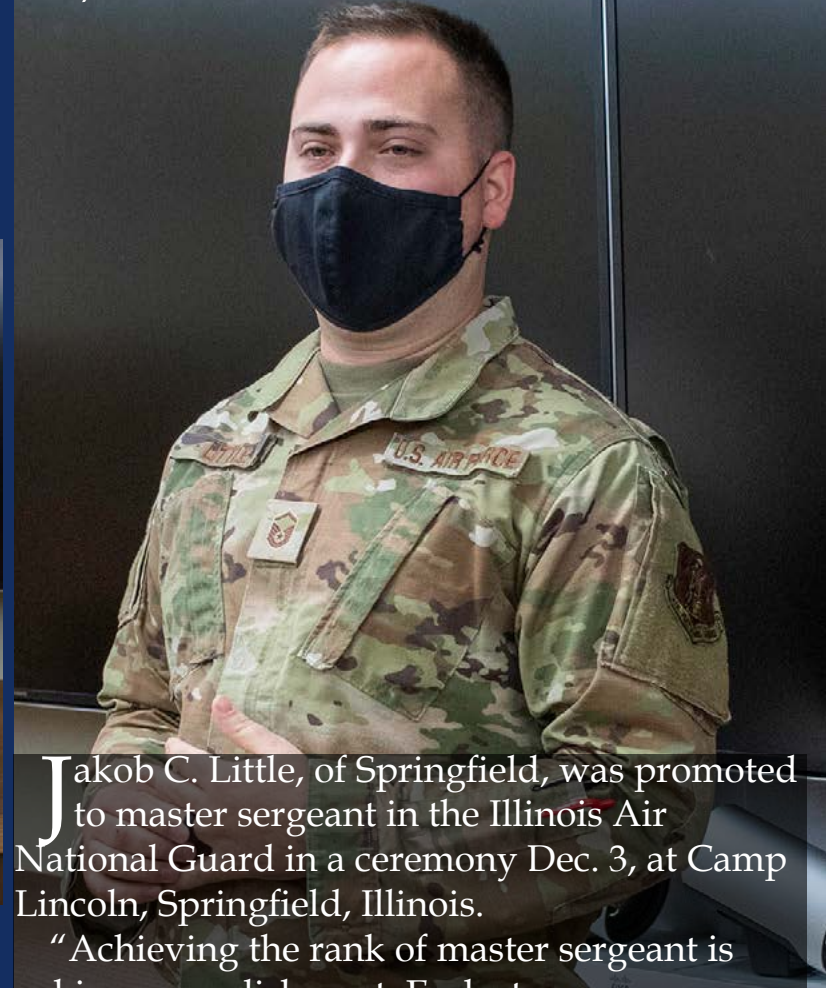
“Leaders, give the trust to your Soldiers,” he said. “Soldiers, earn the trust placed in you.”



A LITTLE PROMOTION

NGB's Director of Manpower and Personnel promotes son to Master Sergeant

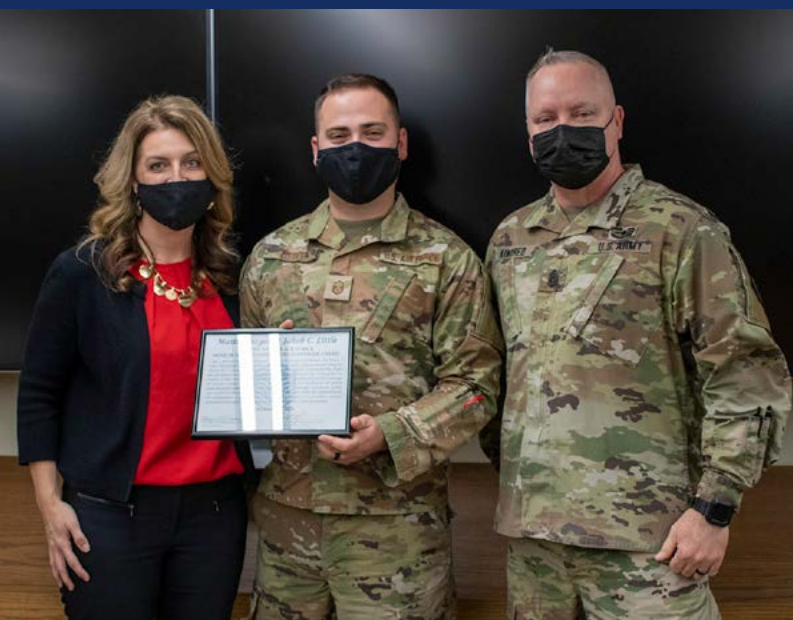
By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs



Jakob C. Little, of Springfield, was promoted to master sergeant in the Illinois Air National Guard in a ceremony Dec. 3, at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.

"Achieving the rank of master sergeant is a big accomplishment. Each step up means more is expected of you and that's what promotions are all about," said Col. William Miller, Illinois Air National Guard Director of Staff. "We're happy you're a part of the team and look forward to the future."

Little enlisted in the Illinois Air National Guard in 2012, and was pinned by his father, Maj. Gen. Eric Little, the Director of Manpower and Personnel at NGB and former ILARNG Chief of Staff.



Holiday Remembrance

The Adjutant General helps light the Governor's Gold Star Christmas Tree



Illinois Gold Star families, veterans and spectators gathered in the atrium of the James R. Thompson center in downtown Chicago Dec. 2, for the Governor's annual lighting of the Gold Star Christmas Tree. Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General for Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, joined Illinois Governor JB Pritzker and Mr. Terry Prince, Acting Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs to light the tree. Following the lighting, Gold Star families in attendance were invited to hang ornaments on the tree honoring their fallen loved ones.

Headquarters, Illinois Air National Guard receives 2020 Air Force Organizational Excellence Award

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –Lt. Gen. Michael A. Loh, Director of the Air National Guard, recently announced Headquarters, Illinois Air National Guard (ILANG) is among six Air National Guard units that received the 2020 Air Force Organizational Excellence Award (AFOEA).

“Our Airmen in the Illinois Air National Guard execute the mission, day in and day out, with precision and excellence,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “We’re extremely proud to receive this award, which is a reflection of the selfless service of the men and women of the Illinois Air National Guard.”

Approximately 40 Airmen assigned to Headquarters, ILANG, will receive the award. This is the third time Headquarters, ILANG received the AFOEA. Headquarters, ILANG previously received the award in 1999 and 1986.

“The men and women of the Illinois Air National Guard serve something greater than themselves,” said Maj. Gen. Peter Nezamis, Assistant Adjutant General-Air and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard. “This award validates their hard

work and dedication to the mission of the Air National Guard and United States Air Force.”

Headquarters, ILANG was recognized for the exemplary way it executed its missions throughout the award period, which was dominated by COVID-19 response operations, civil disturbance missions, election support, and flood operations, while at the same time completing its overseas missions.

“In 2020, more than 700 members of the Illinois Air National Guard were mobilized as part of the largest domestic operations activation in Illinois Air National Guard history. Headquarters, Illinois Air National Guard, tasked the wings with the missions and funneled information to and from the activated units and to and from the Joint Operations Center,” said Illinois Air National Guard Lt. Col. John Dwyer of Champaign, Plans and Operations Officer, Illinois Air National Guard. “The headquarters

tracked the information and personnel activated for the missions.”

Dwyer, a traditional Guardsman who serves as the Director of the Champaign County Emergency Management Agency, said he, and the county, directly benefited



from the activation for the COVID-19 response operations.

“Champaign County had a testing site which was stood up and operated by members of the Illinois Air National Guard as well as having two local liaisons assigned to the county’s emergency operations center,” he said. “The two liaisons actively participated in the briefings with the state agencies.”

Dwyer said the testing sites set up around the state made a huge impact in the COVID-19 response operations.

“The testing site in Champaign County was stood up and operated by Airmen from the 183rd Wing out of Springfield and the 126th Air Refueling Wing based at Scott Air Base,” Dwyer said. “It was a big deal and is still going strong operated by contractors.”

Dwyer said even though much of 2020 was controlled by COVID-19 restrictions, the ILANG found ways to connect with other worldwide partners.

“We were part of a panel discussion with Israel,” Dwyer said. “This virtual panel discussion allowed us to maintain our relationships and leads to improving their operations and ours.”

Illinois Air National Guard Chief Master Sgt. Christina Rizzo, now the Command Chief Master Sergeant of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, was among the ILANG members activated for the COVID-19 response operations. She spent her days as a county liaison for St. Clair County and the East St. Louis Health District.

As part of her duties, Rizzo briefed the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff a couple times daily.

“I worked with the commander and first sergeant – both Army, to gather the information which I would use to brief our government

agencies,” she said.

Rizzo agrees it’s no small task Headquarters, Illinois Air National Guard, was honored for its work.

“Our motto is anytime, anywhere,” she said. “Our Airmen give all to serve and put others first. This award shows our Airmen are dedicated to go anytime and anywhere.”

Headquarters, ILANG was recognized for its community involvement as well.

According to the application submitted, ILANG Airmen volunteered with the local Team RWB chapter to forge health and wellness. The groups laid wreaths and flags at Camp Butler National Cemetery in Springfield, honoring the 28,000 veterans buried there. In addition, the group donated \$1,000 in goods to the local library and homeless shelter.

The ILANG also directed an aviation flight



science, technology, engineering and mathematics program with 30 Lincoln’s ChalleNGe Academy cadets supporting community outreach.

“The LCA was one of the first academies of its kind in the United States,” Dwyer said.

“It’s run by the National Guard and mentors work with the cadets.”

As part of its outreach program, members of the Illinois Air National Guard educated local resident and businesses on the ILNG’s federal and state mission.

ILANG Chief Master Sgt. Jennifer Aurora, State Command Chief Master Sergeant, Illinois Air National Guard, said Headquarters, ILANG, certainly lives up to the U.S. Air Force’s core value of excellence in all we do.

“Excellence is going beyond the call of duty, striving and maintaining the highest standards,” Aurora said. “This award means Joint Force Headquarters – ILANG is doing their very best in everything, in every way!”

A DATE WHICH WILL "LIVE IN INFAMY"



Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia, Director of the Joint Staff for the Illinois National Guard, was joined by Springfield Mayor Jim Langfelder and Mr. Terry Prince, Acting Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, at the Springfield Elks Lodge on E. Lakeshore Drive to mark the 80th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Flanked by volunteers from the Illinois State Military Museum's Living History Detachment, standing on a dock on Lake Springfield with Prince and fellow veterans, Alessia dropped a wreath into the lake to commemorate the events of that fateful day.



Peoria's 182nd Airlift Wing receives 2020 Air Force Organizational Excellence Award

By Master Sgt. Lealan Beuhrer, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

PEORIA, Ill. - The Airmen of the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing received the unit's 10th Air Force Outstanding Unit Award from director of the Air National Guard Lt. Gen. Michael Loh at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, Oct. 12, 2021.

The Peoria, Illinois-based unit is comprised of more than 1,200 Airmen from across the United States whose supporting missions including air mobility, special warfare, combat communications, and the Air Force Band of the Midwest. The most recent Outstanding Unit Award was awarded for exceptionally meritorious service for services rendered to the nation from Oct. 1, 2018, to Sept. 30, 2020.

"The Outstanding Unit Award is a testament

to the dedicated hard work of the members of the 182nd," said Col. Daniel McDonough, the commander of the 182nd Airlift Wing. "This award represents the Air Force acknowledging what many of us have known for decades — that the work ethic and accomplishments of the men and women of this wing are truly exceptional. Members of the 182nd should be proud to be recognized for their efforts."

The wing was applauded for deploying four C-130 Hercules aircraft, 360 personnel and associated mission support equipment to various hostile areas in addition to supporting unprecedented domestic response operations during the award period. These domestic operations response operations included mobilizations supporting COVID-19





makes me most proud about the 182nd Airlift Wing is the work ethic, can-do attitude and diversity that our Airmen display daily. Not only do our people work well together in Peoria, they succeed in building mission partners and accomplishing the mission throughout the world.”

The Air Force Outstanding Unit Award is awarded by the Secretary of the Air Force to numbered units that have distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious service or outstanding achievement that clearly sets the unit above and

apart from similar units. The

pandemic response, civil unrest in Illinois and Washington, D.C., and 2020 election cybersecurity.

Despite the high operations tempo, the unit was cited for accomplishing the Air Force mission “with a maximum degree of war readiness while supporting our National Security Strategy.”

Leaders credited the unit for a “culture of dedication to mission success” evidenced by C-130 aircraft Mission Capable Rates of 85.7 percent (Fiscal Year 2019) and 82.61 percent (Fiscal Year 2020) – the highest in all of Air Mobility Command.

“This is an outstanding unit because of the Airmen,” said Chief Master Sgt. Douglas Turner, the wing’s command chief. “What

services include: performance of exceptionally meritorious service, accomplishment of a specific outstanding achievement of national or international significance, combat operations against an armed enemy of the United States, or military operations involving conflict with or exposure to hostile actions by an opposing foreign force.



The 2021 award marks the 182nd Airlift Wing’s 7th consecutive time earning the service-level honor. The unit previously received the award in 1979, 1986, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019.



LCA Graduates 90 cadets from class 56-21

By Michael Camacho, Lincoln's Challenge Public Affairs

RANTOUL, III. – When 90 Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy Cadets walked across Illinois State University's Braden Auditorium stage on Oct. 30 they graduated from the residential phase of an academy that is now offering more opportunities than ever in its nearly 30-year history.



LCA staff recognized the achievements of the graduating class, highlighting the accomplishments of the corps and individual Cadets. Class 56-21 represented several major milestones for the academy in service as well as academic and personal growth, said Jaime Eaker, deputy director of programs.

"We had approximately a 70 percent pass rate on the GEDs with 21 honor scores and seven high honors," said Eaker. "Our credit recovery program helped seven Cadets receive a total of 9.5 credit hours through Illinois Virtual Schools as they return to high school, with one completing all their education requirements to receive her high school diploma. (She was) the first to do so since Class 42."

Growth-wise, the academy is expanding its vocational offerings by developing a welding class piloted by Class 56-21 Cadets, a redeveloped focus on the GAF Roofing Academy training and its online resources, as well as developing a driver education and a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program.

These new programs are being developed with insights Class 56-21 and cadets in the post-residential phase. About 30 Cadets from 56-21 completed forklift training. All 90 Cadets received training and certifications in CPR, food handling, mandated reporting, and financial management.

"Every class we ask what else we can do and offer. Our Cadets help us understand what those needs are to improve their future and help them find placement," said Eaker. "It helps the academy to be able to do more for our Cadets and better prepare them."

Class 56 performed a total of 6,521 hours of service to the community. The class gave 61 units of blood during the blood drive resulting in 183 lives potentially saved. Cadets were awarded more than \$14,000 in scholarships.

"It is certain and indeed gratifying to see how Class 56 Cadets matured and became ready to tackle their dreams and goals," said Michael Haerr, Lincoln ChalleNGe Academy's director. "Structures, processes, and relationships will certainly change in their day-to-day lives. They will certainly face new challenges and things may certainly seem a little different in the year ahead. Yes, life is definitely going to become a little 'shaken up and stirred.'"

Haerr said it has been an honor and a privilege being part of their journey, which has brought many wonderful memories.

"This class has also had the opportunity to move beyond focusing on completing the resident phase of the program to planning for the future by working with both deputies ... sharing their post-residential plans for us all to see and hear," Haerr said.

"All of these young men and women have done so much to better themselves," Eaker said. "I am proud of each and every one and all they've done while at the program. This isn't an overnight change. This program requires determination to see it through and each one has stayed true to helping themselves be a better version of themselves."

Haerr said it is through the combined efforts of the staff that enabled the Cadets to achieve so much.

"I would also like to pay tribute to the dedicated instructors, the placement adviser,



support staff, and cadre - you have all guided, molded, and shaped the ladies and gentlemen standing here today," Haerr said. "Your role has been hugely instrumental in molding our youth...our hope for the future."

The future is in capable hands, said Haerr. The graduates of Class 56-21 have been exceptional.

"These are the future leaders of tomorrow," Haerr said. "I believe that the vast majority of pupils strived to work to their potential. They aimed high. They set their goals and for the most part, they not only achieved them but, in fact, surpassed them."

Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy, administered

by the Illinois National Guard, is for youth between the ages 16-18 who are at risk of not graduating high school or have dropped out of high school. The academy focuses on eight core objectives: life coping skills, academic excellence, responsible citizenship, job skills, health and hygiene, leadership/followership, service to community, and physical fitness. LCA includes a quasi-military 5-month residential program at its campus in Rantoul followed by a year-long post residential mentorship phase. LCA will start its next 5-month residential phase on Jan. 12. Please visit www.lincolnschallenge.org or call 1-800-851-2166 for more information.

Now Hiring Cadre Staff



Be a leader. Join our team

217-761-1302 www.lincolnschallenge.org

FOR THEIR HONOR

12 Soldiers earn their Honor Guard tab



Twelve Soldiers from across the state earned their ARNG Honor Guard tabs Dec. 10, when they graduated from the State Certification Course conducted from December 4-10. This is the first State Certification course since 2019 due to the COVID-19 restrictions. The participants were eager to get back out and train.

Col. Ron Bonesz, Director of Military Personnel for the Illinois Army National Guard, reminded the Soldiers that they only “get one chance to do this right,” as he spoke at the small ceremony. Bonesz also thanked the Soldiers as he “tabbed” each graduate and awarded them their ceremonial gold cords.

The Military Funeral Honors Program will be hosting a National Certification Course in August 2022 that certifies each MFH graduate to become “Train the Trainer” certified so they can train others at the state level.



126th Air Refueling Wing earns 10th Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

Courtesy story from the 126th Air Refueling Wing

SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, Ill. – The Air Force Outstanding Unit Award has been awarded to an Illinois Air National Guard unit at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois.

The 126th Air Refueling Wing has been selected for this prestigious citation three times in a row and a sum of 10 times. Most recently it was for meritorious service from January 2019 through– December 2020.



“The 126th Air Refueling Wing has lead the way in sustained performance and operational capability. Our culture of excellence, our commitment to performance, and your continuous support of worldwide missions have put the 126th ARW at the top,” wrote Col. Thomas Jackson, wing commander, in an email announcement to the wing.



During this period, the wing held the highest mission capable rate of any KC-135 unit in the command for the duration of the award period. They consistently demonstrated mission accomplishment, and operational readiness in support of multiple worldwide contingency operations despite the worldwide pandemic.

The wing hosted regular training exercises and missions to ensure that its more than 1,000 members were ready to carry out the wing’s primary mission of providing air refueling support to aircraft of the Air Force as well as other U.S. military forces and the military forces of allied nations.

The 126th Maintenance Group operations superintendent, Chief Master Sgt. Jeffery Whyte said, “This is well deserved and speaks to our ability to carry out the mission anytime, anywhere.”



One of its newest members, a 126th Force Support Squadron customer support technician, Airman First Class Kiana Franklin, completed her basic military training a little more than one year ago. She says she is proud of being a member of the wing.

Speaking of how she sees wing members working together, Franklin said, “It has been a really nice experience seeing every one come together to get something done during this time.”

The wing is planning a formal ceremony in 2022 when they will be officially presented with the award.

DeKalb Soldier retires after more than 30 years

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

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – After more than 30 years of service, Col. Jose Jaques of DeKalb, Illinois, retired from the Illinois National Guard at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield



in early December.

Jaques, a DeKalb police officer on the civilian side, originally enlisted with the Illinois Army National Guard as a helicopter mechanic with D Company, 106th Aviation Battalion based in Decatur. In 1991, he commissioned into the Army Reserves through Northern Illinois University's Reserve Officer Training Corps as a second lieutenant. In 2009, Jaques returned to the Illinois National Guard.

Jaques has served in a multitude of command



and staff positions, culminating as Battalion Commander for the 6-54th Security Forces Assistance Battalion based in Rock Island, Illinois. Jaques deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 and commanded Bilateral Embedded Staff Team A14 in Bagram, Afghanistan in 2014.



Jaques thanked his family for their support throughout his military career.

"My parents were a big part of why I could do this," said Jaques. "Thank you, mom, and even though dad's not here to see this, you've always been there for me."

He also thanked his wife, Jamie for her support.

"I told myself I wouldn't get into a relationship pre-deployment,"

said Jaques. "But Jamie, we hit off, and look where we are now. You've been an amazing partner through this, thank you."

Jaques also took the opportunity to present some departing awards to a few of his Soldiers. For their work on the Eager Lion and Bright Star exercises, Jaques presented Maj. David Adams and Sgt. Jordan Gibson the Army Commendation Medal. For her service as the 6-54th SFAB's senior enlisted leader, Command Sgt. Major Dena Ballowe was also presented with the Army Commendation Medal.



Chicago Soldier retires after 20 years

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

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – During a small ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield, Maj. Aaron Tvrdy of Chicago, originally of Ceresco, Nebraska, retired after 20 years of Service.

Joined by friends, colleagues and his wife, Lisa, and young son, Henry, Tvrdy thanked those that attended.

“I know it’s not much of a ceremony, most of my family is out in Nebraska and I couldn’t justify the trip for them for a short-notice ceremony,” said Tvrdy. “Thank you to those of you who are here, and to my wife, thank you for the support you’ve provided



throughout my career.”

Tvrdy enlisted in the Nebraska National Guard in 2001 as a cavalry Soldier, achieving the rank of corporal before commissioning through the University of Nebraska’s Reserve Officer Training Corps in 2007.

Following his commission, Tvrdy transferred to the Illinois



Army National Guard as an Engineer officer where he served in multiple positions including platoon leader and company executive officer for the 631st Engineer Support Company, Commander of the 766th Field Support Company and most recently as a project manager and architect for the Illinois National Guard’s Facilities Directorate.

Retired Mechanicsburg Soldier recognized for more than 40 years of service

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



SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Recently retired Command Sgt. Maj. Lester Edwards joined his former colleagues to be recognized for his more than 40 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard.

Edwards retired from the Illinois Army National Guard in May 2020, but continued to serve as a federal technician in the Illinois Army National Guard’s Personnel Directorate as the Casualty Operations Branch Manager until Nov. 30, 2021.

Col. Ron Bonesz, Director of the Illinois Army National Military Personnel Office presented Edwards with the Illinois Medal of Military Merit.

Edwards thanked his former colleagues for the honor and said his time as Casualty Operations Branch Manager was among his most memorable assignments.



FROM THE TOP

Illinois Soldier honored at Army-Navy game by U.S. Army Senior Leaders



The Illinois Army National Guard's Spc. Jared Reyes was honored by the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General James C. McConville, and the Sergeant Major of the Army, Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Grinston during the second quarter of the Army-Navy game on Saturday. Reyes, a member of the 33rd Military Police Battalion, saved multiple lives in an active shooter incident at a tavern in Wisconsin last April. He was one of only 10 Soldiers nationwide chosen to be honored by General McConville and was selected from more than 150 nominees.



RARE AIR

Congratulations to this year's Airmen of the Year Selections



Airman 1st Class Landon Hiebert
Outstanding Airman of the Year



Tech. Sgt. Stephanie Paczesny
Outstanding NCO of the Year



Master Sgt. Hans-Ryan Hilt
Outstanding Senior NCO of the Year

126TH ARW WINNERS



Senior Airman Seth Herrmann
169th Air Support Operations Squadron
Outstanding Airman of the Year



Tech. Sgt. Katherine Friedrich
182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron
Outstanding NCO of the Year



Master Sgt. Zachary Hardy
264th Combat Communications Squadron
Outstanding Senior NCO of the Year



Master Sgt. Kathy Moran
182nd Medical Group
Outstanding First Sergeant of the Year

182ND AW WINNERS



SENIOR AIRMAN KENDALL MAYES
183d Security Forces Squadron
Airman of the Year



TECHNICAL SGT. LAURA WRIGHT
183d Air Intelligence Squadron
NCO of the Year



MASTER SGT. DYLAN GEER
183d Security Forces Squadron
Senior NCO of the Year



MASTER SGT. CHRISTINE TEER
183d Security Forces Squadron
1st Sgt. of the Year

183RD WING WINNERS

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

October

2 **183rd Activated for Operation Noble Eagle**
2001: In response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, Illinois Air National Guard units manned security checkpoints at 10 state airports. The 183rd Fighter Wing patrolled the skies with the help of the 126th Air Refueling Wing. Operation Noble Eagle remained in effect until May 31st 2002.

6 **Sgt. Jessica Cawvey**
2004: Sgt. Jessica L. Cawvey, 21, of Mahomet, Illinois, died Oct. 6 in Iraq, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near her convoy vehicle. Cawvey was assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company, Paris, Illinois..



7 **Cpl. Rayln Hill**
1917: Cpl. Rayln M. Hill of Company H, 129th Infantry witnessed a French plane go down on the German side of the Meuse River near Donnevoux, France. After Hill observed movement from the pilot, he darted across the footbridge and over several hundred yards of open ground to the wrecked plane. He lifted the pilot onto his shoulder and ran back amid a storm of enemy shells and bullets. Hill succeeded in reaching his own lines and received the Medal of Honor for his bravery.



12 **Spc. James Grijavla**
2005: Spc. James Grijalva, 26, of Burbank, Illinois died from a non-combat related injury in Baghdad, Iraq. Grijalva was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment based in Urbana, Illinois.



16 **Grant visits Cairo**
1863: On the same

day that he received a summons to Cairo from Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, Major General Ulysses S. Grant took command of the newly formed Military Division of the Mississippi. The new appointment consolidated the Departments of the Tennessee, Cumberland, and the Ohio into one body. With this development, the majority of the Union Army now served under Grant's command.



November

2 **1st Lt. Brian Slavenas**
2003: 1st Lt. Brian Slavenas, 30, of Genoa, Illinois, was killed in action when the CH-47 Chinook he was in was attacked near Fallujah, Iraq. Slavenas was assigned to Company F, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, based in Peoria, Illinois.



3 **Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Wehrly**
2005: Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Wehrly, 28, of Galesburg, Illinois, was killed in action when the vehicle he was travelling in encountered an improvised explosive during patrol operations in Ashraf, Iraq. Wehrly was assigned to Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment, based in Macomb, Illinois.



4 **Sgt. Samuel Casaga**
1918: On patrol in St. Maurice, France, a German machine-gun nest opened fire on Soldiers of Company A, 132nd Infantry. The squad immediately took cover and returned fire. Sgt. Samuel E. Casaga crawled forward under small arms fire and flanked the enemy nest, capturing a member of the gun crew. For his sudden show of courage and tenacity in executing his attack, Casaga received the Distinguished Service Cross.

19 Lincoln gives the Gettysburg Address

1863:

Nearly five months after the Battle of Gettysburg turned the tide of the war,



President Abraham Lincoln approached the podium before 15,000 people that had come to see the dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery. In two minutes and 272 words, Lincoln forever shaped America's view on war and how to cope with loss. Lincoln allegedly prepared his most famous speech on the sixty-two mile train ride from Washington to Gettysburg.

December

6 Spc. Brian Wright

2005: Spc. Brian Wright, 19, of Keensburg, Illinois, was killed in action when the vehicle he was travelling in encountered an improvised explosive during patrol operations in Ramadi, Iraq. Wright was assigned to 135th Engineer Company, based in Lawrenceville, Illinois.



7 182d TASG Activated for Desert Storm

1990: President George Bush Sr. called on Illinois Governor James R. Thompson to activate thirty-one members of the 182nd Tactical Air Support Group for service in the Persian Gulf. The Peoria based unit of the Air National Guard deployed to the Middle East for 180 days. They acted as a liaison between the Army and Air Force coordinating air to ground tactical operations.

17 192nd Tank Battalion takes part in first U.S. tank battle of WWII

1941: Poorly equipped, but desperate to slow the Japanese offensive in the Philippines, Company B of the 192nd Tank Battalion hurried to



Lingayen Gulf on Luzon. The 194th Tank Battalion followed close behind. The two battalions had a paper strength of 108 tanks, however only five were serviceable enough to be sent to meet the invasion. The first tank in the column narrowly missed colliding with one of the fifty enemy tanks that met them near Lingayen Gulf. In total, the Japanese landing force included 50,000 infantry, 100 tanks, and 106 artillery pieces. Four out of five of the American tank shells did not explode, meaning that the two units fled almost immediately after arriving on scene. This was the first U.S. tank battle of World War II. It ended with the loss of one American tank and its crew.

24 132nd Infantry repels Japanese 'banzai' attack at Guadalcanal

1941: Resting in their foxholes on the slopes of Mt. Austen, the Soldiers of the 132nd Infantry Regiment had no idea that the Japanese had crept to within ten yards of their positions. The terrifying war cry, "Banzai!" broke the stillness of the night, and a vicious close-quarters firefight ensued. Surprised, but not overwhelmed, the 132nd threw back the assault, as well as the six more banzai charges the Japanese sent against them nine days later when they took Mt. Austen. Some of the heaviest fighting for the 132nd on Guadalcanal had yet to come.



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