

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

# PRAIRIE SENTINEL

VOLUME 8



## **ON THE ROAD AGAIN: 233RD MILITARY POLICE COMPANY CONDUCTS ROAD TO WAR TRAINING**

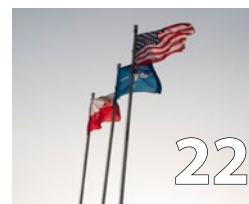
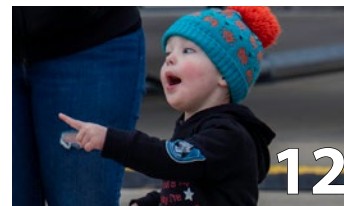
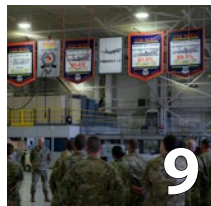
**HOMEWARD BOUND: 2ND BATTALION, 130TH INFANTRY  
REGIMENT RETURNS HOME**

**BEST OF THE BEST: BILATERAL EMBEDDED STAFF TEAM  
A-25 CAPS OFF BEST CO-DEPLOYMENT MISSIONS**

NOV-DEC 2020



# ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL



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Eric Davis of Mt. Pulaski, Illinois, is promoted to colonel in a small ceremony at Camp Lincoln Dec. 29. By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

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Peter "Pete" Nezamis of Bellville, Illinois, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, Illinois National Guard, and commander of the Illinois Air National Guard is promoted to major general Dec. 29. Story by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs, photos by Robert Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

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Bilateral Embedded Staff Team (BEST) A25 returned home from Afghanistan Dec. 24, bringing an end to a more than 15-year era of co-deployments between the Illinois National Guard and the Republic of Poland. By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs, photos courtesy of USO of Illinois, BEST A25 and BEST A11

## Selfless Service: Ray Perry retires after more than a half-century of serving the ILNG 24

Col. (ret.) Ray Perry retires after 55 years of service to the Illinois National Guard. Perry spent 33 years in uniform to come back after retiring to work another 22 years for the Illinois Department of Military Affairs. Story by Mike Chrisman, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs, photos courtesy of Ray Perry and Robert Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

# Take it From the Top:

## Senior Leader's Corner

### COVID-19 Vaccines: Stay informed, be safe and vaccinate!

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

The Year 2020 has finally passed, but the worldwide pandemic has not. As we look forward to 2021 with hope, please do not become complacent and continue to follow the COVID-19 safety protocols. Wear a mask. Keep at least six-feet distance from others. If you do not feel well, stay at home.

The great news is that the COVID19 vaccine has already started to arrive. When it becomes available to you, I would ask each of you to please get the vaccine.

Some of our troops – those working at the state's Veterans Homes – have already been vaccinated. The Department of Defense will offer the vaccinations to more in the coming months as the vaccine becomes more plentiful. DoD is providing vaccinations under Centers of Disease Control guidance with the priority going to those providing direct medical care, maintaining essential national security and installation functions, deploying forces, and those with beneficiaries at the highest risk for developing severe illness from COVID-19 receiving the vaccine before other members of the DOD population.

DoD is offering the COVID-19 vaccines on a voluntary basis, but refusing the vaccine could jeopardize the overall readiness of the Illinois National Guard and, more importantly, your personal health and the health of those you love.

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe. COVID-19 is not safe.

The Centers of Disease Control tell us that:

- FACT: COVID-19 vaccines will not give you COVID-19
- FACT: COVID-19 vaccines will not cause you to test positive on COVID-19 viral tests
- FACT: People who have gotten sick with COVID-19 may still benefit from getting vaccinated
- FACT: Getting vaccinated can help prevent getting sick with COVID-19
- FACT: Receiving an mRNA vaccine will not alter your DNA

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits/facts.html> ( National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases, updated 20 December 2020)

If you do not trust the CDC, or the National Institutes of Health or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration;



**Maj. Gen. Richard Neely**  
**The Adjutant General**  
**Illinois National Guard**

then ask your family doctor or primary care physician. Please get your facts from medical professionals rather than social media chatter or the uninformed before refusing a vaccine. If you can safely receive a flu vaccine, you can safely receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

What is not safe? Refusing vaccination. It is true that those who are older or who have pre-existing conditions tend to be more susceptible to the disease, but that is not always the case. Take Capt. Jeff Money of the 182nd Airlift Wing who was young and very healthy, but lost consciousness and was on a ventilator because of COVID-19. Luckily, Jeff recovered and was able to tell his story and contribute to the fight against this terrible

disease.

The Illinois National Guard has not lost a Soldier or Airman to COVID-19 yet, and I pray we do not. I repeat that prayer every time I see a Commander's Critical Information Report announcing another Illinois National Guard service member has tested positive for the disease. These reports roll in on a daily basis now, averaging 3 to 4 ILNG members a day stricken with this horrible disease.

Unfortunately, we did lose some valued team members. This includes Family Assistance Center Specialist Dan Anzelone and his spouse, Nancy, both of whom died last April of COVID-19. Those at the Crestwood Armory will tell you it just is not the same without Dan's soothing voice and his talks about Disney or the Chicago White Sox or whatever is going on in your life. Both Dan and Nancy were kind souls who looked out for others.

Most of us have lost someone to COVID-19 in the past year. It could've been a friend, or family member or a member of your faith community. Or perhaps it was a neighbor, a co-worker, a retiree or a veteran. There are many others who are suffering because of the pandemic as it damages the economy and many livelihoods.

I am immensely proud of the work the Illinois National Guard has done in the last year to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 for the citizens of Illinois and continuing to support multiple state and federal missions despite the pandemic. This includes the deployment of more than 1,000 troops. Your work over the last year will be etched into history.

However, the work is not done. Your vaccination against COVID-19 will help us in the year ahead to end the horrendous disease, as we continue to protect our communities, our state and our nation.

## Illinois National Guard's Diversity Council Hosts Native American Heritage Speaker

*By Staff Sgt. LeAnne Withrow, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

Springfield, Ill. - Soldiers and Airmen of the Illinois National Guard gathered for a small informational panel on Native American Heritage conducted at the Illinois Military Academy on November 6 and 7, 2020. Chief Master Sgt. Teresa Ray, Superintendent of the 183rd Wing of the Illinois National Guard was among a small number of individuals selected for the panel, which consisted of members with Native American heritage.

"It was an honor and a privilege," Ray said.

**"It's so easy to say no, especially as we in the Guard are always so busy and we're being asked to do so many things," said Ray. "But I've always looked at challenges as opportunities, and so it was an honor to represent myself and my family."**

"To be asked to do this event was an absolute honor. This year I became part of the Diversity Council because I felt like if I could do it then someone would step up to do it after me."

Ray provided a slideshow explaining her background, and detailing her connection to her heritage, and how it had grown.

"I didn't know too much about it growing up," she said. "We knew we were native, but if it wasn't for a close cousin of mine I might never have known what I do now."

Ray was invited by Army National Guard Col. Maurice Rochelle, Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff, to participate in the panel, and she said she began to dig deeper into her family history.

"Looking back, I found out that the tribe

we were a part of had essentially been wiped out," Ray said. The tribe I belong to isn't even federally recognized because there was no one left to tie back to the land they used to own."

Ray belongs to the Tongva tribe from the San Gabriel region of modern day California, where their descendants are known as Gabrielinos. Like many Native American tribes, they struggled to survive in a time when Indigenous people across the United States were slowly being exterminated.



"It turns out my Great Grandmother was one of the people responsible for keeping the language alive," said Ray. "It's crazy to think that it's really not that long ago that these things were happening."

Doing all this research not only helped Ray learn more about her own history, she also said it made her think about what being Native, as well as Hispanic and a woman, meant for her service. She said that she believes differences are good and that working towards a common goal is part of what

makes the organization strong.

"I think that we all have a commonality in terms of wanting to serve for our state and our country," said Ray. "But even those of us who have different backgrounds, we have so many similarities." 🏞️



# Company D, ILARNG RRB home to Illinois Army National Guard's top Recruiter and First Sergeant

*By Sgt. 1st Class Kassidy Snyder, Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion*

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Staff Sgt. Justin Wise of Oswego, Illinois, was selected as the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Non-Commissioned Officer (RRNCO) of the Year and 1st Sgt. Joshua Wittenauer of Dixon, Illinois, was named the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and

Retention Battalion (ILARNG RRB) First Sergeant of the Year for the 2020 fiscal year.

Both Soldiers went on to represent the Illinois Army National Guard in regional competition. Wise placed second at regionals

while Wittenauer won to advance to the national level competition.

Wise's award was based not only on the number of enlistments achieved, but the whole Soldier concept. Metrics such as physical fitness, leadership and Initial Active Duty Training success rate were taken into account.

The award for top first sergeant goes to a first sergeant who achieves at least 100 percent of their yearly recruiting mission and maintains at least a 94 percent Initial Active Duty Training success rate. Two of Wittenauer's recruiters were in the state's Top Ten, to include Illinois' top producer. Additionally, his company as a whole met or exceeded every ILARNG RRB metric and was selected as the ILARNG RRB Company of Year. The selection was based upon team performance, accomplishments,

stability and their overall contributions to the battalion.

"I'm honored to represent Illinois as the RRB NCO of the Year, but also humbled because of the intense competition from the other recruiters. It feels great to be recognized for my hard work, but I'm more excited that our team was the recruiting Company of the Year," said Wise.

Wise credits his success to the efforts of Company D, ILARNG Recruiting and Retention Battalion, based in Aurora, Illinois.

"Although I was 'number 1,' it was only through the efforts of our team and my outstanding team leader Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Schreiber and NCOIC 1st Sgt. Joshua Wittenauer who provided excellent leadership and support throughout the mission year," he said.

Both Soldiers are members of Company D, ILARNG RRB, based in Aurora, Illinois. His office is co-located with the East Aurora High School and the Aurora Armory. 🇺🇸



Staff Sgt. Justin Wise of Oswego, Illinois, was selected as the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Non-Commissioned Officer (RRNCO) of the Year for 2020.



1st Sgt. Joshua Wittenauer of Dixon, Illinois, was named the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion (ILARNG RRB) First Sergeant of the Year for 2020.



# ***Homeward Bound***

***Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment's B and C companies return home.***

***by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs***

Approximately 200 Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment were welcomed home Oct. 31 when they returned from a deployment to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility.

Soldiers from Company B, based in Effingham, and parts of Company C, based in Litchfield, and Headquarters and Headquarters Company, from Marion, arrived at MidAmerica St Louis Airport, Mascoutah, Illinois, on two flights from El Paso, Texas, following post-deployment screening and out processing at Fort Bliss, Texas.

The Soldiers were welcomed home by Maj. Gen. Richard Neely, the Adjutant General, Illinois National Guard; Command Sgt. Maj. Dena Ballowe, Senior Enlisted Leader, Illinois National Guard; Col. Michael Eastridge, Commander, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, before being released to their families.

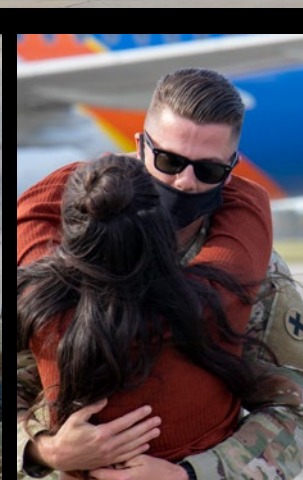
Approximately 400 Soldiers with 2-130th Infantry Regiment deployed Jan. 21 to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility. The remaining Soldiers are expected to return home at the end of 2020.

Company B provided security forces at Naval installations in Bahrain, protecting critical infrastructure and securing capabilities.

A portion of HHC and Company C deployed to Jordan to support the U.S. Security cooperation agreement with the Kingdom of Jordan through training with the Jordanian Armed Forces as part of the Jordan Operational Engagement Program in support of Operation Spartan Shield.









# Illinois Army National Guard's Joint Force Medical Detachment Commander promoted to Colonel

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** - Lt. Col. Jayson Coble, of Lincoln, Illinois, the commander of Joint Force Medical Detachment, was promoted to colonel Nov. 7 at the Illinois State Military Museum

"Thank you for allowing us to borrow your loved one. I know it's supposed to be two days a month, but in 2020 that seems to be how many days we have been at home," said Brig. Gen. Mark Jackson, of Frankfort, Illinois, Director, Joint Staff, Illinois National Guard. "Colonel Coble, we appreciate you as a silent warrior, for taking care of our Soldiers first so we can continue our missions."

Coble also thanked his family and friends for their support and mentorship throughout the years.

"Today offers me a unique opportunity for me to speak to both my family and my fellow Soldiers," Coble said. "I put my boots on each morning because of people. I have been blessed throughout my career to have mentors who have guided me."



career that I have."

"Your support allows me the ability to serve," he said to his family. "Without your support I couldn't continue to do what I do."

Coble enlisted in the Illinois Air National Guard in 1993 and was mobilized in support of Operation Southern Watch to Saudi Arabia in 1999 and to Kuwait in 2002.

Coble was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Illinois Army National Guard in 2004, serving as a physician assistant with Company C, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, based in Springfield, Illinois. He graduated from the U.S.

Army Flight Surgeon course in 2008.

Coble deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom to Afghanistan with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team as part of Joint Task Force Phoenix VIII in 2008-2009.

Coble practices emergency medicine as a physician assistant and is a clinical preceptor and lead instructor at HSHS St. John's Hospital in Springfield, Illinois. He is a legislative co-chair and legislative liaison for the Illinois Academy of Physician Assistants and adjunct clinical professor at Indiana State University.

Coble was joined by his wife and daughter, Jaelyn and Haley Coble, who placed his new rank on his uniform. 🇺🇸



"Through their mentorship I have been afforded unbelievable

opportunities," he continued. "Without their guidance I wouldn't be here today. I want to give back to people and help those coming up realize the same successes throughout their

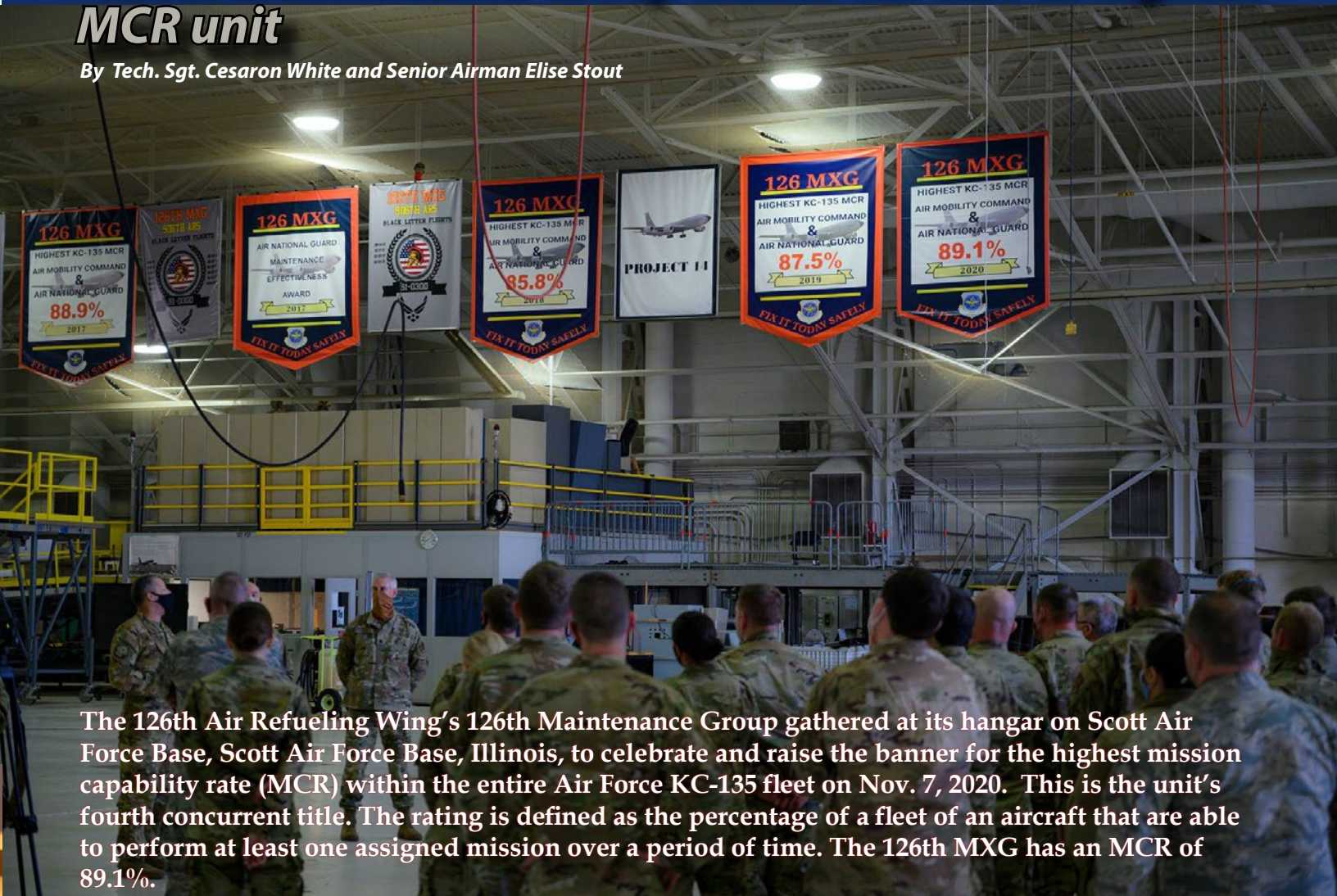




# High Capacity:

## 126th Maintenance Group claims 4th title as highest MCR unit

By Tech. Sgt. Cesaron White and Senior Airman Elise Stout



The 126th Air Refueling Wing's 126th Maintenance Group gathered at its hangar on Scott Air Force Base, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, to celebrate and raise the banner for the highest mission capability rate (MCR) within the entire Air Force KC-135 fleet on Nov. 7, 2020. This is the unit's fourth concurrent title. The rating is defined as the percentage of a fleet of an aircraft that are able to perform at least one assigned mission over a period of time. The 126th MXG has an MCR of 89.1%.





# *Back to back, shoulder to shoulder:*

## *108th earns back to back sustainment awards for deployment*

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, Illinois** – Two exceptional Illinois Army National Guard teams won the prestigious U.S. Secretary of Defense Maintenance Award for Sustainment Train, Advise, and Assist of Foreign Military Forces back to back.

“To win a Secretary of Defense award once is an outstanding achievement. To win the award two years running is just amazing and testament to the excellence and professionalism within our ranks,” said Maj. Gen. Richard Neely, the Adjutant General for Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard.

The Illinois Army National Guard’s 108th Sustainment Brigade, based in Chicago, deployed back-to-back teams to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility supporting Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve, earning the Secretary of Defense Maintenance Award for Sustainment Train, Advice and Assist of Foreign Military Forces in the operational category. The first team deployed in November 2018 and returned home in September 2019. They were replaced by the 108th’s second team, which deployed in July 2019 and returned in May 2020.

“For two teams from the same unit to receive

the award in back-to-back deployments speaks volumes for the work the 108th accomplished while there, but for it to be a National Guard unit is pretty special,” said Col. Gerald L. Newman of Oregon, Illinois, who just retired as Commander of the 108th Sustainment Brigade and led the second team.

Newman said the two teams had different missions during the deployments.

“When team one arrived overseas, they did 90 percent of the work compared to 10







percent of the work by the Iraqi Army,” he said. “When team two left Iraq, the Iraqi Army was in control putting in 90 percent of the effort compared to 10 percent of U.S. effort. By the end of the deployment, the Iraqi Army was fully capable and willing to execute the sustainment mission.”

The 108th directly supported nine Iraqi Army depot-level maintenance facilities, a tactical Iraqi Army Transportation Brigade, and two tactical Iraqi Army Engineer units, according to Newman.

“The teams conducted nearly 450 key leader engagements, advising Iraqi Army General Officers,” Newman said. “The team guided the Iraqi Army towards self-sufficiency with a focus on depot-level maintenance and warehouse operations on the Taji Military complex.”

Newman said team one advised the Iraqi Army in training, fault tracking, and standardized fulfillment processes, leveraging all coalition efforts to improve sustainability while supporting ongoing operations.”

The 108th’s team two provided logistics training and support to the Iraqi Army. The goal was to develop the Iraqi military’s logistics capability through training, tracking, forecasting and execution.

The 108th increased Iraqi Army capability in tracking, forecasting and budgeting repair parts for vehicles. They worked with the First Iraqi Army Engineer Depot to rebuild engines and also increased the Iraqi Army’s ability to track real-time transactions and improved the Iraqi Army’s capabilities coordinating and transporting internal supplies using Iraqi resources.

“The greatest accomplishments for the 108th was the unit’s success building long-lasting relationships with our Iraqi Army counterparts, which enabled us to enhance their strategic and tactical logistic and maintenance processes throughout the Iraqi Army,” Newman said.

The most rewarding part of the mission was the work our junior captains put in to help Iraqi Army senior leaders, according to Newman.

“Our young captains were conducting key leader engagements with senior Iraqi Army leaders, advising and assisting generals,” he said. “Through the KLEs, they improved the process and worked with two- and three-star

level positions to move the needle toward more Iraqi Army effort and less U.S. effort.”

Newman said he was proud of both teams and their work, which earned them the back-to-back award.

“Both teams’ performance was phenomenal,” he said. “I’m proud of them and the support of our families which allowed



us to conduct this mission.”

Newman said he was also proud of the 108th SB’s resiliency, determination and will to execute the mission with the Iraqi Army.

“We know the Iraqi Sustainment community has the leadership and competency to execute their sustainment system across the region,” Newman said.

The award was to be presented at the Pentagon in January, but the ceremony was canceled due to COVID-19 safety protocols and restrictions on DoD travel. 🇺🇸



# ***Homeward Bound II***

***Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment's A, C and HHC companies return home.***

***by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs***

Approximately 185 Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment were welcomed home Dec. 3 when they returned home from a deployment to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility.

Soldiers from Company A, based in West Frankfort, and the remaining Soldiers from parts of Company C, based in Litchfield, and Headquarters and Headquarters Company, from Marion, arrived at MidAmerica St Louis Airport, Mascoutah, Illinois, on two flights from El Paso, Texas, following post-deployment screening and out processing at Fort Bliss, Texas.

The Soldiers were welcomed home by Maj. Gen. Richard Neely, the Adjutant General, Illinois National Guard; Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, Assistant Adjutant General-Army, Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Behary, State Command Sergeant Major, CWO5 David Hamman, State Chief Warrant Officer, as well as leadership from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, before being released to their families.

Approximately 200 Soldiers from Company B, based in Effingham, and a portion of HHC and Company C returned home Oct. 31.

Company A provided security forces along the Jordan border and secured U.S. resupply routes in austere outposts supporting Operation Inherent Resolve.

A portion of HHC and Company C deployed to Jordan to support the U.S. Security cooperation agreement with the Kingdom of Jordan through training with the Jordanian Armed Forces as part of the Jordan Operational Engagement Program in support of Operation Spartan Shield. 🇺🇸









# High Fliers:

## Illinois Air National Guard Wings Select Outstanding Airmen of the Year

Each year the wings choose its best Airman (AMN), Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO), Senior Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO), and First Sergeant (1st SGT), based on set of criteria that takes into account, duty performance, adherence to military standards, and off duty accomplishments.

### Nominees from the 126th Air Refueling Wing

Not pictured is NCO of the Year, Staff Sgt. Mariah Nelson, 126th Medical Group



Airman of the Year:  
Senior Airman  
Cole Gelfius, 126th  
Operations Group



SNCO of the Year:  
Master Sgt. Bryan  
Hatfield, 126th Air  
Refueling Wing



First Sergeant of the Year:  
Senior Master Sgt. Nichole  
Peterson, 126th Mission  
Support Group

### Nominees from the 182nd Airlift Wing



Airman of the Year:  
Senior Airman Michael  
Zepeda  
Det. 1, 182nd Medical  
Group



NCO of the Year:  
Tech. Sgt. Cody Razo  
182nd Civil Engineer  
Squadron



SNCO of the Year:  
Master Sgt. Cody  
Canfield  
169th Air Support  
Operations Squadron



1st Sgt. of the Year:  
Senior Master Sgt.  
Ryne Meardy  
182nd Logistics  
Readiness Squadron



Honor Guard of the  
Year:  
Senior Airman Kaylee  
Larkin  
182nd Force Support  
Squadron

### Nominees from the 183rd Wing



Airman of the  
Year:  
Senior Airman  
Courtnee Grafton



NCO of the Year:  
Technical Sgt.  
Clinton Odle



SNCO of the Year:  
Master Sgt.  
Michael Schormann



1st Sgt. of the Year:  
Master Sgt.  
Mitchell Shelton



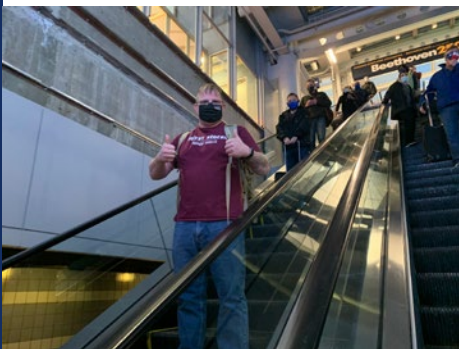
# Chemin' Home

## 135th Chemical Company returns from Kuwait

By Sgt. Stephen Gifford, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Approximately 150 Soldiers with the 135th Chemical Company, based in Machesney Park, Illinois, arrived home Dec. 11 in time for the holidays after a successful overseas deployment.



The unit deployed in January to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility in support of Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) as part of Task Force Spartan.

“The 135th took control of the COVID-19 mission, running the border between Iraq and Kuwait sanitizing all equipment that traveled into Kuwait from Iraq,” said Capt. Eric Rezba, of Sherman, Illinois, Commander, 135th Chemical Company. “If it was not for the Soldiers of the 135th there would have been a serious degradation of movement of equipment, supplies, and services throughout the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. The Soldiers of the 135th did a

fantastic job supporting CJTF OIR, Task Force Spartan, and Task Force Hellhound.”

Rezba said the 135th is overjoyed being home in time to celebrate the holidays with family.

“Coming home and being able to see our families is very exciting. Now if we have to quarantine, we can at least quarantine with our families,” he said. “COVID-19 touched the 135th just as it did everyone else, if not more so. We were in



lockdown for a majority of the time we were in country.”

Rezba said the 135th deployed just before the pandemic hit hard in the United States, so coming back into the new environment is an adjustment, but he’s sure the Soldiers are up to the task.

“COVID-19 is worldwide, so we have dealt with this before,” he said. “I imagine a

few of us will have a shock as we try to get back into a routine at home.”





# Dixon Colonel Retires After 35 Years of Service

*Veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan Led Unit That Won Secretary of Defense Logistics Award*

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

**DIXON, Ill.** – A small group of friends and family gathered at the Illinois National Guard Armory in Dixon, Illinois, to celebrate the career of Col. Gerald Newman on Dec. 5.



"It's fitting that we're here at the place it all started," said Newman. "My military career started right here in an office upstairs. It makes sense that it comes to a close here too." The retirement of a senior officer is typically a large event, but Col. Newman kept the event small and adhered to all the current COVID-19 safety protocols.

Newman enlisted in 1985 as an infantryman with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 129th Infantry Regiment, based at the Dixon armory. Five years later, he graduated from Illinois State University with a degree in Industrial Technology and commissioned as an air defense artillery officer with Battery C, 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery Regiment, also based in the same Dixon armory.

Newman has held a variety of leadership positions in his career, most recently as the commander of the 108th Sustainment Brigade based in Chicago. The 108th recently returned from a deployment in support of Operation



Inherent Resolve. While in Iraq, Newman's unit was awarded the U.S. Secretary of Defense's Sustainment, Training Advise and Assistance of Foreign Military Forces Award. Newman was also on state active duty for the "Great Flood" of 1993. He also deployed in 2005 to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and in 2012 to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, Illinois National Guard, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, who deployed with Newman to Iraq and Afghanistan, officiated Newman's retirement ceremony.







“When you think of Colonel Newman, you think hard-working, driven and dedicated,” said Zerbonia. “I’ve been with Jerry since the beginning. When I came off active duty in 1996, he was right there running a PT test right next to me. We’ve been together ever since.”

Zerbonia lauded Newman’s service and ability to embrace any assignment given to him. He also thanked him and his family for the



many years of hard work and dedication to the Illinois National Guard. Zerbonia spoke highly of the memories and deployments he shared with Newman.

“When you serve with someone you create a bond, but when you deploy with someone that bond becomes an unbreakable bond of shared service and friendship,” said Zerbonia. “It’s a little hard standing up here, I’m not just saying good-bye to a great officer, but also one of my best friends in the military.”

During the ceremony, Newman was

presented with his retirement orders, a retirement certificate and a flag commemorating his service. Newman’s wife, Angie, was also presented a certificate of retirement as a thank-you to her dedication to her husband’s career. Newman also presented his wife, his mother and mother-in-law with bouquets of roses in appreciation of their support.



Newman said throughout his career, he seized every opportunity given to him and attributed his success to taking those opportunities, even if they weren’t exactly what he was hoping for.

“My great-grandmother used to say everything happens for a reason, and it stuck with me,” said Newman. “I went wherever I was needed and took every opportunity. My reward wasn’t my success, but the success of the Soldiers and officers that I commanded.”

Newman thanked the many mentors he had during his military career, but was especially grateful for the advice of a retired Command Sgt. Maj. William Lafferty, who told Newman about the Guard.

“The decision to join was the best decision I made,” said Newman. “If it weren’t for that decision, I wouldn’t have the family that I have today.” 🌹



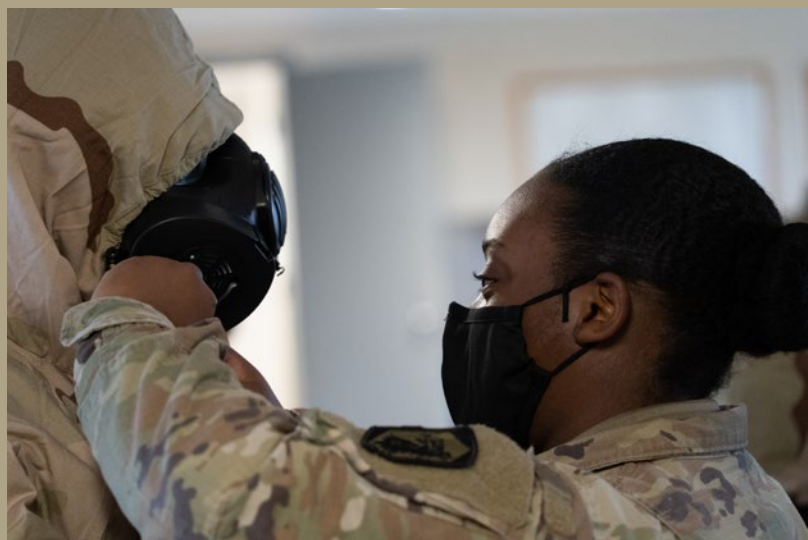
# ***On the Road Again:***

***233rd Military Police Conduct Road to War training***  
***by Staff Sgt. Justin Goad, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade***





Soldiers from the 233rd Military Police Company based in Springfield, Illinois, traveled to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, Dec. 4 - 8 to conduct their "Road to War" training. The collective training is designed to simulate scenarios the Soldiers may encounter while deployed. The unit conducted a variety of training to prepare for deployment including military operations in urban terrain (MOUT), movement and navigation to an objective and Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology (JSLIST) training.





# Mt. Pulaski Soldier Promoted to colonel

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Eric Davis of Mount Pulaski, Illinois, was promoted to colonel in a ceremony at the Illinois National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois, Dec. 29.

“This is a big day for Eric and his family,” said Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. “It’s not everyday we get to promote such a truly talented officer to the rank of colonel. He is a truly gifted officer who can think tactically and strategically and then bridge the gap between the two. That makes us all better as the Illinois Army National Guard. This is a well-deserved promotion.”

Davis enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1987 as a cannon crewmember, serving with the Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment, where he rose to the rank of master sergeant. In 2001, Davis received a direct commission as a field artillery second lieutenant in the Illinois Army National Guard. As a captain, Davis activated and served as the first commander of the 2123rd Forward Support Company, based in Milan, Illinois.

Davis has served in a variety of positions with the then-404th Chemical Brigade and the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. In 2017 Davis assumed command of 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery Regiment.

In 2011, Davis deployed to Afghanistan with the Polish Army as part of the ILARNG Bilateral Embedded Staff Team A7, serving as Deputy Commander of a joint multi-national task force in southern Ghazni Province, Afghanistan.

He was assigned as the Deputy Chief of Staff of Plans, Operations and Training, Illinois Army National Guard in June 2020.

“In moments like this there are always lots of people to thank,” Davis told those gathered both physically and virtually through a Facebook Live feed. “I firmly believe we are simply the sum of all who have invested in our service.”

Davis thanked Bonnie, his wife of more than 30 years for “being a rock for our family.”

“I’m at this point in my career because of you,” he said. “You

have challenged me to think bigger and I appreciate that very much.”

He also thanked his parents, Ed and Eleanor Davis, for the “solid foundation they provided.”

“You raised me with values and a strong work ethic and I greatly appreciate it,” he said. Davis also thanked his children for the sacrifices they made over the years.

“I have missed significant events over the years I wished I could have been at because of my job,” he told his five children. “We are proud of each of you.” 🇺🇸





# Illinois Air Guard commander gets second star

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs, photos by Robert Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Peter “Pete” Nezamis of Belleville, Illinois, the Assistant Adjutant General – Air, Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, was promoted to major general during a ceremony Dec. 29, at Illinois National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln.



“The Illinois Air National Guard is in the top-tier of readiness across all three of our wings because of the hard work and dedication of our Airmen as well as the outstanding leadership of Pete Nezamis,” said Maj. Gen. Richard Neely, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “General Nezamis is an excellent officer and this

promotion is well deserved.”

Nezamis spoke of the importance of mentors in his career and in the careers of young officers and Airmen.

“There is a time at squadron command when someone says ‘You’ve got to go do this.’ Listen to your mentors,” said

Nezamis. “Certain seasoned leaders, many of whom have since passed, saw that potential in me...I was reluctant at times. I wasn’t always ‘yes, yes, yes,’ but they saw something in me

that, at the time, I didn’t see in myself.”

He said that all young leaders are going to make mistakes and that good mentors are “there



to pick you up when you didn’t do it quite right” and make it a teachable moment.

He advised young leaders to “Be bold. Don’t wait - have a plan. Listen to your mentors. Prepare yourself. Know what want to do versus waiting for the opportunity. Know where you want to be.”



Soon, he said, “you will be seasoned, been mentored, and will be ready to lead others.”

Maj Gen Nezamis thanked Maj Gen Neely for his leadership and confidence in him while expressing gratitude for his family especially his wife Teeshia for her sacrifice, encouragement, and the “pillar” supporting him and their three sons all at the same time. 🇺🇸



# Best of the BEST



## *Bilateral Embedded Staff Team A25 returns home, capping more than 15 years of co-deployments*

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs, photos courtesy of USO Illinois, BEST A25 and BEST A11*

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** - Five Illinois National Guard Soldiers who deployed in May as part of Bilateral Embedded Staff Team (BEST) A25 returned home in time for Christmas, wrapping up combat missions with the Polish military in U.S. Central Command that has lasted more than 15 years.

"These missions were vital for our national defense as the country of Poland was part of the U.S. coalition in Iraq and Afghanistan. Fighting together as brothers and sisters in arms strengthened the Illinois National Guard's unique State Partnership Program relationship with the Polish military," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, The Adjutant General and Commander, Illinois National Guard.

BEST A25, whose mission it was to advise

and support the Polish military contingent in Afghanistan, deployed in early May to the U.S. Central Command area in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel, arriving in theater amid the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

The Soldiers are from various communities in Illinois, including Champaign, Chicago, Frankfort, Tinley Park and Collinsville. The Soldiers were selected for the mission based on their training and skills.

"It was not long after combat operations in Iraq began that the Polish military requested a contingent of Illinois National Guard Soldiers to serve as a liaison team. After the Polish shifted forces to Afghanistan,







we went with them,” said Maj. Gen. Michael A. Zerbonia, of Chatham, Illinois, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of Illinois Army National Guard. Maj. Gen. Zerbonia led one of these missions. “The Illinois Army National Guard was requested because of our long-standing and successful partnership with the Polish military.”

The size of these teams has varied from more than 20 led by a colonel to the returning five-person team led by a lieutenant colonel, depending mostly upon the size of the Polish Army contingent they supported. Poland has sent thousands of Soldiers to support U.S.-led efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.



During the latest deployment, the team oversaw the retrograde of more than \$11.5 million of equipment, updated the Polish armored vehicle fleet and oversaw the end of the Polish mission at

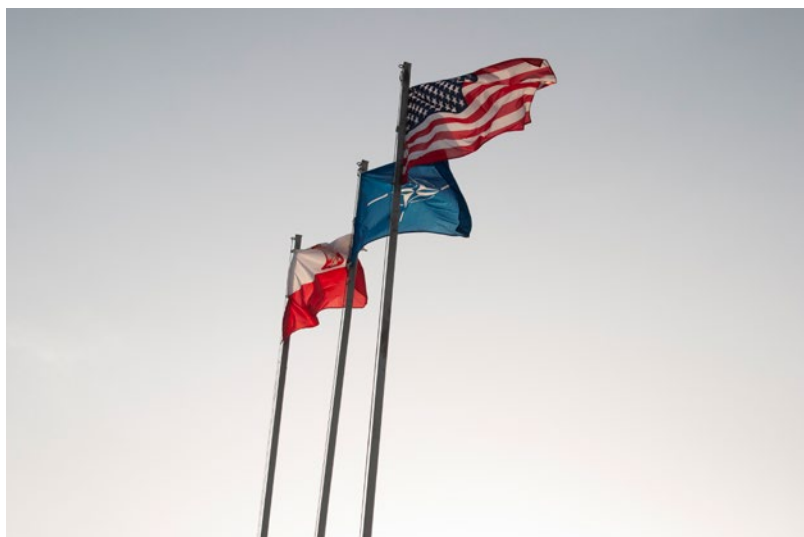
Forward Operating Base Fenty, which included the retrograde of more than \$6 million in equipment.

Lt. Col. Jason F. Osberg of Champaign, Illinois, BEST A25 Commander, said one of the most important accomplishments of his team was overseeing the end of the Illinois Army National Guard BEST missions. Prior to departing Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan (BAF), BEST A25 turned over operations to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, based at Fort Drum, New York.

“The BEST missions were extremely important because it not only demonstrated the strong relationship between Poland and the state of Illinois, but it also showed the Illinois Army National Guard commitment to the war on terror and the NATO mission in Afghanistan,”



Osberg said. “It was an honor to command the last rotation, but this is not the end of the relationship between Illinois and Poland - just a closed chapter. I’m confident the relationship



will continue in the future.”

The Illinois National Guard has had a State Partnership Program with the Polish military since 1993. The State Partnership Program between the Illinois National Guard and Poland has been the most successful State Partnership in the nation, helping Poland emerge from the Warsaw Pact to become a member of NATO and one of the United States’ staunchest allies. 🇺🇸



# Selfless Service

## Col. (ret) Ray Perry retires after serving the Illinois National guard for more than a half-century

story by Mike Chrisman, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs, photos courtesy of Ray Perry and Robert Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL. -** In the age of technology, it has been said that great leaders use doors, not Windows. The reference compares hands-on leadership versus leaders who spend most of their time on a computer (Windows).

Raymond F. "Ray" Perry Jr. of Springfield, Illinois,

embodies the doors versus Windows reference. He officially retired on Dec. 31, 2020 marking more than 55 years of serving the men and women of the Illinois National Guard and the Illinois Department of Military Affairs.

Perry, who will turn 76-years-old in January 2021, is retiring from his IDMA position after 22 years – a career that started after more than 30 years of service with the Illinois National Guard. The retired Army colonel was hired in January 1999 as the Illinois National Guard Mail Manager at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois. In 2001, he found his niche at Camp Lincoln, taking a job as Personnel Support Officer, where he has impacted the lives and careers of

thousands of Soldiers and Airmen during his 20-year stint at that job.

"I find the professionalism of the Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen to be the most rewarding," Perry said. "I enjoyed helping

thousands of Soldiers attain active duty tours in Illinois,

**"As a military leader, my style was 'Management by Walking Around (MBWA)'"**

stateside or across the globe."

Besides helping Soldiers and Airmen attain active duty tours, Perry worked as the Illinois National Guard Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Manager, Awards Program Coordinator and Personnel Administrator.

It was his unique style, though, that many at Camp Lincoln will remember and miss.

"As a military leader, my style was 'Management by Walking Around (MBWA),' " Perry said. "I had a knack for being able to describe an objective in terms of what the outcome should look like, assets available and timeliness. From time to time, I would check the progress and clarify any issues.....never micro-



manage.”

For nearly two decades, those working at the Illinois National Guard’s headquarters in Springfield enjoyed daily conversations with



Perry, as he spent the beginning of each day popping into different offices to greet the staff and ensure their day started off with a smile and positive attitude.

“MBWA worked well for my 30-year career as an Army officer, so I used it as a state employee as

well,” Perry said.

Perry started his military career in August 1965. He was commissioned as an Army Officer in 1968. He served as a citizen-Soldier from 1965 to 1983, serving in North Carolina, Texas, Indiana and Illinois National Guards while working full-time for Weyerhaeuser Company in each of those states.

In 1984, Perry was hired full-time for the Illinois Army National Guard, working numerous different positions throughout the state until he hung up his boots and retired from the military in January 1999. Perry served 33 and a half years in the military and retired as a full-bird colonel, receiving numerous awards for his service, including the Legion of Merit and Defense Meritorious Service Medal.

“Ray Perry shaped many careers through mentorship, while in uniform and after retiring from the military,” said James Smith of Chatham, Illinois.

Smith served alongside Perry for many years in the Illinois Army National Guard before



Smith retired as a full-bird colonel in 2008. Similar to Perry, Smith has continued to serve the Illinois National Guard as the Chief of Staff for the Illinois Department of Military Affairs.

Over the last half century, Perry said

he has seen many changes in our military, especially after the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks.

“In 1965, National Guard Soldiers were second class,” Perry said.

“National Guard units received equipment and training only after the active duty components. Since around 2003, National Guard units and Soldiers are nearing par with the active duty units. Additionally, military and civilian education has become increasingly more important to Soldiers and the organization.”

Perry will be remembered by many for his positive outlook on life and his love for the men and women in uniform. Others will remember him for his mentorship.

“Any time I needed advice, whether in uniform or in my civilian capacity, Ray Perry was the person I trusted to give me that advice,” said Tony Boster of Auburn, Illinois.

Like many others at Camp Lincoln, Boster served alongside Perry in the Illinois Army National Guard before Boster retired in 2012 as a sergeant major. Boster now works as the Illinois Department of Military Affairs State Personnel Director at Camp Lincoln, where he has connected more personally with Perry.

“Any time I needed a sounding board or just a friend, he was there,” Boster said.

Looking back on his career, Perry points to one special moment that impacted him.

“While I was serving as the 33rd Infantry Brigade Executive Officer, I was part of a team that had to brief General Colin Powell, Army Chief of Staff, on a proposed federal mission change for the 33rd,” Perry recalled. “General Powell prefaced the briefing by telling us ‘be careful what you ask for, you may get it.’ That quote stuck with me through the years. I’m always prepared to be ready for any mission.”

Perry has been married to his wife Lynda for 44 years. They have five children. Perry said he looks forward to his retirement and continuing to spoil their 11 grandchildren.

“Ray dedicated his entire adult life to the service of others,” Smith said. “He is a special person and deserves an amazing retirement.”





# THIS DAY IN HISTORY

## 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 B. Wehrly, 28, of Galesburg, Ill., died in Ashraf, Iraq, on Nov. 3, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his HMMWV during patrol operations. Wehrly was assigned to the Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery, Macomb, Illinois.



### 6 Operation Noble Eagle

2001: As part of Operation Noble Eagle, Illinois Governor George Ryan ordered members of the Illinois Army National Guard to provide additional protection for the state's nuclear power plants. One-hundred five Soldiers in Companies C and D of the 1st Battalion, 131st Infantry manned security posts at eight nuclear facilities. Operation Noble Eagle came to a close on May 31st, 2002.



### 11 Armistice Day

1918: On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, an Armistice took place between the Allied and Central powers across all battle zones. It marked the beginning of the steps that would bring the First World War to an end. The efforts of the National Guard were pivotal to Allied success in obtaining this goal of ending a bloody and futile war. The Guard engaged in combat for the first time ever with the official name of "National Guard." Illinois' 33rd Infantry division played pivotal roles in major battles and units like the 131st Infantry and 370th Infantry were highly decorated.

### 12 Ashley Sietsema

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



### 24 Famous Guardsman: Otis B. Duncan

1918: Otis B. Duncan of Springfield, Illinois joined the Illinois National Guard in 1902. His obedience and skill as a Soldier helped him rise quickly through the ranks. He first saw action in the Mexican Campaign that began March 15, 1916, when General John Pershing attempted to capture the renegade Pancho Villa. Duncan served with distinction in the European theater of WWI. He took part in the final engagement of the war when he led his unit, the all-black 8th Infantry, against the German garrison at Laon, France. As a major he received the Croix de Guerre for actions in the Oise-Aisne Offensive on November 24, 1918. Duncan died in May 1937, having spent the post-war period working for the Illinois Department of Education. In 2020, the city of Springfield, Duncan's hometown, renamed Douglas park to Otis B. Duncan Park in his honor.





# December

## 6 Spc. Brian Wright

2005: Spc. Brian A. Wright, 19, of Keensburg, Ill., died in Ramadi, Iraq on Dec. 6, when his HMMWV struck a mine during combat operations. Wright was assigned to the Army National Guard's 135th Engineer Company, Lawrenceville, Ill.



## 8 Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion received its baptism of fire in the Philippines

1941: Within hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese launched their invasion of the Philippines. Stationed at Clark



Field on Luzon, Company B of the 192nd Tank Battalion found itself directly in the path of the Japanese onslaught. Enemy aircraft strafed the column of tanks lined up on the runway. Days later, the 192nd received word that they were to spearhead the allied counterattack with the 194th Tank Battalion at Lingayen Gulf.

## 16 Decatur Soldier earns Silver Star at Battle of the Bulge

1941: Private Harold W. Munson of Decatur, Illinois, assigned to the 32nd Cavalry Squadron, not the 106th Cavalry, voluntarily provided cover to a medic as he advanced toward a wounded forward observer. At great personal risk, he crossed three hundred yards of fire-swept terrain and protected the medic as he administered medical treatment to the wounded soldier. Twice more he advanced through devastating artillery and small arms fire to protect the medic who crossed dangerously near enemy positions to reach wounded soldiers. Munson received the Silver Star for his bravery during the battle.

## 18 126th Air Refueling Squadron

became the second Illinois Air Guard unit activated for Desert Shield

1990: Acting on orders from President George Bush Sr., Illinois Governor James R. Thompson activated the 126th Air Refueling Squadron for Operation Desert Shield. Based out of Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, the 126th became the second Illinois Air Guard unit to be sent to the Persian Gulf. The Airmen from the 126th joined the 182nd Tactical Air Support Group from Peoria.



## 28 Air Guard delivers first U.S. military aid to Iran after deadly earthquake

2003: An Illinois Air National Guard cargo plane that joined an international

effort to aid victims of a devastating earthquake was the first U.S. military flight to Iran since the hostage crisis more than two decades ago. The C-130 Hercules



from the 182nd Airlift Wing landed December 28 in Iran, a breakthrough that U.S. officials hope will warm diplomatic relations. The United States severed ties with Iran in 1979 when Iranian militants took 52 Americans hostage at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held them for 444 days.



The Hercules touched down at an airport in Kerman, about 120 miles from the ancient city of Bam, where up to 45,000 people were killed, in

the pre-dawn December 26th quake. Iranian soldiers and the aircraft's crew first broke down five pallets of supplies then formed a human chain to transfer the 20,000 pounds of medical supplies, food, and purified water into a first and then a second waiting truck.



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1301 NORTH MACARTHUR BOULEVARD  
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**DSN: 555-3569  
PHONE: (217) 761-3569  
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