



Illinois National Guard

Prairie Sentinel

Volume 16

Illinois Air Guard Civil Engineers Help Cherokee Veterans

ILANG COMMANDER RETIRES FROM NATIONAL GUARD AFTER 37-
YEAR CAREER

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD SERGEANT MAJOR FROM EAST
PEORIA RETIRES AFTER MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF SERVICE

Summer 2022

Illinois National Guard

Prairie Sentinel

Click on a title to jump to the full story

Table of Contents

Commander’s Farewell p.3
Maj. Gen. Peter Nezamis Retire’s
ILANG Commander Retires from the National Guard p. 4-6
State command chief warrant officer retires after 40 years of service
SGM Retires After 30 Years p. 7
Sgt. Maj. Merritt of East Peoria Retires
Company H RSP Orientation Flight p. 9
“It was a once in a lifetime experience.”
New COS IL Department of Military Affairs..... p.10
Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Cobetto new IDMA...
IL Air Guard Civil Engineers Help Nation’s Veterans p. 11
126th Civil Engineer Squadron
123rd Engineers Battalion Go to Work at Camp Ripley p. 13
Improvements being made at Minnesota Military Post
Southern Illinois Fallen Soldier Honored p. 15
The Illinois National Guard helps celebrate Polish Constitution Day in Chicago.
ILNG OCS 65 Years in..... p. 17
Established in June of 1957.....
Cyber Shield Exercise p. 18
Approx. 30 ILNG cyber and computer securirty specialists hone their skills
TAG Awarded Polish Award for Building p. 20
Commander of ILNG receives....
ILNG Incentives Process p. 21
ILARNG Incentives Processing..
Govenor of Illinois Awards Medal to ILNG TAG p. 24
General Awarded for “poise and leadership” during Covid 19...



Bud Billiken Parade 2022 p. 25
ILARNG Participates in...
Polish Delegates at IEMA... p. 26
Polish Secretary of State joins...
Hard Work Paid the Price p. 28
New command chief remembers where he came from...
CW4 Retires After 38 Years p. 30
In 1984, Bates starts her ILARNG career....
CW5 Black Named 6th Command Chief Warrant Officer of IL p. 32
Black is the fourth full timer....
President Signs Legislation to Rename Post Office after Fallen Soldier p. 33
The Marion Post Office will.....
ILANG Welcomes New Commander
Brig. Gen. McDonough.... p. 34
Skokie Veteran Honored p. 36
Veteran recieves....
ILARNG Soldier Inducted in Hall of Fame p. 37
Sgt. 1st Class Terry Jones II was...
PeaceKeeper Ride... p. 39
Starting at the ILNG HQ ...
ILNG at STEAM EXPO p. 40
Science, Technology, Engineering.....
IL State Military Museum Honors... p. 41
ILNG General Speaks at American Legion Convention p. 42
Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia, Director....
Task Force Restore Trust p. 43
182nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron p. 44
Unit Deploys to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command AOR p.45
This Day in History p. 46
Social Media and Contacts: p. 48

Take it From the Top:

Senior Leaders’ Corner

Commander’s Farewell



To the Officers, NCOs, and Airman of the Illinois Air National Guard

After nearly 37 years of service to Illinois, and our nation, the time has come to bid you all a heartfelt farewell as I step down as your Commander and retire this summer. I say 37 years, but my first two were in the Michigan Air National Guard in Battle Creek. Those days are a distant memory. Teeshia and our sons; Nicholas, Eric Peter, and Alexander, served and sacrificed alongside me for all of it. There’s no way I would be here today without their love and support.

This has been the greatest adventure I never planned - to serve and be blessed with all the opportunities presented to me. I had but one simple goal, fly airplanes in the Air National Guard. I would worry about tomorrow, tomorrow.

Never in my imagination would the journey look as it did - especially serving abroad in harm’s way. I spent most of my career at the 126th Air Refueling Wing, first in Chicago and then moving in 1999 to Scott Air Force Base. In 2018 I was called to our headquarters on Camp Lincoln, first as the Chief of the Joint Staff and then, in January 2019, as Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard.

The many priceless places, faces, and friendships are etched in my memory. I have served for and with the best Airman, officers, NCOs, aviators, and leaders one could ever hope for. It has been an honor to serve in the Illinois Air National Guard in the Cold War, Gulf War, the Balkans, the Global War on Terror, during the war in Ukraine and through other conflicts and challenges. Under all conditions, elements, victories, and tragedies; every day you - the best professionals in uniform - inspired me. You are darn good at what you do. Adversaries, challenges, and struggles were never a match for the determined Illinois Air National Guard member.

No one can match the accomplishments of your wings and our state headquarters. Your infinite drive, experience, pursuit of excellence, adaptability, and innovative spirit was evident with every visit I paid to your wings and organizations.

As National Guard members, you supported the

nearly 11 million citizens of Illinois during domestic emergencies. During the Great Flood of 1993 and the many floods that followed, you were there. More recently, during Covid-19 response, civil unrest in our cities and the nation’s capital, and winter storms; you were there. You were there during hurricanes and earthquakes in our fellow U.S. states and territories and in other countries needing our help.

You built and continue to foster the greatest nation-state partnership; our State Partnership Program with Poland. It was among the first and will reach its 30th anniversary next year. Its success is your success. You can be proud as Poland plays such a vital role on the world stage and in the security of Europe. Your friendships and strong relationships with the Polish and their Airmen will maintain a positive and enduring partnership for generations to come.

You set the standards and benchmarks for the entire Air Force. Organizational excellence is your hallmark. Collectively, you’ve had no fewer than seven higher headquarters inspections. Every wing met or exceeded every inspection milestone with grades of fully effective or better and many sub areas graded Outstanding or Excellent. The Air Force Inspector General has shared several of your “best practices” throughout the enterprise. You met every global force requirement to contingencies throughout the world propelling Illinois as the model state for service to our nation. Just in the past four years, you’ve earned four Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards and the headquarters won an Air Force Organizational Excellence Award. This all added to the Illinois Air National Guard’s legacy of excellence. Our principles as an institution are to build, maintain, and ensure the combat readiness of your flights, squadrons, groups, and wings. That’s evident to anyone who has visited your organizations.

My family and I leave you in the most capable hands, that of your own determination, your leadership and Brig Gen (S) Dan McDonough from the 182nd Airlift Wing. As you have so professionally served and supported each other and your wings, undoubtedly, you will continue to lead from the front with honor.

May God bless you and your families, the Illinois Air National Guard, the State of Illinois.



ILANG COMMANDER RETIRES FROM NATIONAL GUARD

**Peter Nezamis led Illinois Air Guard
during one of most challenging
periods of nation's history**

By Senior Master Sgt. Ken Stephens, 126th Air Refueling

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois – “Have you ever thought about flying in the Air National Guard?”

This question set Peter Nezamis on a 37-year path that stretched around the globe.

He knew he wanted to be a pilot. “To just fly,” Nezamis says, but, no, it didn’t involve the National Guard or the military at all.

It was his aviation professor at Western Michigan University, Maj. Bob Aardema, a pilot with the Michigan Air National Guard, who talked him into considering the military.

Nezamis looked into it and decided it would help him reach his goals.

“I just wanted to focus on airplanes, so I decided to go towards the Air Force and started down that road,” said Nezamis.

It was Aardema who introduced the Guard as a real option, and recommended he interview at the Battle Creek Air National Guard Base where they flew the OA-37 Dragonfly jet.

The wing decided to give him a chance at being a pilot, conditional on finishing his degree at Western Michigan.

He graduated later that year leaving for Officer Training School in November of 1986.

He considers graduating officer training as a real milestone in his life.

“To me, that represented a moment where I felt like I really accomplished something,” he said, “That

was a real test, getting through officer training.”

He didn’t get to rest long. He graduated as a second lieutenant in mid-December and was on his way to pilot training after Christmas.

Completing the year-long course in January 1988, was another milestone in his career.

“Pilot training was difficult. It was fun, it was challenging. There were days that sucked. That’s just how it was,” he said, “But I felt like I really accomplished something.”

Returning to Battle Creek, the unit told him to get experience flying larger aircraft before learning the Dragonfly. That meant training with another Air National Guard wing for a while.

“I got a call from the Battle Creek guys who said Chicago would hire me but under one condition, I had

to stay with them for three years as a full-time employee,” Nezamis said, “I

thought, ‘They’re going to hire me to work full time, pay me, and move me from Michigan to Chicago and back again. What’s not to like about that?’”

Driving to Chicago for another interview, he met with Lt. Col. Rich Anders, with the 108th Air Refueling

Squadron, under the 126th Air Refueling Wing, who laid out the responsibilities of working under the Strategic

Air Command in the late 1980s, including rotating aircrews on standby alert status to quickly respond to

hostile actions from our adversaries.

This also meant another flight school, this time at Castle Air Force Base in California, to learn to fly the KC-135 Stratotanker.

After working with the 126th for a while, Nezamis found he enjoyed flying the larger planes, especially the travel opportunities that came with the refueling aircraft.

“I joined the military and then I started flying around the world. I was seeing other cultures, and other people, and experiencing that. It was nothing like I had ever experienced,” he said, “The Tanker allowed for that.

I liked being able to take it places and still support the fighters and bombers up close.”

In 1991 Battle Creek wanted their pilot back. By this time, he had flown with the KC-135 long enough to feel comfortable with it. He decided to stay with the 126th and the life he found in Chicago.

“I took the mission that I enjoyed flying, and the friends that we made, and the local community that we lived in,” he said, “Who knows what it’s going to be like, to go back to Michigan and start over?”

Nezamis said he learned a lot from the leaders who trained him early on.

“Some of my very early mentors would have been Lt. Col. Al Neil, who taught me how to fly the airplane, taught me priorities, and taught me discipline. Col. Bob Bilik who taught me the mission, how critical the nuclear mission is, and the support of the nuclear mission, and how disciplined that is,” said Nezamis. “Certain people enter your life at certain times, and they make an impact. Sometimes they’re there for a lifetime, sometimes for a minute.”

He said the Gulf War had an impact on him, in part, because he was with his mentors. He credits the success of surviving the war to the disciplines he learned during those alert years.

“We went off to war together,” he said, “and we came home, and everyone was alive.”

After the war and coming into the 1990s, a lot of changes occurred. The Strategic Air Command reorganized under the Strategic Command and the alert missions went away. The wing was realigned under the new Air Mobility Command. Nezamis was hired as a



full-time technician for the 126th, and he was given his first leadership opportunity.

He said Col. Anders told him, “We’re going to stand up this division called ‘training flight,’ and I want you to stand it up with others in the unit.”

Documented training was the new standard for the Air National Guard and Nezamis was assigned to head it up for the squadron.

“That’s how it started. I was hired to do something, and I’ve got to do it,” he said. “If I ruffle some feathers in the meantime, then I’ll dust off, get reprimanded, come in the next day and try again.”

He started interacting more with squadron and wing leadership, which he said gave him more opportunities to learn about them and prove himself.

“You start to interact with people, you start to learn people, you learn the quirks of people,” he said. “So, you start to build relationships.”

He said moving from one position to another in the 108th allowed him to learn more about the mission and how it works.

Around the middle of the 1990s, the Base Realignment and Closure Committee decided to move the 126th from Chicago to Scott Air Force Base in southern Illinois.

Brig. Gen. Hal Keistler was the wing commander throughout the transition. Many wing members opted to take early retirement rather than the move creating a need for new commanders.

“I remember sitting in his office and he looked me and said, ‘I’m going to put you on a path here. Could you contemplate being the wing commander in five years?’” Nezamis said. “I was just a major at the time.”

Nezamis said he realized he wasn’t being offered the wing command, only that Keistler was putting him on a track of learning and training that could put him there in five years.

Keistler encouraged Nezamis to apply for the 108th Air Refueling Squadron commander position, which he did and was hired in 1998, one year before the wing officially left Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport.

As the wing was moving to southern Illinois, Nezamis was also packing up his household and family.

He met his wife, Tisha, in Michigan while they were both in college. She was a nursing student. They married after he completed pilot training and moved to Chicago.

“Tisha had a different path in life. She had definite plans to graduate nursing school and then move south to start a new life,” said Nezamis. “But I kept pursuing her. In the end she sacrificed where she saw herself wanting to be. She sacrificed all that for me.”

During his time in command, Tisha made it a priority to take care of the household and their three boys, Nick, Eric, and Alex.

“We have three great sons who are out there doing great things,” he said. “They have Tisha navigating them.”

In 2003 Nezamis was selected as the 126th Operations Group commander. Three years later, in March of 2006, Nezamis was promoted to Wing Commander, which brought about new mentors.

Maj. Gen. Tom Kaine, the previous 375th Air Mobility Wing Commander filled that role.

“He took an interest in me, trying to get me to understand how the active duty is,” said Nezamis. “He took me under his wing to help me to understand the relationship.”

Nezamis said his one regret is staying too close to home during his career and hopes young Airmen will see the benefit of taking broadening assignments in various locations.

“I would have and should have embraced a tour at the National Guard Bureau or something to broaden the horizon a little bit,” he said. “Getting out and abroad is important, especially if you want to find yourself in leadership positions. But, my biggest regret could be my biggest blessing.”

After spending 12 years as the wing commander, he was asked to be the director of the joint staff, at the Illinois National Guard Headquarters in Springfield, Illinois, leading the Army and Air Force staffs.

He said working at the headquarters level was a new experience.

“It’s about building those relationships,” he said. “You have to walk around the building. You have to get to know people. Your job is to remove obstacles that are in the way of your Airmen and officers who are doing the job, your people. Find opportunities that benefit the mission set of



the wings and help people with those opportunities.”

Less than a year later he was appointed the Assistant Adjutant General – Air for Illinois. This gave him oversight of the command, control and operations of plans and programs of the three Air National Guard wings in Illinois.

“From an Air Adjutant General perspective, you set those priorities for force development, for Airmen development in the state. You have to pay attention to what the Air National Guard Capstone Principles are, and make sure your wings are aligned within those principles. You remove the obstacles that may be in their way,” he said. “It’s the same kind of approach.”

The move to the Joint Force Headquarters also came with promotions. Nezamis pinned on a brigadier general star in 2019 as the Chief of the Joint Staff, and the second major general star as the Adjutant General - Air in 2020.

Becoming a general officer brought an opportunity to be an airborne emergency action officer with Strategic Command on the Airborne National Command Post. He was a designated nuclear expert advisor to the president.

The nuclear deterrence mission is something Nezamis said he always considered a “no fail mission.”

“Doing this job I understand the complexities of the world, there are many more nuclear powers nowadays,” he said. “There is much more instability in many ways, which makes deterrence even more critical.”

This brought his career full circle. “I started out pulling alert in (Strategic Air Command), and somehow I ended my career as a major general right back where I started, pulling alert,” he says.

Now retired after 37 years, Nezamis said there was always one constant source of support for him and his mission, Tisha.

“I could not have done it without her,” he said. “I look at our family today and I give her all the credit. I owe it all to her.”



ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD SERGEANT MAJOR FROM EAST PEORIA RETIRES AFTER MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF SERVICE

Sgt. Maj. David Merritt will work with Junior ROTC in Pekin

Story by Sgt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard, PAO



SPRINGFIELD, Illinois – Sgt. Maj. David Merritt of East Peoria retired from the Illinois National Guard on Friday, July 22, with more than 30 years of Army service, but he’s not done serving.

His next assignment, as a retiree, will be to teach Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) cadets within Pekin Community High School District #303. “Now he will pass on 30 years of Army knowledge to our youth,” said Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff Col. Lenny Williams.

“There’s a difference between leadership and authority,” Merritt said. “If you want to be a leader, you must do more than exercising your authority.” That includes caring for your Soldiers, he said. “Always be the leader who you want leading you.”

Merritt served as the Plans, Operations, and Training (G3) Sergeant Major for the Illinois Army National Guard, the “pinnacle” of noncommissioned officer (NCO) positions for “operators,” Williams said. “He took hard key assignments and every single one of them he did the right way.”

“I never had a down time. I always loved being in the Army,” Merritt said. “There was never a day that I didn’t want to go to work. Even

if we made a mistake, we fixed it and we learned from it.”

The Pekin JROTC “Dragon” Battalion will benefit from Merritt’s experience that includes a 14-month tour in Iraq from 2003 to 2004 with Peoria’s F Company, 1st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment based in Peoria. Merritt was also a key NCO leader during training rotations at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, Calif.; the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, La.; and the Joint Maneuver Training Center in Fort Chaffee, Ark. He conducted training with Poland’s Territorial Defense Forces in both Warsaw and Rzeszow, Poland.

The Illinois Army National Guard’s State Aviation Officer Lt. Col. Jason Henderson, who worked with Merritt for more than 20 years, said the cadets will also benefit from Merritt’s honest and empathetic leadership. “He takes the time to sit down with Soldiers and explain what they did right and discusses areas where they can improve,” Henderson said.

As Henderson got to know Merritt outside the military, he realized how much he applies his leadership within the community, coaching multiple sports and opening his home to those

less fortunate. But those Merritt lets into his home must be willing to work hard. “He helps them with a plan of action to get back on track.”

Merritt thanked his spouse, Wendy, and his two adult sons, Gunner and Tavin, for their support throughout his military career. “Here we are today, 30 years later, and there were a lot of missed birthdays, anniversaries and ball games.”

Merritt was a star athlete leading the East Peoria High School football team as quarterback, including the Raiders’ 1990 historic 35-34 win over Washington High School. He enlisted in the Army in January 1992 through the delayed entry program and would spend five years in the active Army, most of which was as a petroleum supply specialist with the 29th Signal Battalion based on Fort Lewis, Washington.

After his initial tour in the active Army, he came home to East Peoria enlisting in the Illinois Army National Guard’s 1-106th Aviation based on the General Wayne A. Downing Airport in Peoria. He would serve most of his career – more than 20 years - as an Active Guard-Reserve (AGR) NCO within easy commuting of his hometown. With the 1-106th Aviation he would serve as a fuel handler, supply sergeant, readiness NCO, Aviation operations sergeant, senior aviation operations sergeant, and operations sergeant. From 2010 to 2012 he served as the first sergeant of the aviation battalion’s headquarters company. From 2018 through 2021, he served as the operations sergeant major for the 65th Troop Command, also based in Peoria.

Capt. Bryce Greenwood, now the deputy chief of the Officer Training Branch at the U.S.



Army Aviation Center of Excellence, Fort Rucker, Ala., served with Merritt for more than a decade in the 1-106th. He called Merritt “a mentor, a coach and a friend” with “confidence that is contagious and assuring.”

“I don’t have a particular moment in time, but rather several

moments over the course of our friendship, where David has mentored and guided me,” Greenwood said. “Applying the principles such as trust, integrity, effective communication, and Soldier care, David has always been the anchor of any organization that has had the pleasure of having him in it.”

Lt. Col. Jason Celletti, the Commander of the 1st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, served with Merritt for more than a decade.

“His dedication and knowledge of training within the Illinois Army Aviation Units has postured the Soldiers of the 1-106th Assault Helicopter Battalion for multiple deployments and missions over the years,” Celletti said. “Sergeant Major Merritt has had outstanding leadership qualities that mentored and prepared

the junior leaders for the success at everything they do. His exceptional leadership over the past 20 years will truly be missed, but he has set the standard for the junior leaders to follow. Just like a good Soldier; he has balanced life, family, and the Army for multiple years and this retirement is

well deserved. The 1-106th Assault Helicopter Battalion will always be his home, full of great stories and mentorship moments that will live on from his legacy.”



COMPANY H. RECRUIT SUSTAINMENT PROGRAM CONDUCTS ORIENTATION FLIGHT, PHASE TRAINING, PHYSICAL FITNESS

By Shaylin Quaid, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Illinois National Guard

The Illinois Army National Guard Company H. Recruit Sustainment Program based in Woodstock, Illinois, conducted an orientation flight, worked in groups for phase training, and conducted physical training June 11 - 12. The Recruit Sustainment Program (RSP) is how recruiters prepare new recruits for Basic Combat Training where the recruits learn basic soldier skills, and Advanced Individual Training where the recruits learn job-specific skills.

Sgt. Yoon Kim is one of the primary recruiters and instructors at Company H. RSP. She said her passion is to develop and teach comprehensive training to the recruits.

“We take the fear of the unknown factor out,” said Kim. “I think people don’t know what we do, truly and simply that is the biggest fear. But RSP mitigates that fear by showing them a glimpse of what their one weekend a

General Support Aviation Brigade. Several of the recruits mentioned that they had never flown before.

“This is my first time flying. I’m excited to see the world in a different perspective, and what Illinois looks like from above,” said Pvt. 1 st Class Melissa Elias of Saint Charles, Illinois.

Two newly qualified Soldiers, Pvt. 1 st Class Kyle Smith of Arlington Heights and Pvt. 1 st Class Nicholas Pinedo of Lake Zurich had returned to RSP for their last drill after completing 15T Helicopter Repairer training. The pair sat harnessed in at the edge of the Chinook, and they were all grins as they pointed at buildings they recognized.

“It was a once in a lifetime experience,” Pinedo said, “I was smiling the whole time. My face hurts!”

Another role RSP serves is to create an environment where



month and two weeks in the summer will look like.”

Company H. themes their drills around specific topics, and June was centered on aviation. The recruits were divided into groups, where they conducted field classes on topics such as combat life-saving and buddy carry tactics, which tie into aviation because they are necessary in the event of medical evacuation via aircraft.

The recruits said they were most enthralled with the orientation flight, which took place on a CH-47F Chinook piloted by a team from Company B. 2 nd Battalion, 238

new recruits can develop their confidence, better themselves as people, and connect with their peers.

“Personal Courage is something we really focus on in RSP, they are coming out of their comfort zones. For the first time they have responsibility outside of their school life and family life, and here today they as individuals were able to see that they could fly high, do it safely, be educated, and enjoy the experience as a group,” Kim said, “I think the true magic of RSP is Soldiers learning who they want to become, through us and the program that we instill.”

COBETTO APPOINTED AS CHIEF OF STAFF OF ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois – Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois, Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Director of the Illinois Department of Military Affairs (IDMA) has selected Maj. Gen. (retired) William “Willie” Cobetto of Hillsboro as the next IDMA Chief of Staff.

Cobetto, IDMA’s Legislative Liaison since August 2019, has served as the acting Chief of Staff since his predecessor, Col. (retired) James A. Smith died of natural causes on May 11. Smith had served as IDMA’s Chief of Staff since 2008 after serving more than 30 years in the Illinois Army National Guard (ILARNG). He culminated his military career as the ILARNG Chief of Staff.

“Jim Smith’s leadership and mentorship will be missed. He left a lasting legacy with both the Illinois Department of Military Affairs and the Illinois National Guard,” Neely said. “Willie Cobetto will bring his own style of leadership to the position. Like Colonel Smith, Major General Cobetto has dedicated decades of his life to the organization.”

Cobetto said he is honored to be selected as the next IDMA Chief of Staff, but it is bittersweet. “Jim Smith was a friend and mentor and, like so many in this organization, I’m deeply saddened by his passing. There will only be one Jim Smith, but I will continue to try to move the organization forward as Jim did for so many years.”

Cobetto retired from the military with more than 30 years of service in 2015 as the Illinois National Guard’s Assistant Adjutant General – Air and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard. Prior to taking command of the Illinois Air National Guard, Cobetto served as the Air Guard’s Director of Staff for many years.

He worked in banking for three years before returning to the organization in 2019 as the Legislative Liaison.

Cobetto was born in Hillsboro and raised in Taylor Springs. He is a 1980 graduate of Hillsboro High School. He earned a bachelor of science degree in aeronautical administration from Parks College of Saint Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri. He and his spouse, Kelly, reside in Hillsboro and have four children, Ashley (son-in-law Matt and granddaughter Adeline), Jacob, Adam and Emily.

The Illinois Department of Military Affairs, with more than 200 state employees, directly supports the Illinois National Guard and oversees the Illinois State Military Museum, the Illinois Military Family Relief Fund, and Lincoln’s Challenge Academy.



Illinois Air Guard Civil Engineers Help Nation's Veterans



The Illinois National Guard 126th Civil Engineer Squadron is participating in an Innovative Readiness Training's Cherokee Veterans Housing Initiative. This volunteer opportunity provides U.S. military personnel with readiness training while addressing public and civil-society needs.





The excess shims are being cut flush with the wall by, U.S. Air Force, Senior Airman Jacob Mellenthin, 126th Civil Engineer Squadron, in a home being built for Cherokee veterans at Tahlequah, Oklahoma, Aug. 4, 2022. The Illinois National Guard members are participating in an Innovative Readiness Training's Cherokee Veterans Housing Initiative. This volunteer opportunity provides U.S. military personnel with readiness training while addressing public and civil-society needs.



U.S. Air Force, SMSgt. Ray Bell, 301st Civil Engineer Squadron, works with 126th Civil Engineer Squadron to put vapor wrap on a house during an Innovative Readiness Training in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, Aug. 4, 2022. The 301st CES is an Air Force Reserve Unit working with the 126th CES during this IRT's Cherokee Veterans Housing Initiative. This volunteer opportunity provides U.S. military personnel with readiness training while addressing public and civil-society needs.

Murphysboro-based Illinois National Guard Battalion Practices Engineer Skills While Making Infrastructure Improvements at Minnesota Military Post

Story by Spc. Elizabeth Hackbarth, Sgt. Ryan Swanson and Riley Anfinson
364th Theater Public Affairs Support Element



CAMP RIPLEY, Minn. – The Illinois Army National Guard's Murphysboro-based 123rd Engineer Battalion – including Macomb's 661st Horizontal Engineer Company and 616th Engineer Utilities Detachment as well as Sparta's 631st Engineer Company - is leaving Camp Ripley a better place than when they arrived and getting great hands-on training at the same time.

During the unit's annual training from July 9-23, the Soldiers practiced their military job skills while also replacing a roof on the post's wellness center, installing interior and exterior lighting on a warehouse, working on a survey and design project, repairing windows at a react to contact training site, and repairing a tank trail on Camp Ripley's ranges.

"Camp Ripley provided the materials and gave us projects throughout the camp," said Staff Sgt. Chase Sharp of the 661st. "A lot of these skills are perishable, so if they don't do it on the civilian side, they'll forget it on the Army side."

Completing these projects ensure the engineers are ready for deployments. "The Engineer Corps of the Army is essential, especially on deployment," Sharp said. They also worked on their basic military skills such as completing their annual weapons qualification.

Spc. Abdoul Sanfo, a plumber, worked on the roof project. "As a plumber, it's something new to learn about, and it's not part of my job, but I am learning from my experience in the Army," he said. That, he added, makes him more valuable to his unit and the Army.

At Camp Ripley, the 661st has also been value-added as they work to repair and construct a two-mile long trail through the woods for tanks and other tracked-vehicles.

"You don't want your tracked-vehicles running on your (paved) roads or the roads that you run wheeled-vehicles on because it will tear them up," said Sgt. Cody Huffman, a horizontal construction engineer with 661st and noncommissioned officer in charge of the operation. "So you make specific tank trails for them to travel on."

"Over time, they wear down, so we're here to touch them up a little bit, get them back into working order, try to reshape what's there so that they'll last for hopefully a couple more years before someone comes back and takes care of them again," said Huffman.

The tank trail that the 661st has been tasked with improving had become severely damaged over the past several years.

"There's a lot of bumps, a lot of potholes, so we're gonna try to cut and fill all of those and make it so it's smooth and you're not bouncing around everywhere," said Spc. Ethan Wolf, a horizontal construction engineer with 661st.

It rained during the work on the tank trail, turning potholes have turned into puddles of muddy water. "The rain has been making everything more difficult to dig in," said Wolf. "We have to scoop out all the water first and then swap it with dry dirt."





“There’s one pretty significant hole at the road that intersects the tank trail,” said Huffman. “We’ve been calling it the pond.”

Despite the weather challenges, the Soldiers were not deterred.

“I think this project has taught us you’ve got to stay flexible and shift fire,” said Huffman.

The 661st arrived at Camp Ripley for their two-weeks of annual training with the tank trail as their main mission. Huffman said it was “a perfect opportunity for junior soldiers and junior (noncommissioned officers) to both operate and be put into leadership roles one or two above their own.” said Huffman.

“This is a project where anything that’s not right we can always go back and fix,” said Huffman. “It’s not detrimental. It’s not like we’re pouring concrete or asphalt. It’s a tank trail. We’ve got a really good opportunity for people to both learn and teach.”

For most of the lower-enlisted Soldiers, that means more “stick time.” “Stick time” refers to the hands-on operating time with the heavy machinery.

“You can only perfect (operating the machinery) with practice,” said Wolf. “The two-weeks for AT is really beneficial because most of it is just stick time. So we’re all operating, we’re all switching, using all of the equipment we have here.”

“There are techniques that a lot of lower-enlisted (Soldiers) might not know, but that’s why we’re out

here,” said Wolf. “It gives them a chance to learn and learn how to make the mission successful.”

For the 661st, annual training allows the unit to test and evaluate their capabilities.

“It gives us the opportunity to use everything that we have to try and get the job done,” said Huffman. “We’re using all of our own equipment, all of our own trucks, all of our own personnel, and all of our own knowledge to try and complete the task at hand.”

In the end, a tank trail is just a fraction of what the horizontal construction engineers are capable of.

“I move dirt, and I move things that move dirt,” said Huffman. “(But that’s) an oversimplification. Of course, our job is to support combat (Soldiers) and make sure they can get to the enemy. But our role (is also) to do anything where needed.”

“There isn’t anything that a group of engineers can’t pull off,” said Huffman. “We can do anything from pull security to dig tank ditches and defilades. We can repair roads and runways, and we can blow stuff up. That’s why our motto is essayons (“let us try”). Anything and everything we possibly can get accomplished, we’ll do it.”

Southern Illinois Fallen Soldier Honored

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

ANNA, Illinois - A ceremony renaming a 15 mile stretch of Highway 146 from Anna to Vienna, Illinois, the Sgt. Brian Romines Memorial Highway was held June 6, in Anna, 17 years after the Illinois Army National Guard Soldier from Simpson, Illinois, was killed in action when an improvised explosive device detonated near the vehicle he was travelling in near Baghdad, Iraq.

“The Sergeant Brian Romines Memorial Highway will not only honor a fallen Illinois Army National Guard Soldier, a loving son, and an exuberant friend, but will also ensure our solemn promise to never forget,” Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, of Naperville, Illinois, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard told family and friends. “Brian is a hero who lived to help others and make us laugh. We will not forget. His life and his sacrifice, like so many others, are the cobblestones that pave the roads of freedom.”

Romines, a 2003 graduate of Vienna High School, enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in October 2002 and attended the Field Artillery Cannonmember Course in 2003. He was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery, based in Milan, Illinois.

“There are some things which happen to you in life that change you,” said retired Maj. Gen. Johnny Miller, from Tamms, Illinois, who served as Romines’ battalion commander on June 6, 2005. “June 6, 2005 was one of the hardest days in my 32-year military career. He didn’t have to join the Army – he volunteered to join. He volunteered to go to Iraq and he volunteered to go on that mission. He’s a hero. He represents the best of our nation,

our state and our area. His sacrifice will never be forgotten.”

Melinda Clary, Romines’ mother, who worked with local state legislators, State Rep. Patrick Windhorst and State Sen. Dale Fowler, to get the joint resolution passed through both the Illinois House and Senate, said she is appreciative of the support she has received.

“I appreciate the kindness. It helps us to heal,” Clary said. “I think to know that people truly care and want to show they appreciate his sacrifice.”

Clary thanked officials from the Illinois Department of Transportation for installing the eight road signs along Highway 146 as well as the Gold Star families she has met in the past 17 years.

“These signs will forever more honor Brian,” Clary said. “And I am truly thankful for the friendship from the Gold Star families who know

the never ending journey of grief.”

Windhorst said the renaming ceremony was a great way to pay tribute to a Soldier who fought and died for our country.

“It’s important for us to recognize and honor sacrifices made by our brave service men and women,” Windhorst said. “We owe our freedoms to the sacrifice made by our military and

their family. This is a very appropriate way to honor the sacrifice by Sergeant Romines.”

Windhorst said the cost of freedom is high.

“We owe so much to those who paid the cost with their lives,” Windhorst said. “We owe Sergeant Brian Romines and his family. We cannot and must not forget the service and sacrifice of the American Soldier. That is why we rename highways after heroes. That is why we celebrate Veterans Day and that is why we pause and mourn on Memorial Day.”

Fowler agreed the dedication was an appropriate tribute and one he was honored in which he played a role.

“One of my greatest honors is to be able to recognize heroes,” Fowler said. “It reminds us each





day and each moment is precious. We never know when we will get that knock on the door.”

Highway 146 has a high volume of travelers each day, and Boyd said those motorists will be able to reflect on Romines’ service and sacrifice.

“Each year tens of thousands of commuters and travelers will pass through this section of highway and reflect on Sergeant Romines’ service and sacrifice to our state and nation,” Boyd said. “Brian’s school mates from Anna Junior High and Vienna High School will drive this highway and

remember their friend.”

Clary said it was only fitting the dedication ceremony be held on the anniversary of his death, but told everyone it is the least that can be done in memory of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

“This isn’t just for Brian. It’s for all who didn’t make it home,” Clary said. “We want it to represent all of them. They all should have this same honor and dignity and respect. Their sacrifice should never be forgotten.”



ILNG Officer Candidate School

By Sgt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard, PAO

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School (OCS) dates back 65 years. Established at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, on June 1, 1957, the first class graduated on Governor’s Day, July 22, 1958.

Since its inception, the school’s standards have centered on tireless efforts of previous leaders, who, through their devotion to duty, set the path for future leaders. Over the decades, the program has served as the primary source for new second lieutenants in the Illinois Army National Guard, ensuring a continuous stream of newly trained leaders.

“The program has done a lot to guarantee that the state of Illinois has officers to lead our troops,” said Adriana Schroeder, the Illinois National Guard Command Historian. “The idea for federal OCS was presented in 1938, around World War II, but didn’t get started until 1941. Many states really didn’t have their own program to ensure that they had enough officers.”

The school has relied on qualified and experienced commissioned and noncommissioned officers to train and mentor officer candidates. In 2021, the ILARNG’s 129th Regional Training

Institute (RTI), which oversees the state OCS program, received a 98.4% accreditation score as an “Institution of Excellence” by U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC).

“It was a look at our processes and control measures for executing our classes and trainings,” said Lt. Col. Wyatt Bickett, the Officer in Charge of the 129th RTI. “That means that everything we’re being asked to do by TRADOC is being executed to the highest level possible. We can’t do that without our course managers and staff.”

Capt. Anthony McClain completed the Illinois state OCS course in 2010. He now serves as Security Cooperations Officer and Director of Diversity Equality and Inclusion at the Illinois National Guard Joint Force Headquarters.

“The 129th RTI has always been a center of excellence,” said McClain. “The leadership, instructors and cadre within the organization has always set, followed and enforced the standard for themselves, students and candidates.”

The Illinois state OCS program has continued to find a way to execute new innovative ways to improve training and ensure that OCs are trained to their full potential, starting from Phase Zero, also known as “Pre-OCS.” It is during this time

CYBER SHIELD AIMS TO DEVELOP, TRAIN, AND EXERCISE IN THE AREAS OF COMPUTER NETWORK, INTERNAL DEFENSE MEASURES AND CYBER INCIDENT RESPONSE

that cadre will work with OCs to ensure that they understand drill and ceremony, land navigation and other required knowledge that will ensure that OCs are fully prepared for Phases 1 through 3. As the phases progress, so does the intensity. OCs are expected to think quickly and make decisions as leaders. By Phase 3, OCs should have a broader understanding of what it means to be a second lieutenant.

Recently, the school reduced the OCS course length from 18 months to 8 months. This will hopefully lessen the burden for candidates who have commitments in their civilian lives throughout the year.

"We are one of a hand full of states that offer the 8 month OCS program," said Capt. Andrew Ducker, Officer Strength Manager and Basic Branch Recruiter at the ILARNG Recruiting and Retention Battalion in Springfield, IL. "Almost all other state programs are 18 months long. We are also one of the limited number of states that offer their own in-state OCS."

Although the training has continued to change over the years, graduates still cherish the memories from their experiences going through the program and are impressed by its continuous growth.

"I can honestly say that OCS was the best training I received in my career," said McClain. "My class graduated 5 personnel after starting with 28. The cadre helped identify my weaknesses and comfort zones and put me in a position to become a more effective leader. I support all commissioning programs, but what makes the Illinois OCS program unique is the fact that a great percent of candidates were noncommissioned officers. To understand the leadership relationship firsthand between a platoon sergeant and platoon leader or first sergeant and commander makes the transition to synergy easier."

"I think history is always important to learn, but more so to learn and grow," Ducker said. "The integrity of the program exists through the core values and the troop leading procedures. The program will always need to grow, adjust and evolve to meet the mission of today, but more importantly the mission of tomorrow."

NORTH LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas – About 30 Illinois National Guard cyber and computer security specialists are honing their skills, June 5-17, as part of Cyber Shield 2022, the Department of Defense's largest unclassified cyber defense exercise involving approximately 800 National Guard cyber specialists as well as law enforcement, legal, government and corporate partners from across the country.

This year the exercise is being conducted at the Army National Guard's Professional Education Center on Camp Joseph T. Robinson in North Little Rock, Arkansas. Service members and civilian experts from 20 states and the U.S. territory of Guam have gathered for the exercise.

The officer-in-charge of this year's exercise is Illinois Army National Guard Lt. Col. Jeff Fleming of Chicago.

"It is an absolute honor to lead this exercise and a staff of top-notch professionals," said Fleming, a cybersecurity professional with Broadleaf, Inc. in his civilian career. "The outstanding talent involved in this exercise underscores its importance to our nation's cyber defense."

The Illinois National Guard also has staff officers and noncommissioned officers in the exercise's opposing force, training, communications and public affairs sections.

The majority Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are part of the state's Defensive Cyber Operations Element based in Springfield. However, the exercise also drew Airmen from the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, the 126th Air Refueling Wing on Scott Air Force Base, and the 183rd Wing based in Springfield. These Illinois National Guard members formed a defensive "Blue Team" for the exercise.

"The exercise provides a great training environment for our cyber troops to learn terrific skills and then put those skills to the test in a competitive environment," said Illinois Army National Guard 1st Lt. Christopher Muentner of Springfield, who is leading Illinois' Blue Team.

The annual exercise, led by the Army National Guard and assisted by the Air National Guard, is a concentrated effort to develop, train and exercise cyber forces in the areas of computer network internal defensive measures and cyber incident response, according to the National Guard Bureau.

These cyber defensive measures can be employed to defend and protect critical cyber infrastructure including industry, utilities, schools, health care, food suppliers as well as military networks.

"Cyber warfare is not just our future – it is our contemporary reality," said Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau during an April U.S. Cyber

Command summit. "The National Guard is positioned to be leaders in the digital domain and continues to enhance our nation's cyber capabilities in combat and in the homeland.

"With 4,000 National Guard cyber operators across 40 states, many working for leading tech companies, the National Guard has the knowledge, skills and abilities to play a critical role in the DOD's cyber enterprise," he added.

Cyber Shield 22 brings together the nation's top cyber defense professionals from National Guard Soldiers and Airmen to various governmental, nongovernmental and high-tech partners. This year's exercise also involves teams from the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Effective cyber defense requires unclassified collaboration across multiple partners, said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the adjutant general of the Illinois National Guard and a master cyberspace officer. "We all need to be talking about these attacks and where they are coming from. To do that requires effective relationships and communications across all levels of government as well as the private sector."

Neely said that many of those professional relationships the National Guard shares with its partners in cyber defense "all began at a Cyber Shield."

The first week of the exercise involves training classes and hands-on exercises for participants. During this part of the exercise, service members have the opportunity to take top-notch information technology classes and earn industry-standard certifications that can be used both in the military and in civilian careers. These 15 different classes and certifications typically cost hundreds of dollars outside the exercise and are provided to participants at no cost.

On June 12, the second phase of the exercise begins. This second week puts the cybersecurity service members' skills to the test pitting them against an opposing force of hackers. The cyber defenders will work on identifying an intrusion into a computer network and then countering the hacker's actions, said George Battistelli, Cyber Shield 2022 exercise director and the deputy chief information officer for the Army National Guard.

"It is important for us to continue to train our Soldiers using real-world events, so they are able to cut down the noise and focus on the mission," Battistelli said. "In the exercise, and in the real world, we strive to achieve and maintain information advantage over our adversaries."

This year the exercise is focusing on responding to a "supply chain" attack similar to the SolarWinds attack that

effected many corporate and government networks, Battistelli said. A supply chain attack is when the hackers insert malicious code into third-party software such as IT monitoring software. When the software, or updates to the software, are installed, the malicious software is also installed allowing the hackers access to the corporate and government networks. The SolarWinds attack infiltrated a wide array of corporate and government networks. The exercise also infuses social media "noise" into the scenario, making the exercise as realistic as possible.

This year the Blue Teams – the "good guys" – will work to defend the military's own computer networks. In the past, the exercise scenario has had the Blue Teams responding under the authority of a state governor. This year, they are responding under federal authority. This changes the policy and regulatory bounds as well as the legal authorities of the response.

The exercise is also helping to train National Guard lawyers on assisting cyber service members in staying within those bounds and authorities, said Minnesota Army National Guard Capt. Cumah Blake, the lead staff judge advocate for the exercise.

"The Cyber Shield exercise is a great model," Blake said. "The exercise pulls together an integrated team of experts, not just cyberspace experts. It addresses not just cyberspace operations in a vacuum, but how do you pull together other members of your team and make those missions successful."

The Red Team – the "bad guys" – includes some of the best cyber experts in the industry, Fleming said. Members of the Red Team last year wrote their own malicious code and a bug bounty hunter brought proof of concept code to test a zero day vulnerability he discovered to train the Blue Teams with very sophisticated and challenging situations, he added.

This year the exercise will have a "Purple Day" when the Red Team will meet with the Blue Teams to discuss the attacks, what was done, and where and when it could have been caught. This will help train the cyber service members to defend against real-world attacks.

The training cyber service members receive at Cyber Shield are vitally important to the ongoing effort to protect the nation in cyberspace.

"We have to be right 100 percent of the time," Battistelli said. "Our adversaries only need to be right once to get into our networks."



POLISH PRESIDENT AWARDS ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD COMMANDER WITH MEDAL FOR BUILDING COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP

WARSAW, Poland – Polish President Andrzej Duda awarded Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, with the “Commander’s Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland” during a Polish Armed Forces Day celebration in Warsaw, Poland, on Aug. 15. The medal, commonly called the “Order of Merit,” is bestowed by the Polish President to distinguished foreigners for their contributions to international cooperation or cooperation between Poland and other countries within different fields. The medal has five classes with “Commander’s Cross with Star” being the second-highest class. “I am humbled to receive the Order of Merit and to have President Duda present it himself. This great honor really belongs to the 13,000 members of the Illinois National Guard and the work our Soldiers, Airmen and civilian employees have devoted to our partnership with Poland. Ours is the gold standard of State Partnership Programs,” Neely said. “Our partnership with Poland has become even more important to the security of both nations after Russia’s unprovoked and unjust invasion of Ukraine and the resulting humanitarian crises on Poland’s border with its neighbor.” Next year will mark the 30th anniversary of the Illinois National Guard’s State Partnership Program with Poland. The partnership conducts military-to-military engagements and facilitates broader interagency engagements. Over the past few years, the Illinois National Guard has been heavily engaged with the Polish Territorial Defense Force (TDF). Established in 2017, the TDF is geographically based within Poland’s different regions. In many ways, it resembles the National Guard in the United States. These engagements have increased in frequency and intensity after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Poland,

which borders both Ukraine and the Russian Kaliningrad region. Poland’s 332-mile border with Ukraine has been vital in supporting the invaded nation. This year the Illinois National Guard and the Polish TDF have conducted medical, Javelin anti-tank weapon, and sniper training together. The partnership between the Illinois National Guard started shortly after Poland emerged from behind the “iron curtain” of the Russian-led Soviet Union. The partnership helped Poland prepare for membership in NATO, with the European nation becoming a NATO member in March 1999. Poland has become a staunch U.S. ally and Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers fought side-by-side with Polish Soldiers in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The partnership has also forged long-standing ties between Illinois and Poland. When Polish Secretary of State Jacek Siewiera visited Illinois earlier this month, it was his second visit to the state in the past two years. The first was in April 2020 when then Polish military Capt. (Dr.) Siewiera led a medical team to Illinois to assist with the state’s COVID-19 response. The Polish Secretary of State’s most recent visit, facilitated and coordinated by the Illinois National Guard’s State Partnership Program, is forging ties between Poland’s 200,000-plus Fire Service and the State of Illinois and City of Chicago. “These friendships were forged by strong cultural ties and years of working together to address mutual security concerns. They have helped Illinois, Poland, the United States, and really the entire free world,” Neely said. “Our partnership with the Polish has made communities on both sides of the Atlantic safer and more secure across many different spheres.”

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD INCENTIVES PROCESS

By Col. Ron Bonesz, G-1, Illinois Army National Guard

ILARNG INCENTIVES PROCESSING 101

In early June, the Military Personnel Office (G1) distributed a simple two-page document which provided the force a brief synopsis of the process behind incentives and bonuses within the Illinois Army National Guard. This article is intended to dig further into the situations that caused our current dilemma, what we’ve been doing to right the ship, and initiatives we are putting in place to ensure we take care of our Soldiers into the future. Before I get into that though, I want to ensure each and every Service Member that everyone involved in the processing of bonuses and incentives, as well as the entire senior leadership of the Illinois National Guard, are doing everything possible to correct this situation. Even as a young Platoon Leader, I knew that one of the most severe injustices we can do to our Soldiers is to mess with Soldier pay or not correct it in a timely manner. The fact that we are here, despite the situation being impacted by a myriad of issues, is inexcusable, but do know that we will fix it and get our Service Members paid!

So, what happened and how did we get here? Although this probably doesn’t matter much in the long run and you are more concerned with what we are currently doing, I feel it is important to explain the background and basically explain that the Illinois National Guard has no nefarious intentions behind the delay in the processing of bonuses and incentives, nor do we plan to renege on any contractual obligation that has been signed. Going back several years, the Guard Incentives Management System (GIMS) has had a difficult time dating back to 2018 when the network server overheated and destroyed information within the automated system. The Nation slowly rebuilt itself though there were many errors once GIMS was back online. Back in Illinois, this situation was further complicated by the methodology the state was using to process incentives along with manpower shortages within the incentives branch.

Even though GIMS struggled to maintain consistent functionality fighting frequent errors, system outages, and a need for an improved system, in early 2021, the ILARNG restructured the Incentives and Education Offices with additional manpower to begin working the backlog of incentives created by the aforementioned

issues. However, in mid-June 2021, GIMS began experiencing several challenges, chief among them was the inability to write or pay reenlistment contracts. Additionally, on the horizon was the sunset of Adobe Flash with no operational system from the National Guard Bureau (NGB) available for when GIMS was no longer supported by Adobe Flash. The Nation struggled to utilize the new and Legacy GIMS, however no functionality was found in the new GIMS, Legacy GIMS was offline, and States were left to wait for NGB to determine our next steps in processing incentives.

On 4 August 2021, while trying to create a new incentives management system, the NGB Branch Chief of Incentives Oversight sent a message stating, “There is currently no supporting contract or contractors for GIMS support. There is no known remedy date for the new contract. Although the previous contractors worked toward resolution, there has been no perceptible improvement in the functionality of GIMS. Now there are no support personnel to fix any new/old issues or answer any help tickets.” This now left us in a completely manual processing environment without guidance or training on how to proceed.

In response to this, Illinois sat down with State leadership across the G1 and Military Pay Office (USPFO) to create a manual process that fit within the guidelines given to Illinois by NGB. Within the first two weeks of September, all Major Subordinate Commands (MSC) were trained on the Illinois manual process and by 1 October 2021 were informed to start utilizing this process across the State. Many challenges have filtered between NGB, Illinois, and the USPFO during the processing of the test cases of the manual process assisting to alleviate the pressure off the field. Additionally, in response to this change in processing temporary technicians were hired and trained, initially being placed in the field to build these manual packets. This was a slow process at first as these packets had to be built from scratch and each required document had to be downloaded from the Soldier’s electronic record or from various systems. Even then, the completed packet had to go through reviews at the battalion, brigade, state, and military pay before being processed for payment. As time went on, and the number of uploaded packets increased, those Temporary Technicians were pulled to the state level to provide additional support in the review process.

Again, I felt that it is important to relay to you the background of what happened and understand that most of these issues were at the national level impacting all the States and Territories. With that said and through the manual process, the ILARNG was able to pay out over 335 bonuses through both the USPFO and NGB. As GIMS slowly came back online starting in May of this year, the remaining backlog of manual packets, as well as any new bonus contracts, were migrated and entered into the new software. The ILARNG continued to employ our Temporary Technicians to continue reviewing and expediting the processing of our current backlog.

Additionally, nationwide decentralization efforts have allowed state military pay offices to approve payment (thereby circumventing NGB review). This initiative was put into place to ensure that states can process and pay bonuses internally and as quickly as possible.

Presently, the ILARNG Incentives Office in conjunction with the USPFO continues to work through the backlog of incentives. Although still backlogged, we are now on the right track and continue to push incentives daily for payment in accordance with the included lifecycle. Our intention is to clear out our backlog no later than September 2022 and then work to stay ahead of the curve. Unit staff and Career Counselors have the ability to see when Service Member Dates of Eligibility are, basically the date a bonus can be paid. The system populates these Service Members 90 days in advance of that date so that any required paperwork can be assembled, the bonus reviewed, and pending payment on that date. This is what we are striving to accomplish.

As we also look to stay ahead of new and future bonuses, as well as to ensure we do not repeat the issues of the past, the G1 Incentives Office, in conjunction with the Recruiting & Retention Battalion, have implemented a plan to have full-time Career Counselors at the brigade level to spearhead incentive, education, and retention efforts.

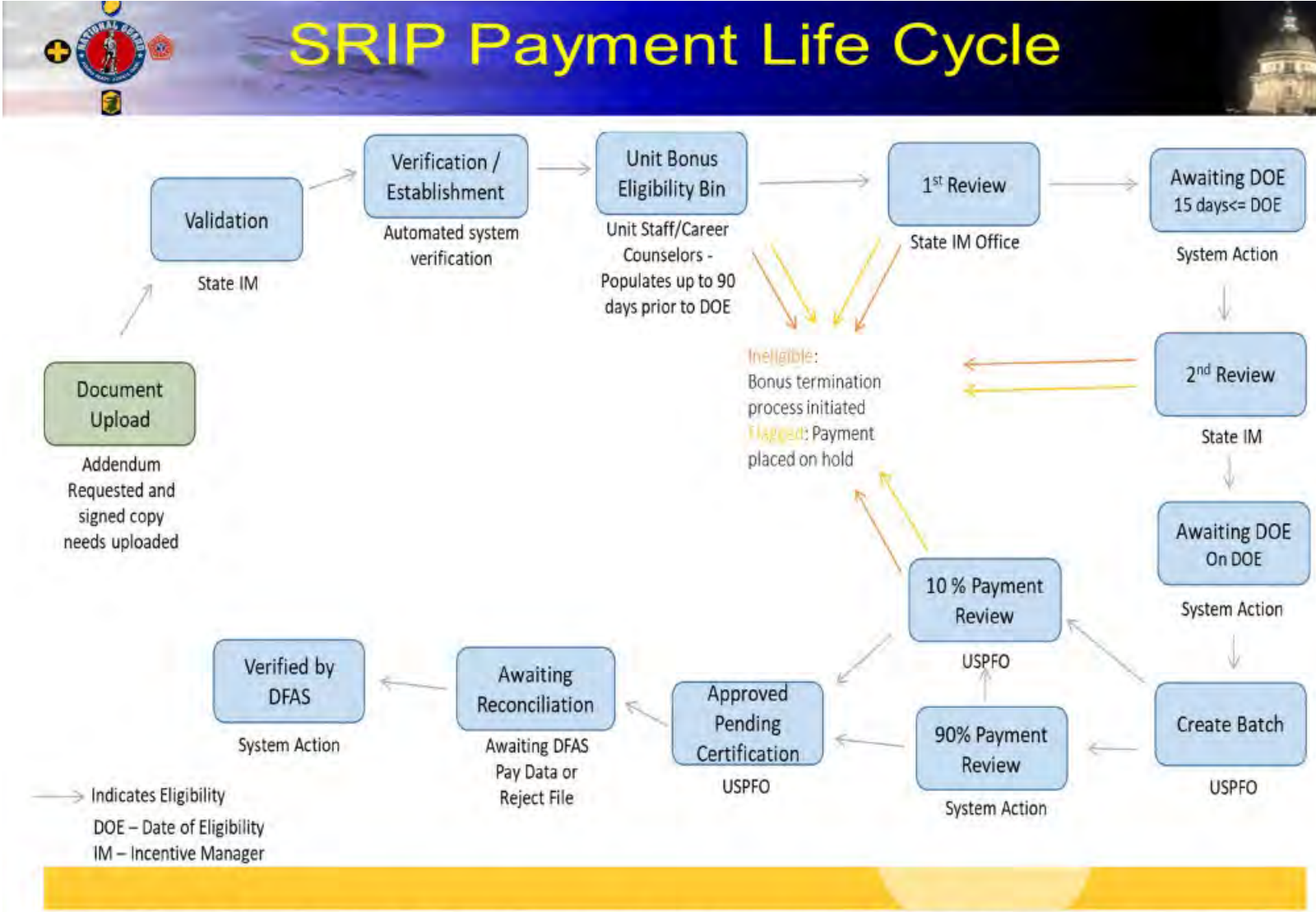
These Career Counselors will be the incentive subject matter experts in the field working with the units and their assigned recruiters. Additionally, they will be fully trained in GIMS and handle the quality check and uploading of documents in order to begin the processing of incentives and bonuses prior to reaching the state level, thereby alleviating a majority of the requirements on our unit Readiness NCOs. However, Readiness NCOs will still have the ability to view GIMS and should be the primary unit point of contact for our Service

Members if they have questions concerning their bonus and where it is at.

One additional initiative that we have initiated is that our full-time recruiters have begun attending at least one day of each unit's IDT weekend to advise command teams on issues that impact the retention of the Soldiers assigned to their unit. Additionally, these individuals will coordinate with the Brigade Career Counselors and Retention NCOs to identify Soldiers eligible for extension and provide unit level command teams with updates based on analysis and review of eligible population. These efforts will assist in allowing us to properly manage bonuses and ensure timely payments.

As the ILARNG works new bonus packets in GIMS, I've included the process regarding the complete lifecycle of a bonus for your reference. As you can see, there are many steps and reviews that must be accomplished prior to a bonus paying out. Upon initiation of a bonus / incentive, an addendum must be requested, and documents uploaded into GIMS. Upon validation by the State Incentives Manager and verification through GIMS, the bonus is established. Ninety days prior to the date of eligibility (DOE), the bonus then populates in GIMS in what is known as the Unit Bonus Eligibility Roster Bin or UBER Bin. This tells our Readiness NCOs and Career Counselors what bonuses are coming due and allows them to coordinate any actions and review of documents prior to the DOE. As I mentioned previously, our goal once we have cleared out the backlog is to ensure we get to a point where we are actioning all bonuses and conducting an initial and secondary review prior to the DOE to ensure payment is expedited. Once the Service Member is eligible for payment, the bonus is then sent to USPFO where 10% of the bonuses within that batch are reviewed for any errors. It is important to note that at any time between when the bonus populates in the UBER Bin to when USPFO conducts their review, that a Service Member either becomes ineligible for the bonus (breaks the terms of the contract) or is flagged for any reason, this will result in the bonus being terminated or payment placed on hold. Once reviewed and certified by USPFO, the bonus is then sent to the Defense Finance Accounting Service (DFAS) for payment.

As we work through the challenges of the past, we appreciate your patience and understanding. I know that is asking a lot, especially with some bonus payments being severely delinquent. Just know that the Incentives Office continues to work each bonus as quickly as possible to move the packet forward for validation and payment and we will continue to make improvements to our processes to ensure future bonuses are paid on time and that you are taken care of!



For additional information or to find out the status of your bonus, contact your Unit Readiness NCO, who will be able to look up the bonus within the Guard Incentive Management System (GIMS)

Background

For years, dating back to 2018, the Guard Incentives Management System (GIMS) and the internal processing of incentives in Illinois has been plagued with issues to include primary server malfunction, personnel shortage, nationwide contractor expiry, and programmatic failures. In early 2021, the ILARNG restructured the Incentives and Education Offices with additional manpower in order to work the backlog of incentives created by the aforementioned issues. Unfortunately, the process was dealt another blow in August 2021 as the entire automated process ceased operating and the nation was forced into a manual process.

The ILARNG reacted as best it could knowing that this situation would only increase the backlog and further delay processing efforts. Temporary Technicians were hired and trained, initially being placed in the field to build manual packets. This was a slow process at first as these packets had to be built from scratch and each required document had to be downloaded from the Soldier's electronic record or from various systems. Even then, the completed packet had to go through reviews at the battalion, brigade, state, and military pay before being processed for payment.

As time went on, and the amount of uploaded packets increased, those Temporary Technicians were pulled to the state level to provide additional support in the review process.

Where We're At Now

Through the manual process, the ILARNG was able to pay out over 180 bonuses, and at present there are another 300 bonuses pending payment at either NGB or USPFO. As GIMS has come back online as of May 2022, the remaining backlog, as well as any new bonus contracts, has been migrated / entered into the new software. The ILARNG has continued to employ our Temporary Technicians in order to continue review and expedite the processing of our current backlog.

In order to better serve the Soldiers of the ILARNG and to be ahead of the other states and territories, the ILARNG volunteered to be a test state for GIMS not only for incentive bonuses, but also for loan repayment and officer bonuses. Coupled with the nationwide decentralization efforts allowing state military pay offices to approve payment (thereby circumventing NGB review), the intent is to ensure that the state can process and pay bonuses internally and as quickly as possible.

Again, the Incentives Office continues to work each packet as quickly as possible in order to move the packet forward for validation and payment. As each packet is painstakingly reviewed, it is vital that they are thorough and complete, as any discrepancy noted must be researched thereby delaying the processing timeline.

At present, the intent of the ILARNG is to have the entire backlog of incentives processed by the end of September 2022 (hopefully sooner).

Where We're Going

As the ILARNG works through the backlog of incentives, we are also looking at means to stay ahead of new / future bonuses, as well as to ensure we do not repeat the issues of the past. As such, in close coordination with the Recruiting & Retention Battalion, we have implemented a plan to have full-time Career Counselors at the brigade level to spearhead incentive and retention efforts.

Furthermore, our full-time recruiters have begun attending at least one day of each unit's IDT weekend to advise command teams on issues that impact the retention of the Soldiers assigned to their unit and assist in achieving their retention goals, as well as coordinate with Brigade Retention NCOs to identify Soldiers eligible for extension and provide unit level command teams with updates based on analysis and review of eligible population. These efforts will allow us to properly manage bonuses and ensure timely payments.

An additional effort that has been successful in the past is our Quarterly Incentives Training. It is our intent to continue this training with all full-time unit staff that process these packets to ensure they are up to date on requirements, provide best practices and lessons learned, and to answer any questions and concerns from the field.

As the ILARNG works new bonus packets in GIMS, please reference the included process for the complete lifecycle of a bonus.



GOVERNOR JB PRITZKER AWARDS ILLINOIS DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL TO NATIONAL GUARD LEADER

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Illinois Governor JB Pritzker awarded Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, with the Illinois Distinguished Service Medal for the general’s “leadership and poise” during the state’s COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

The Governor, who is the Illinois National Guard’s Commander-in-Chief, awarded the medal to General Neely during the Guard’s quarterly Senior Leader Engagement on Aug. 19 at Manufacturing times Digital (MxD) in Chicago.

“The Illinois National Guard is the best National Guard force in the nation and it has the best leadership with Major General Rich Neely,” Governor Pritzker said. “The State of Illinois is grateful for how the Illinois National Guard responded to the COVID-19 pandemic saving countless lives with their fast and innovative support to the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and the Illinois Department of Public Health. The Guard is truly ‘Always Ready’ and ‘Always There’ when the State of Illinois needs it.”

The COVID-19 response was among the largest domestic response activations of the Illinois National Guard in history. The award cites Neely for providing “leadership and poise” as well as “clear and concise operational guidance” to his Soldiers and Airmen in establishing more than 630 vaccination sites in 241 communities throughout 71 of Illinois’ 102 counties.

Under Neely’s leadership, the Illinois National Guard conducted over 220,500 man-days of

support to COVID-19 vaccination efforts resulting in more than 1.87 million doses of vaccine being administered to the citizens of Illinois.

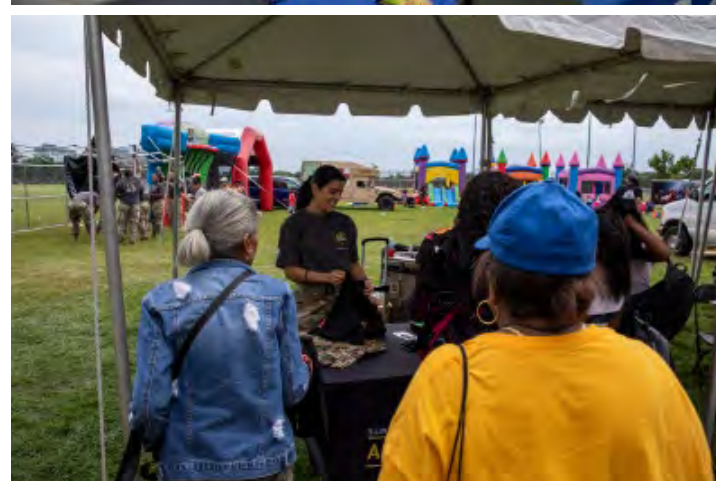
General Neely said he was honored – and surprised – by the Illinois Distinguished Service Medal. “This medal has my name on it, but it is really the Soldiers, Airmen and civilian employees of the Illinois National Guard and the Illinois Department of Military Affairs who earned it,” the general said. “The COVID-19 response was an example of what this state can accomplish working together. The cooperation and unity of effort from FEMA, IEMA, IDPH, local health departments, first responders, municipalities, counties, community agencies and many businesses saved countless lives. I’m proud to have been part of it and I’m proud that the Illinois National Guard played a vital role in this all-out team effort.”



Bud Billiken Parade 2022

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

Chicago, Ill. – The Illinois Army National Guard participated in the 2022 Bud Billiken Parade on Chicago’s South Side on August 13. The Bud Billiken Day Parade is the largest African-American parade in the United States. The famous all African-American “Fighting” 8th Infantry Regiment, based on Chicago’s South Side, was an Illinois Army National Guard unit that fought in the Spanish-American War through World War II. After integration of the Armed Forces, it became the 178th Infantry Regiment, today’s 1-178th Infantry. The 1-178th Infantry still has its headquarters on Chicago’s South Side in the General Richard L. Jones Armory. General Jones was a combat Soldier of World War I and World War II, businessman who managed the Chicago Defender, and 8th Infantry leader who established the 178th Infantry after the integration of the Armed Forces.



POLISH DELEGATES JOIN THE ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD AT IEMA

By Mr. Robert R. Adams, Command Information Manager, ILNG PAO



A delegation led by Polish Secretary of State Jacek Siewiera visited the Illinois Emergency Management Agency in Springfield, Illinois, on Aug. 9. During the visit, Siewiera along with Małgorzata Bąk-Guzik, Consul of the Republic of Poland in Chicago, Brig. Gen Adam Konieczny, Eng. Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the PSP, Deputy Head of civil defense of the Country, Colonel Arkadiusz MIKOŁAJCZYK, Chief of Staff of the Territorial Defense Forces Command and Major General Andrzej Bartkowiak Commander-in-Chief of the PSP-Head of Civil Defense of the Country, asked many questions regarding how the Illinois National Guard works directly with the IEMA during emergencies.



Hard work paid the Price

Story by Staff Sgt. Paul Helmig

“[Success is] up to the individual,” said Chief Master Sgt. Micheal Price, the new command chief of the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois. “You’ve got to fight for it, but the only one that’s going to limit you is you. If I can make it this far, anybody can make it this far.”

Price hasn’t forgotten where he came from. And he remembers what it took for him to get to where he is now.

The wing’s new command chief grew up in a small town along the Mississippi River with his parents and four siblings. It was there in Oquawka, Illinois, that he learned the meaning of hard work by tending stables and training horses for competitions.

Price said he remembers cleaning stalls every day after school before taking the horses on a 4-mile ride just to prepare for competitions on the weekend. It was the kind of demanding work that was rewarding at the same time.

In 1996, as a junior in high school, Price knew college was not going to be the right path for him after graduation. Instead, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and in 1997 he put small town life behind him to be a carpentry and masonry specialist.

After four years, and at his second duty station in Hohenfels, Germany, Price felt he made a mistake by enlisting in the military and ultimately decided to separate from the Army. But approximately one month after leaving active duty, while working in mine and again in the horse training business, he sensed something was missing.

“Man, I really miss it,” Price remembered thinking. “I miss the camaraderie and the sense of accomplishment and pride.”

So, in 2001, he made the decision to enlist into the Army National Guard as a field artillery specialist with the 2nd Battalion, 123rd Regiment out of Galesburg, Illinois. He spent almost two years there before joining the Illinois Air National Guard in 2003 and fulfilling his original dream of working in the military police field.

Price was initially put on orders at the 182nd Security Forces Squadron after completing technical training and backfilled positions on shifts. But in 2004, he was hired full-time as a military security

police specialist before being selected for an Active Guard Reserve position.

Price’s hard work and dedication to the 182nd Security Forces Squadron soon paid off, providing opportunities to hold the positions of flight chief, squad leader, unit deployment manager, government purchase card holder, NCO in charge of plans and programs, antiterrorism officer and operations superintendent. He ultimately was selected to become the chief of Security Forces in March 2016.

Additional personnel retirements and transfers during this time necessitated the huge undertaking of balancing a heavy workload, including his role as manager and simultaneously backfilling several of his previous duty positions.

“But you face challenges of manpower and lack of resources every day,” said Price. “There’s always something that throws a wrench in your plan, and you have to adjust like any other squadron does.”

Whether it was state mission taskings, overseas deployments, or a lack of resources, Price handled every challenge thrown his way, but certainly didn’t do it alone. He understood, and still understands, the importance of surrounding himself with subject matter experts to help him along the way.

Working in Security Forces for 19 years, Price had a strong working knowledge of the career field and its mission. However, selection as the wing command chief presented a new challenge: the understanding and knowledge of all career fields at the wing.

“That’s why it’s one of my first goals, is just to get out and job shadow somebody in maintenance and in operations and in ASOS, in a mission support group,” said Price, “Just so that I know what they’re experiencing and going through so I can provide assistance where it’s necessary.”

When 182nd Airlift Wing commander Col. Rusty Ballard sent an email looking for the next wing command chief, Price took some time to reflect on the path he should take. He understood the transition in a service member’s career from taking to giving back.

Price knew that in order to be an effective chief, and now the command chief of the wing, his mindset had to change. His mission and focus had to shift from taking opportunities to giving back to Airmen to help them succeed.

“I didn’t apply for the command chief job because of the title, because of a star, because of anything other than wanting to give back,” said Price. “For

the last 2.5 years or so I’ve been a chief, I’ve been focused on trying to give back because that’s what we’re supposed to do at this level.”

And Price feels like he has a lot more to give.

He views the position of command chief is charged with the responsibility for assisting with Airman development, career opportunities and empowering Airmen to become future leaders in the Air Force.

Price understands that living out and teaching leadership principles of ownership, empowerment and innovation will provide opportunities, tools and resources for Airmen to excel on their own. He wants the Airmen to know that he will support them, even if they fail, as long as it’s in the pursuit of excellence.

Price admits that he didn’t get to this position by himself. It was a combination of his faith in God, the people that surrounded him and guidance from

mentors that elevated him to the level of command chief.

Price said he pushed himself to succeed, took pride in his work, challenged himself and took advantage of the opportunities presented to him. He said that Airmen can achieve all that they want to and make the most of their careers by following the same recipe.

“Pursue every opportunity forwarded to you,” said Price. “If it’s a TDY, if it’s a deployment, if it’s continued education. Growth comes in many different ways. Every trip I’ve taken has taught me a lesson, good or bad. And it shaped me to be the person I am today.”





Chief Warrant Officer (4) Peggy Bates Retires After 38-Year Career

By Sgt. Trenton Fouché, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois – The year -1984. The original Apple Macintosh personal computer was released. Michael Jordan, NBA draft's number 3 pick, was Rookie of the Year and a young Bull; but Magic and Bird still ruled the hardwood. Prince's "Purple Rain" would flow out of the boom box and everyone got "Footloose" in movie theaters.

And an Illinois Army National Guard recruiter snatched a young Peggy Bates of Glenarm from an Air National Guard recruiter beginning a 38-year journey. That journey ended Sunday, Aug. 7, in front of family, friends, and colleagues at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln with her retirement from the Army as a chief warrant officer 4.

Over decades she would climb the enlisted ranks, becoming a first sergeant, before transitioning to warrant officer.

Known as a leader, mentor and friend to countless service members and civilians, she says that she hopes to leave things better for the people that will eventually take her place.

"When I was in high school, I didn't know much about the National Guard and I had no desire to

join," Bates said. "My best friend's uncle served, so she convinced me that it would be fun if we went to basic combat training together. We started speaking with the Air Guard recruiters before eventually speaking with the Army. I saw a poster of a Soldier carrying a civilian out of a flood zone and I instantly knew that it was what I wanted to do."

Bates' friend would back out, so Bates went to basic training by herself.

"I really didn't have any plans to go to college," she said. "At the time, I wanted to be an architect and I knew that I would eventually have to go to college at some point. The National Guard's educational benefits had me hooked and they ended up offering me a military technician job once I finished Advanced Individual Training."

Throughout her career, Bates has had a profound impact.

"Chief Bates and I have served together during several assignments, in both the G4 Logistics division and within the 108th Sustainment Brigade Team II deployment to Iraq," said Maj. Alan Davis, Supply Management Specialist, G4.

"Chief Bates is a true professional who will always tell you how it

is and assist with developing solutions to identified problems. I will probably miss that the most about her as she completes both of her careers, both (traditional one-weekend-a-month National Guard) and full-time."

Command Sgt. Maj. Dena D. Ballowe serves as the Adjutant General's Senior Enlisted Advisor – the top enlisted service member in the Illinois National Guard. She advises Maj. Gen. Rich Neely on the training, management and well-being of the Illinois National Guard's 13,000 Soldiers and Airmen. As a young Soldier, she served under Bates.

"I'm extremely thankful and blessed that I got to be a young Soldier under her leadership," Ballowe said. "She was my first sergeant and I'm very proud to be able to say that."

Bates served more than 22 years as an enlisted Soldier and completed the Sergeants Major Academy. Then she re-invented her career.

"I asked myself 'how could I stay relevant and continue to progress my career?'" Bates said. "If I want to be in for over 30 years, what do I have to do to make myself stand out? There weren't any other schools to go to because I had topped out my (NCO) military education, so becoming a warrant officer was an opportunity to reset my calendar and give myself a path to continue my education and development in the Guard."

"Having a successful senior noncommissioned officer advance to the position of warrant officer pays several dividends for the organization," Davis said. "Not only do you gain a technical expert, but also someone with the backbone to execute in



some of the most critical areas within the logistics field. Mentorship within the logistics community is critical for newcomers trying to navigate such a challenging arena. Chief Bates has always been willing to share her knowledge and experiences to better the Soldiers she has served over."

Bates' love for her community and for the United States has been a driving force. Her passion for the Illinois National Guard and her family legacy have helped develop her into the person that she is today.

"I've tried to make everything that I've done better than the way it was when I got there," Bates said. "At the end of the day, if I've made a difference in at least one person's life, then it's all worth it."



CW5 Thomas R. Black named sixth Command Chief Warrant Officer of Illinois

Chief Warrant Officer (5) Thomas R. Black is the sixth Command Chief Warrant Officer of Illinois and the fourth full-time Soldier to hold the position. He serves as principle adviser to the Adjutant General on all matters pertaining to warrant officers. As the State Command Chief Warrant Officer, Chief Black is responsible for keeping the Adjutant General informed and makes recommendations on matters related to warrant officer accessions, training, education, promotion, and career management. As the lead for warrant officer affairs, he works closely with the leadership of National Guard Bureau and the Department of the Army Officer Branches throughout the United States.



President Signs Legislation to Rename Maroa Post Office After Fallen Illinois Guardsman



The Maroa, Illinois, post office will bear the name of a fallen Illinois National Guardsman who was killed in action while serving in Iraq in 2004.

Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Jeremy Ridlen, of Maroa, Illinois, was among approximately 170 Soldiers who deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in December 2003 with the 1544th Transportation Company, based in Paris.

He was just 23 years old when he died from small arms fire May 23, 2004, after a dump truck on the side of the road was detonated as his military convoy passed by in East Fallujah, Iraq.

On June 16, 2022, President Joe Biden signed House Resolution 3579, designating the U.S. Post Office as the Jeremy L. Ridlen Post Office.

"Specialist Jeremy Ridlen gave his life for his country, and renaming this post office in his honor will serve as a lasting tribute to his sacrifice," said

Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard.

Ridlen was born and raised in Maroa, where he attended Maroa-Forsyth High School. He and his twin brother, Jason, attended Illinois State University where they signed up for the Illinois National Guard and were assigned to the 1544th. When the unit was activated in 2003 and deployed to Fallujah, Iraq, Ridlen served as a gunner.

"As a member of the Army National Guard, Specialist Jeremy Ridlen gave the ultimate sacrifice in service of his country and we remain eternally grateful," said Congressman Rodney Davis, District 13, Illinois. "Designating this post office in honor of Jeremy will serve as a testament to his bravery and a reminder of all those who laid down their life for the United States of America."





Illinois Air National Guard Welcomes New Commander

U.S. Air National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Jason Grabiec



U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Daniel McDonough, middle, the incoming commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, receives command of the Illinois Air National Guard during a change of command ceremony in Peoria, Illinois, June 7, 2022. McDonough served as the 182nd Airlift Wing commander for four years.



U.S. Air Force Col. Daniel McDonough, the commander of the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, gives his final salute as wing commander during a change of command ceremony in Peoria, Illinois, June 7, 2022. McDonough assumed command of the Illinois Air National Guard from outgoing commander Maj. Gen. Peter Nezamis. Peace Memorial Museum in Japan.





The Illinois National Guard and the 1st Cavalry Division joined Skokie (Illinois) in honoring three Army Veterans who were to be the Military Grand Marshals of the Skokie Independence Day Parade on July 4 when the parade was suddenly cancelled because of the shootings at the parade in nearby Highland Park. The Veterans were: 89 year-old Master Sgt. (retired) Henry “Hank” Gould (center in uniform) who served for 24 years in the Illinois National Guard and 50 years as a pharmacist in Skokie; Vietnam Veteran Gerald Jaffe (to the right of Gould), who served with the 1st Air Cavalry in Vietnam and went on to become a local business owner in Skokie; and Staff Sgt. Paul Plotnick (far left), who served in the Army Reserves from 1968 to 1975 and would go on to become a community leader and successful attorney. The Veterans were honored at the Aug. 15 Village of Skokie (Illinois) Board of Trustees meeting with Maj. James Brock (in Army Service Uniform) of the Illinois Army National Guard’s 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery Regiment making the presentations to the Veterans. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Dejuan Patterson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs.)



ILLINOIS ARMY NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIER POSTHUMOUSLY INDUCTED INTO ARMY’S TRANSPORTATION CORPS HALL OF FAME

Story by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois – Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Terry Jones II was posthumously inducted into the U.S. Army Transportation Corps Hall of Fame (HOF) at Fort Lee, Virginia, July 29.

Jones, who died June 13, 2021 as a result of injuries sustained when he was struck by a driver who swerved into his motorcycle’s path, was among 21 Soldiers inducted as part of the 2022 Hall of Fame class.

“As a Soldier and leader, Sergeant First Class Jones stood out from the crowd,” said Lt. Col. Michael Barton, commander, 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, based in Springfield and a former commander of the 1644th Transportation Company, based in Rock Falls, who had served with Jones. “He always had a ‘can-do’ attitude who placed his Soldiers and the mission above his own needs.”

“The people we recognize today represent the best of the best of the Transportation Corps,” said Col. Beth A. Behn, the U.S. Army’s 33rd Chief of Transportation. “Their loyalty, dedication and accomplishments have left an indelible mark on the presence and future of our Corps. They’ll soon be added to an already incredible list of Hall of Fame members to whom we collectively owe a debt of gratitude for our passion.”

Behn recognized the HOF inductees as legends.

“You are transportation legends,” she said. “Whether you embrace it or not you are. From shaping our Corps and creating a vision for the future, you did that both during times of conflict and during times of peace.”

Jones, who was 33 at the time of his death, enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard as a junior in high school, and served his entire 15-year career in the 1644th Transportation Company. He deployed twice to Iraq, including once with his father, then Staff Sgt. Terry Jones, Sr., in 2011-2012.

Jones was activated during COVID response operations and was serving as the non-commissioned officer in charge of the Aurora, Illinois, vaccination site, when he died. Jones was employed by the Illinois Department of Transportation in Morrison, Illinois, in the highway maintenance department prior to his death.

Jones is survived by his wife, Amy, daughters,

Cadence and Evelyn, his mother, Teresa, and father Terry, along with other relatives. His wife, daughters, and father accepted the award on his behalf.

“He was certainly a one in a million, and from a commander’s perspective, I would take a thousand just like him,” Barton said. “He had a big smile and an infectious boisterous laugh. In all the years I worked with him, I don’t think I ever heard him make a single complaint.”

Behn thanked the families of the inductees for their commitment and support throughout the years.

“Thank you to the families here today. Thank you for being a part of this, but most importantly thank you for what you’ve done over your many years of service to the nation,” Behn said. “None of us can do what we do without your support.”

Jones was recognized as one of two posthumous inductees.

In part, Jones’ induction biography read, “he served two tours overseas, including one with his father and volunteered for additional duties within his unit. He was a dedicated leader, friend, and noncommissioned officer. His impact to the organization will be felt for years to come.”

Maj. Gen. (ret.) Steve Farmen, the senior member of the 2022 HOF class, spoke on behalf of the class, calling the list a “who’s who list of transportation leaders who have founded, shaped and set in motion the vision of

evolution which has sustained the Transportation Corps.”

Farmen acknowledged the families and friends of the inductees in the audience.

“I want to acknowledge all the families and friends of the inductees present, for all the contributions, support and sacrifices you have made to propel us to a point like this,” he said.

He recognized the family and friends of Jones in attendance.

“To the family and friends of Sgt. 1st Class Terry Jones, a special tip of the cap,” he said.

Farmen went on to congratulate his fellow class of inductees and those who are future members of the Transportation Corps.

“We all contributed in part to spearhead history,” he said. “We are professionals, both military and civilian.





You are a war fighter supporting war fighters. You will make history and be part of a long legacy and heritage of excellence. Someone is counting on you to move, to deliver, and to be at the spearhead of change. Have the vision and courage to move the force forward."

The Transportation Corps Regimental HOF recognizes individuals who served the Corps with distinction. The program maintains and enhances the legacy of the Transportation Corps and promotes cohesiveness and esprit de corps.

"Sgt. 1st Class Jones' induction falls right in line with the tenets of the program," Barton said. "The Transportation Corps is known as the spearhead of logistics and the Corps' motto is 'nothing happens until something moves'. Sgt. 1st Class Jones firmly believed in that motto and was cognizant of the impact the Transportation Corps had across the Army."

Barton said Jones was proud to be a motor transport operator and instill that same pride in his Soldiers.

The process to be inducted into the HOF changed in 2022. Barton said prior to this year, Soldiers were inducted into the HOF through a board process, but there was no submission to the board. In 2022, the Office of the Chief of Transportation changed the process to allow submissions from across the Army. This allowed Jones' command to submit a nomination packet to honor his contributions to the Transportation Corps.

"Sgt. 1st Class Jones' legacy within the Transportation Corps lives on in the many Soldiers he trained and served with," Barton said.



PEACEKEEPER'S RIDE

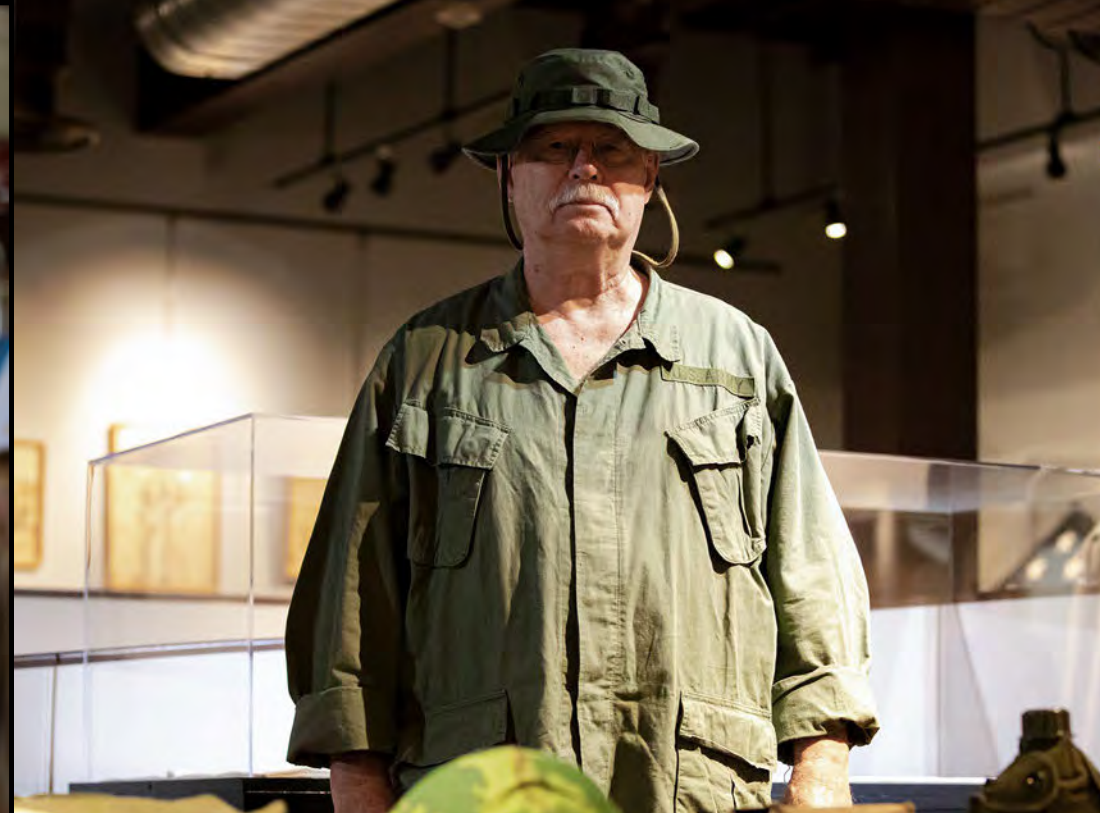
Honors Former Illinois National Guard Chief of Staff

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The annual Peacekeepers ride starts at the Illinois National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield. This year the ride, held on July 17, honored Illinois Army National Guard Col. (ret.) James Smith and Sangamon County Sheriff Department Sgt. Jason Boesdorfer, both of whom died in May. Hundreds of riders participated despite steady rain throughout the morning. Smith served in the Illinois Army National Guard for 31 years retiring as the ILARNG Chief of Staff in 2008. He then went on to serve as the Illinois Department of Military Affairs Chief of Staff from 2008 until his death on May 11, 2022.





Soldiers and Airmen from the Illinois National Guard participated in the Illinois State Fair Tech Prairie STEAM Expo August 19. The event gave service members an opportunity to speak to civilians about the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics opportunities available in both the Army and Air Guard.



Illinois State Military Museum Honor Vietnam Veterans





ILNG GENERAL SPEAKS AT AMERICAN LEGION CONVENTION

Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia, Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff, gave his remarks during the state of Illinois American Legion convention at the Bank of Springfield Center in Springfield, Illinois, July 15. Alessia discussed the Illinois National Guard's State Partnership Program with Poland, COVID-19 relief efforts and units deployed overseas with American Legion members from districts throughout the state of Illinois.



The Illinois Army National Guard is leading the way with innovative solutions focused on embracing the Army's People First Initiative. Task Force Restore Trust has developed programs addressing the top four (Named "3+1") harmful behaviors across our formations: sexual harassment/assault, discrimination, suicide, and counterproductive leadership. This month, Task Force Restore Trust will begin a four-month pilot program, engaging with units that have been selected using data collected over the last year. The feedback received from these units on the quality and effectiveness of these programs will be integrated in the final Task Force Restore Trust programs that will become the ongoing effort to build a foundation of trust, safety, and respect while preparing leaders at all levels to implement proactive solutions.

Illinois Army National Guard Advisor Team to Deploy to Asia

The Illinois Army National Guard’s Logistics Advisor Team 6611 of the 6th Battalion, 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade is deploying to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Area of Responsibility. The 5-Soldier team held a deployment ceremony Sunday, Aug. 7, at its headquarters on Rock Island Arsenal just prior to its activation.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Chance Whisenand, a crew chief assigned to the 182nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, performs a post-flight wing walk on a C-130H Hercules at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, Aug. 14, 2022. The 182nd maintains and operates C-130H Hercules aircraft capable of airlifting and airdropping personnel and equipment.



Crew chiefs assigned to the 182nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, perform a post-flight check on a C-130H Hercules at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, Aug. 14, 2022. The 182nd maintains and operates C-130H Hercules aircraft capable of transporting large amounts of personnel and equipment



U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Shannon Wrage, a navigator with the 169th Airlift Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, greets her daughter after her “fini flight” at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, Aug. 14, 2022. Wrage has 26 years of military service.



THIS DAY IN HISTORY

June

6 Illinois Soldier earns Medal of Honor at Luzon

1945: Staff Sergeant Howard E. Woodford of Company I, 130th Infantry, made his way through the jungle on the Philippine island of Luzon to link up with an inexperienced guerrilla force attached to his own unit. Finding them under heavy fire and taking many casualties, he assumed command and evacuated the wounded. During the firefight, he reorganized the unit and led them to a nearby hilltop affording a better defensive position. He chose to remain with the men through the night. The Japanese counterattacked before dawn. During the ensuing battle, Woodford killed 30 enemy before being killed himself. For his profound leadership, he posthumously received the Medal of Honor.



5 Illinois Guard responds to Joliet prison riot

1917: On June 5, a riot began at the state prison in Joliet. The warden called for help from the 131st Infantry to retake control of the prison and restore order. Company G under the command of Major Clinnin responded to the call, and restored order without any loss of life.



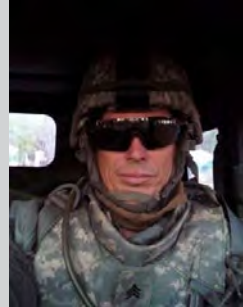
6 Sgt. Brian Romines

2005: Sgt. Brian Romines, 20, of Simpson, Illinois, was killed in action when an improvised explosive device detonated near the vehicle he was travelling in near Baghdad, Iraq. Romines was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment based in Milan, Illinois.



19 Staff Sgt. Joshua Melton and Sgt. Paul Smith

2009: Staff Sgt. Joshua A. Melton, 26, of Carlyle, Illinois, and Sgt. Paul G. Smith, 43, of East Peoria, Illinois both died of wounds sustained when their vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Melton was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, Marion, Illinois and Smith was assigned to 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry, Aurora, Illinois.



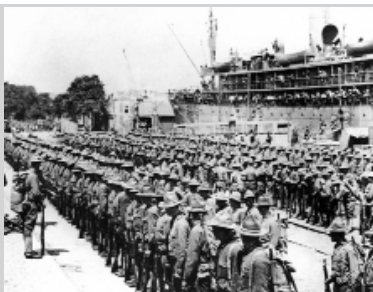
23 126th Composite Wing takes part in June Jumper

1953: The 126th Composite Wing began the NATO exercise June Jumper to practice low level defense of central Germany. The operation concluded on June 26.



26 First US units arrive in France

1917: Fourteen thousand troops of the First American Expeditionary Force arrived in France after 12 days at sea. The AEF troops landed in France on June 26, and began training on the tactics needed to occupy the trenches with their French and English counterparts. These Soldiers paved the way for the units that followed, including the 33rd, which was comprised of Illinois National Guard units.



29 1st Illinois Cavalry deploys for Mexican border wars

1916: As part of the escalating tensions between the U.S. and the Mexican renegade Pancho Villa, the 1st Cavalry deployed to Brownsville, Texas on June 28th. The 1st did not see combat in the Border Campaign, and mustered out at Fort Sheridan, Illinois on November 17.



July

6

Camp Lincoln officially established

1886: On orders from Illinois Governor Richard Oglesby, Illinois Adjutant General J.W. Vance established Camp Lincoln in Springfield through General Order Number 14. It read: "The permanent camp and rifle range established for the Illinois National Guard, near Springfield, is hereby designated and will be known as Camp Lincoln." Since 1886 Camp Lincoln has served as the state headquarters for the Illinois National Guard, and provided troops for all major American military operations, as well as for assistance in cases of state emergency.



6

Sgt. Chester Hosford and 1st Lt. Derwin Williams

2009: Sgt. Chester Hosford, 35, of Ottawa, Illinois, and 1st Lt. Derwin Williams, 41, of Glenwood, Illinois, died of wounds suffered when the vehicle they were travelling in encountered an improvised explosive device in Khanabad, Afghanistan.

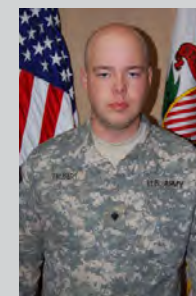


Both Soldiers were assigned to Troop B, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, based in Dixon, Illinois.

7

Sgt. Christopher Talbert

2009: Sgt. Christopher Talbert, 24, of Galesburg, Illinois, died of wounds suffered when the vehicle he was travelling in encountered an improvised explosive device in Shindad, Afghanistan. Talbert was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Dixon, Illinois. Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, based in Dixon, Illinois.



12

The 33rd Division heads to Hawaii

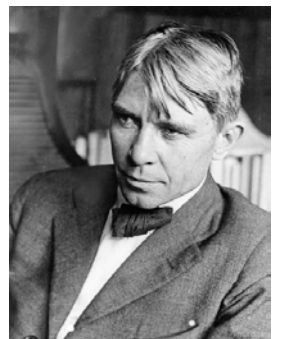
1943: After deploying from San Francisco on July 1, the bulk of the 33rd Infantry Division arrived in Hawaii for civil defense duties and jungle warfare training. The lush tropical Hawaiian climate offered a realistic jungle environment that the training camps in mainland America could not. Soldiers learned to adapt to the warm and unpredictable jungle weather, as well as how to fight offensively in inhospitable terrain. Within a year of their arrival in Hawaii, the 33rd had joined the New Guinea Campaign of General Douglas MacArthur. Their first battle against the Japanese occurred on the island of Morotai.



25

Carl Sandburg deploys with 6th Illinois Infantry to Puerto Rico

1898: Born in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1878, Carl Sandburg began his writing career as a columnist for the Chicago Daily News. As a Private in the 6th Illinois Infantry he shipped out with his comrades in the Spanish-American War. On July 25, 1898, he landed at Guanica, Puerto Rico. He saw no combat. Following his war service, he attended West Point for two weeks before dropping out, and began an esteemed writing career. Sandburg became one of the most noted biographers of Abraham Lincoln. His 1926 book Lincoln: The Prairie Years made him a household name. In 1940 he won his first Pulitzer Prize for Lincoln: The War Years. He later earned two more Pulitzers for Sandburg's Complete Poems in 1951, and Corn Huskers in 1918, a collection of poetry. Sandburg died in July of 1967 at his North Carolina home.



25

Sgt. Gerrick Smith

2009: Sgt. Gerrick Smith, 19 of Sullivan, Illinois, died as a result of non-combat related injuries while in Heart, Afghanistan. Smith was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment based in Marion, Illinois.



August

4 August 4, 1918: Illinois Soldier earned the Distinguished Service Cross for braving enemy snipers on reconnaissance mission. American and British forces prepared for an assault on Albert, France. The mission entailed securing the major roads that intersected inside the town. Control of these roads allowed the allies to move supplies into the Somme Offensive combat zone. The coming battle would be the third the citizens of Albert had endured in 2 years, having been taken and retaken by both sides repeatedly. The 131st Infantry entrenched outside the town needed intelligence on the enemy strength. On his own accord, Sergeant James B. Powers of Company L went forward alone to accomplish this task. Though harassed by enemy snipers the whole way, he successfully made it through the town and to allied forces dug in on the other side. His reconnaissance provided valuable information that benefitted the commanders. For his coolness under fire in accomplishing his mission he received the Distinguished Service Cross. The Third Battle of Albert began on August 21, and within a day of hard fighting the allies had achieved victory.

6 August 6, 1862: Famous Guardsman: Albert D.J. Cashier (Jennie Hodgers)
On August 6, 1862, an 18 year-old Irish immigrant named Albert D.J. Cashier walked into the recruiting office in Belvidere, Illinois. He enlisted as a private in the 95th Illinois Volunteer Infantry. By fall, his unit became attached to the Army of the Tennessee under Major General Ulysses S. Grant. He served dutifully throughout the war, seeing action in at least 40 engagements including Vicksburg, Nashville, the 1864 Missouri Campaign, and the Red River Campaign. In 1911, after being hit by a car, doctors discovered that Cashier was, in fact, a woman. Since coming to the United States, Jennie Hodgers had successfully maintained the identity of a man, so much that her fellow infantrymen never suspected the ruse. Hodgers continued to collect her \$70 a month veteran's pension. Hodgers died in October 1915 in the Watertown Insane Asylum in East Moline, Illinois. Although the court declared her legally insane due to her former lifestyle, her comrades rallied by her side until the end. She had a burial with full military honors at Saunemin, Illinois.

7 August 7, 1964:
The Air National Guard took part in Operation Ready Go

The 108th Air Refueling Squadron took part in Operation Ready Go, a massive training exercise designed to respond to a crisis.

10 August 10, 1918: Heroism in the Battle of Chipilly Ridge earned 5 Illinois Soldiers the Distinguished Service Cross

Day 2 in the struggle for the French town of Chipilly Ridge opened with strong attacks by the 131st Infantry. Fierce German resistance required heavy, close-quarters fighting. An enemy machine-gun nest opened fire on Company E, killing the platoon commander. Sergeant George B. Gourley took over for the fallen officer. He and Private Charles W. Michaelis charged the enemy nest, killed the crew, and used the captured gun to great effect. Sergeant William Scholes of Company C completed a similar action. Also in Company C, Private First Class Steve Zappa served dutifully under heavy fire as a regimental runner. In Company B, Corporal Stephen M. Mance ventured alone into the town to scout for enemy snipers. When attacked by a German machine-gun nest he charged it. He successfully captured the gun and the crew of 4. For their selfless heroism the 5 Soldiers received the Distinguished Service Cross.

15 August 15, 1918: Illinois Soldier maintained solo defense of outpost during the Somme Offensive Heavy shelling blasted the 131st Infantry during the Somme Offensive in central France. Sergeant Alvin Wiberg of Company C arose after having been blown from his trench by a direct hit. Shaken, he helped get the wounded men to safety. Heavy machine-gun fire tore up the ground around him as he completed his mission. After confirming all the wounded had been rescued, he armed himself with a Browning Automatic Rifle and took up a position at an abandoned forward outpost. He remained there for 14 hours under concentrated artillery and small arms fire, successfully holding off repeated enemy attacks. For his selfless heroism he received the Distinguished Service Cross.



The Prairie Sentinel
1301 North MacArthur Boulevard
Springfield, Illinois 62702

DSN: 555-3569
Phone: (217) 761-3569
Fax: (217) 761-2988

The Prairie Sentinel is the official newsletter of the Illinois National Guard authorized by the Adjutant General.

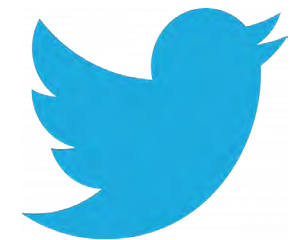
DEADLINES:

Story and photo submissions are due the 1st of each month to ng.il.ilarng.list.staff-pao@army.mil

Connect with the Illinois National Guard:



<https://www.facebook.com/illinoisnationalguard/>



https://twitter.com/IL_Natl_Guard



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/illinoisnationalguard/>



https://instagram.com/illinois_national_guard

DOWNLOAD THE NEW APP:



www.il.ngb.army.mil



Apple App Store



Google Play