

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

# PRAIRIE SENTINEL

VOLUME 21

## Changing of the Guard



**Maj. Gen. Rich Neely relinquishes command of Illinois National Guard, retires after 40 years of military service**

**Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd becomes first Black officer to command Illinois National Guard**



**FEBRUARY - MID-MAY 2024**



# ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

*Click on a title to jump to the full story*

## FEATURES

### **Coming Home after 82 years p. 20**

*DPAA identifies remains of Illinois Guard member who died as a POW during World War II*

### **Touring DPAA facilities p. 23**

*Great niece tours the DPAA facilities in Hawaii, meets team who identified uncle's remains*

### **Honoring Illinois Militiaman p. 26**

*The Illinois National Guard honors Abraham Lincoln on 215th anniversary of birth*

### **Calling it a Career p. 34**

*Illinois Air National Guard Chief Master Sergeant retires after 34 year career*

### **Top Enlisted Now Officer p. 38**

*After reaching pinnacle of enlisted career, Airman commissions as second lieutenant*

### **Meeting the Challenge p. 50**

*Infantry Battalion initiative recruits southern Illinoisans into Guard*

### **Into the ROTC Hall of Fame p. 76**

*Maj. Gen. Henry Dixon and Col. (ret.) Clayton Kuetemeyer are inducted into the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign ROTC Hall of Fame*

### **Combat Leader ... and 'Super Geek' p. 84**

*During a distinguished 28-year career, Col. Ron Bonesz led Soldiers on three combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, twice as a commander. But he's also a "super geek" who went from playing Dungeons and Dragons as a kid to a lifelong love of science fiction and fantasy.*

## STAPLES

### **Take it from the Top p. 4**

*Maj. Gen. Rich Neely bids farewell to military service after 40 years*

### **Highlighting Diversity p. 6**

*Women become "Six Star Finishers" in a sport once closed to female participation*

### **This Day in History p. 88**

*Highlighting important dates in the Illinois National Guard's history*

### **Remembering Our Fallen p. 90**

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

## PHOTO SPREADS

### **Women's History p. 9**

*Illinois National Guard celebrates the contributions of Women in the Military*

### **Discussing Black History p. 19**

*Members of the 182nd Airlift Wing participated in a panel discussion in celebration and awareness for Black History Month.*

### **Speaking to the Frugal Masses p. 19**

*ANG Comptroller Strategic Training at Scott Air Force Base advances and trains National Guard fiscal managers' abilities to lead financial teams.*

### **Changing Leaders p. 30**

*New leaders assume command in Illinois Air National Guard*

### **Welcome Home 1844th Trans Co p. 36**

*1844th Transportation Company returns home following Southwest Border mission*

### **Welcome Home 933rd MP Co p. 42**

*933rd Military Police Company returns home following U.S. Southern Command mission*

### **Strategic Summit p. 46**

*182nd Airlift Wing leaders collaborate and plan for the future of the base*

### **Fueling the Fight p. 48**

*Air Mobility Commander flies with 126th ARW to orient himself with the Wing's refueling mission*

### **Easter Egg Art on Display in D.C. p. 52**

*Illinois National Guard family receives invitation to visit White House for annual Easter Egg roll.*

### **Gold Star Family Egg Hunt p. 54**

*Survivor Outreach Services hosts Easter Egg Hunt for Gold Star and Military families*

### **Senior Leader Engagement p. 57**

*U.S. Army War College professor Bert Tussing addressed Illinois National Guard leaders during the ILNG Senior Leaders Engagement*

### **Ruck Around and Find Out p. 60**

*Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Security Forces Squadron ruck around Scott Air Force Base during training*



U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Paul Chamberlin, right, military deputy for Budget Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army Financial Management and Comptroller, recognizes Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Deandray Jackson, a finance management technician deployed with the 1863rd Finance Management Support Detachment, for his hard work and dedication at Camp Kościuszko, Poland, April 6. Chamberlin visited V Corps' forward headquarters, with the corps' primary mission being to conduct operational planning, mission command, oversight of the rotational forces in Europe, and providing additional capability to support Allies and partners in the region. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Devin Klecan)



**Polish Visit Camp Lincoln p. 62**

*Soldiers from Poland's Territorial Defense Forces toured the installation and discussed opportunities for future collaboration on training*

**Feeding the Army p. 67**

*Soldiers from the 128th Field Feeding Platoon participated in kitchen and field equipment training opportunities*

**Controlled Burn p. 68**

*Firefighters with the 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron conduct a structural fire drill training exercise*

**The Day the Music Stopped p. 70**

*Airmen with the 566th Air Force Band hold an inactivation ceremony*

**Security Forces Training p. 74**

*Airmen from the 182nd Security Forces Squadron hone their skills and ensure mission readiness*

**CERFP evaluates TACPs p. 75**

*The training exercise focused on Tactical Combat Casualty care, a field-based medical treatment*

**Welcome Home 633rd TG-PAT p. 78**

*Soldiers from the 633rd Theater Gateway Personnel Accountability Team returned to Illinois following an overseas mission*

**Exercise Raging Piasa p. 82**

*The 126th Air Refueling Wing hosted the exercise to ensure unit readiness to respond to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear events*

**NEWS**

**Changing of the Guard p. 10**

*Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd becomes first Black officer, person of color, to lead the Illinois National Guard*

**Competing to be the Best p. 14**

*Illinois Soldiers shine during state Best Warrior Competition*

**More Rank and Responsibility p. 27**

*Col. Jason Carter pins on eagles, becomes ILARNG's new G3/5/7 director*

**Celebrating a 30-year Career p. 28**

*Maj. Christine Hurley retires from the Illinois National Guard, highlights strides made by women in the military*

**Oswego Soldier retires p. 31**

*Sgt. Maj. Kevin Driscoll, 129th RTI's Operations SGM, bids farewell to ILARNG*

**Leadership Award in Basic p. 32**

*Chicago Police Officer enlists in ILARNG at age 39, earns Soldier Leader of Basic Training Cycle award*

**USO Honors Guard Member p. 33**

*USO selects 183rd Wing Airman as National Guard Member of the Year*

**129th Officer in Charge retires p. 39**

*Lt. Col. Wyatt Bickett celebrates 23 years of military service*

**Mobilizing for Overseas Missoin p. 40**

*Specialized team deploys to INDOPACOM for mission*

**Macomb Soldier Retires p. 41**

*Master Sgt. Kenneth Ray retires after 20 years of service*

**New Deputy ATAG selected p. 43**

*Former 33rd IBCT commander selected as ILARNG Deputy ATAG*

**From Private to General p. 44**

*Eastridge continues to climb the ladder of success in Illinois Army National Guard*

**Champaign Soldier promoted p. 47**

*Capt. Mikaya Thomas pins on captains bars*

**Operation Copper Arrow p. 56**

*126th Air Refueling Wing completes two-week deployment to Poland in support of Operation Copper Arrow*

**Knocking it Out of the Park p. 58**

*Leaders from all three Army components attend the Chicago White Sox home opener*

**Black Horse Unit Comes Home p. 64**

*106th Aviation Regiment honors families during welcome home ceremony*

**56 Years of Service Recognized p. 69**

*Two Soldiers from Petersburg retire from Illinois Army National Guard with 56 years of combined service*

**Honoring Valor in Service p. 72**

*Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Michael Gambino, 333rd Military Police Company, receives two awards for valor as Deputy Sheriff*

**Promotion to Chief Warrant 4 p. 80**

*Illinois Army National Guard's AGR Branch Manager in HRO pins on Chief Warrant Officer 4*

**Boy Scouts Lincoln Pilgrimage p. 81**

*Brig. Gen. Marty Green delivers keynote address to Boy Scouts' 79th annual Lincoln Pilgrimage*



Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the 40th Adjutant General of Illinois, presents Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the 41st Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, with the Illinois Military Distinguished Service Medal in a ceremony at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, May 16, in recognition of his service for the past three years as the Assistant Adjutant General - Army. Neely lauded Boyd's amazing support and outstanding work as the ATAG-Army for the past three years. "When we do these jobs, we don't do them for awards," Boyd said. "We're the first ones to say let's take care of our Soldiers, let's make sure they know how much we appreciate their work. Rarely do we take credit because it's all about you and the people in your sections. Without each of you, we're not able to do what we do."

**About the cover:** Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the 40th Adjutant General of Illinois, Governor JB Pritzker, and Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the 41st Adjutant General of Illinois, troop the line during the Illinois National Guard change of command ceremony May 4 at Glenwood High School in Chatham. Boyd becomes the first Black officer, and person of color, to command the Illinois National Guard.



# Take it From the Top:

## Senior Leaders' Corner

### Thank You for Your Amazing Work and Making History



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

To the Soldiers, Airmen and Civilian employees of the Illinois National Guard -

As I close out the last chapter of my military career, I am overwhelmed with all the amazing letters, e-mails, text messages, phone calls, and social media posts of support and accolades after the announcement of my retirement. It has truly been humbling.

Most of all, I want to thank you, the men and women of the Illinois National Guard for the numerous successes over the last five plus years during my term as the commander of the Illinois National Guard. There were many obstacles to overcome and hard choices to make during the last five years as we faced historic challenges from a global pandemic to civil disturbances, to securing the Capital, to more than 4,800 deployments all over the world.

Even while faced with these challenges, we moved the organization forward. You focused on Readiness, Innovation, and People and made the Illinois National Guard more effective at defending

our communities, our state, and our nation. You can be justifiably proud. I know I am proud of you and what we have accomplished together.

Through incredible teamwork, we have been successful even through the most challenging times. This work will continue. The journey never ends, and we are never complete.

It has been my greatest honor to lead this amazing organization of 13,000 Soldiers and Airmen, in addition to our full-time civilian force and families of the Illinois National Guard. During my tenure as TAG, this organization deployed more than 4,800 Soldiers and Airmen all around the world. As I like to remind those around the state during speaking events, these are service members who put their daily lives on hold leaving work and families and gear up to deploy around the world into harm's way for up to a year.

Outside of our military community, so few really understand the sacrifice. Our Soldiers and Airmen are part of the 1 percent of the U.S. Population that wear the uniform. They are the 1 percent who serve to include the active duty, Guard and Reserve. The 1 percent who raise their right hand and swear an allegiance to this country, and they are part of the 1 percent that deploy into harm's way to protect the 99 percent.

If you are a National Guard Citizen Soldier and Airmen, you are also protecting your neighbors in your State. They did this heroically. During my tenure we saw the most significant increase in the use of the Illinois National Guard ever. This included the COVID-19 response where our Soldiers and Airmen went out when everyone else went home to shelter in place.

Our Illinois National Guard members also responded to civil





disturbance missions five times within Illinois. This had not occurred in Illinois since 1968. Then there was the mission I thought I would never see. Our Soldiers and Airmen stood on the steps of the National Capital to protect it after January 6th. More than 5,600 Soldiers and Airmen mobilized for more than 500,000 days to support their state over the last five years.

The Illinois National Guard and the Illinois Department of Military Affairs does even more than respond to domestic emergencies and train, equip, and deploy Soldiers and Airmen to support our nation's defense. Last year we celebrated our 30th Anniversary of Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy and graduated our 16,000th graduate from the program. These are young men and women who grew up in some very challenging environments, but who volunteered for this rigorous 22-week in residents' program because they want to achieve more in life.

Our Counterdrug Program continues to excel. Last year alone the Counterdrug Program worked with partner agencies to pull more than \$307 million in illegal drugs off



the streets. Our 5th Civil Support Team continued to work with local, national, and international partners to counter biological, chemical, and radiological threats.

We have also stood up the

Integrative Prevention Program to help address the issues of sexual assault and harassment, drug abuse, suicide, domestic violence, and other behavioral health issues. The initial results are promising, and we owe it to our service members and families to continue to work on these issues.

We also owe it to our fallen heroes to care for our Soldiers, Airmen, and their families. Our Gold Star Families hold a special place in my heart. These family members gave the ultimate sacrifice with the loss of their loved ones. Since 9-11 we have lost 34 Illinois National Guard Sons and Daughters, Fathers and Mothers, Brothers and Sisters, overseas. These families have given the ultimate sacrifice and have earned our highest respect and praise.

As I leave command, I am very optimistic about the future of the Illinois National Guard. Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd is an excellent leader, and he will continue to move the organization forward with the help of our amazing leadership team and the servicemembers in the formation. The Illinois National Guard will continue to be Always Ready, Always There just as we have been for the last 300 years.

God Bless & God Speed!





## Illinois National Guard Friends Complete Marathon Challenge

*Women become 'Six Star Finishers' in a sport once closed to female participants*

Pheidippides, the original marathon runner, was a Soldier in the Greek Army who ran roughly 26 miles to Athens to give news of the Greek victory at Marathon. Then he died.

Illinois Air National Guard Lt. Col. Kira Tierney of Middletown, the commander of the 183rd Force Support Squadron based in Springfield, and retired Illinois Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 4 Rachele McKay of Hartselle, Alabama have run six marathons, roughly 160 miles.

Both are still alive!

One of the ultimate feats in the running world is to complete a major marathon. There's a special breed of runners though that say one just isn't enough. For those, the Abbott World Marathon Majors began a program to incentivize runners to complete all six world marathons: Boston, New York, Berlin, London, Chicago, and Tokyo.

On March 3, Tierney and McKay officially became "Six Star Finishers" by completing their sixth marathon in Tokyo, Japan.

So, what does it feel like to cross the finish line after your sixth major marathon?

"There was a lot of emotions. Relief was probably the biggest," Tierney said. Her goal was to finish, not to place. But there are strict cut-off times even for those in the back of the pack. "I wrote the cut offs on my arm so I could keep track of where I was at on the course and how much time I had until the next checkpoint."

McKay agreed. "(There was) lots of relief and happiness," she said. "Relief because the cut off times are so strict and there is so much stress prior to the race on whether Kira and I were going to make the cutoffs. Happiness for completing the Abbott

World Marathon Majors challenge because I know so many never get the chance. Happy that Kira and I were able to do the challenge together with our friends and families over the years and all over the world."

### **The Line Up**

Their journey began with the world's oldest - the Boston Marathon, which grew from 15 runners in 1897 to become the world's most venerable footrace.

Boston was ornery on April 16, 2018, when Tierney and McKay faced its path route of rolling hills from Hopkinton, Mass., to Boylston Street in Boston. Drenching rain, high winds, and with wind chills in the 20s made for apocalyptically atrocious running conditions. It was the worst running conditions on record in over three decades. A total of 2,785 runners received medical attention with multiple reports of hypothermia and 81 runners had to be transported to local hospitals for treatment.

"That was by far the worst

conditions I have ever been exposed to. However, with those conditions being our first of the series - any running conditions after that was a piece of cake," Tierney said. "Chief and I would often say, 'Hey at least this isn't 2018 Boston weather.'"



**Illinois Air National Guard Lt. Col. Kira Tierney of Middletown, the commander of the 183rd Force Support Squadron based in Springfield, and retired Illinois Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 4 Rachele McKay of Hartselle, Alabama have run six marathons, roughly 160 miles. Both completed the Abbott World Marathon Majors, a program to incentivize runners to complete all six world marathons: Boston, New York, Berlin, London, Chicago, and Tokyo. (Courtesy photo.)**



It was shortly after the 2018 Boston Marathon that Tierney heard about the World Majors from a podcast she was listening to. "That's when I got this crazy idea to attempt to complete all six marathons," Tierney said. "I didn't want to do this alone, but who would be crazy enough to join me?"

Then she thought of her close friend and running buddy, Rachelle McKay. McKay's response: "Does 2018 Boston count or do we have to do that one again?"

She had taken the bait.

*The New York City Marathon:* On Nov. 3, 2019, Tierney and McKay toed the starting line with more than 54,000 of their compatriots to run through New York City's five boroughs. Starting at the Verrazzano Bridge on Staten Island, running through Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Manhattan to the finish line in Central Park. Geoffrey Kamworor of Kenya won the race in 2:08:13. Tierney and McKay both finished and survived to run another day.

*The Berlin Marathon:* McKay blazed through Brandenburg Gate earning another star on Sept. 29, 2021. But Berlin was a struggle the first time for Tierney, who could not finish the race in 2021. Tierney returned to Germany on Sept. 25, 2022.

"I had no business toeing the line in 2021. I had not been in the right mental headspace and was very undertrained," Tierney said. "My 'stubborn self' thought that I could walk it within the allotted time. I was sorely mistaken. I knew I needed to stay on the same completion timeline with Rachelle. Rachelle was scheduled for ankle surgery in 2021 and needed to take running break in 2022, so this allowed me time to go back to Berlin and redeem myself and to stay on the same timeline."

*The London Marathon:* On April 23, 2023, just days before McKay's 50th birthday, the Illinois National Guard duo ran London's world-famous course past the more than 2,000-year-old city's most iconic landmarks. Running across Tower Bridge, they had spectacular views of the London Eye and Big Ben, and taking a final right turn, they finished in front of Buckingham Palace.

For McKay, the London Marathon

came at a difficult time, and she relied on her friend for the support she needed to get through.

"I don't remember much about the London race. My mom was dying, and I shortened my trip to as short as possible so that I could get back home," McKay said.

Tierney's father, Carl Crocker, had died a little more than a month before the pair ran the New York City Marathon in 2019. She understood what it was like to lose a loving parent and to push through that grief to complete a 26.2-mile run. She did everything she could to support her friend.

"My mom was one of my biggest supporters and I knew she would want me to go but it was a tough time in life for me. Kira lost her dad during this challenge and she supported my choice to shorten my time in London by going to the expo for me and collecting my bib and timing piece. It was another way that we bonded over the years of completing this challenge."

McKay's mother, Vivian Lester, died three days after her daughter successfully completed the London Marathon. Vivian had a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease, but supported her daughter's endeavors and celebrated her accomplishments throughout her life.

For Tierney, the London Marathon was special. She was able to complete it with her friend, McKay, and support her while also enjoying 'London Town.'

"Of all the races, London was



**Illinois Air National Guard Lt. Col. Kira Tierney of Middletown, the commander of the 183rd Force Support Squadron based in Springfield, and retired Illinois Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 4 Rachelle McKay of Hartselle, Alabama are pictured here at the finish of the Chicago Marathon on Oct. 8, 2023. The two running buddies completed the Abbott World Marathon Majors, a program to incentivize runners to complete all six world marathons: Boston, New York, Berlin, London, Chicago, and Tokyo. (Courtesy photo.)**

probably my favorite. Being able to see all the sites, running across Tower Bridge and the crowd support was unmatched," Tierney said.

*The Chicago Marathon:* It was back home in Illinois for the 45th running of the Chicago Marathon on Oct. 8, 2023. The two women both earned their 5th Star on the same day and course that Kelvin Kiptom set the world record of 2:00:35!



*The Tokyo Marathon:* On March 3, Tierney and McKay completed their journey and earned their sixth star in the 'City of the Rising Sun.' But only after adjusting to more than 24 hours of travel and a 15-hour time change. Jet lag was not going to stop them from completing their six-marathon, 160-mile, running journey.

After they crossed the finish line, Tierney's mind immediately went to the future. "My first thought after finishing was...well, what's next?" she said. Whatever future challenges lie ahead for this dynamic duo in running shoes, they were able to accomplish something together that very few others have obtained.

**Outdistancing Discrimination:** Both Tierney and McKay both understand that their grandmothers, even their mothers, would not have been allowed to participate in one marathon, never mind six.

"I am grateful for history, not for the discrimination itself, but for the women who showed up for the races showing the world that women could run long distances too. I am grateful for all of the runners who continue to show up all over the world," McKay

said.

Women were not allowed to run in the marathons in Boston or New York City until 1972. There was even pseudo-science to justify this discrimination with claims that a woman's uterus would fall out or she would grow hair on her chest if she ran long distances. Per the Amateur Athletic Union, women were only allowed to run up to 1.5 miles – less than the Army physical fitness test.

But that didn't mean that all women waited for permission. In 1967, Kathrine Switzer entered the Boston Marathon as "K.V. Switzer." Two miles in, an official tried to eject her from the course, a moment captured in dramatic photographs. Switzer overcame the assault to become the first woman to officially finish the race.

The year before, Bobbi Gibbs ran the Boston Marathon without an official number hiding in a bush near the starting line, disguising herself with a hoodie and men's gym shorts, and starting the race when most of the men had already crossed the starting point. To the cheers of the crowd, she finished the race faster than more than

half of the men.

"I'm thankful for all the women marathon trailblazers - the Katherine Switzers, Bobbi Gibbs, and Joan Benjots of the world," Tierney said. "The mindset in the late 1960s early 1970s toward women runners baffles me. I can't image a time that women could not sign up for a race."

Women runners now continue to excel. In June 1972, a new federal law known as Title IX was enacted stating "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." This opened the door for female distance runners. On average, 45.7 percent of American marathon participants are now women.

"Women have only gotten faster over the years. The current women's marathon world record is 2:11:53 set by Tigist Assefa," Tierney said. "That's a 5:01 per mile split for 26.2 miles! There isn't a lot of people that can do that for 2 miles for their fitness test."







Above right, U.S. Air Force Capt. Brittany Durant, left, 108th Air Refueling Squadron, Senior Airman Isabel Wiggins, 108th Air Refueling Squadron, Col. Jeanette Moore, 126th Operations Group, and Lt. Col. Viveca Lane, 108th Air Refueling Squadron, recreate the iconic "Pistol Packing Momma" picture taken during World War II, Feb. 14, 2024, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. The 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard flies the KC-135 Stratotanker ready to refuel U.S. and Allied aircraft anytime, anywhere. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)

# Celebrating Women's History



U.S. Air Force Airmen with the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, pose for an all female photo in front of a C-130 Hercules Aircraft in honor of Women's History month, March 1. The U.S. Department of Defense recognizes the contributions of women serving in the military during Women's History Month and throughout the year. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Avery Litton)

U.S. Air Force Airmen with the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Force Support Squadron, Peoria, pose for an all female photo in honor of Women's History Month March 3. The U.S. Department of Defense recognizes the contributions of women serving in the military during Women's History Month and throughout the year. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Avery Litton)







Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd receives a standing ovation prior to his remarks during a change of command ceremony May 4 at Glenwood High School in Chatham, Illinois. With Boyd's assumption of command, he becomes the first Black officer and person of color to lead the 13,000 Soldiers and Airmen in the Illinois National Guard. (Photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)

# Boyd Assumes Leadership of Illinois National Guard During Change of Command Ceremony

## *Neely Retires After 40 Years of Military Service*

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

In a ceremony steeped in military tradition, Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, of Springfield, relinquished command of the Illinois National Guard to Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, of Naperville, during a change of command May 4 at Glenwood High School in Chatham. Following the change of command ceremony, Neely retired after 40 years of service in the Illinois National Guard.

With Boyd's assumption of command, he becomes the first Black officer and person of color to lead the 13,000 Soldiers and Airmen in the Illinois National Guard as the Adjutant General. Boyd will also serve on the governor's cabinet as the Director of the Department of Military Affairs.

"Major General Neely is leaving some very big shoes to fill, but I could not be more confident in Major

General Rodney Boyd's ability to do so," said Governor JB Pritzker. "Today, he will become the first Black officer and person of color to assume command as Adjutant General and Director of Military Affairs. I chose you for this position because you are an outstanding commander and leader. Though the challenges of tomorrow are unknown, it gives me great comfort knowing you will be with us to face them. I look forward to working together with you to promote security, safety, and freedom for the people of Illinois and our nation."

Boyd is a combat veteran who has served in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait; and has been the Assistant Adjutant General-Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard since July 2021.

Boyd grew up on the South Side of Chicago. After graduating

from Wendell Phillips High School, he enlisted as a Marine Corps Reservist before transitioning to the Army National Guard and then commissioning through the Guard's Officer Candidate School on Camp Lincoln, Springfield, in August 1990. He has served honorably in the military for more than 38 years.

He commanded the Chicago-based 108th Sustainment Brigade before being selected in 2020 as the Assistant Chief of Staff, J4 (Warfare), United States Forces Korea and being promoted to brigadier general.

Prior to serving as the Assistant Adjutant General - Army, Boyd was a traditional National Guard Soldier holding positions in the private sector after retiring as the Chief of Police in Bellwood, Illinois. Boyd holds a bachelor's degree in criminology from Northern Illinois University, a



master's degree in education from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and a second master's degree in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College.

"We're also here to honor a man who has given so much to our state, our nation, and to the troops under his command over his 40 years of service," Pritzker said. "General Neely was an outstanding leader of our forces, guiding us through unprecedented times with a poise and decisiveness honed through a storied career in the Armed Forces. From historic floods to civil unrest to a global pandemic, General Neely has helped us face some of our toughest challenges, leading us out to the other side safer, stronger, and more unified."

As Adjutant General, Neely oversaw the deployment of 4,800 Soldiers and Airmen to 21 countries worldwide, and supported domestic missions made up of 5,600 Guard members, oversaw 220 international partnership activities assisting countries across the world including the Illinois National Guard's State Partnership Program with Poland.

In 2019, 890 Soldiers assisted communities in Illinois impacted by historic flooding.

In 2020, he directed the largest domestic operation in Illinois National Guard history in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The true extent of the logistical and operational challenges presented by the pandemic is really impossible to convey," Pritzker said. "Every day presented a new challenge and there was no instruction manual or modern experience to guide us. But make no mistake, General Neely's leadership saved lives. His leadership has shaped a new generation of Guard members who are not only exemplary Soldiers and Airmen but model citizens. I have no doubt that you'll continue to serve others in generous and masterful ways as you retire from this phase of your life."

Pritzker thanked the families of both generals for their support throughout their careers.

"You are the rocks of Gibraltar standing tall, sometimes facing fierce storms," he said. "You are wonderful examples, and sometimes the hidden strengths. You, and all the other families of our service members are



**Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the 40th Adjutant General of Illinois, relinquishes command of the Illinois National Guard to Governor JB Pritzker during a change of command ceremony May 4 at Glenwood High School in Chatham, Illinois. Following the change of command, Neely retired from the Illinois National Guard after 40 years of military service. (U.S. Army photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**

the support systems for those who keep us safe."

"You forget how many people you interact with across a 40-year career," Neely said. "As I transition, I am extremely encouraged that my leadership had some impact to the organization."

Neely said that when becoming Adjutant General, for he and his wife, Tammy, it was about giving back.

"When I became The Adjutant General, I was at the pinnacle of my career and it was all about giving back as much as possible, taking care of our Soldiers, Airmen and fulltime civilian employees, as well as their families,"

he said. "I've been blessed throughout my career with opportunities, direction, and guidance. Very few can start at the very bottom in the Army and end up in the Air Force as a two-star after a 40-year career serving in the National Guard, Reserves, and on Active Duty."

Neely said he and his brother joined the Army Reserves together to pay for college.

"We got a postcard in the mail. It was like oh they'll pay for our college. This is great," he said. "That's how we started. Pretty dumb kids that joined in high school that were like, hey this looks like a great opportunity





**Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the 41st Adjutant General of Illinois, assumes command of the Illinois National Guard from Governor JB Pritzker during a change of command ceremony May 4 at Glenwood High School in Chatham, Illinois. (U.S. Army photo by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)**

and here we are 40 years later. I was never going to stay past six years. I was never going to become an officer. I was never going to become fulltime. So much for good fortune and planning.”

Neely thanked his family for their support throughout his career.

“My family has put up with many many things,” he said. “They’ve endured multiple deployments, many schools, lots of deployments, and the kids never complained. It was my wife, Tammy, who sacrificed the most. It was my second deployment – she was left at home with four teenagers and a seven-year-old, managing a business. I think my deployment to Iraq was easier than her time at home.

“She’s been an amazing partner,” he said. “I sought out her approval

before accepting this position because I knew she would be thrust into an even more challenging position.”

Neely said it has been a great honor to lead the Illinois National Guard.

“It has been my greatest honor to lead this amazing organization of 13,000 Soldiers and Airmen, plus our full-time civilian employees,” he said. “Often when I talk about the Illinois National Guard, people do not realize the significance of this organization’s service. You heard the governor talk about during my tenure we deployed 4,800 Soldiers and Airmen throughout the world. These service members stop their daily lives, put everything aside, families and work, to deploy sometimes into harm’s way, for sometimes up to a year. Outside of this community, so few really

understand their sacrifice.”

Neely also thanked Boyd for his support of Neely as Adjutant General.

“As I prepare to pass the flag to Major General Boyd, I’d like to thank Rodney for his many years of outstanding support to me as Adjutant General,” he said. “I couldn’t be happier the governor selected you. Major General Boyd is a phenomenal leader. I am confident he will continue to move this great organization even further forward.”

Boyd said it feels like he’s been preparing for this role his entire life.

“Thank you, Governor Pritzker, for offering me the opportunity to command this great organization,” he said. “I feel like I have been preparing for this my entire life.”

Boyd also thanked the Neely family for their support.

“We can’t do what we do without the support of our spouses, significant others, and our family,” Boyd said.

“We have the easy job. We put on the uniform, and we go. Without you all, we can’t do that.”

Boyd called Neely “an incredible person to work for.”

“You know it’s not easy breaking the glass ceiling,” he said. “You know you can break that glass ceiling, get into that position, and meet resistance. Never, ever did I feel that way because of General Neely. He told me he was going to train me to replace him. He meant that and stood by that. What a welcoming feeling to come to work every day and know you have the support of your boss like General Neely.”

Boyd said he looks forward to continuing the Illinois National Guard’s strong relationship with Poland.

“Thank you for coming today,” he said. “I was just in Chicago last week for the flag raising ceremony. I look forward to continuing our strong relationships.”

Boyd also expressed his appreciation to his family – including his siblings, two sons, Rodney, Jr., and Randy, and most importantly, his wife Darlene.

“My wife Darlene and I have been together 34 years this August,” he said. “We have a lot more work to do, so hang in there.”

Boyd laid out his plans as the Adjutant General.





**Major General Ireneusz Nowak, Polish Air Force Inspector, congratulates Maj. Gen. Rich Neely on his retirement after 40 years of military service.**

“It’s our responsibility to make sure we have a force that’s manned, equipped and trained, to do the business of the governor for Illinois and this nation,” he said. “That will not change. That will be my focus – to make sure we have a premier fighting force ready to work for this state and this country.”

Boyd said it’ll take a little work but he’s ready.

“When it comes to manning, everything starts with the Soldiers and Airmen,” he said. “We must bring the Soldiers and Airmen into the formation. We must make sure they

have the right equipment to do their jobs. I will continue to do that. We made some amazing advances under General Neely, and I’ll continue those advances. The last piece is training. We have the Soldiers and Airmen, they have the equipment, we must have solid training plans so they can ultimately do their jobs on their missions.”

Boyd also had a personal message for young people.

“Some of you know I was born and raised on the south side of Chicago by a single parent in public housing and on public assistance. Some of

you young folks out there may find yourself in a similar situation where you feel that you’ve been given lemons and the world is crashing around you,” he said. “I want to encourage you to take those lemons, squeeze them, and surround yourself with good people. Use education, the greatest equalizer, to get you through those tough times. And one day, like me, you’ll be drinking lemonade.”

During Neely’s retirement ceremony, Pritzker presented the Distinguished Service Medal for “exceptionally meritorious service in duties of great responsibility” as the Adjutant General for Illinois.



**Brig. Gen. Dan McDonough, left, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, and Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, 41st Adjutant General of Illinois, present Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, 40th Adjutant General of Illinois, with a token of appreciation for Neely’s leadership during a retirement ceremony May 4.**



**Governor JB Pritzker presents Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the 40th Adjutant General of Illinois, with the Distinguished Service Medal during a retirement ceremony May 4 at Glenwood High School in Chatham. Neely relinquished command of the Illinois National Guard to Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd and retired after 40 years of military service.**



**Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the 40th Adjutant General of Illinois, addresses the Soldiers and Airmen of the Illinois National Guard for the final time as commander as he relinquished command to Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the 41st Adjutant General of Illinois. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Paul Lauricella, 183rd Wing Public Affairs)**





# Competing to be the Best

Pfc. Nathan Johnson of Arlington Heights, Illinois, drags a “casualty” with smoke cover during the Illinois Army National Guard’s Best Warrior Competition, April 12-14, at Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Illinois.

## College Student from Arlington Heights and Pekin Police Officer Take Top Honors in Illinois Army National Guard’s Best Warrior Competition

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

Pfc. Nathan Johnson of Arlington Heights was named the Illinois Army National Guard’s “Soldier of the Year” and Sgt. Terry Lair of Pekin was named the “Noncommissioned Officer of the Year” after a grueling 3-day competition at Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Illinois, that pitted the top placers from each of the Illinois Army National Guard’s major subordinate commands against each other.

The Illinois Army National Guard’s Best Warrior Competition, April 12-14, tested the Soldiers’ physical endurance, mental toughness, leadership abilities, as well as analytical and decision-making skills.

Events included an Army Combat Fitness Test, land navigation, radio operations, medical tasks, and a mystery event designed to test mental agility. It concluded with a timed 12-mile road march with full military gear and ruck sack.

Johnson is a student at William Rainey Harper College in Palatine, Illinois, where he studies political science and aviation. He plans to continue his education at the University of Illinois in Urbana/Champaign. His military goal in the Illinois Army National Guard is to become a warrant officer and helicopter pilot and as a civilian he

aspires to become an Illinois State Police pilot. He is a Soldier with the National Guard’s 135th Chemical Co. based in Machesney Park.

Lair is a police officer in the Pekin (Illinois) Police Department and has been in law enforcement for the past four years. He is a noncommissioned officer with the headquarters company of the 44th Chemical Battalion based in Bloomington. He is married to Kara and they have two boys, 2-year-old Atlas and 6-month-old Damon. Both Johnson and Lair were representing their higher headquarters, the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade based at Heartland Community





**Sgt. Terry Lair of Pekin, Illinois, was named the Illinois Army National Guard’s “Noncommissioned Officer of the Year” at the Illinois Army National Guard’s Best Warrior Competition from April 12-14 at the Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Illinois. Lair is shown competing in the hand-release arm-extension pushup event.**

College in Normal.

The runners-up in the competition both represented the Urbana-based 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. Spc. Nicholas Hester of Jacksonville, Illinois, was the runner-up for the “Soldier of the Year.” Hester is a Soldier in the brigade’s headquarters. The runner-up for “Noncommissioned Officer of the Year” was Sgt. Brandon Elliot of Springfield, Illinois, an NCO in the Springfield-based C Co., 634th

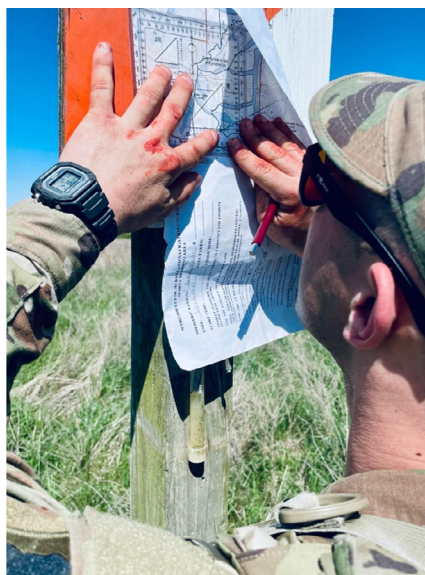
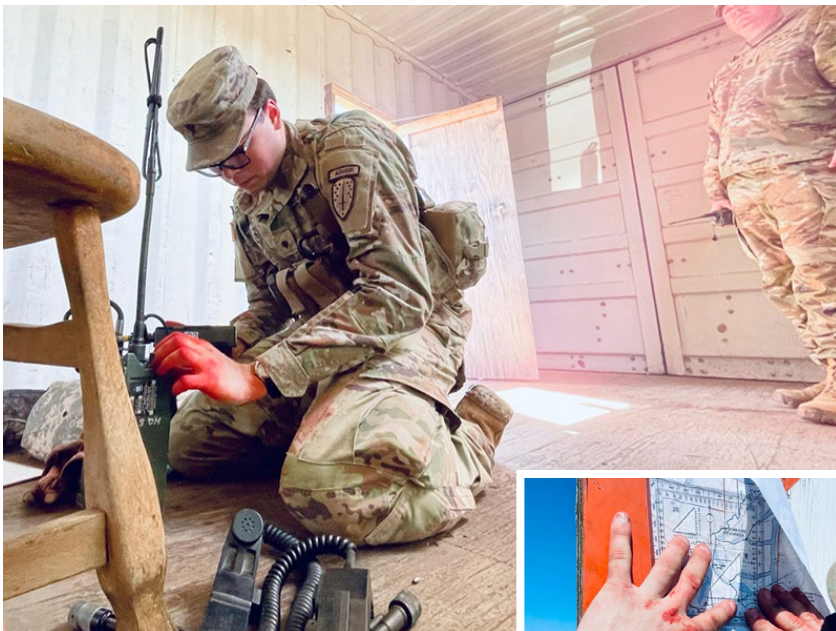
Brigade Support Battalion.

Representing the Chicago-based 34th Division Sustainment Brigade were two Soldiers from the Rock Island Arsenal-based 6th Battalion, 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade; Spc. Mark Meyers of Woodstock, Illinois, and Sgt. Quentin Corrington of Peoria.

The Peoria-based 65th Troop Command Brigade were represented by Spc. Anthony Porter of Crete,

Illinois, a member of the Chicago-based 244th Digital Liaison Detachment, and Sgt. Brennen Hoover of Springfield, Illinois, a member of the Decatur-based A Co., 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment.

Both Johnson and Lair will compete in the Midwest Regional Best Warrior Competition in two weeks, which is being hosted by the Iowa Army National Guard this year.



**Above, Spc. Mark Meyers of Woodstock, Illinois, works on his radio, (far right) Spc. Anthony Porter of Crete, Illinois, competes 12-mile road march, and right, Spc. Anthony Porter of Crete, Illinois, checks a point on the land navigation course. The three Soldiers were competing in the Illinois Army National Guard’s Best Warrior Competition, April 12-14, at Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Illinois.**





Spc. Anthony Porter of Crete, Illinois, checks a clue as part of the 'Mystery Event' during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition, April 12-14, at Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Illinois.



Above, Sgt. Brandon Elliot of Springfield, Illinois, competes in the communications event and at left, Spc. Mark Meyers of Woodstock, Illinois, performs medical tasks, during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition, April 12-14, at Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Illinois. The competition tested the Soldiers' physical endurance, mental toughness, leadership abilities, as well as analytical and decision-making skills. Events included an Army Combat Fitness Test, land navigation, radio operations, medical tasks, and a mystery event designed to test mental agility. It concluded with a timed 12-mile road march with full military gear and ruck sack.





Command Sgt. Maj. Russell Creviston watches Spc. Anthony Porter of Crete, Illinois, check a clue as part of the 'Mystery Event' during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition, April 12-14, at Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Illinois.



Sgt. Brennen Hoover of Springfield, Illinois, performs a communications task during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition, April 12-14, at Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Illinois.



Three competitors compete in the 2-mile run during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition, April 12-14, at Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Illinois.





**Spc. Anthony Porter of Crete, Illinois, opens the lockbox as Sgt. 1st Class Rose Tatge looks on as part of the 'Mystery Event' during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition.**



**Pfc. Nathan Johnson of Arlington Heights, Illinois, reads the operations order as part of the "Mystery Event" during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition.**



**Sgt. Brandon Elliot of Springfield, Illinois, competes as part of the ACFT during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition, April 12-14, at Sparta Training Area in Sparta, Illinois.**



**Spc. Nicholas Hester of Jacksonville, Illinois, reads a clue as part of the "Mystery Event" during the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition.**



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***Air National Guard Comptroller Strategic Training at Scott Air Force Base***

U.S. Air Force Col. Tara DeJanovich, left, certified defense financial manager and Deputy U.S. Property and Fiscal Officer for Illinois and U.S. Army Col. Jonathan Pinkard, certified defense financial manager and Deputy U.S. Property and Fiscal Officer for Tennessee, speak during the ANG Comptroller Strategic Training event held at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 9. The event is held to advance and train national guard fiscal managers' abilities to lead their financial teams in an ever-changing economy. (U.S. National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez)



***Joint Diversity Executive Council Hosts Black History Month Panel in Peoria***

Members from the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, participate in a panel hosted by the Joint Diversity Executive Council in celebration and awareness for Black History Month at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, Feb. 3. The panel consisted of three members of the wing and State Command Chief Master Sgt. Marlon Burton. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Wynndermere Shaw)



# COMING HOME

## DPAA Identifies Remains of Illinois Army National Guard Soldier from World War II

*Pfc. Harry Jerele, a Member of the 192nd Tank Battalion, Died While a Prisoner of War at Cabanatuan POW Camp*

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

Rosemary Dillon, of Chicago, was about five years old when her Uncle Harry, who was serving in the Illinois Army National Guard's Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion, was activated for federal service, arriving in the Philippines just days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the next day, the Philippines.

On Oct. 4, nearly 83 years after the start of World War II, Dillon's Uncle Harry, Pfc. Harry Jerele, will be buried with full military honors at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, Elwood.

"This is a miracle," said Dillon, Jerele's primary next of kin, about the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's (DPAA) accounting for Jerele's remains. "We've been trying for about 10 years to positively identify his remains. It's been a long time coming. What a joyous occasion it will be when he is finally laid to rest in his home country."

DPAA announced April 18 that the remains of U.S. Army Pfc. Harry Jerele, 26, of Berkeley, Illinois, were identified Dec. 20, using anthropological analysis, as well as circumstantial evidence. Additionally, scientists from the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System used mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis.

**Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele, 26, of Berkeley. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced April 18 Jerele's remains were identified Dec. 20 and will be returned to Illinois for burial at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery Oct. 4.**





Jerele was an Illinois National Guard Soldier who was deployed to the Philippines with the rest of the Guard's 192nd Tank Battalion before Pearl Harbor. He was part of the first U.S. Army Soldiers to engage the enemy in tank warfare in World War II. After the unit was forced to surrender several months later, its Soldiers were the longest serving U.S. POWs in World War II and many were part of the Bataan Death March and the Japanese POW Hell Ships.

"On behalf of the State of Illinois, I want to thank all those involved in bringing Harry Jerele home to his family in Illinois," Governor JB Pritzker said. "The epic tale of Maywood's B Company, 192nd Tank Battalion lives on thanks to many who have never forgotten what these Illinois Soldiers sacrificed for their nation."

"The story of the 192nd Tank Battalion is both extraordinarily heroic and horrific. More than 80 years later we continue to draw inspiration from Private First Class Harry Jerele and the rest of the 192nd," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "I applaud the continuous efforts of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency to identify and return the remains of our heroes. I pray this finally brings some closure to the Jerele family."

Dillon said she remembers her uncle as a very quiet man whom she saw on weekends.

"He liked to sing and play guitar," she said. "He was an unassuming man, but he had great friends who joined up with him."

Dillon said the only thing which makes this homecoming bittersweet is her mother and grandmother, Jerele's sister and mother, are no longer alive to welcome him home.

"It's a great feeling to finally accomplish this identification," Dillon said. "I only wish my mother and grandmother were here to witness his homecoming."

Dillon says she can't say enough about DPAA's important work in identifying remains of missing service members.

"It is of utmost importance their work continues," she said. "Years ago,



**Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele, 26, of Berkeley**

DPAA had to rely on little things that were found with the remains, like dog tags, to help with the identification. Oftentimes, it left families with no real ending. Now that DNA is used, it's amazing. I'm so glad my family and I decided to give DNA samples. It definitely gives us closure."

In the summer of 1941, Jerele was a member of the Illinois Army National Guard's Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion, when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands in December. Intense fighting continued until the surrender of the Bataan peninsula on April 9, 1942, and of Corregidor Island on May 6, 1942. The 192nd Tank Battalion was made up of Company A from Janesville, Wisconsin, Company B from Maywood, Illinois, Company C from Port Clinton, Ohio, and Company D from Harrodsburg, Kentucky. The unit's headquarters company was also based in Maywood, Illinois.

Thousands of U.S. and Filipino service members were captured and interned at POW camps. Jerele was among those reported captured when U.S. forces in Bataan surrendered to the Japanese. They were subjected to

the 65-mile Bataan Death March and then held at the Cabanatuan POW camp. More than 2,500 POWs perished in this camp during the war.

According to prison camp and other historical records, Jerele died in December 1942, and was buried along with other deceased prisoners in the local Cabanatuan Camp Cemetery in Common Grave 804.

Following the war, American Graves Registration Service (AGRS) personnel exhumed those buried at the Cabanatuan cemetery and relocated the remains to a temporary U.S. military mausoleum near Manila. In 1947, the AGRS examined the remains in an attempt to identify them. Two sets of remains from Common Grave 804 were identified, but the remaining two were declared unidentifiable, including those of Jerele. The unidentified remains were buried at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial (MACM) as Unknowns.

In early 2020, the remains associated with Common Grave 804 were disinterred and sent to the DPAA laboratory for analysis.

Although interred as an Unknown in MACM, Jerele's grave was meticulously cared for over the past 70 years by the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC).

Jerele was one of seven children born to Leopold Jerle and Mary Flori-Jerele on Feb. 1, 1916, in Clinton, Iowa. After leaving Iowa, his family moved to Maywood, Melrose Park, Bellwood, and finally Berkley, Illinois. Since his father was an employee of the Chicago & North Western Railroad, his family was allowed to live in a house that sat on railroad property at the intersection of St. Charles and Wolf Roads.

Jerele enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard and became a member of the 33rd Tank Company based in Maywood. The unit was redesignated as Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion on Sept. 1, 1940.

Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion, included 104 Soldiers from Illinois. The unit experienced 43 casualties during World War II, including 28 who died from diseases, illnesses, and wounds. Seven were killed when aboard various Japanese POW ships, called "Hell ships" by U.S. troops, which sank. Eight were killed in action, and



five were declared missing in action.

Headquarters Company, 192nd Tank Battalion, included 31 Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard, of which 19 died due to diseases, illness, and wounds, one died aboard a Japanese ship, and one killed in action.

The men of Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion, many from Maywood, were mostly kids from the same high school. In 1940, a federal draft act had passed, and they knew that it was just a matter of time before they would be drafted into the Army. Having heard that the federal government was going to federalize National Guard units for a period of one year of military service, these men decided to join the National Guard to fulfill their military obligation.

Arriving in the Philippine Islands at Manila on Thanksgiving Day, Company B had barely settled in at Clark Field when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor days later. A mere 10 hours after the enemy raid at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese followed with a surprise attack at Clark Field. The attack wiped out the American Army Air Corps, and the first member of the battalion was killed during the attack.

At Lingayen Gulf on Dec. 22, 1941, a platoon of the battalion's tanks engaged enemy tanks for the first time in World War II. Another Soldier died during the engagement and four other Soldiers in the battalion became Prisoners of War. A little under two weeks later, another platoon of 192nd tanks would engage and destroy a platoon of Japanese tanks. For the next few weeks, the members of the battalion fell back toward the Bataan Peninsula with the other Filipino and American troops. At Plaridel, the tankers fought a frantic battle against the Japanese. As they fell back, they were constantly strafed and shelled. Since they had no air force, enemy planes could destroy the tanks at will.

The 192nd Tank Battalion was the last American military unit to enter the Bataan Peninsula just moments before the last bridge into the peninsula was blown up by the engineers. There, they fought without food, without adequate supplies, without medicine, and with only the hope of being reinforced.

On April 9, 1942, the order "CRASH" was given. Upon hearing

it, most of the tankers destroyed their tanks and other equipment before surrendering to the Japanese. On this date, many of the Soldiers in the battalion became Prisoners of War. Others escaped to the Island of Corregidor to fight on for another month. Three joined the guerillas. Two of the three would be killed by the Japanese, while the surviving man spent the entire war as a guerilla fighting the Japanese. The rest made their way to Mariveles at the southern tip of Bataan. There, they started what the United States press called the Bataan Death March.

The march was long and hot. The Japanese had not been prepared to handle such large numbers of prisoners, most of whom suffered from varying illnesses. Many of the POWs went days without food or water on the march. Some of the Soldiers in the battalion died of exhaustion or were executed simply because they had dysentery and had tried to relieve themselves. As one member of the battalion said, "We were all sick. It was more of a trudge than a march." It took some of them two weeks to reach San Fernando, completing the march. At times, they stumbled over the bodies of Filipinos and Americans who had died or been executed.

At San Fernando, the men rode in small wooden boxcars known as "40 and eight" (meaning a car could hold 40 men or 8 horses) on a railroad used to haul sugarcane. They were packed in so tightly that those who died remained standing. At Capas when they disembarked, the bodies of the dead fell out of the cars behind them. The POWs walked the last few miles to Camp O'Donnell, an unfinished Filipino Army base which the Japanese pressed into service to use as a prison camp.

Disease and lack of food and medicine took their toll on the weak. One water spigot served the entire camp. An average of 50 men died each day. The burial detachment worked nonstop to bury the dead. To escape the camp, members of the battalion went out on work details to rebuild what they had destroyed weeks earlier as they had retreated. Others worked recovering scrap metal that was sent to Japan.

When a new camp at Cabanatuan opened, the "healthier" POWs were sent there. In this new camp they reunited with other Soldiers from the battalion who had escaped to Corregidor. Most of the POWs who remained at Camp O'Donnell died. For some Soldiers in the battalion, Cabanatuan was where they would spend the remainder of the war. Others ended up in satellite camps in other parts of the Philippines. Still, others were boarded onto cargo ships and sent to Japan or other occupied countries.

As the war went on and American troops got closer to the Philippines, most of the Soldiers in the battalion, were sent to Manila for shipment to Japan to prevent them from being liberated. Many died in the holds of Japanese cargo ships. Some died from the heat, some passed out and suffocated, one was murdered by another American for his canteen. Some died when their ships were torpedoed by American and British submarines since the Japanese refused to mark the ships with "red crosses" which indicated they were carrying Prisoners of War.

After the American armed forces landed in the Philippines, four Soldier's in the battalion were burnt to death on Palawan Island by the Japanese. They simply did not want the POWs to be liberated by the advancing American Army. The luckier battalion Soldiers were freed when U.S. Army Rangers liberated Cabanatuan on Jan. 30, 1945. Some gained their freedom with the liberation of the Bilibid Prison on Feb. 4, 1945. They were the first to come home and tell their stories of life as Japanese POWs.

Those Soldiers in the battalion who had been sent to Japan, or other Japanese controlled countries, became slave labor. They worked in factories, in condemned coal and copper mines, in steel and copper mills, they loaded and unloaded ships, and hauled hazardous chemicals. They worked for weeks without a day off and very little food. What kept them going were rumors and the planes. The bombings of Japanese cities became more frequent. American planes flew overhead both day and night. One day, a Soldier in the battalion watched



an American bomber circle above the shipping docks where he was working. The plane dropped leaflets to the POWs working on the docks of the Japanese port. The leaflets indicated that the Americans knew where the prison camps were located.

The POWs began to sense that it was just a matter of time before the war would be over. The only question they asked themselves, "Would they be alive to see the end of the war?" The men did not believe the interpreters, who told them that

Japan had surrendered. Only when the guards vanished from the camps did they know the rumor to be true. American B-29s also confirmed the rumors when the planes appeared over the camps and began dropping food and clothing to the men. Most of the surviving members of the battalion were returned to the Philippines to be "fattened up." The United States government did not want them to be seen until they were healthier looking.

Many of the surviving Illinoisans returned home, married and raised

families. They tried to get on with their lives. Some were successful at doing this while others never really recovered from their years as Japanese POWs.

Of the 596 soldiers who left the United States in late October 1941, 325 had died. Some in combat, some were executed, but most died from disease or malnutrition while Japanese Prisoners of War. Many also died in the holds of ships that were sunk by Allied submarines.



## Great Niece Takes Tour of Daniel K. Inouye Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency

*Meets anthropology team who made ID of Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele*

**By Sharon Nakamua**

I'd been meaning to set up a tour with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) here in Hawaii ever since the new facility was opened in 2015.

My relationship with the DPAA (formerly JPAC) started 10 years ago when I began researching my mom's uncle, PFC Harry Jerele, who died during WWII and whose remains were never identified. Then on Dec. 21, 2023, I learned that this facility had made a positive identification. Time for the tour!

Tucked away near the back gate of Hickam Air Force Base, the facility is a bit unassuming from the road. The entrance is not well marked and is easily missed. But once we find our way around to the front of the building, I was immediately struck by its magnificence.

Whatever the architect's vision, I see the hull of an ancient voyaging canoe. The roof's two pieces, like giant sails, are painted a dark rusty red and flow out horizontally on either side of the enormous structure with a split down the middle that allows light to stream into the





building's center atrium. A calming knee-high wall of cascading water fronts the entrance, accentuating the idea of a canoe on the ocean.

Once inside, I get a peek behind the glass wall into the secret garden filled with vibrant, tropical flora. From the squeaky-clean polished floors to the touch screen display of fallen soldiers on the wall, the newness of the building is palpable. My husband Glen, a retired Colonel from the Hawaii Air National Guard, is with me and he too is impressed.

Our escort, Cory Idleburg, soon greets us with a handshake and warm smile while the receptionist checks

us in. Cory has been with the DPAA for some time, serving as both a field agent and as the Outreach and Communication Liaison. Recently retired from military service, he continues his work as a civilian. This is also when we discover this is a VIP tour. Glen and I look at each other. We weren't expecting this.

Next, Cory ushers us into a conference room with an oval table that seats at least 20 and enough tv screens mounted around the room so no one seated needs turn his head. Three scientists in white lab coats are waiting inside and introductions are made. This is our anthropology

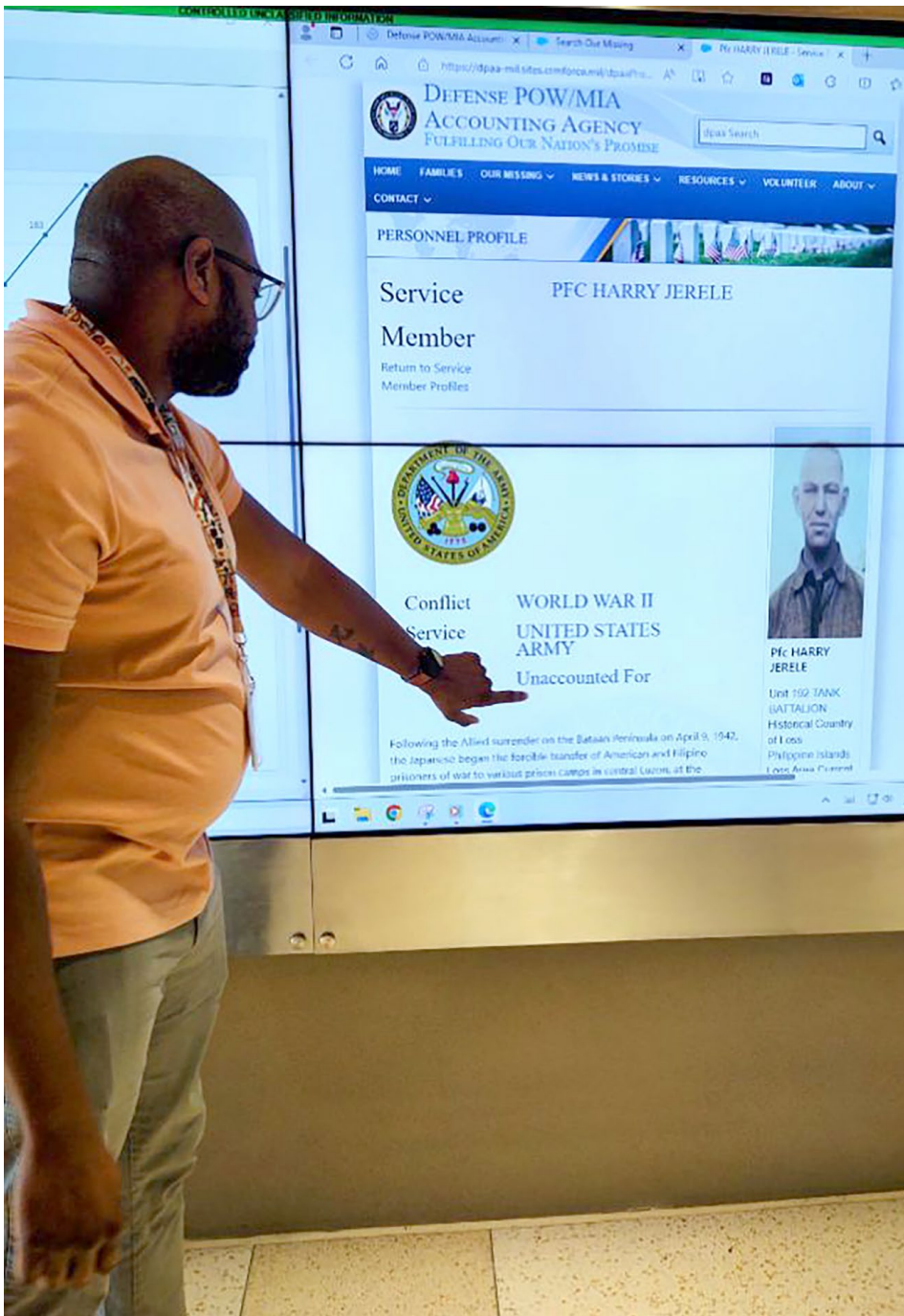
team, OUR team, meaning they worked directly on Harry Jerele's case and made the identification. It takes a moment to process this revelation. Ten years ago, I barely knew who Harry Jerele was. Now I'm sitting with three young women and we all share a very intimate relationship with a guy who died in 1942, was never married, served in the Civilian Conservation Corps, was a motorcycle messenger for the 192nd Tank Battalion in the Philippines during WWII, survived the Bataan Death March and died of malaria in a POW camp in Cabanatuan. We know more about Harry than HARRY. I'm awestruck.

After a short video on the DPAA's mission (that I watch from several angles) our facility tour begins. Ms. Stephanie Hartley takes the lead from here. She introduces the other two. Dr. Valerie Sgheiza who personally headed Harry's case, and Ms. Georgette Massou Bandes, along with Ms. Hartley, work full time on the Cabanatuan project. They are all thoughtful and impressive.

We take the elevator to the second floor where the real work is done and as the doors open, my heart skips a beat! Twenty feet away, staring me right in the eyes, is a man in a flight suit and helmet. Oxygen mask hanging off to the side. Just standing there. Staring! Oh, wait. It's a mannequin. Or is it? I'm still trying to decide when I'm assured he's not real, but Stephanie mentions that from time to time he is standing in a different spot. Yes, scientists have a sense of humor.

We look at some display cases that house terrain maps and field instruments used to locate and analyze wreckage and casualty sites while we discuss the recovery process. A display case on the wall houses various items discovered during excavations in the field that cannot be linked to any soldiers or the items would have been returned to the next of kin. Stephanie points out a few of her favorites, a couple cologne bottles that still have the liquid in them (one a neon blue).

From there, we move into a long corridor with glass walls that allows us to view the remains of soldiers





laid out on stainless steel exam tables in various states of assembly and decay. The idea is not to put these heroes on display. This is a privilege like no other and I think of the canoe and the journey these individuals are on. Sailing through time until they reach their final destinations. It is a humbling experience. Each bone, as it comes into the lab, is photographed. Meticulous attention is paid to the whereabouts of everybody and everything in these rooms that are divided by wars and battles. Visitors do not enter into the working areas. If we touched something in there, our DNA could contaminate the environment. The three anthropologists take great care to run their IDs through every checkpoint along our route. Stephanie tells me everyone in the lab has given a DNA sample that is used for crosschecking potential contamination.

We stop in front of the Cabanatuan Project room. Harry was here! Stephanie mentions that it's no coincidence the remains all face the same direction. They are facing the American Flag. I take it all in. The attention to detail and level of respect paid to the fallen is remarkable.

Behind me, two posters with the names and photos of the soldiers from the Cabanatuan Project hang on the wall. From 2013 to present, 77 soldiers identified. Harry is number 76. A 3x5 card displays Harry's name and date of identification which was 20 December 2023. Cory gives me a new card to replace the one on the wall. The new one has Harry's picture on it. He's looking at us with a big, toothy grin. The guy is happy to be going home! The number identified is growing every day, but no name will be posted until the next of kin is



***Sharon Nakamura places a new card with her great uncle Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele's photograph and date of identification on the Cabanatuan Project poster. Jerele was the 76th set of remains to be identified from the project. Jerele's remains will be returned to Illinois for burial Oct. 4 at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood.***

notified. Another protocol the DPAA strictly enforces.

We finish our tour in a smaller conference room, much more intimate than the one downstairs. Stephanie explains that, if my mother, who is the Primary Next of Kin, was with us, Harry's remains would be laid out on the table for final viewing by the family. The room floats above the atrium. There is nothing above nor below. Like floating on the ocean, we are floating on air. I wish my mom could have made the trip out here to experience this. She is turning 89 in July and though she is in fantastic health, she does not like to fly.

It's time to go, but we'll probably see this group again when the final

funeral arrangements are made. There will be a small ceremony here in Hawaii before Harry's remains are flown to Illinois and a ceremony with full military honors when Harry is laid to rest in the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood.

A Hui Hou to our new friends at the DPAA. Thank you for the amazing work you do!

Until we meet again

*Editor's Note: Sharon is the great niece of Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele, whose remains were identified by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. Jerele will be returned to Illinois and buried in the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery on Oct. 4.*





Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia delivers remarks at the tomb of President Abraham Lincoln, Feb. 12 at Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, after placing a wreath at Lincoln's Tomb as part of the 90th annual American Legion Pilgrimage to Lincoln's Tomb. Feb. 12 marked the 215th anniversary of Lincoln's birth.

## **Illinois National Guard Honors Former Militiaman President Abraham Lincoln on Anniversary of Birth**

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

The Illinois National Guard recognized its most notable militiaman and 16th President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, during a ceremony at his tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois, Feb. 12, marking the 215th anniversary of his birth.

Army Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia,

Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff, presented a wreath on behalf of President Joseph Biden as part of the 90th annual National American Legion Pilgrimage to his tomb.

"On behalf of the men and women of the Illinois National Guard, it is an honor to participate in this ceremony

today," Alessia said. "And it is a privilege for us all to learn from the life, the deeds, the words, and the wisdom of Abraham Lincoln."

Alessia was carrying on a tradition that began in 1967 when President Lyndon Baines Johnson sent wreaths to be presented at the graves of his predecessors on their birthdays. Each year, wreaths of red, white, and blue flowers are sent to the burial places of all deceased presidents on the anniversary of their birthday.

"Abraham Lincoln's integrity, leadership and wisdom still permeates the fabric of our country 159-years after his death," Alessia said.

Alessia told the approximately 150 people who assembled for the ceremony that Lincoln has particular significance for the Illinois National Guard because he served as a captain in the Illinois State Militia during the Blackhawk War.

"Our guardsmen draw inspiration from Lincoln almost daily," Alessia said. "This is easy when you consider Lincoln served at the lowest levels of a military unit, and at the very top as our Commander-in-Chief."



Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia renders a salute after placing a wreath at the tomb of President Abraham Lincoln on behalf of the President of the United States Feb. 12.



# With Promotion to Colonel, Carter Becomes Director of Plans, Operations, and Training

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

Jason Carter of Bloomington, Illinois, was promoted to the rank of colonel during a ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield Feb. 2. Carter was pinned with his new rank by his wife, Celena, son, Jalen and his daughters Cenea and Ciere.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, officiated the ceremony and thanked those in attendance, specifically, Carter’s family.

“What a special day for Jason. Getting promoted to full-bird colonel is no joke. There’s a lot that goes into that,” said Boyd. “I do want to start by saying, Celena, thank you, and kids, thank you all for supporting Jason throughout his entire career. It’s a family affair. We can’t do what we love to do, wear this uniform and serve this great state and nation without the support of the family.”

Carter thanked everyone in attendance and said he was honored to be given the opportunities he was afforded as an Active Guard Reserve officer. Carter said that without those who led, trusted and mentored him, he would have never made it this far.

“I could go on and on with ‘thank-yous’ because I’ve been blessed to work with some phenomenal soldiers, NCOs and officers that I’ve learned something from at every echelon,” said Carter. “If I could impart any wisdom to the junior leaders in audience, the recipe is simple: work hard, do the right thing, get your school done so you don’t close the door on opportunities, but most importantly, take care of your people and build good relationships.”

Carter enlisted in 1998 as a forward observer with Illinois’ 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery and commissioned in 2004 from the Illinois National Guard’s Officer Candidate School as a signal officer. In 2005, Carter transferred back to field artillery. Throughout his more than 25 years of service, Carter has served in multiple command and staff positions.

With his new promotion, Carter will serve as the Director of Plans, Operations, and Training (G3/5/7) for the Illinois Army National Guard.



**Col. Jason Carter is pinned with his new rank by his daughter, Cenea, during a promotion ceremony held at the Illinois National Guard’s Military Academy in Springfield, Illinois. Carter was promoted to the rank of colonel and will take over as the Director of Plans, Operations and Training for the Illinois Army National Guard.**



**Jalen Carter, son of newly-promoted Col. Jason Carter, tacks the new rank during a promotion ceremony held at the Illinois National Guard’s Military Academy in Springfield, Illinois. Carter was promoted to the rank of colonel and will take over as the Director of Plans, Operations and Training for the Illinois Army National Guard.**



# Springfield Soldier Celebrates 30 year career

## Hurley Highlights Military Journey During Women's History Month

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Illinois Army National Guard Maj. Christine Hurley, of Springfield, used the backdrop of Women's History Month to retire following 30 years of military service during a ceremony March 1 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

"Thirty years ago, I embarked on a journey which would shape the very core of my being," said Hurley, the Illinois Army National Guard's collective training branch chief. "It has been a journey filled with challenges, triumphs, and unforgettable memories, many of which were built with you in this room."

Hurley enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1994 as a parachute rigger.

"When I joined in 1994, I wanted to be a firefighter, but women were not allowed in that military occupational specialty," she said. "So I became the next best thing, a parachute rigger, because I wanted to something exciting. They guaranteed I would be able to jump out of airplanes as a parachute rigger."

Col. Randy Edwards, Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, Training and Operations and incoming Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff, said when he first met Hurley, he knew she would make an impact on the ILARNG.

"Christine, you are an extraordinary leader and truly the best of the best," he said. "She is a training subject matter expert and passionate about training Soldiers."

Edwards said that as the collective training branch chief, Hurley has had a positive impact on training plans in every unit throughout Illinois.

"She has worked tirelessly to ensure Soldiers were prepared to answer our nation's call if needed," he said.

Edwards said Hurley will be missed but will always be a part of



Illinois Army National Guard Maj. Christine Hurley, of Springfield, the collective training branch chief of the Illinois Army National Guard, thanks family, friends and fellow Soldiers for their support during her nearly 30 years of military service during a ceremony March 1 at Camp Lincoln, Springfield.

the operations family and part of the Illinois Army National Guard.

"I'm super excited for both you and Kim for this next chapter and whatever you have in store," he said.

**"As I bid farewell to the Army today, I do so with a sense of pride of the things we've accomplished together."**

"I have no doubt you will continue to knock it out of the park just like you have done in every assignment in the Illinois Army National Guard."

After leaving active duty in 1999, Hurley attended Southern Illinois University. She re-enlisted in the U.S. Army as a motor transport operator in 2003 to support the needs of the

U.S. Army during the Global War on Terrorism. She left active duty in 2010 after completing three deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom with the First Cavalry Division.

She attended East Carolina University, earning a degree in nutrition science. While attending college, she

graduated from Officer Candidate School and was commissioned in 2011 as a second lieutenant in the Army National Guard.

In 2013, Hurley transitioned to the Illinois Army National Guard, serving briefly as a platoon leader with 1st Detachment, 1644th Transportation Company in Springfield. In September



2013, Hurley served as a motor rail transportation officer with the 1144th Transportation Battalion.

In 2015, Hurley entered the Active Guard and Reserve program as the training officer for the 634th Brigade Support Battalion. Over the next few years, Hurley would serve as an Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School instructor and Commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment while assigned to the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), before being selected as the 108th Sustainment Brigade's training officer. In 2021, she was selected as the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion's officer-in-charge in Springfield.

"I have been privileged to serve alongside some of the bravest men and women the nation has to offer," Hurley said. "We have faced adversity with courage, overcome obstacles with determination and stood shoulder-to-shoulder in defense of our nation or while responding to COVID-19."

Hurley said it was by design she selected today to retire from the ILARNG.

"As a woman in uniform, I've had the distinct privilege of witnessing first-hand the incredible progress that we've made in breaking down barriers and paving the way for future generations of female Soldiers," she said. "From the front lines to the highest echelons of command, women have proven time and time again they are capable of achieving anything they set their minds to."

Hurley said as she stood on the precipice of retirement, she is



**Col. Randy Edwards, Director of Plans, Training, and Operations for the Illinois Army National Guard, presents Maj. Christine Hurley with a certificate of retirement in recognition of her nearly 30 years of military service during a ceremony March 1 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.**

profoundly grateful for the countless individuals who have supported her in this journey.

"To my fellow Soldiers, thank you for your unwavering camaraderie, selfless sacrifice, and steadfast dedication to duty," she said. "I have never met anyone who works as hard as you do or accomplish the things you do."

Hurley took a moment to reflect on her legacy in the military.

"I'm reminded of the countless lives I've had the privilege of touching throughout my career," she said. "From mentoring young Soldiers or leading by example on the battlefield, each interaction has left an indelible mark on my heart. As I bid farewell to the Army today, I do so with a sense of pride of the things we've accomplished together."

Hurley also thanked her mentors and leaders for their guidance.

"Thank you for your guidance, wisdom and your belief in my abilities," she said. "You truly gave me the courage to be the person I needed to be."

Hurley offered advice to her fellow female Soldiers.

"Never underestimate the power of your voice, the strengths of your convictions or the impact of your actions," she said. "Together we have the power to shape the future for the next generation of female leaders."

Hurley also had a message for all the Soldiers she has served alongside.

"It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve alongside each of you. I am forever grateful for the memories we have shared," she said. "As I embark on a new chapter, I do so with a heart full of gratitude, and a spirit of adventure. Thank you for the privilege to serve with you."



# New Leaders Assume Command in Air National Guard



U.S. Air Force Maj. Kathy Koons, right, the outgoing commander of the 182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, hands the unit's guidon to Col. Steve Rice, the 182nd Mission Support Group commander, as she relinquishes command of the unit during the change of command ceremony at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, March 3. Koons retired after 27 years of military service. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Paul Helmig)



U.S. Air Force Col. Jeanette Moore assumes command of the 126th Operations Group, during a ceremony on March 3 at Scott Air Force Base. The assumption of command ceremony provided junior personnel the opportunity to witness the formal changes in leadership. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. Ariana Freeman)



U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Joseph Sanders, right, the incoming commander of the 182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, receives the unit's guidon from Col. Steve Rice, the 182nd Mission Support Group commander, as he assumes command of the unit during the change of command ceremony at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, March 3, 2024.



U.S. Air Force Col. JoeLee Sessions, left, the 168th Air Support Operations Group commander, Illinois Air National Guard, receives the unit's guidon from Col. Rusty Ballard, the 182nd Airlift Wing commander, as he assumes command of the ASOG during the change of command ceremony in Peoria, March 1. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Paul Helmig)



# Oswego Soldier Retires After 26 Years of Service

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Sgt. Maj. Kevin Driscoll, of Oswego, Illinois, retired from the Illinois Army National Guard Feb. 24 after a 26-year military career, including 22 years in the Illinois National Guard.

"You will be missed here," Col. Shawn Nokes, Commander, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), told Driscoll during a retirement ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy at Camp Lincoln, Springfield. "You have been a sounding board and a trusted advisor to me. You are a true professional."

Driscoll, the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) operations sergeant major, enlisted in the U.S. Army on Oct. 17, 1997 as an indirect fire infantryman. He deployed to Afghanistan in 2008-2009 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and again in 2019-2020 in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

Nokes also thanked Driscoll's family in attendance, wife, Shera, and children, Arreyana and Merrick, for their support of his service.

"The first time I met him, he told me his family was number one," Nokes said. "He said he was married and had four beautiful children and was truly enjoying that aspect of life. That's a testament for the support you have given him."

Nokes thanked Driscoll for his

years of dedication to the U.S. Army and the Illinois National Guard.

"The U.S. Army and the Illinois National Guard are better because you've been in it," he said. "Today, it's weaker because you've left. Your legacy will live on in the lives of the service members you have touched throughout your impeccable career."

Driscoll, who is a police officer with the Aurora (Illinois) Police Department, said he had many people to thank for their support of his military service.

"Thank you to the military leaders who believed in me," he said. "You allowed me the opportunity to grow into a leader, which was the best experiences I had during my time in the military. Thank you to the Soldiers who allowed me to lead them. Leading Soldiers became a passion of mine, and more importantly it taught me more than any school ever will."

Driscoll also thanked his family.

"Thank you to my family who supported me through my initial enlistment and the next 26 years. I'm sure it wasn't easy on them during my active-duty time, but I'm positive it was much harder on my wife and children," he said. "This is as much for you as for me. Shera, you've been my rock. You stayed strong during my being gone for a year, but you did it during the worst transition for the kids."

"Kids, thank you for sharing me with the Army," he continued. "I missed out on a lot of weekends with you and a



Sgt. Maj. Kevin Driscoll, of Oswego, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) operations sergeant major, thanks family and friends for many years of support during his 26 years of military service during a retirement ceremony Feb. 24 at the Illinois Military Academy.

year of your childhood. I'll never get that back, but I'm yours now."

Driscoll offered advice to fellow Soldiers.

"I encourage you to seek growth. Train others and strive for leadership positions available to you. You will find a passion and success when leading others," he said. "To my fellow noncommissioned officers - never forget what you signed up to do. The NCO creed is your guideline. Live by that creed and you will succeed. Take care of your Soldiers and they will take care of you."

Driscoll urged the officers to let the NCOs train and lead their Soldiers.

"Don't be a ghost," he said. "Support and guide them to your expectations."

Driscoll said in his 26 years of service, he has learned a lot of skills and gained a great deal of experience.

"I hope to continue to share with Soldiers looking for guidance, but most importantly, I hope to share that experience with my children," he said.



Col. Shawn Nokes, Commander, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) presents Sgt. Maj. Kevin Driscoll, 129th RTI's operations sergeant major, with a Certificate of Service from the National Guard Bureau during Driscoll's retirement ceremony.



# Guard Member Selected as Soldier Leader of the Cycle During Basic Combat Training

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

One of the Illinois Army National Guard's newest Soldiers not only completed Basic Combat Training (BCT) at 39, but also earned the Soldier Leader of the Cycle award for their training company in the process.

Spc. Christina Fiorentino, of Chicago, who graduated from BCT Feb. 8 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, was selected by the Drill Sergeants from among the approximately 250 Soldiers in the training company.

"I was unaware there was a Soldier Leader of the Cycle award," Fiorentino said. "Not to sound cliché, but I think everything happens for a reason. I didn't take me long to realize my purpose in basic training was to not only challenge myself, but to share my life experiences which could potentially teach and guide young

minds who are also the future of the Army."

While many people enlist in the military in their early 20s, Fiorentino was 38 when she enlisted in August, turning 39 while in training.

"I enlisted not only to be a part of something that is bigger than myself, but to also challenge myself mentally, emotionally and physically," she said. "I believe that learning skills or performing tasks which place you in uncomfortable situations forces you to continuously adapt, evolve and ultimately helps you to become a better all-around individual."

Fiorentino, assigned to the



Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Christina Fiorentino, of Chicago, was selected as the Soldier Leader of the Cycle while attending Basic Combat Training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Fiorentino was selected by the company's Drill Sergeants from approximately 250 Soldiers.

433rd Signal Company, was surprised being selected for the award.

"I was performing my everyday tasks incorporating the Army Values of empathy, discipline and the warrior ethos," she said. "I performed my duties everyday completely unaware of this award."

Fiorentino has aspirations to attend the Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School in October, and said the award will help with those future goals.

"I think about earning this award daily as I prepare for Officer Candidate School," Fiorentino said.

Fiorentino, a traditional member of the Illinois Army National Guard, is a Chicago police officer in her civilian career.







Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief, National Guard Bureau, presents Air Force Capt. James Horn, Illinois National Guard, as the 2024 USO National Guardsman of the Year during the 2024 USO Service Members of the Year gala, Washington, D.C., April 11. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Zach Sheely)

# Springfield-based Airman Named USO National Guard Member of the Year

*Captain James Horn Earns Title for Heroic Actions During Medical Emergency*

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois - Capt. James Horn has been named the 2024 USO National Guardsman of the Year. Capt. Horn is a medical planner in the Air Operations Group at the 183d Wing, Springfield, Illinois. He also works full-time as an Operations Research Analyst at Scott Air Force Base.

A native of O'Fallon, Missouri, Horn enlisted in the military in 1996 - the summer before his senior year of high school. After successfully completing both U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Navy Basic Training, and extensive overseas deployments, Horn decided to leave military service to focus on his education and his family.

Then 17 years later, Horn decided to return to the military. This time

he joined the Illinois Air National Guard. Horn says that he chose to join the Guard because of the balance it allowed him to have between his duty to the nation and his responsibilities as a father to his four children. Horn credits the recruiting team at the 183d with their help in re-enlisting and then commissioning as an officer shortly after.

The service members nominated for and awarded USO Service Member of the Year are recognized for their heroic and selfless actions. Horn was driving on the interstate when the car in front of him pulled abruptly into the median. Horn pulled over and immediately went to assess the scene. Upon realizing that the driver was experiencing a

medical emergency, Horn called 911 and began flagging and slowing down traffic. However, an SUV did not see the vehicle and crashed into it causing it to collide with Horn's vehicle. Despite the collision, Horn continued to help everyone affected to the best of his ability.

In addition to these acts of bravery, Horn is a volunteer for the USO Missouri and spends lots of his free time helping there. Horn expressed gratitude to the service members and military for helping him get where he is today.

"In the DOD, we have about 2.7 million service people. I like to think that every one of them would have done the same thing I did," Horn said, "I truly believe that there's 2.7 million people that deserve this award."



# Nokomis Chief Master Sergeant Retires with 34 Years of Service in Illinois Air National Guard

By Master Sgt. Cassidy L. Snyder, 65th Troop Command Brigade

Chief Master Sgt. Amanda G. Stewart, of Nokomis, Illinois, was honored for 34 years of military service during a retirement ceremony at the 126th Air Refueling Wing (ARW) Hangar, Scott AFB, Illinois, March 3.

The 126th ARW Logistics Readiness Squadron (LRS) Commander Lt. Col. Brad Kahrhoff, of Trenton, Illinois, presented Stewart with a Meritorious Service Medal for outstanding service during a distinguished career in the United States Air Force.

Stewart enlisted in the Illinois Air National Guard (ILANG) in April 1990 as a material storage and distribution specialist at the 183rd Fighter Wing (FW) in Springfield, Illinois. She continued to stay within the logistics community her entire career and supported multiple aircraft.

"I chose the Air National Guard because several people from my hometown were members and I saw they had successful careers, talked about the traveling opportunities and were still able to be around home," said Stewart. "I enlisted, got a full-time job, and never left."

After graduating basic training, she returned to the 183rd to complete on-the-job training that qualified as her technical school. Stewart spent her first 18 years of service in the Logistics Readiness Squadron at the 183rd FW. She worked in the warehouse and delivered bench stock parts to various shops on base that all supported the F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft mission.

"Nothing beats hearing a fighter jet take off or fly by," recalled Stewart of her days in Springfield. "I enjoyed seeing how my duties fit into the overall mission and you can't fly without supply."

In 1993, she was ordered to state active duty in support of Operation Wave Rider, the largest state active duty mission in the history of the Illinois National Guard. More than 7,000 Soldiers and Airmen were activated after heavy rains led to record flooding of the Mississippi, Illinois, Rock, Sangamon and Wabash



Chief Master Sgt. Amanda Stewart, right, 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, receives her Certificate of Retirement from 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron commander, Lt. Col. Brad Kahrhoff, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, March 3, 2024. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Vincent Lang)

rivers. "Working side-by-side with local citizens and my fellow Airmen was a memorable experience," said Stewart. "Being transported by a Chinook from one location to another was something I had never experienced. We stayed in high schools, slept in hallways and classrooms as everyone worked around the clock to stop the flooding from destroying homes."

Stewart became a full-time federal technician in 1994. She held a multitude of technician and leadership positions within the logistics career field from base level to the entire material management.

"She was one of the hardest working, dedicated, and team-oriented Airman I have ever supervised or had the opportunity to serve with," said ILANG State Command Chief Master Sgt. (Ret)

Jimmie E. Flinn, of Chandlerville, Illinois. Flinn was Stewart's supervisor from her young Airman years into her early noncommissioned officer (NCO) years. "That work ethic remained with her throughout her entire career and as the State Command Chief, I was proud to serve alongside her as a fellow Chief."

After working in the warehouse, she transitioned to a specialty field as a supply systems analyst. She managed all supply system activities, employing systems analysis techniques to manage and control supply system processes.

Stewart deployed multiple times in support of operations across the globe. By 2006, she supported Operations Southern Watch in Kuwait, Noble Eagle in Bahrain and Enduring Freedom in Qatar. She also supported drug interdiction and counternarcotics



operations at Howard AFB in Panama City, Panama.

"You don't realize it at the time, but interacting with people on your deployments and sharing experiences and expertise will help develop you as a person and leader in the future," recalled Stewart of her many trips all over the world. "I am still in contact with people from deployments and gained different programs that I took back to help my unit operate better and more efficiently."

In July 2008, Stewart transferred to the 126th ARW after the 183rd lost its flying mission due to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. She became a charter member of the 126th Supply Chain Operations (Management) Squadron.

"Her leadership skills really started to shine after we transitioned to the 126th," said Senior Master Sgt. (Ret.) Diane Parker, of Boston, Massachusetts, who also moved from the 183rd to 126th. "Amanda has a way of pushing you to always want to do better. She truly is a natural born leader."

While at the 126th, Stewart supported the KC-135 Stratotanker which provides aerial refueling capabilities. The KC-135 keeps the F-16s in the air and she was able to see the aircraft she previously supported refueled on numerous occasions, she said. Additionally, she supported KC-135s while deployed to Bahrain and it came full circle supporting them again at 126th.

"When Chief came into our organization, she was a breath of fresh air," said Tech Sgt. Robby Aguilar, of O'Fallon, Illinois, the NCO in charge of 126th LRS Cargo Movement Operations. "She would never tell you to do anything she wouldn't do herself."

Stewart supported many training deployments throughout her career. She said some highlights include places such as Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Anchorage, Alaska; Powidz Air Base, Poland; Hickham Air Force Base (AFB), Honolulu, Hawaii; and Aviano AFB, Italy.

In December 2016, Stewart achieved the Air Force's highest enlisted rank of chief master sergeant and served as the president of the 126th ARW's Chiefs Group from 2017-2024.



**Chief Master Sgt. Amanda G. Stewart, of Nokomis, Illinois, stands with her family after her retirement ceremony at the 126th Air Refueling Wing Hangar, Scott AFB, Illinois, March 3. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Cassidy L. Snyder)**

"I knew from the beginning that I wanted to reach the top and become a chief master sergeant," said Stewart. "I had great mentors who drove me to be the best and I kept setting goals for myself and achieving them."

Not only does she drive herself at work, but outside of the uniform she is heavily involved in her community. In 2019, she received the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal in recognition of performing outstanding volunteer community service. She is a member of her local Veterans of Foreign War and American Legion, supporting several Veterans Day programs and community events each year.

She was called to State Active Duty and served as the Wing Control Center Superintendent for COVID-19 testing support in 2020 and Military Vaccination Augmentation Team support in 2021.

"Any officer in the military needs to have a strong senior NCO with them," said 126th Maintenance Group Commander Col. Timothy Huchel, of Fairmont, Illinois. "Chief Master Sergeant Stewart was mine while working in the Wing Control Center during COVID-19. Her organizational skills were second to none and she did the majority of her duties working from home because of the COVID-19 restrictions. It would

not have operated as meticulous as it did without her dedication and hard work."

After COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, there was a mission need in the Traffic Management Office (TMO) and Stewart attended the Traffic Management Apprentice Course. She managed TMO, Ground Transportation, and Air Transportation elements within the Logistics Readiness Deployment and Distribution flight.

"I've grown to what I hope is a better officer, serving the personnel that truly accomplish the mission around me and I owe that to her," said 126th LRS Operations Officer Capt. Justin Högman, of Highland, Illinois. "In her time serving in our squadron, I believe she's done a great job to improve communication and mentorship amongst our Airmen."

Stewart's last military position was as the Distribution Flight Chief within the 126th LRS. She plans to stick close to the 126th as she currently works in the War Reserve Material section of the 635th Supply Chain Operations Wing as a federal civilian employee. She said she is happy to transition from a military member to a civilian employee. She plans to spend more time with her family on the weekends and further her involvement in the community.





# Welcome Home 1844th Transportation Company

The 1844th Transportation Company, based in East St. Louis, was officially welcomed home during a ceremony Feb. 10.

The unit was ordered to active duty on 15 October 2022 in support of Southwest Border Operations. Their

mission was to provide detection and monitoring support in the vicinity of Laredo, Texas.

The 1844th Transportation Company undertook the unique and challenging mission of dividing into two elements, providing

augmentation for manning and expansion in two lines of effort across Task Force Argonne and Task Force Southeast with posts in Zapata and Laredo, Texas.

**(U.S. Army photos by Sgt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters - Illinois National Guard)**









# Top Enlisted Leader Now Officer

## Seeking More Out of Career 182nd AW Chief Master Sergeant Commissions

**By Senior Airman Avery Litton, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs**

After 22 years, Chief Master Sgt. Ben Reed, of Washington, Illinois, finally reached the top of the mountain. Ascending through the Air Force enlisted ranks was a grueling climb, with more responsibilities and commitments the higher up he went. Chief Master Sgt. Reed overcame every challenge to achieve what so few could.

But what if reaching the top wasn't enough?

Only one percent of the total enlisted Air Force earns the rank of chief master sergeant. For the very few that manage to achieve the title of "Chief" that is the end goal of their career, but not for Reed. He wanted more. After 22 years of enlisted service and earning the highest enlisted rank, Chief Reed took the leap to start a new beginning and commission as an officer.

"When I made chief, I had to start thinking about what my next move was going to be," said now 2nd Lt. Reed, a civil engineer with the 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron. "I started getting comfortable in my position, and I felt like I needed to do something else. So, I was thinking about commissioning and being able to serve in another capacity and still being able to give back."

When Reed first enlisted as a firefighter at Scott Air Force Base over two decades ago, he never envisioned commissioning as an officer. However, when he graduated college in 2007, his thinking started to change.

"When I joined, I went in pretty blindly as to the depth of what the force was actually made up of," said Reed. "I think maturing over the years has made me want more and more and take things more seriously."

Retired Master Sgt. Todd Prater, who has known Reed for 15 years and has gone through the ranks with Reed describes his career as "impressive."

"He did two jobs to make that chief position," said Prater. "To go from a firefighter, then go through school and then come back here as a maintenance

facility person and also an engineer... is impressive."

Prater knew that Reed had wanted to commission for a long time and watched his hard work to try to make his goal happen over the years. Becoming an officer was not a quick road for Reed. His heart was set on the civil engineer position, but his degree did not meet the very specific requirements set for that career. He and several of his mentors tried to submit waivers and find workarounds, but they had no luck.

"I kind of gave up, honestly, and just pressed as hard as I could, until I made chief," said Reed. "Being a chief was an amazing experience. To finally reach the end goal of the enlisted force and being able to do everything that I've always wanted to do for the enlisted Airmen around me all these years."

Even though Reed was not able to commission like he wanted to for close to two decades, he still pushed himself to great achievements. Reed's hard work and patience not only paid off in earning the rare chief title but also led him back to his long awaited goal of commissioning into civil engineering.

"About a year into being a chief they changed the officer classification directory and added my specific degree into the career field. There was a gap in position here in civil engineering with the wing that needed to be filled," said Reed. "It was about 17 years that I was trying to get a commission and it didn't work out and then it finally did."

Switching from top of the enlisted to bottom of the officers, Reed will



**2nd Lt. Benjamin Reed, 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron**

have many challenges ahead of him.

"It's really cool to see someone who is 40 years old doing something that most younger people are doing," said Prater. "It's almost like he's restarting another career."

Prater saw his work ethic carry him through the enlisted ranks and has no doubt that same work ethic will help him though the officer ranks as well. Reed also has years of prior military service behind him that will help push through the challenges of being an officer, which is not something that many newly commissioned second lieutenants can boast about.

As a senior enlisted member, Reed gained lots of leadership experience that is helpful to him even more now. In his new position as an officer he is able to use that experience to help others.

"My 'why' would be to continue to help everyone else joining," said Reed, "and guiding them along on the right path and being a voice for them."



# Smithton Soldier Retires after 23 Years of Service

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Lt. Col. Wyatt Bickett's 23 years of military service was honored during a retirement ceremony March 27 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Bickett, of Smithton, the deputy commander and officer-in-charge of the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) was commissioned as a chemical officer through the Reserve Officer Training Corps program at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale in 2001. He served on active duty in the U.S. Army until 2007 when he transitioned to the Illinois Army National Guard after returning from deployment to Iraq with the 4th Infantry Division from 2005-2006.

"When I think about Wyatt Bickett, three things come to mind," said Col. Randy Edwards, Chief of Staff of the Illinois Army National Guard. "The first is officer in charge. Wyatt has served as the officer in charge of three separate battalions and a brigade on his way to serving 11 years as an officer in charge. The Illinois National Guard is postured well today in part because of your extraordinary leadership."

Edwards said the second thing which comes to mind when thinking about Bickett is his ability to not sweat the small stuff.

"Wyatt has mastered knowing when to get serious and dig in and when not to sweat the small stuff," Edwards said.

The final thing which comes to mind for Edwards is Bickett's love of family and service.

"Wyatt is big on family. He loves his wife, Jenny and is very proud of his three children," Edwards said. "As far as service, no one sets out to be an OIC for 11 years. That's amazing. That's someone who truly cares about Soldiers, the unit and this organization. I wish you the best in retirement."

Edwards thanked Bickett's family for their support.

"Thank you for your support of Wyatt all these years," Edwards said. "We're not able to do what we do



**Lt. Col. Wyatt Bickett, of Smithton, officer in charge of the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) is presented a certificate of retirement by Col. Randy Edwards, Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard. Bickett retired after 23 years of military service in a ceremony March 27 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.**

without the family's support."

Bickett said he and Edwards have been friends for a long time.

"Seems like a handful of years ago we were standing in the back of the RTI, the last two majors of our group standing, talking about retirement," Bickett said. "Now he's the chief of staff and I'm retiring. It's been great serving with you."

Bickett thanked a few people who he's served with throughout his career.

"I couldn't serve 23 years without people helping me out along the way," Bickett said. "Looking around the room, many of my cohorts are now the directors, so I know when I leave this organization, it's in good hands."

Bickett also thanked his family, wife, Jenny, and children, Leoni, Hatcher, and Clara.

I want to thank my family for all their support. My children were born into the military," he said. "They

probably think well everyone's dad lives hours away. It's just normal to them. They probably don't think they've done a lot to support me. They're resilient."

"Jenny joined up about halfway through the military career, but she's always very supportive of my career," he said. "I wouldn't be standing here without their support."

Bickett said he's had a lot of great assignments throughout his career.

"I've had a lot of great assignments from Germany to here," he said. "I've been fortunate to start where I did and end where I did. My first assignment was Germany and today I'm ending my career at the 129th. There were rough assignments between, but it eventually brought me back to Illinois. What made the assignments great was the people. It's just time for me to do something different and be reenergized by it."





Lt. Col. Beth Roxworthy (left), Commander of the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade, and Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black (right), State Command Chief Warrant Officer for the Illinois Army National Guard, present Capt. Simon Lee (center), Logistics Advisor Team 6612 Team Leader, with the Illinois flag that will accompany them on their deployment. The small, specialized team is deploying to the Philippines to advise and assist the Filipino armed forces, replacing another team slated to come home later in February.

## Specialized Team Deploys to INDOPACOM Area

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

Friends and family gathered at Rock Island Arsenal's Heritage Hall Feb. 4, for a mobilization ceremony for Logistics Advisory Team 6612 of the

Illinois National Guard's 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade.

The team of about half a dozen

Soldiers will deploy to the Philippines to replace a team slated to come back in February. LAT 6612 will take over training and integrating with Filipino armed forces to bolster their medical and logistical operations.

Lt. Col. Beth Roxworthy, commander of the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade, parent unit of the SFAB, said she couldn't be more proud of the work the SFAB has done in preparation for their mission.

"I'm proud to have this unit under our brigade," said Roxworthy. "The work you put in day in and day out shows in everything. I know that you're fully prepared and capable of succeeding in the task set before you."

Capt. Simon Lee, LAT 6612 Team Leader, said he's excited to get in country and start conducting the mission.

"I'm grateful and blessed to have such a wonderful team," said Lee. "We're excited, we've been training for this for a while, but we have big shoes to fill."

LAT 6612 will deploy later this month and be gone for approximately 6 to 9 months.



Soldiers from the 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade's Logistics Advisor Team 6612 stand as their deployment order is read during a ceremony held at Heritage Hall at Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois.



# Macomb Soldier Retires After 20 Years of Service

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Illinois Army National Guard Master Sgt. Kenneth Ray, of Macomb, retired following a 20-year military career Feb. 25 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln, Springfield.

“Master Sergeant Ray is a subject matter expert, and a linchpin of the RTI,” said Lt. Col. Nick Camardo, Commander, 1st Battalion, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute). “He is a tactical expert with 20 years of experience. Congratulations on your retirement.”

Ray enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard on Dec. 20, 2003 as an administrative specialist. During his military career, Ray deployed to Egypt in 2010-2011 in support of the Multinational Force and Observers and to Iraq, Kuwait and Qatar in 2020-2021 in support of Operation Freedom Sentinel.

Ray’s awards and decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal third award, Army Achievement Medal second award, Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal fifth award, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with M device second award, Iraqi Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Noncommissioned Officers Professional Development ribbon fourth award, Good Conduct Medal, Meritorious Unit Commendation, Army Service Ribbon, Army Overseas Service Ribbon second award, Army Reserve Component Overseas Training Ribbon third award, Illinois National Guard Lincoln Medal of Freedom second award, Illinois National Guard Long and Honorable Service Medal second award, Illinois Military Attendance ribbon tenth award, and the Illinois State Active Duty ribbon.

“Twenty years seems like a long time, but it has flown by,” said Ray. “I’ve been to a lot of cool places and met a lot of great people over the last 20 years.”

Ray thanked his family for their support over the years.

“I couldn’t have done it without the support of my family,” he said.

Even though Ray has hung up his uniform, he told friends and fellow Soldiers he’s only a phone call away.



Lt. Col. Nick Camardo, Commander, 1st Battalion, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) presents Master Sgt. Kenneth Ray, Branch Chief, 1st Battalion, 129th RTI, with a Certificate of Retirement during Ray’s retirement ceremony Feb. 25 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois.



Master Sgt. Michael Ladd, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) presents Master Sgt. Kenneth Ray, Branch Chief, 1st Battalion, 129th RTI, with a safety cone during Ray’s retirement ceremony Feb. 25 at the Illinois Military Academy.



# 933rd Military Police Company Welcomed Home from Deployment During Ceremony

*Fort Sheridan-based unit honors Soldiers, Families after mission to U.S. Southern Command AOR, receives access to reintegration resources*

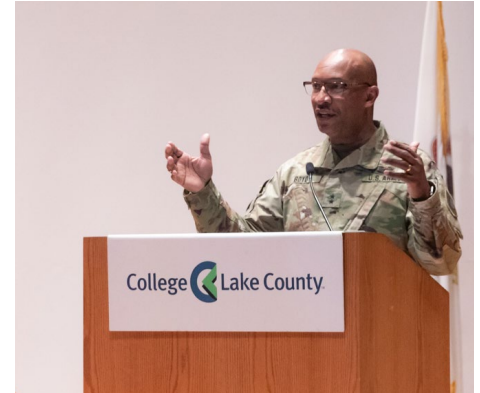
On March 9, the Illinois National Guard held a welcome home ceremony for the 933rd Military Police Company and their family members at the College of Lake County, in Grayslake, Illinois.

The 933rd Military Police Company deployed to U.S. Southern Command Area of Responsibility from January 2023 to November 2023.

"The work we did was an important lasting piece of our history," said Staff Sgt. Samantha Pody, with the 933rd.

After the deployment ceremony, the 933rd Company was provided access to resources aimed at helping the Soldiers integrate into their lives back at home. Booths were posted outside the ceremony hall such as the Yellow Ribbon Program, counseling resources, and education benefits.

"Take advantage of our resources to reintegrate back because it is not easy to do that," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard.



**Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General Army of the Illinois National Guard speaks to the Soldiers and families of the 933rd Military Police Company on March 9 at a welcome home ceremony at the College of Lake County, in Grayslake, Illinois.**



**Soldiers and families with the 933rd Military Company came together March 9 for a welcome home ceremony at the College of Lake County, in Grayslake, Illinois. The 933rd Military Police Company, based at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, deployed to U.S. Southern Command Area of Responsibility from January 2023 to November 2023. (U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Kristel Cordero, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)**



# Eastridge Named Deputy Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard

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

Col. Michael Eastridge, the Illinois National Guard Chief of the Joint Staff and former Commander of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, has been named as the Illinois National Guard's next Deputy Assistant Adjutant General – Army and received his federal recognition as a brigadier general.

His promotion ceremony was held in April.

"Mike Eastridge has both extensive combat and domestic response experience combined with years of corporate management," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, The Adjutant General for Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "His broad spectrum of leadership will help carry the Illinois Army National Guard ahead as we face future challenges and change."

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard who has been selected as The Adjutant General for Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, said Eastridge will be instrumental in advising him and the new Illinois Army National Guard Commander in the years ahead. "He's the right officer for the job. He is already a trusted advisor and friend who will help me and the next Illinois Army National Guard Commander make the right decisions for our 10,000 Soldiers."

Eastridge enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1988 and rose to the rank of staff sergeant before commissioning as a second lieutenant in 2000 through the Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School as the program's distinguished honor graduate.

"A dozen years as an enlisted Soldier and noncommissioned officer gave me a great foundation as an officer who understands Soldier issues," Eastridge said. "I did not envision becoming a general officer back then, but I do think that time was extremely valuable in my

development as a leader. I am humbled and grateful for this opportunity to continue my military career and have an impact on the future of the organization."

Col. Eastridge has deployed three times. His last deployment was from 2008 to 2009 to Afghanistan as a Team Chief for an Afghan Border Police Embedded Training Team. While deployed he assumed command of the 333d Military Police Company, which was conducting decisive action operations. He also deployed to Germany in 2002 with Task Force Santa Fe as a platoon leader with 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, which conducted force protection operations. In 2004, he mobilized to Fort Polk, LA with the 1st Battalion, 131st Infantry Regiment as the Opposing Force Military Intelligence Officer.

He has held two troop-level commands with the 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment in addition to the overseas command of the 333rd Military Police Co. From 2015 to 2017 he commanded the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment.

He commanded 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team from June 2020 through December 2022 and guided the brigade during the Illinois National Guard's COVID-19 response and helped it maintain its readiness and combat power during the pandemic. Eastridge received the Legion of Merit for his command of the 33rd.

Throughout his career, Eastridge



**Col. Michael Eastridge**

has also held multiple key staff positions culminating with his selection as the Chief of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff responsible for all Illinois National Guard staff coordination for domestic operations.

As a traditional National Guard Soldier, Eastridge also has extensive civilian experience that includes over 20 years with Mercedes-Benz Financial Services. He now serves as Mercedes-Benz Financial Services' Marketing and Sales Support Manager for the United States.

Eastridge grew up in Wheaton, Illinois. He raised two daughters, Rachel and Megan, and a son, Tim, to adulthood. He now lives in Plymouth, Michigan, with Mary and her two sons, Gavin and Karter.



## From Private to General

# Eastridge Continues to Move Up the Ranks

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Joined by family, friends, and fellow Soldiers, Michael Eastridge, of Plymouth, Michigan, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General – Army, was promoted to brigadier general during a ceremony April 8 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, in Springfield.

Eastridge enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1988, rising through the ranks to staff sergeant before graduating from the ILARNG Officer Candidate School in 2000, commissioning as an Infantry officer.

Eastridge, a traditional member of the National Guard, is the Mercedes-Benz Financial Services Marketing and Sales Support Manager for the United States. He has been employed with Mercedes-Benz for more than 20 years.

“What a special day this is for Mike and his family,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “It’s through mentors and friends that we make it through our careers.”

Neely thanked Eastridge’s family for their support throughout his career, including mother, Christine Eastridge; his daughters, Rachel and Megan; and his partner, Mary Gollan.

“The military has stolen Mike away for 35 years for deployments, training, school and other events,” Neely said. “I know it’s special for Mike to have each of you here today for this promotion and to celebrate his success.”

Neely told friends and family it’s difficult to become a commissioned officer in the military, and even more so to be promoted to general officer.

“It is hard to become an officer in the military,” Neely said. “It’s really difficult to make lieutenant colonel and some are fortunate to get promoted to colonel, but to become a general officer is very rare.”

Neely said Eastridge has not shied away from the challenges of balancing military obligations and a civilian career.

“I’m always amazed by our



**Rachel and Megan Eastridge, daughters of newly promoted U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge, of Plymouth, Michigan, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, Illinois Army National Guard, pins on general officer rank during a promotion ceremony April 6 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.**

traditional Guard members,” Neely said. “Mike epitomizes the ability to successfully balance military obligations and a civilian career. He has grown and excelled in every position he’s held.”

Eastridge has deployed multiple times throughout 35 years of military service. He deployed to Germany in 2002 with Task Force Santa Fe with Company A, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, where the unit conducted force protection operations. In 2004, Eastridge mobilized with 1st Battalion, 131st Infantry Regiment as the Opposing Forces Military Intelligence Officer to Fort Polk, Louisiana.

In 2008 he deployed to Afghanistan as a team chief for an Afghan Border Police Embedded Training Team. While deployed to Afghanistan, Eastridge assumed command of the 333rd Military Police Company. Eastridge later became commander of 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment from 2015 to 2017 and in 2020, he was selected to command the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

“Thirty five years ago I enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard specifically for college tuition,” Eastridge said. “I never thought I’d stay past six years, let alone stand here today receiving a promotion to brigadier general.”



Eastridge said many people helped him throughout his career.

"There is no way to thank everyone," he said. "I have learned from each and every one of you with each interaction I have had over time to achieve this great career milestone."

Eastridge thanked his family for their support in his career.

"You have supported me throughout my career and continue to support me through all these different commitments as well as long-term mobilizations," he said. "I knew with my supporting cast everything would be okay at home."

Eastridge is no stranger to military service. He was the grandson of an Army Air Corps veteran of World War II, the son of an Air Force veteran and the father of an Air Force veteran.

"Although my grandfather, father, and my son are no longer with us, I want them to know they inspired and encouraged me during my career."

Eastridge, who interviewed for a position at Mercedes-Benz in 2001, a month before the terrorist attacks of September 11, also thanked Mercedes-Benz Financial Services for their many years of support.

"After 9/11, and for my first seven years of employment there, I was gone



**Newly promoted U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge, of Plymouth, Michigan, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, Illinois Army National Guard, is administered the oath of office during a promotion ceremony April 6 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln**

for three of those years due to military commitments," he said. "They were always there supporting me. I knew everything would be okay when I got back and today they continue to support me."

Eastridge said it's difficult to balance time with family, civilian jobs, and military commitments.

"I often say it's like air inside a balloon," he said. "The balloon is flexible, but sometimes someone doesn't get the air they need, and sometimes someone needs a little more air like during deployments. I just hope you understand when that happens."

Eastridge said there are times in one's career which become defining moments.

"I came in as a private knowing nothing at 17 years old," he said. "When I was promoted to staff sergeant that defining period helped me understand the noncommissioned officers corps. That helped me as a commander to work collaboratively with NCOs to accomplish the mission."

Eastridge offered advice to fellow Soldiers.

"You never know what the future holds," he said. "Take advantage of every opportunity. Doors will be opened and paths established but it is still your responsibility to perform well and know how to work best with your supporting cast to succeed."

Eastridge said he is excited for the new challenges which lie ahead.

"I'm excited for this new opportunity," he said. "I'm looking forward to working with everyone in this new role."



**Newly promoted U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge, of Plymouth, Michigan, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, Illinois Army National Guard, and his partner, Mary Gollan, unfurl Eastridge's general officer flag during a promotion ceremony April 6 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln.**





# 182nd AW Leaders Attend Strategic Summit

U.S. Air Force leaders with the 182nd Airlift Wing attend a strategic summit at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, Feb. 4, 2024. During the summit key leaders collaborated and planned for the future of the base. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by 2nd Lt. Jay Grabiec)





# Champaign Soldier Promoted to Captain

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Nearly nine years after joining the U.S. Army, Mikaya Thomas, of Champaign, was promoted to the rank of captain in the Illinois Army National Guard during a ceremony March 23 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, in Springfield.

Thomas, the commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), told family, friends, and fellow Soldiers that her career has come full circle as she celebrates nine years of service March 24.

“I remember being in basic training with aspirations of doing big things and leading Soldiers,” she said. “Today, I’m getting promoted to captain and leading Soldiers.”

Lt. Col. Wyatt Bickett, of Smithton, officer-in-charge of the 129th RTI, said Thomas has proven she has what it takes to move forward in the Illinois Army National Guard and to be a great leader.

“This is a great day for Lieutenant Thomas and her family. We promote Soldiers based on potential not just previous accomplishments,” he said. “This isn’t just a reward. We’re giving you these captain bars today because this is what we expect of you going forward. She has an immense amount of potential. We’re looking forward to keeping her around here for a while and using her talents.”

Thomas aspires to become a Training, Advising, and Counseling Officer with the Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School in the future.



**Newly promoted Illinois Army National Guard Capt. Mikaya Thomas, of Champaign, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) thanks family, friends, and fellow Soldiers for their support during her nine years of service during a promotion ceremony March 23.**



**Tracy Thomas, mother of newly promoted Illinois Army National Guard Capt. Mikaya Thomas, secures new rank on Thomas' uniform while Ernie Secest, Thomas' great aunt, pins new rank on her cap March 23**





A U.S. A-10 Thunderbolt II from the 442nd Fighter Wing approaches the refueling boom of a 126th Air Refueling Wing KC-135 Stratotanker in U.S. Air Space, March 2, 2024. Thunderbolt's are used as air-to-ground fighter jets and most notable for their GAU-8/A Avenger Gatling gun located on the nose of the aircraft. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez)

## 126th Air Refueling Wing Fuels the Fight

At right, U.S. Air Force Gen. Mike Minihan, commander of the Air Mobility Command, meets 126th Air Refueling Wing members before an orientation flight at Scott Air Force, Illinois, March 2. Minihan thanked the crew for prepping the KC-135 Stratotanker he flew on that day. Minihan flew with the aircraft's crew to orient himself with the wing's refueling mission. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez)







U.S. Air Force, Gen. Mike Minihan, Air Mobility Command commander, right, listens to 108th Air Refueling Squadron boom operator, Technical Sgt. Ryan Mullins give instruction on how to operate the boom of a KC-135 Stratotanker during an orientation flight, March 2, 2024. This was the first time the general experienced how 126th Air Refueling Wing members operate refueling booms during ongoing and critical missions. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez)



U.S. Air Force, Capt. Vaughn Campbell, 906th Air Refueling Squadron instructor pilot flies a KC-135 Stratotanker, March 2, 2024. Campbell was a member of 126th Air Refueling Wing crew who took, Gen. Mike Minihan, Air Mobility Command commander, on an orientation that day. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez)





# Meeting the Challenge

Master Sgt. Stephen Salefski, the Illinois Army National Guard Strength Management Noncommissioned Officer-in-Charge, presents the Blackhawk Recruiting Challenge Award to Spc. Weston Riding. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Stech, Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion.)

## ‘Blackhawk Challenge’ Helps Bring Southern Illinoisans into Illinois Army National Guard

By Spc. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

The Blackhawk Challenge, a recruiting initiative spearheaded by the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Marion, is seeing success in bringing qualified Southern Illinois men and women into the Illinois Army National Guard where they serve their community, state, and nation.

The challenge gives Soldiers the opportunity to refer candidates to their local recruiters. If a candidate successfully enlists, then the Soldier who made the referral receives incentives. These incentives come in the form of promotion points, an Army Recruiting Ribbon and the

opportunity to attend specialized Army training. The Blackhawk Challenge’s success has the Illinois Army National Guard replicating the program throughout the state.

The battalion is the oldest actively serving National Guard unit in the state tracing its lineage back to the Black Hawk War in 1832, when a young man named Abraham Lincoln was serving in the Illinois Militia ranks.

“The Blackhawk Battalion has an over 200-year history of service to our nation and our community. The Soldiers of 2-130 Infantry take great pride in the unit and train hard to

uphold the battalion’s motto of being ‘Always Ready,’” said Maj. Edward Worman, the Commander of the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry. “In the last few years, the battalion has conducted realistic training both at home and abroad, to include a mobilization to the Middle East. Blackhawk soldiers are professionals, and the Blackhawk Battalion is unmatched in the training and opportunities we provide to our Soldiers.”

Lt. Col. Matthew Morse, who relinquished command of the battalion to Worman earlier this year, said the recruiting program was a great way for the Soldiers to choose friends who



could benefit from service in the National Guard.

"This Blackhawk Challenge is a great way for Soldiers in the Battalion to recruit those they want to serve with," Morse said. "Our motto, 'Always Ready' we take to heart because we are a large team of that works hard and is ready for anything whenever we are called upon. Infantrymen learn and know more than anyone could ever fathom and we are all proud to be a member of the Blackhawk Battalion. We are always looking for a few more Blackhawks to join the team and embrace the culture."

"I think these guys are full of pride in their battalion and would do this stuff even without schools," said Staff Sgt. Travis Stamp, a recruiter in the Mount Vernon area. "We recruiters rely on the referral process and develop relationships to make sure that candidates get what they want and get the best out of the National Guard experience."

According to Stamp, the Blackhawk Challenge has proven to be successful. One such success story is that of Spc. Weston Riding of Mount Vernon, an Infantryman with the 2-130 Infantry, who recently completed the challenge by referring a friend, Pvt. Landon Lowery.

"I have a track record of trying get people into the Guard," said Riding. "I want to share my experience with people. It gave me a purpose, and I figured it can do that for other people."

Riding and Lowery met a few years back and stayed in contact not knowing that their paths would cross in such a big way later.

"I've known him for a long time" said Lowery, the recently recruited Infantryman. "We wrestled for a while and stayed in contact."

Lowery, a high school student at Fairfield Community High School, knew that joining the military was what he wanted to do and luckily, he



**Lt. Col. Matthew Morse, past commander, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, congratulates Spc. Weston Riding on receiving the Blackhawk Recruiting Challenge Award. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Stech, Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion.)**

had a friend who had been through the process. The encouragement and guidance from Riding played a big role in Lowery's decision to embark on this new chapter.

"I felt like I needed to do something," said Lowery, who enlisted Feb. 27, 2024. "I felt like I needed to serve my community and this was the best way to do so."

With plans to leverage the college benefits offered by the Illinois Army National Guard, Lowery aspires to go to college and eventually pursue a career as a law enforcement officer or game warden. He is set to begin his journey with Basic Combat Training over the summer and Advanced Individual Training (AIT) immediately after graduating high school in 2025.

Lowery expressed gratitude for his friend and recruiter to have helped get him in the door and looks forward to the opportunity to serve with them.

"I look forward to opportunities that might come from it," Lowery said.

"It's cool to reconnect, serve our

community and nation together."

As the Army National Guard continues its commitment to recruiting individuals who embody the values of service and dedication, stories like Lowery's serve as inspiring examples of the transformative power of military service in shaping lives and building stronger communities.

Stamp encourages everyone to explore the options that are available in the Illinois Army National Guard.

"There are a ton of companies and corporations that provide incentives, but this is a pretty unique one and there are tons of doors that this opens up for people," said Stamp. "You don't have to join if you talk to a recruiter but talking to a recruiter can get you a lot of information. That might put you in the direction that you want to go."

For more information on joining the Army, initiatives and opportunities, please visit <https://www.nationalguard.com/illinois>.





## Local military child's Easter Egg artwork earns family White House visit for annual Easter Egg Roll

Original artwork created by National Guard youth from each of the 54 states and territories was on display at The White House during its annual Easter Egg Roll event.

A total of 6 submissions from Illinois Army and Air National Guard youth were submitted with the winner being Eliot Krzesinski to represent the Illinois National Guard in the White House display.

Eliot's father, Lt. Col. Nicholas Krzesinski, SPO, 34th Division Sustainment Brigade, is currently deployed to Kuwait.





**FRONT**

**BACK**

Eliot Krzesinski's Easter Egg artwork. Eliot's artwork was selected to represent the Illinois National Guard at the White House. His artwork was painted onto an egg and on display during the White House Easter Egg roll. The Krzesinski family were invited to the White House for the Easter Egg roll.



**FRONT**

**BACK**

Anuhea Burgess' Easter Egg artwork.



**FRONT**

**BACK**

Haddie Coleman's Easter Egg artwork.



**FRONT**

**BACK**

Ashley Krzesinski's Easter Egg artwork.





# Easter Egg Hunt an Afternoon of Fun for Gold Star and Military Families at Mt. Vernon Armory



Two-year-old Maverick Bielecki of Olney, Illinois, does arts and crafts while Family Programs volunteer 14-year-old Jewelina Scrivner of Woodlawn, Illinois, assists during the Survivor Outreach Services and Illinois National Guard Family Programs' Easter Egg Hunt at the Mount Vernon (Illinois) Armory on March 9.



Six-year-old Everly Thomas of Fairfield, Illinois, runs for Easter Eggs



Four-year-old Zayla Bielecki grabs Easter Eggs as 2-year-old Maverick Bielecki of Olney, Illinois, looks on.



Future Farmers of America volunteer Olivia Moser talks on the phone while helping 6-year-old Everly Thomas and 4-year-old Zayla Bielecki feed the goats





Two-year-old Maverick Bielecki of Olney, Illinois, offers 12-year-old Brock Forristall an Easter Egg.



Brothers 5-year-old Toby Gordon and 11-year-old Nate Scott assemble Legos.



Six-year-old Ava Gordon (left) reads a book while her sisters, 7-year-old Kyra Gordon and 8-year-old Kenzie Gordon play.





Members of the 126th Air Refueling Wing stand with Polish Air Force counterparts after touring the 33rd Air Base maintenance facility March 25, 2024, in Powidz, Poland. The Illinois Air National Guard wing visited Poland as a part of the State Partnership Program.

## 126th ARW Wraps Up Copper Arrow Rotation

*By Master Sgt. Brian Ellison, 126th Air Refueling Wing*

The 126th Air Refueling Wing recently wrapped up a two-week deployment to Poland in support of Operation Copper Arrow.

The operation enhanced combat readiness amongst NATO allies and partner nations, enabling them to rapidly respond to any threat. Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve aerial refueling tankers, KC-135s, KC-10s, and KC-46s, supported Copper Arrow on a two-week rotational basis.

"The Copper Arrow mission has been highly successful," said Lt. Col. Spencer Leidel, the 108th Air Refueling Squadron commander, "fulfilling all of the required objectives for United States Air Forces in Europe, European Command and the eastern European theater."

The wing also provided much-needed nighttime aerial refueling training for the Polish Air Force,

Illinois' partner under the National Guard's State Partnership Program. According to Leidel, nighttime refueling can be a tricky task because it is hard to see visual references and it messes with depth perception.

"It becomes a team effort between both the boom operator and the receiver pilot to coordinate, make sure that they're in the proper position for optimal refueling," Leidel said.

On the ground, members of the 126th met with their Polish counterparts to discuss further ways to expand their partnership.

"Talking to our logistics readiness squadron commander, our civil engineer commander, as well as our aircraft maintenance squadron commander, we've identified specific opportunities," said Maj. Mike McCarthy, maintenance squadron commander. "We can either do some

annual training or bring a deployment for training here."

The deployment was not without its problems. A part broke on one of the two planes. After some searching, a spare part was found at Royal Air Force Mildenhall, England, and installed a few days afterwards.

"It was a very good team effort," McCarthy said, "Yesterday afternoon, for a few hours it was all-hands-on-deck. We had every maintainer that was here on this trip out there. Definitely a lot of coordination and a lot of hard work that went in from a lot of different agencies to make that happen."

The 126th Air Refueling Wing's two-week rotation comes to an end for COPPER ARROW, but McCarthy added that the Illinois Air National Guard looks forward to continue strengthening its relationship.





Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, provides opening remarks during the Illinois National Guard Senior Leaders Engagement at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria on Feb. 23.

# U.S. Army War College Professor Addresses Illinois National Guard Senior Leaders in Peoria



Above, U.S. Army War College Professor Bert Tussing addresses Illinois National Guard leaders during the Illinois National Guard Senior Leaders Engagement at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria on Feb. 23. Tussing, the Director of Homeland Defense and Security Issues for the U.S. Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership, was the keynote speaker for the engagement. He told the Illinois National Guard's senior leaders that "the next time we go to war, war will be coming to us" and the American public should be alerted to the fact that we are not invulnerable. Above right, Col. Rusty Ballard, Commander of the 182nd Airlift Wing, and right, Col. Max Casteleyn, Commander of the 65th Troop Command gives fellow Illinois National Guard leaders capabilities briefings on the units under their command during the Illinois National Guard Senior Leaders Engagement at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria.







Steven Herman, civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army, Illinois (left), U.S. Army Reserve Maj. Gen. Matthew Baker, commanding general, 88th Readiness Division, U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Antoinette Gant, chief, Army Enterprise Marketing Office, U.S. Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, and James Bland, civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army, Illinois (far right), pose for a photo during the Chicago White Sox home opener game at Guaranteed Rate Field, Chicago, March 28, 2024. (U.S. Army Reserve photo by Maj. Shamika Hill)

### **Unity Beyond the Diamond**

# **Army Participates at White Sox Game Opener**

**By Maj. Shamika Hill, Army Enterprise Marketing Office (AEMO)**

In the heart of baseball season’s opening day, where fans eagerly filled the stadium, another significant presence was there — the proud representation of the Army.

Leaders from all three components of the Army, Army civilians and community partners attended the Chicago White Sox home opener at Guaranteed Rate Field in Chicago on March 28, 2024.

Brig. Gen. Antoinette Gant, chief, Army Enterprise Marketing Office, emphasized the importance of having the total Army present.

“Having all three components here shows that we are one team, one fight,” Gant said. “We need each other; one does not function without

the other.”

Country music star and Army Reserve Warrant Officer Craig Morgan Greer, an associate band director with the 313th Army Band of Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, sang a distinctive rendition of the national anthem. His voice was full of strength and pride, and the Illinois National Guard’s flyover moved everyone in the stands.

“For me to be able to do this in the uniform and represent my Army and our country is very humbling, and I am grateful,” Greer said. “My hope is that people see me and say, ‘If that guy can do it, I can do it.’ That’s the idea. I am not here for me but for the Army.”

Maj. Gen. Matthew Baker,

commanding general of the 88th Readiness Division, highlighted the significance of having an Army Reserve band at the event.

“Having the Army band changes the dynamics of the event,” Baker said.

“They promote not only the Army Reserve, but the Army, and it helps to build a bond with local community.”

Greer was also recognized during the third inning changeover as the Hero of the Game.

“I am very humbled,” Greer said. “None of us join the Army for rewards or to have people pat us on the back. We join to serve our country. When I am presented with these awards, I receive them on behalf of all the men



and women that are serving.”

Beyond the symbolic gestures, the military’s participation served as a tangible demonstration of the bond between the armed forces and the communities they serve.

“We are normal people, we are everyday individuals,” Gant said. “The fact that we are here gives us an opportunity to talk to the community about the various possibilities that the Army offers.”

Additionally, two civilian aides to the secretary of the Army (CASA) representing northern Illinois graced the event.

Steven Herman, civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army, Illinois, explained the important role of CASAs.

“We are the outreach locally,” Herman said. “We are trying to show that we (military) are citizens just like everyone else.”

The baseball game opener served as a powerful reminder of the strength

that comes from standing together, united in purpose and shared values.

“It is an opportunity for us to be able to collaborate with other military organizations in the Chicago area,” Gant said. “The more we find ways to work together, the better we help to overcome some of the stigmas of the military.”

The inclusive presence was a reminder that the commitment to duty extends far beyond the battlefield, encompassing every aspect of American life, including the beloved pastime of baseball.



**U.S. Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, and country music star and U.S. Army Reserve Warrant Officer Craig Morgan Greer pose for a photo during the Chicago White Sox home game opener at Guaranteed Rate Field, Chicago, March 28, 2024. (U.S. Army Reserve photo by Maj. Shamika Hill)**



**U.S. Army senior leaders, civilian aides, Soldiers, and local community leaders during the Chicago White Sox home opener game at Guaranteed Rate Field, March 28. The event offered an opportunity for U.S. Army outreach and networking for all components. Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, Illinois National Guard, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, was among regional Army leadership. (U.S. Army Reserve photo by Maj. Shamika Hill)**





Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Security Forces Squadron members ruck during training at Scott Air Force Base, Feb. 4. Squadron members packed required gear and weapon systems to travel, on foot, to their training location. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez)

# Ruck around...



Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Security Forces Squadron members ruck during training at Scott Air Force Base Feb. 4.





Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Security Forces Squadron security response team members, (left) Senior Airman Cheyenne Doverspike, and Senior Airman Savannah Jibben, work together to prepare range cards during training at Scott Air Force Base, Feb. 4. The two volunteered to prepare the training equipment for their squadron team members.

# and find out



Illinois Air National Guard Master Sgt. Jared Clauser, 126th Security Forces Squadron unit training manager, aims down the sights of a M240-B machine gun at Scott Air Force Base, Feb. 4. Proficiency with the M240-B machine gun is required by all Security Forces personnel. At right, he surveys a training field. On the field, Clauser's team practiced creating range cards used to determine the distance of shooting targets from defensive positions.







Leaders from the Illinois National Guard with Soldiers from the Polish Territorial Defense Force (TDF) on Camp Lincoln March 13. Soldiers from the TDF toured the installation and discussed opportunities for future collaboration on training. The Illinois National Guard has shared a State Partnership Program with the Polish military for over 30 years. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters - Illinois National Guard)

# Territorial Defense Forces Visit Camp Lincoln

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas R. Black, State Command Chief Warrant Officer, Illinois National Guard, meets with Soldiers from the Polish Territorial Defense Force (TDF) on Camp Lincoln March 13.







**Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard meet with, and provide briefings to, Soldiers from the Polish Territorial Defense Forces. Soldiers from the TDF toured the installation and discussed opportunities for future collaboration on training. The Illinois National Guard has shared a State Partnership Program with the Polish military for over 30 years. (U.S. Army photos by Sgt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters - Illinois National Guard)**





# Black Horse Unit Recognizes Soldiers, Families during Welcome Home Ceremony

*Peoria-based aviation battalion completes year-long overseas mission*

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

Approximately 195 Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers serving with 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, based in Peoria, and Company B, 935th Aviation Support Battalion, based in Kankakee, were welcomed home during a ceremony in Bloomington, April 13. The 106th returned home in February, following a year-long deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

"This ceremony marks a historic occasion in the unit," said Maj. Charles Auer, Operations Officer, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment. "Today represents another successful milestone in the distinguished service to the citizens of this country, the Illinois Army National Guard, and the U.S. Army."

Auer said the purpose of the ceremony was to acknowledge ILARNG Soldiers who deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, Operation Spartan Shield, and Operation New Normal, and most importantly, to recognize the families, friends, and all who supported the unit throughout the deployment.

"It does my heart well to see all of you Soldiers back home safe, and spending time with your families," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, The Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "It was a year ago back in February last year when we were in Peoria, sending you off. I know each one of you at that time were asking, as we all do when we are preparing for deployment, what's this? What's ahead of you? What's the next step in this mission? What will I be doing next? How will I perform?"

"Let me tell you, I could not be prouder of how well all of you performed," he said. "This unit took the Black Hawk Victor model and were the first in the entire Army to



**Lt. Col. Jason Celletti, second from right, Commander, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, and Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Stickelmaier, right, the Command Sergeant Major for 1/106th Aviation, present Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, left, The Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami, Senior Enlisted Leader, Illinois National Guard, with the Illinois state flag which was carried on the unit's deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. The flag flew during multiple operational missions throughout CENTCOM's area of responsibility, including Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon.**

get it through training, prepare it for deployment, and deploy it. You really set the record for the rest of the Army on how to use the Victor model."

Neely said the 106th Aviation Regiment set standards for developing Crisis Response Task Force Aviation tactics.

"You worked with international partners, not just in Kuwait, but partners across the Central Command area of responsibility," he said.

"Lieutenant Colonel Celletti and I talked about some of the hardships this unit went through, especially the change in theater after Oct. 7. You answered the call with

professionalism and expertise and brought that capability into theater, so the entire theater was able to have the needed aviation capability that was there."

Neely said it took each Soldier to accomplish the mission.

"It took each of you to do that," he said. "We have some amazing pilots, but we also have amazing maintainers, mission planners, and supply. It takes an entire team to get that helicopter off the pad to the next mission. It is a reminder today of the one percent that does this mission, the one percent of people in the United States that wear this uniform. We often forget



how unique we are because we're surrounded by other service members in our community."

Neely said since he has been The Adjutant General of Illinois, more than 4,800 Soldiers and Airmen have deployed around the world to 21 different countries.

"We couldn't do what we do without the support of the family who stands behind us," he said. "The only reason we can serve is because of the families and employers who step up behind us."

Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Stickelmaier, senior enlisted leader for 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation, thanked the families for their support throughout the deployment.

"Keeping the household wasn't easy I'm sure," he said. "Taking care of that allowed us to do what we needed to do to focus on our mission. And focus they did."

Stickelmaier said the Soldiers did a great job by taking a normal five-year training cycle and condensing it down to 18 months.

"We fielded a brand-new helicopter and took it through its final paces of a combat deployment," he said. "This mission was extremely successful because of the Soldiers here. It was a

pleasure serving with all of you. As you go back to your unit, continue to build on the lessons learned and training received, share this knowledge with fellow Soldiers and continue the tradition of the Black Horse."

Lt. Col. Jason Celletti, commander, 1/106th, said he told the Soldiers at the mobilization ceremony in 2023 that teamwork is the key to successful organizations.

"Professionalism, quality training and leadership from all levels will make the team successful," he reminded the Soldiers and their families. "I said then I couldn't guarantee there wouldn't be challenges over the next few months but the only way to get through the deployment is to rely on the rest of the team and others for support and to offer support when needed."

"The team was successful," he said. "We fought through challenges of the Victor model, the 'who we work for mentalities', and events in the Middle East after October 7. We came together whether we realized it or not."

Celletti said the Task Force was made up of about 300 Soldiers from across all three components.

"Black Horse went out of the

normal assault helicopter battalion doctrine to ensure we met the Central Command Commander's intent for a Crisis Response Task Force Aviation," he said. "The Task Force was stood up a couple of times but fortunately it did not deploy to its full extent to any crisis."

Celletti said the Black Horse executed 5,000 hours of flight time with multiple aircraft frames, not just the battalion's Black Hawk helicopters.

"We flew AH-64 Apaches, H-47 Chinooks, three varieties of UH-60 Black Hawks, the C-12 fixed wing aircraft, and others in multiple countries, maintaining an 83 percent ready to launch rate for the brigade, Operation Spartan Shield and Operation Inherent Resolve," he said.

Celletti said the Black Horse Soldiers, including teammates from units in Connecticut and Maine were awarded 13 Meritorious Service Medals, 96 Air Medals, 136 Army Commendation Medals, 29 Army Achievement Medals, 45 Combat Action Badges, and three Purple Hearts. In addition, 1/106th Assault Helicopter Battalion will receive the Meritorious Unit Commendation from Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve.



Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, based in Peoria, and Company B, 935th Aviation Support Battalion, based in Kankakee, salute during a welcome home ceremony April 13 in Bloomington. The Soldiers arrived home in February, following a successful overseas deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.



“That is a testament to a job well done across multiple operational commands,” Celletti said. “One of the greatest accomplishments of the team is growth. I witnessed Soldiers grow into great leaders. They will go a long way in the organization.”

Celletti told the families they played a vital role in the Black Horse Team.

“You held the households together. You were chauffeurs, ensuring the children were taken to school,” he said. “You made sure houses didn’t fall apart. You were dealing with air conditioners going out, storms destroying cars and sheds and other events no one wishes to deal with.”

“Because of the solid support you provided the Soldiers, we were able to set their minds at ease enabling them to focus on the mission at hand,” he said. “The team we created together is what made this mission a success.”

Celletti and Stickelmaier presented Neely and Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami, Senior Enlisted Leader for the Illinois National Guard, with the Illinois flag presented to

the unit during the mobilization ceremony.

The flag was flown during multiple operational missions in the CENTCOM AOR, including Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon.

Neely told the returning Soldiers the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration programs are important.

“These programs provide us with the resources to help with problems which may arise,” he said. “If you’re having problems, be humble enough to ask for help.”

The unit has deployed multiple times, both domestically and overseas, including the 1993 Mississippi River flood operations, to Honduras in 1995 and 1996 in support of Joint Task Force Bravo, 1997 to Georgetown, Guyana in support of Task Force New Horizons 97, and to the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, Louisiana in 1999 and 2000. The unit deployed to Iceland in 2001 in support of Icelandic Defense Forces and Northern Viking 01.

“Black Horse again answered the call of our nation, supporting stability operations in Kosovo in 2008, Southwest Border operations in 2006, 2012, 2014 and 2021, and the Northern Command Joint Emergency Evacuation Plans in 2020,” Auer said. “In 2003, and continuing through the years, most notably in 2004, 2009, 2021, 2015, and 2017, the battalion has deployed in support of the Ground Force Commander under contingency operations during Operation Iraqi Freedom II, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom Sentinel, and Operation Inherent Resolve.”

“You continue to carry on with our battalion motto, commitment to excellence, in your actions,” Auer said. “Today, we dry the ink and close the newest chapter, adding to the Black Horse story, by completing the reintegration event for the 2023-2024 mission in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, maintaining the CENTCOM Commander’s Crisis Response Aviation Task Force. Job well done.”



Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, The Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, welcomes home Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, based in Peoria, and Company B, 935th Aviation Support Battalion, based in Kanakee, during a ceremony April 13 in Bloomington. The Soldiers arrived home in February, following a successful overseas deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.





# Feeding the Army

Soldiers from the 128th Field Feeding Platoon recently converged at the North Riverside Armory to participate in kitchen and field equipment training operations. Chief Warrant Officer 3 Melissa Downey and State Food Service Program Manager, Master Sgt. Melissa Turner, were on site to provide mentorship and staff assistance to their troops.







U.S Air Force Firefighters with the 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, execute a structural drill training exercise at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, March 3, 2024. This training exercise tests how quickly the squadron can execute fire suppression for a structural fire. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Airman Avery Litton)

## 182nd AW Firefighters Execute Structural Drill





# Two Petersburg Soldiers Retire

Two military careers spanning a total of 56 years were celebrated at the Illinois Military Academy, March 23, as Sgt. 1st Class Richard Knowles and Sgt. 1st Class Michael Caceres, both of Petersburg, retired.

"I could stand up here and talk about these two Soldiers all day long," said Lt. Col. Wyatt Bickett, of Smithton, officer-in-charge, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute). "I've enjoyed serving with you both. I'm sad to see you go but you deserve all you get."

Knowles enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1994 as a plans and operations specialist, transitioning to the Illinois Army National Guard in 1998 as supply, training and readiness noncommissioned officers throughout his career. Knowles has served as the program manager for the Culinary Specialist military occupational specialty reclassification course with the 129th Regiment (Regional Training

Institute) since 2020.

Caceres enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1994 as a medical specialist and transitioned to the active-duty U.S. Army in 1997. In 2005, he returned to the Illinois Army National Guard and served as the 129th RTI's senior supply noncommissioned officer since 2017. Throughout his career, he has served as a medical specialist, finance specialist and a supply noncommissioned officer.

"There were times I didn't think I'd get here," Knowles said. "Thank you for sharing this moment with me."

Knowles also thanked his family for their support, and fellow service members for their guidance.

"When someone joins the military, they sign a blank check to be cased at any time for any amount. The family doesn't write that check, but you can bet they helped cover it," he said. "The Marines, Sailors, and Soldiers I've

served with the past 30 years offered leadership, guidance, and mentorship and sometimes provided examples of what not to do."

Knowles offered advice to his fellow Soldiers.

"No matter what you're doing, make a plan, and work on it every day," he said.

He also urged them to be resourceful, to take chances, to not sweat the small stuff, and try as many things as you can, and to not look at failures as just failures.

"Failures are lessons learned and knowledge gained," he said, adding that he is looking forward to whatever the future holds for him.

Caceres thanked his family for their support, and his fellow Soldiers for their friendship.

"My military service was better because of the people I served with and the people I've seen grow up in the Illinois National Guard since I've been here," he said.



Sgt. 1st Class Richard Knowles, center, and Sgt. 1st Class Michael Caceres, right, both of Petersburg, are presented with certificates of retirement from Lt. Col. Wyatt Bickett, of Smithton, during a joint retirement ceremony March 23 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield. Knowles is retiring after serving 30 years in the U.S. Marine Corps and Illinois Army National Guard. Caceres is retiring after serving 26 years in the U.S. Army and Illinois Army National Guard.





## 566th Band Plays Last Notes Before Inactivation

The last notes have played, the flag has been furled and cased as the 566th Air Force Band held an Inactivation ceremony at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, March 2.

U.S. Air Force members, family and friends gathered during the ceremony as the band played one final time.

The unit traces its history to Boise, Idaho in 1941 and later was re-

designated as the 566th in 1943. The ceremony celebrated and paid homage to its mission history and heritage.

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











Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Michael Gambino of the 333rd Military Police Co. was honored for Valor by Winnebago (IL) County Sheriff Gary Caruana and County Board Chairman Joe Chiarelli last night (April 25) at the county board meeting. Gambino, a Winnebago County Deputy Sheriff, apprehended a man accused of murdering four people and wounding several others on March 27. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Charlie Michaels, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment.)

## Illinois National Guard Soldier Recognized for Valor in Stopping Multiple Murder Suspect

By Pfc. Charlie Michaels, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Winnebago County presented Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Michael Gambino, a military policeman with the Freeport-based 333rd Military Police Company, with two awards for valor on April 25.

Gambino, a Winnebago County deputy sheriff, apprehended a man accused of killing four people and wounding several others. He was among the first law enforcement officers on the scene of the March 27 multiple murders and his quick actions are credited with putting an end to a violent rampage.

Winnebago County Sheriff Gary Caruana presented Gambino with "The Valor Award" for "swift thinking, professional actions,

bravery, and courage on March 27 that led to the arrest of an active killer." Winnebago County Board Chairman Joseph V. Chiarelli, presented Gambino with the "Chairman's Hero Award" in recognition of his "extraordinary effort and selfless actions." Both awards were presented during the Winnebago County board meeting at the Winnebago County Courthouse, in Rockford, Illinois, on April 25.

According to published reports, Deputy Sheriff Gambino chased the suspect, later identified as 22-year-old Christian Soto, through the Rockford neighborhood, subdued him and brought him into custody.

"Spc. Gambino's actions were

nothing short of incredible – yet absolutely expected. He is, has been, and will continue to be an outstanding Soldier, police officer, and leader," said Staff Sgt. Lily Meyer-Volinek, Gambino's squad leader in the 333rd Military Police Co.

Gambino, a Rockford native, has been in the National Guard for more than five years and has been a Sheriff's Deputy for the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department for the past three years.

"We trained for days like these, although the majority of officers will never experience a day like that," Gambino said. "But the main thing is remembering all lives lost."

His fellow Soldiers in the 333rd



Military Police Co. also expressed their condolences to a community that suffered loss and trauma on March 27. "My team and I are incredibly saddened for the families afflicted by the attacker and offer our condolences for the losses felt across the community," Meyer-Volinek said.

Gambino expressed gratitude to the Illinois Army National Guard for giving him a good start to his career.

"The military definitely got me started on what I wanted to do with my life," Gambino said. "It was one of those points where I needed some structure. The military gave me that, and that's ultimately how I decided I wanted to be a police officer."

"I learned most of my tactical skill through the Illinois National Guard and that really transferred over to my civilian career," Gambino said. "I was with a lot of great leaders at the 333rd Military Police Company, and I will take what I've learned from them and hopefully teach others on the civilian side."

"The Illinois Army National Guard teaches both skills and values," said Capt. Chad Harris, the commander of the 333rd Military Police Co. "When you read the Army Values - Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage - Specialist Gambino lives all of those, both as a Soldier and as a law enforcement professional."



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## Security Forces Hone Skills During Field Training

U.S. Air Force security forces members from the 182nd Security Forces Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, conduct field training at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, March 2. The 182nd Security Forces Squadron regularly train to secure proficiency in their skills and ensure mission readiness. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Airman Avery Litton)





# CERFP evaluates TACPs on Tactical Combat Casualty Care



Tactical Air Control Party specialists with the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, detain a simulated Airman in crisis as part of a field training exercise at the 182nd Airlift Wing, in Peoria, Illinois, March 6, 2024. The detainee fought with the other trauma victim during the exercise and had to be detained as part of the exercise.



Tactical Air Control Party specialists with the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, transport simulated injured trauma victims to safety during a field training exercise at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, March 6, 2024. The simulated victims were moved to safety away from view of attacking forces to have their wounds treated.



Tactical Air Control Party specialists with the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, apply bandages to an injured victim missing an eye during a training exercise at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, March 6, 2024. The training exercised Tactical Combat Casualty Care, which is a field-based medical treatment. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Airman 1st Class Noah Hardin)



# Two Illinois Army National Guard Officers Inducted into University of Illinois ROTC Hall of Fame

*Maj. Gen. Henry Dixon and Col. Clayton Kuetemeyer honored*

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

The University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign's Army ROTC program inducted two Illinois National Guard officers into its Hall of Fame in May: Maj. Gen. Henry Dixon of Dixon, Illinois, and Col. (retired) Clayton Kuetemeyer of Champaign, May 3.

Although the university's Army ROTC program is more than 150 years old, its Hall of Fame was started about a decade ago. After this year's inductees, the Hall of Fame will still have under 40 inductees honored.

Illinois National Guard Soldiers previously honored in the university's ROTC Hall of Fame include Illinois National Guard Director of the Joint Staff Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia, former Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff Col. (ret.) Fred Allen, and former Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard Maj. Gen. John R. Phipps.

Phipps, who died in 2009, spent 42 years in the military, served in the Philippines in World War II and earned a Silver Star for gallantry in Korea. The University's ROTC Hall of Fame also includes former Illinois National Guardsman Maj Gen. Charles Kemper, who serves with the Minnesota National Guard as the Commander of the 34th Infantry Division as well as Ambassador Phillips Talbot and former White House Chief of Staff and U.S. Transportation Secretary Samuel K. Skinner, both of whom spent a short time in the Illinois Army National Guard.

To be inducted into the Fighting Illini Army ROTC Hall of Fame, a UIUC graduate must have earned a commission into the U.S. Military from the Army ROTC program and served honorably in society, whether it was through their military, business and/or in the local community. Then the individual must be nominated by someone who knows of the achievements and accomplishments of the candidate. Finally, all nominations are reviewed every two years by a board of current Hall of Fame members and some of the military faculty at UIUC. Only those

candidates that are recommended by a large majority of the board members are inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Maj. Gen. Dixon is serving as the Deputy Commanding General of U.S. Army Central Command based on Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina.

"It is an honor, and I am sincerely appreciative of being selected to the University of Illinois ROTC Battalion Hall of Fame. The U of I ROTC program was the starting point of my military career. I did not anticipate where my career was going to take me, nor did I expect to attain the general officer grade," Dixon said.

"Nevertheless, it was the education and training at the U of I ROTC that set the foundation of my subsequent military career. U of I ROTC instilled the Army values and ethos that will be with me forever. What the Fighting Illini ROTC experience has done for myself and others does not go unnoticed," he added.

Dixon was assigned to U.S. Army Central in June 2021 as Director of Operations. His previous assignments include U.S. Northern Command Deputy Director of Operations, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations for NATO Multinational Division Northeast, Commander of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team; Director of Strategic Plans and Policy of the Illinois National Guard; and Commander of the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment.

He deployed to Iraq from May 2005 to April 2006 as the Executive Officer of the Illinois National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, and to Afghanistan from November 2008 to August 2009 as the Chief of Staff of Afghanistan Regional Security Integration Command - West.

He holds a bachelor's of science degree from the University of Illinois, a masters in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College, and a juris doctorate from John Marshall Law School. His awards and decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star (Oak Leaf Cluster), Defense Meritorious Service Medal,

Meritorious Service Medal (Oak Leaf Cluster),

Col. (ret.) Kuetemeyer now serves as the Deputy Director of Emergency Management for the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and Office of Homeland Security. He retired from the Army last May with 35 years of service.

"I feel incredibly honored to be recognized by the University of Illinois ROTC Battalion. The UIUC ROTC program was a foundational element of my military education and experience. I valued the opportunity to participate in the Simultaneous Membership Program, which enables ROTC cadets to also serve in Army National Guard units as junior leaders, often shadowing commissioned officers and learning by their example," Kuetemeyer said.

"The many hours spent in class and training at the UIUC Armory made it feel like another home to me throughout my college years. The deep relationships built with fellow cadets and cadre made them feel like family. To be inducted in the Fighting Illini Cadet Battalion Hall of Fame is an occasion to return home and reconnect with family," he added.

Kuetemeyer, an Infantry officer, served as the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard's 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), the state's largest brigade with more than 3,000 Soldiers. As 33rd IBCT Commander, he led the brigade's mission as the Joint Multinational Training Group - Ukraine in 2020 to 2021 with approximately 165 Soldiers of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team forming the command element of the training group in Ukraine. The unit was responsible for training, advising and mentoring the Ukrainian cadre at Combat Training Center-Yavoriv, Ukraine to improve Ukraine's training capacity and defense capabilities. As part of U.S. European Command operations, the unit worked hand-in-hand with the Ukrainian Armed Forces, providing training and doctrinal assistance to the Ukrainian military personnel. For its meritorious performance of service,





U.S. Army Capt. (ret.) Fred Ranck presents the UIUC Army ROTC Fighting Illini Battalion Hall of Fame medallion to (above, left) Maj. Gen. (ret.) Mark Jackson, accepting on behalf of Maj. Gen. Henry Dixon, U.S. Army, Central, and Col. (ret.) Clayton Kuetemeyer, during the induction ceremony May 3 at the University of Illinois Armory in Champaign.

the unit received the Army Superior Unit Award.

After returning from Ukraine, Kuetemeyer led the National Guard Bureau Joint Staff's Future Operations Division planning for disaster response, developing policies, ensuring future National Guard readiness within the global force management structure and advising senior National Guard leaders including Gen. Daniel Hokanson, the Chief of the National Guard Bureau.

Kuetemeyer has served as the Chief of the Illinois National Guard's Joint Staff, the Illinois Army National Guard's Plans, Operations and Training Officer (G-3), and the Deputy Command Inspector General for the Illinois National Guard. He also served as Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment and the Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

He holds a bachelor's degree in communications and a master's degree in human resource education from the university in addition to a master's degree in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College. He is a 2015 distinguished graduate of the War College.

He has deployed to Ukraine, Afghanistan and Kuwait and has also served in Poland and Bulgaria. Previous deployments include

Afghanistan in 2011 with Task Force White Eagle and the 17th Mechanized Brigade of the Polish Land Forces, and Kuwait in 2000 as Commander of A Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment.

Upon retirement he was awarded the Legion of Merit for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements. Kuetemeyer's awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with

six oak leaf clusters, and the 2002 National General Douglas MacArthur leadership award.

Also inducted into the Hall of Fame were Tuskegee Airman Brig. Gen. Charles McGee along with fellow World War II veteran and longtime University of Illinois College of Fine and Applied Arts Professor (Emeritus) Daniel Perrino, a first lieutenant in the Pacific theater during the war. Both McGee and Perrino were posthumously inducted into the Hall of Fame.



The plaques for Col. (ret.) Clayton Kuetemeyer and Maj. Gen. Henry Dixon, U.S. Army, Central, were unveiled during the UIUC Army ROTC Fighting Illini Battalion Hall of Fame induction ceremony May 3 at the University of Illinois Armory in Champaign.





# 633rd Theater Gateway Personnel Accountability Team Receives Welcome Home After Overseas Mission



Capt. Julie Guillebeaux, Commander of the 633rd Theater Gateway Personnel Accountability Team based in Chicago, Illinois, talks with Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, during the unit's official welcome home ceremony at the Kedzie Armory April 20. (U.S. Army photos by Illinois Army National Guard Cpl. Xzavier Marte, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)







# Kincaid Soldier Promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 4

By Sgt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs



Chief Warrant Officer 4 Thomas Watson thanks family and friends for their support during his promotion ceremony April 30, at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Thomas Watson was promoted to the rank of Chief Warrant Officer 4 on April 30, 2024, at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Watson was born and raised in Kincaid, Illinois, and enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard on November 13, 1997, as a Wheeled Vehicle Mechanic. He now serves as the Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Branch Manager for the Human Resources Office (HRO).

"I had to work for everything I have," said Watson. "I truly enjoy new challenges and I'm looking forward to what's next to come."

"He is someone that's up for the challenge," said Col. Randy Edwards of Decatur.

"It's been a joy seeing his growth and progression."

Watson has served in various roles within the Illinois National Guard. His positions include Force Integration Readiness Officer, Operations Non-commissioned Officer, Readiness Non-commissioned Officer, and Training Non-commissioned Officer.

Joined by his wife, Lissa, and their two daughters, Kennady (18), and Adalyn (14), Watson says his family has been instrumental to his success.

"I'm very fortunate for the love of my family, my friends, and colleagues," said Watson. "I appreciate each and every one of you for coming out today to help me celebrate."



Chief Warrant Officer 4 Thomas Watson's daughters Adalyn and Kennady join him on stage during his promotion ceremony April 30, at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.





Brig. Gen. Marty Green, Air National Guard Assistant to the Air Force Deputy Judge Advocate General, delivers the keynote address at the Boy Scouts of America's 79th annual Abraham Lincoln Pilgrimage.

## Eagle Scout turned Air Guard General delivers keynote address to Boy Scouts during 79th annual Lincoln Pilgrimage at Oak Ridge Cemetery

Brig. Gen. Marty Green, Air National Guard Assistant to the Air Force Deputy Judge Advocate General, delivered the keynote address at the Boy Scouts of America's 79th annual Pilgrimage to President Abraham Lincoln at Lincoln's Tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois, April 28.

Green, himself an Eagle Scout, talked about being courteous and how Lincoln portrayed one of the points of the Scout Law.

"History books are full of Lincoln being courteous in his life," Green told the hundreds of Scouts gathered at the tomb. "It has been noted as a lawyer, he was very courteous to both opposing council and witnesses."

Green said Lincoln's courteousness extended to Soldiers serving during the Civil War.

"While Lincoln served as President during the Civil War, he was courteous in extending clemency to Union Soldiers who faced execution," he said. "As the Civil War was ending, he pardoned every Confederate Soldier so they could go home and resume their lives."

Green said Lincoln led our nation as commander-in-chief during a divided time, but it was his time in the Illinois Militia, the modern day National Guard, which gave the 16th

President the skills and leadership qualities which he would use to lead the Union to victory.

"He was elected to Captain in the Illinois Militia during the Blackhawk War because of his leadership abilities," Green said.

Green encouraged the Scouts to embrace the opportunity afforded them from participating in the Pilgrimage.

"You have embarked on an adventure of opportunities," he said. "Don't give up the opportunity, Work

hard. Don't give up this opportunity. It will benefit you later in life. I know being a scout has benefited me greatly throughout my professional career."

Green asked the scouts to remember this day because they are part of history.

"In 20 years, I look forward to seeing one of you delivering the remarks," he said. "When driving home this afternoon, think about what you have experienced this weekend. Be courteous and thank your scout leaders for this weekend."



Brig. Gen. Marty Green, Air National Guard Assistant to the Air Force Deputy Judge Advocate General, poses at Lincoln's Tomb for the Boy Scouts of America's 79th annual Abraham Lincoln Pilgrimage.



# Airmen participate in Exercise Raging Piasa



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Sam Colburn, 435th Supply Chain Operations Squadron general supply specialist, right, spots Tech. Sgt. Robby Aguilar, 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron vehicle manager, as he off-loads a pallet during Exercise Raging Piasa at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 11. Raging Piasa is part of a four-day exercise facilitated to test the Wing's accuracy in responding to a rapid simulated deployment during a crisis. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Ari Freeman)



Illinois Air National Guardsmen Senior Airman Caleb Johnson, 126th Operations Group air refueling specialist, is decontaminated by Tech. Sgt. James Beadling and Staff Sgt. Daniel Jones, 126th Operations Group air crew flight equipment during Exercise Raging Piasa, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 14. The 126th Air Refueling Wing hosted the exercise to ensure the units readiness to respond to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear events. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Vincent Lang)



Wing Inspector Master Sergeant Jeffrey Steder of the 126th Air Refueling Wing speaks to Staff Sgt Jacob Hafley and Technical Sgt. Anna Canglin during Exercise Raging Piasa at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 13. The exercise tests the wing's ability to respond in a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear environment. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Ces White)





**U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Leyna Calice, 126th Operations Group aircraft flight equipment, cuts off a pilots shoe covers during an exercise at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 13. The flight equipment crew was responsible for assisting aircrew with decontamination operations in response to a simulated chemical attack. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Ari Freeman)**



**Senior Airman Kaleb Ballor climbs into a KC-135 Stratotanker during an exercise at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 13. Aircrew members simulated a real-world response to a chemical attack as a part of Exercise Raging Piasa, ensuring the aircraft remained uncontaminated. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Troy Barnes)**



**U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Patrick Henrichs, 126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron supply technician, left, and Tech. Sgt. Sam Colburn, 435th Supply Chain Operations Squadron general supply specialist, inspect a pallet during Exercise Raging Piasa. Members of the SCOS followed checklists to ensure all pallets met safety standards to include ensuring hazardous material are accessible, the pallets are compatible with the aircraft and that the straps were free of corrosion. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Ari Freeman)**



# Colonel Retires as a Respected Combat Leader...and ‘Super Geek’

Col. Ron Bonesz of Normal, Illinois, retired in November with more than 28 years of honorable service, but many Soldiers didn't realize there was another side to the colonel.

During a distinguished career he led Soldiers on three combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, twice as a commander. He was the Illinois Army National Guard's top personnel officer effectively confronting multiple transitions and issues including major deployments and a global pandemic. He's been a Military Police officer, served in aviation, operations, logistics, and in the Joint Staff as Security Cooperation Officer.

He earned two Bronze Stars and a Legion of Merit.

"He was an effective commander and staff officer – one of the best," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General for Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "He was a great problem-solver, using data to get at the root cause of many difficult issues. He was a terrific mentor who helped prepare a new generation of Illinois National Guard leaders."

And he is a geek – just ask his mom.

Nerdiness is not the first thing his fellow Soldiers think of when they look back on the career of the colonel. Tough combat leader doesn't exactly fit with the cast of "The Big Bang Theory."

But, still, who knows someone better than their mother? And mom is insistent...

"He is a geek," said Billie Nejedly, Bonesz's mother, as she recalled the future Illinois Army National Guard colonel staying up to 1 a.m. playing Dungeons and Dragons with his friends. "Oh, yes, he still is a geek."

Perhaps his "JEDI" license plate is a give-away? Or his love of Star Wars, Star Trek, and most-things science fiction? A University of Illinois degree in aeronautical engineering should be an indication, right? He did always show an affection for numbers and analysis...

Col. Lenny Williams, the former



**Illinois Army National Guard Col. Ron Bonesz, then a captain and Commander of the 333rd Military Police Co., looks over a captured weapons cache in Iraq circa 2003 to 2004. Bonesz of Normal, Illinois, retired in November with more than 28 years of honorable service.**

Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff, even claims that Col. Bonesz developed a reverse extra-sensory perception. "I always knew what Ron was thinking," Williams said. Whether Bonesz was projecting his thoughts

into other people's brains with that signature slight, bemused, smile; or whether it was just a mind trick, the retired colonel always did have a way of leading people toward his way of thinking.





**Illinois Army National Guard Col. Ron Bonesz with his family at his retirement ceremony.**

Just ask his wife.

The future Blair Bonesz had already shot down one potential suitor at The Snuggery in Schaumburg. She knew what she wanted in a partner, but Ron Bonesz did too. The two sized each other up with rapid-fire questioning. Ron could tell that Blair was intelligent – she has a doctorate in psychology – so he led with his bachelor’s degree in aeronautical engineering.

That got him a couple points – her grandfather, Leonard Brown, was an engineer.

But then came the standard question – “What do you do for a living?”

“Can’t you tell?” He thought the short-cropped haircut was a giveaway.

“I need you to say it.” She knew it was either military or police. Ok, it’s military. That was a “yellow flag” for Blair. As a psychologist, she had only seen the hurt that is associated with military service – the PTSD, the trauma, the domestic violence, the power dynamics.

“Ok, is that a rule?” Ron asked.

It “kind of was,” Blair recalled, but something about this friendly confident guy made her decide to give him a chance. She’s glad she did. Her husband has introduced her to the honor, respect, loyalty, and comradery that also comes with military service.

“He’s a very family-oriented person. We see the best side of him,” Blair said. While his Soldiers would see the firm, efficient and effective leader, his family would see the “warm, funny, loving, nerdy side,” Blair said.

But Bonesz also led the Illinois Army National Guard’s 333rd Military Police Co. to Iraq in 2003 and 2004. From 2006 to 2007 he served as the battalion operations officer for the 33rd Military Police Battalion, also in Iraq. And from 2017 to 2018, he commanded the Bilateral Embedded Staff Team 20 on a co-deployment with the Polish Armed Forces to Afghanistan.

Those Soldiers who worked under Colonel Bonesz for a few years did get a glimpse of the inner-nerd. “Oh yeah – super geek,” said Lt. Col.

Justin Wilkerson, who worked for the colonel in various positions since 2008. “Star Trek, Star Wars, you name it.” His wedding ring was styled after J.R.R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings. His wedding included light sabers.

But at work, it was always professional. “He taught me a lot about organizational management,” Wilkerson said. “He was always super organized and meticulous.”

34th Division Sustainment Brigade Command Sgt. Maj. Heather Blakeman said Bonesz always led from the front.

“I have met few Soldiers who were willing to spend as much time and effort understanding the mission and then trying diligently to make sure that everyone had the information they needed to make accurate and timely decisions,” said Blakeman, who has served as the G1 (personnel) sergeant major since 2019. “He would spend hours verifying the personnel status reports and knew who was on duty, and where they were supposed to be. His leadership style was always to lead from the front, and it showed during the countless staff meetings and late nights, being one of the first to show up, and last to leave. He never took the easy path, especially if it would leave questions not answered.”

Master Sgt. (ret.) Tony Hodge deployed with Bonesz with the 33rd MP Battalion and the BEST 20. The two remain close friends. Hodge was Bonesz’ best man when he married Blair. As a leader, Bonesz balanced what was good for the organization with what was good for the person, Hodge said.

“With a lot of officers, it is either one or the other – people are just commodities, or they are only thinking about people and not what is best for the organization,” Hodge said. Bonesz was “a really good blend of both of those. He made strategic moves with both the organization and the individual in mind.”

Bonesz could be impatient, but also extra patient, depending on what the situation required, Wilkerson said. “He would be very straightforward if something was not going right.” But it was never about blame – instead it was about why things were not going well and what could be done to get it back on track.

“He always had everything wired





Illinois Army National Guard Col. Ron Bonesz, then a lieutenant colonel and Commander of the Bilateral Embedded Staff Team A20, poses with his team in Afghanistan circa 2017 to 2018. Bonesz of Normal, Illinois, retired in November with more than 28 years of honorable service.

down tight,” Williams, the former Chief of Staff, said. “He made it look easy. He was one of those ‘fire and forget’ officers. If you gave him something, you knew it was going to get done and get done right.”

Williams said Col. Bonesz brought the organization to “a different level as far as personnel management and Soldier care.”

“He was an elite-level staff officer,” Williams added. “He was an excellent Military Police battalion commander, had great organizational skills, and an outstanding work ethic.”

Williams was surprised to learn that Colonel Bonesz is a geek. “That’s the great thing about the Army... it’s a melting pot.”

Bonesz did have a sarcastic sense of humor, Williams added. “He was passionate about the job and about Soldiers. He was a lot of fun to work with.”

Bonesz trusted his subordinates and valued their opinions. “He would ask for my judgement. He wanted me to be his check,” Wilkerson said. “He would challenge you. He’s hard to get



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, presents a coin to Col. Ronald Bonesz, Military Personnel Officer (G1), during Bonesz’s retirement ceremony at Heartland Community College in Normal, Illinois Sept. 29, 2023. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters - Illinois National Guard)



to know, but after you know him, he's an open book."

Part of what set Bonesz apart from many other senior officers was his understanding when a Soldier made a mistake. "He knew the difference between a problem Soldier and a Soldier who has problems," Wilkerson said. "Sometimes he would just listen – just be a sounding board. He has a good emotional IQ."

Hodge said Bonesz was more than willing to expend political capital on a Soldier who made a mistake, but whom he felt could still contribute to the organization. "He may have put himself at risk a bit. It may have cost him personally, but I've seen Ron go to bat for Soldiers. He was not afraid to speak up for someone that wasn't there to speak up for themselves."

Blakeman said Bonesz always stood firm in doing what was right for the Soldiers he served.

"Colonel Bonesz always stood firm in doing what was right for the Soldiers he served," she said. "His words were always thoughtful, well put together, and meant a lot to those around him. There was never a challenge he was not willing to accept, and it showed throughout his career."

Joe Risteca, one of Bonesz' closest friends, said that the colonel was "very cerebral" and gets along with everyone. "He won't let on if you're annoying him," Risteca said.

But Bonesz does like to rile up his close friends. "If he's trash-talking with you, that probably means that you're good friends," Risteca said. "He likes to get under your skin a little bit." For example, Bonesz started to get into football around 2010. While his family are all Chicago Bears fans, Ron became a Green Bay Packers fan.

While his sense of humor might be a bit mischievous at times, his friends said that during serious times, the troubled times that all humans face, there is no greater friend than Ron Bonesz. When Joe, a nonsmoker, had throat cancer, he found that people would distance themselves from him.

"There were some that I thought, really thought, were close friends. Some were people that I knew longer than Ron. There were three to four people that stuck with me. Ron was one of them," said Risteca, who is now cancer-free. "He was always there for me."

## **'You got this' – 10 Leadership Lessons After 28 Years of Service:**

1. Don't forget why you decided to become an officer and a leader. There was a reason why you chose this path...whether it was to better the organization, be a more effective leader, or better yourself (or a combination of all the above).

2. Always remember that this isn't all about you! As a leader, you are just one voice amongst a chorus of Soldiers. Yes, you are a very important voice and the overall conductor of your unit, but everyone has to work as a team for the mission to be successful.

3. You are part of a team! While your assigned mission is absolutely vital so are all the members of your team. Strive to make the organization better, but always keep Soldier care at the forefront of your decisions. Also, make sure you communicate well with your team...effective communication is key to effective leadership.

4. While you are the leader, don't always believe that your way is the right way. There may not always be time to solicit input and ideas, but if there is, listen to your subordinates and take into account their ideas. This is part of being a team and leads to buy-in of the final decision. Know the difference between knowledge and wisdom!

5. You are not alone! They say that it's lonely at the top, but that doesn't mean that you have no one to talk to. Trust your senior enlisted leader, talk with your peers, and find a mentor. These are all excellent sources to discuss your concerns or to be a sounding board.

6. Take chances in future assignments, get out of your comfort zone, and keep learning - especially your professional military education (PME). Often promotion offers come down to the few officers out of the many that have their PME completed. Ensure you are ready when the time comes.

7. You were selected and assigned to the position you are in based on your skills and your potential. Never forget this! Sooner or later, you may experience what a good friend of mine calls 'imposter syndrome,' where you feel that others will think that you don't belong where you are. Ignore this and remember that you were chosen for the job you are in.

8. Stay focused but ensure you also stay balanced! As an officer and leader, you not only have a very difficult assignment, but most likely you also have a family and a civilian career, not to mention needing time for leisurely / recreational activities. Don't let yourself get pulled in too many directions at the same time, as this will directly affect your effectiveness across the entire spectrum.

9. Have fun! Command is one of the most difficult positions you will ever have...but it is the most enjoyable and rewarding!

10. You got this!! Go out and do great things, be the leader our young Soldiers deserve, leave your legacy, and 'Make It So!'

- Col. (retired) Ron Bonesz



# THIS DAY IN HISTORY

## February

### January

#### 5 Two regiments of the 33rd Division went into a third day of combat on Morotai in the South Pacific

1945: Morotai, a jungle rainforest in the Maluku Islands near New Guinea served as the home base for 500 Japanese troops in the fall of 1944. After the allied invasion of the island in September, the 33rd Division's 130th and 136th Infantry Regiments stormed up the slopes of Hill 40, an enemy stronghold four miles inland. The first day of the attack, did not go well, they expended most of their ammunition in the initial assault, and resupply had to come by air. On Jan. 4, troops of the 130th and 136th fought within a few dozen yards of the summit. On Jan. 5, the third day of grueling uphill combat, the 130th and 136th Infantry Regiments finally gained the high ground on Hill 40. This tactical advantage allowed them to easily destroy the last remaining elements of the Japanese 211th Infantry Regiment alleviating the threat to American air and naval installations. Eight-hundred seventy enemy dead littered the hill. Casualties for the 33rd came to forty-six dead and 127 wounded.

#### 7 66th Infantry Brigade receives official sendoff from Governor George Ryan during mobilization for Operation Enduring Freedom

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

#### 11 Famous Guardsman: John Riley Tanner

1897: John Tanner of Boonville, Indiana became the 21st Governor of Illinois on Jan. 11. He enlisted with the 98th Illinois Infantry in 1863. While serving under Major General William Tecumseh Sherman in Kentucky and Georgia, Tanner saw action at Chickamauga and Atlanta. His unit mustered out in June 1865 and was re-designated the 61st Illinois Infantry. After the war Tanner held positions as a sheriff and state treasurer before becoming governor. He had the distinction of being the first governor to have the National Guard ready for a presidential call-up in the Spanish-American War. Tanner died in 1901 and is buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield.

#### 6 Governor calls out Illinois National Guard to respond to nationwide Trucker Strike

1974: The Governor called out the Illinois National Guard to patrol the highways in hopes of stemming violence during a nationwide trucker's strike that left two drivers dead and hundreds of thousands of workers unemployed.

The HHC, 232nd Supply and Service unit responded along with several other units.

The truck drivers went on strike due to the rising cost of gasoline during the oil crisis. The strike lasted eleven days.

Did you Know? That the Illinois National Guard was mentioned in the lyrics to the 1970's song "Convoy."

Here is the Stanza:

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

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

#### 11 108th Observation Squadron on SAD

1937: Twenty-one days of state active duty ended for the 108th Observation squadron, 33rd Division

Aviation on February 11, 1937. During the disastrous floods in the southern Illinois towns of Karnak, Rosiclare, Mound City, Metropolis and Shawneetown, the 108th played a vital role. The Airmen provided reconnaissance over levees, dropped food and medicines to stranded people and livestock and took photos of flooded areas.





# March

# 9

## Illinois troops participated in the first amphibious assault in U.S. military history

1847: At the time considered to be the strongest forts in the Western Hemisphere, three citadels made up the coastal fortress at Veracruz, Mexico. During the Mexican-American War, 4,390 Mexican troops manned three forts and the 224 guns defending them.

Eager to defeat the enemy in a major battle, U.S. Major General Winfield Scott first tried to shell the garrison into surrender. When this failed he launched the first amphibious assault in American military history.

Ten thousand troops, including the 3rd and 4th Illinois Infantry Regiments, went ashore on the night of March 9. Severe storms delayed the arrival of the artillery until March 22.

The American bombardment from both land and sea forced the Mexicans to surrender on March 29.

American casualties amounted to 13 killed, 55 wounded. Mexican losses came to 550 killed, and 250 wounded.

# 18

## Guardsmen Respond to Prison Riot at Stateville

1931: At 2 p.m., a riot started at the Penitentiary located at Stateville. The warden realized it was beyond the control of the Guards. At 2:22 he called the Military Department for assistance in quelling the disturbance. Four companies of the 129th responded with 13 officers and 205 Soldiers. The state active duty lasted until March 23.



Fun Fact: The above photo was given to a Soldier serving at the correctional center during COVID-19 operations in 2020.

# 18

## Illinois National Guard activated for Murphysboro Tornado Response

1925: On the evening of March 18, 1925, a tornado devastated the community of Murphysboro. The 108th Medical Regiment, medical detachments of the 129th, 130th and 106th Cavalry with elements of the 130th Infantry Battalion responded to the Governor's request for aid. Fifty-one officers and 528 enlisted Soldiers quickly created order out of chaos. They worked with local law enforcement to patrol the area for survivors, provide security and administered medical care. The state active duty ended on April 13.

# April

# 24

## Successful seizure of the St. Louis Arsenal carried out by Illinois troops

1861: With the threat of Missouri seceding from the Union, Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, ordered Illinois Governor Richard Yates, to seize the weapons of the St. Louis Arsenal.

Yates sent Captain James H. Stokes and a small detachment from Alton, Illinois downriver to St. Louis on the night of April 24. With the help of Captain Nathaniel Lyon, an officer destined to play a major role in the 1861 fighting, the contingent of Soldiers quietly made their way to the arsenal.

The arsenal commander doubted that Stokes and his men could remove the large stockpile of arms out of the city without being overwhelmed by the mobs. Despite the immense danger, Stokes wired Alton for a steamboat to dock on the riverfront.

On April 25, Lyon sent 500 useless rifles to the wharf as bait for the rebels. The trick worked, and allowed the Union troops to successfully transport all but 7,000 rifles from the arsenal to the waiting steamboat. The ship proceeded upriver to Alton with 10,000 rifles, 500 revolvers, 100 carbines, 110,000 rifle cartridges, and two cannon. The weapons were hastily unloaded at Alton by the civilian population, then put aboard a train bound for Springfield.

The mission proved successful, and denied the Confederate forces in Missouri a vital stockpiles of arms.



Pictured is a monument to Captain Lyon on the grounds of the St. Louis Arsenal.





**MAR 15** Sgt. Christopher Abeyta, Spc. Norman Cain III, and Sgt. Robert Weinger

2009: Sgt. Christopher Abeyta, 23, of Midlothian, Spc. Norman Cain III, 22, of Mount Morris, and Sgt. Robert Weinger, 24, of Round Lake Beach, died of wounds suffered when their vehicle struck an improvised explosive device near Kot, Afghanistan. All three men were assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment based in Woodstock.



**MAR 17** Staff Sgt. Ivory L. Phipps

2004: Staff Sgt. Ivory L. Phipps, 44, of Chicago, died March 17, in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds sustained from a mortar attack. Sgt. Phipps was assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company, Illinois Army National Guard, Paris.



**MAR 29** Staff Sgt. Jacob L. Frazier

2003: Illinois Air National Guard Staff Sergeant Jacob L. Frazier, 24, of St. Charles, assigned to the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron (182d Airlift Wing) in Peoria, Illinois, was killed by suspected former Taliban during an ambush on his reconnaissance convoy at Geresk, in Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan. He was part of a special operations team that was inspecting a school and hospital being built with American funding.



**APR 29** Sgt. Landis W. Garrison

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



**FEB 8** 1st Lt. Jared W. Southworth and Staff Sgt. Jason E. Burkholder

2009: 1st Lt. Jared W. Southworth, 26, of Oakland, and Staff Sgt. Jason E. Burkholder, 27, of Champaign, died Feb. 8 in Helmand, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. They were assigned to 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment in Marion.



**FEB 9** Sgt. Jessica M. Housby

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



**FEB 24** Sgt. Schuyler Patch and Sgt. Scott Stream

2009: On Feb. 24, Sgt. Schuyler Patch, 25, of Galva, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry Squadron, based in Kewanee, and Sgt. Scott Stream, 39, of Mattoon, assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, based in Effingham, died of wounds suffered when the vehicle they were in struck an improvised explosive device in Kandahar, Afghanistan.



**MAR 1** Sgt. Simone A. Robinson

2009: Sgt. Simone A. Robinson, 21, of Dixmoor, died March 1 at Brooke Army Medical Center, San Antonio, Texas, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near her security post on Jan. 17 in Kabul, Afghanistan. She was assigned to the 634th Brigade Support Battalion of the Illinois Army National Guard, Crestwood.







# LEADS TO ENLISTMENTS

## UNIT REFERRAL PROGRAM

### FY 24

BE A FORCE MULTIPLIER

### 1ST LEAD TO ENLISTMENT

ARMY RECRUITING RIBBON\*

AND

MULTI-TOOL, SHAKER BOTTLE, OR TRIPOD CHAIR\*\*



### 2ND LEAD TO ENLISTMENT

ARMY RECRUITING RIBBON\*

AND

BACKPACK OR RTIC TUMBLER (WHITE GLITTER/BEACH)\*\*



### 3RD LEAD TO ENLISTMENT

ARMY RECRUITING RIBBON\*

AND

SPEAKER OR WOOBIE HOODIE\*\*



### 4TH LEAD TO ENLISTMENT

ARMY RECRUITING RIBBON\*

AND

64 OZ STANLEY JUG\*\*



## TOP OVERALL

SEAT AT MILITARY SCHOOL OF CHOICE  
PATHFINDER - AIR ASSAULT\*\*\*



REFERRALS MUST SHIP TO BASIC TRAINING TO QUALIFY FOR THE ARMY RECRUITING RIBBON.  
\*EACH RECRUITING RIBBON IS 10 PROMOTION POINTS TOWARD PROMOTION TO SGT/SSG, 40 POINTS MAXIMUM  
\*\*PROMOTIONAL ITEMS SUBJECT TO CHANGE  
\*\*\*SOLDIERS WITH MOST ENLISTMENTS GET CHOICE OF SCHOOL. MUST MEET REQUIREMENTS TO ATTEND

SCAN HERE  
TO REFER A FRIEND



OR EMAIL MSG STEPHEN SALEFSKI :  
STEPHEN.L.SALEFSKI.MIL@ARMY.MIL



**THE PRAIRIE SENTINEL  
1301 NORTH MACARTHUR BOULEVARD  
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS 62702**

**DSN: 555-3569  
PHONE: (217) 761-3569  
FAX: (217) 761-2988**

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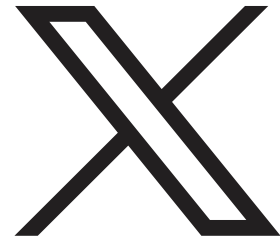
**DEADLINES:**

**STORY AND PHOTO SUBMISSIONS ARE DUE THE 1ST OF EACH MONTH TO  
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