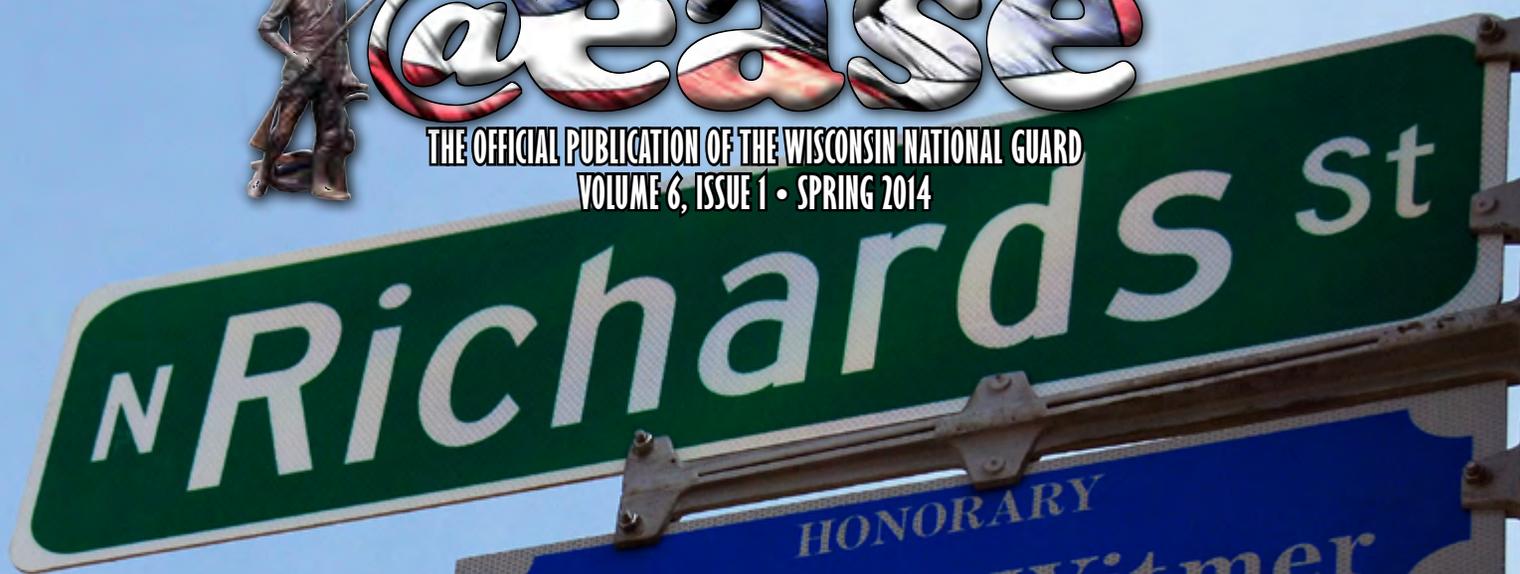




eEase

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE WISCONSIN NATIONAL GUARD
VOLUME 6, ISSUE 1 • SPRING 2014



HONORARY
Michelle Witmer



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Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Joe Trovato



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roll call



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Fighting Falcons fly south for winter training opportunity



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Wisconsin National Guard Soldier makes good impression at first biathlon



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Sixth member of military family enlists in Wisconsin National Guard

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on the cover

Milwaukee renamed a portion of Richards Street in front of the Richards Street Armory April 6 in honor of Spc. Michelle Witmer. Witmer, who served with the 32nd Military Police Company, became the first female National Guard Soldier to be killed in combat on April 9, 2004. See the story on page 4. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Joe Trovato

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From the Adjutant General

“Hagel digs deep into military ethics problem,” reads the headline of a recent Army Times report. “New military ethics chief will face a full plate,” according to a story on National Public Radio. “18 outrageous military ethics violations,” screams the Business Insider. “Chairman promises vigorous military ethics campaign,” states a news article on the Department of Defense website.

You get the idea.

Our profession is under scrutiny for ethical violations like cheating, sexual assault, corruption — and those are making the headlines, crowding out the wonderful work of our Soldiers and Airmen. Our profession is based on trust and should be under scrutiny. We should have no fear of scrutiny and should welcome it. That being said, unlike previous years, the scrutiny is highlighting egregious failures — and the question for us is, why?

We hold ourselves to a higher standard. We spell out our expectations in our core values, which reflect our commitment to something greater than ourselves. The military is more than an occupation, more than a duty — it is a culture. We hold ourselves to a higher standard than the average citizen because we are asked to do more than the average citizen. We choose this path and our character is always on display. For us in the National Guard, we don't change our character when we take off the uniform. Duty with the National Guard may be part-time duty, but it is a full-time passion and we don't get days off from our commitment to the service, our comrades or ourselves.

The question is, why the failures? Why so

many stories of ethical violations? I believe the answer — at its core — is that when these ethical lapses occur, it is because one of our colleagues as placed their own needs first. A poor decision. Make no mistake about it, these stories are based on conscious decisions and did not occur by accident. Sexual assault is not accidental. Cheating on your spouse does not occur by accident. Cheating on an exam did not occur without notice.

I am not perfect and neither are you. None of us has had an error-free career. But that's not what this is about. Mistakes are part of the normal give and take of life in the service. When they occur, we fix them and learn from them and try to avoid them in the future. Ethical violations which call into question the core commitment of wearing the uniform have no place in our profession.

We are privileged to serve in the National Guard and to be a Soldier or an Airman. We enjoy a well earned position of trust with the citizens we serve. We must continue to live our core values — for our nation, for each other and for all those who wore the uniform before us. We are not just a face in the crowd — America and Wisconsin looks to us for leadership in a time of crisis and trusts us to do the right thing. They trust us to do the right thing all the time — even when no one is watching.

Donald P. Dunbar



Remembering Spc. Michelle Witmer

1st Lt. Joe Trovato
Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs Office

Ten years ago on the night of April 9, 2004, Spc. Michelle Witmer and her sister, Rachel headed out on a patrol through Baghdad. Members of different squads within the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd Military Police Company, Rachel's vehicle turned one direction, and Michelle's headed another.

Spc. Michelle Witmer, of New Berlin, manned the gunner's seat in her vehicle. A short time later, the street erupted with small arms fire. A rocket-propelled grenade struck one of the patrol's vehicles. Gunmen opened fire and a bullet struck Witmer — killing her almost instantly.

Witmer became the first female in the history of the National Guard and the first Wisconsin National Guardsman in almost 60 years to be killed in combat.

Almost 10 years later, on April 6, 2014,



the Witmer family, the 32nd Military Police Company and leadership from the County and City of Milwaukee gathered in front of the 32nd's headquarters at the Richards Street Armory in Milwaukee to name a street in Spc. Witmer's honor.

A sign reading "Honorary — Michelle Witmer" now hangs below the sign for North Richards Street directly in front of the National Guard armory at the intersection of Richards Street and Fiebrantz Avenue.

"When the county executive approached me about this idea of renaming the street, I said, I think that's a fabulous idea, and every member of

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Milwaukee renamed a portion of Richards Street in front of the Richards Street Armory April 6 in honor of Spc. Michelle Witmer. Witmer, who served with the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd Military Police Company, became the first female National Guard Soldier to be killed in combat on April 9, 2004, when her vehicle was attacked with small arms fire and an improvised explosive device. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Joe Trovato



Milwaukee street renamed for fallen Guard member

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the common council wholeheartedly agreed as well," Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett said during a ceremony to unveil the new street marker. "Because we understand that it is important for us as citizens to never ever forget those who make the ultimate sacrifice. We cannot as a people, whether it's what happened in Baghdad or in any other conflict overseas, forget those men and women who made that sacrifice on our behalf."

Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele agreed and urged citizens to take every opportunity to honor service and sacrifice.

"Michelle represented a lot of what's great in this country — a lot of what's great in this state, and there is no more appropriate place to add another chapter to the recognition she gets and she deserves than right here on this street," Abele said.

Lt. Col. Scott Southworth commanded the 32nd Military Police Company when the unit deployed to Iraq for 14 months in 2003-04. Then a captain, Southworth served alongside Witmer and guided the unit throughout a deployment that saw the unit suffer 23 wounded and the loss of Witmer. The 23 wounded were the most for a Wisconsin National Guard unit since World War II.

"When we talk about Iraq and our service there, the question that we have to ask is, 'Did we make a difference?'" Southworth said during the renaming ceremony. "Did Michelle's service make a difference, not just from a foreign policy perspective, but to real people? Did we accomplish our mission of changing the hearts and minds and lives of people here in the United States and in Iraq? And the answer is yes."

Joining Southworth at the ceremony was Anwar Sallumi, who served as a translator for the unit on its deployment. When the insurgency in Iraq learned that Sallumi had worked as a translator for the American military, they targeted him and his family, forcing him to flee from town to town in Iraq and eventually to Jordan and ultimately to the United States where he became a U.S. citizen in February.

"Michelle made a difference to them," Southworth said of Sallumi and his wife Nagham and their children Siraj and Sena, who also attended the ceremony.

Southworth also pointed to his own family. During the unit's deployment, Witmer and other members of the 32nd volunteered their limited free time at the Mother Theresa Orphanage in downtown Baghdad.

"It was full of special needs kids," Southworth said. "She didn't like it. She loved it. She loved the children, and they loved seeing her. One of those orphans, named Ala'a Eddeen, knew her. She knew him. After the war, we were



Lt. Col. Scott Southworth speaks during a street renaming ceremony April 6 in Milwaukee. Southworth was the commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd Military Police Company in 2004, when Spc. Michelle Witmer became the first female National Guard Soldier killed in combat. Milwaukee renamed a portion of Richards Street in Witmer's honor. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Joe Trovato

able to get Ala'a Eddeen to the United States. I was able to adopt him as my son."

"Michelle made a difference to him," he continued. "In fact, she made a difference to the millions of people like Anwar, Nagham, Siraj, and Sena, and Ala'a Eddeen and all of us that were in that country to help the people of Iraq be free from tyranny."

It was clear that Witmer touched the lives of nearly everyone with whom she came in contact.

"There's a great picture of Michelle in Iraq surrounded by some young Iraqi boys who referred to her as simply 'their Michelle,'" said Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, Wisconsin's adjutant general. "It's been 10 years for those young men too. No longer boys — young men. And we all hope that through their contact with Michelle and others in her unit, that they'll make a different path for their country — not our way, their way."

"And lastly, who knows what impact Spc. Witmer had on the young girls in Iraq, in a part of the world where women are often second-class citizens — to see a young American woman wearing the uniform of an American Soldier and standing side-by-side the men and serving in a frontline Army unit. Who knows what seeds will germinate as they grow to be mothers and raise their children and demand greater accountability from their own country for the young women of Iraq."

Witmer's parents John and Lori Witmer said their daughter should be remembered not only for her service

and sacrifice, but for what she represented — a symbol of a new age where female Soldiers are respected in the same way as their male brethren in arms.

"...an age where they will be fully respected as competent, capable Soldiers and fully honor them for fighting and dying for this country," John Witmer said.

Reading an excerpt from John Witmer's book, "Sisters in Arms: A Father Remembers," Lori Witmer said, "Remember a young woman who could find something to be thankful for even in a war zone. Remember a young woman who brought comfort, not only to her fellow Soldiers but to the people of Iraq. Remember a young woman who embodied both the strength of the Soldier and the heart of an angel."

Having a street renamed in her honor is a fitting tribute, Southworth said, but Witmer would not have wanted the attention.

"What she would have wanted is for people to be inspired to make a difference here in Wisconsin, in their communities to somebody who's in need," he said. "That's her legacy, and that's how we truly honor her."

In 2005, the Wisconsin National Guard dedicated "Witmer Hall" at its Joint Force Headquarters in Madison, Wis., in her honor. The city of New Berlin also dedicated "Michelle Witmer Memorial Drive" and a troop medical clinic in Iraq bore her name as well. 📷

- [Story online](#)
- [Additional Photos](#)



Preparing for Afghanistan

For much of March, Fort McCoy was home to more than 160 members of the 829th Engineer Company as the unit trained — and then held a sendoff ceremony — for its upcoming deployment to Afghanistan.

The preparation began with annual training, consisting mainly of warrior tasks and drills, to allow the 829th to focus on deployment-specific training at Fort Bliss, Texas, according to Capt. Kyle Gruber, unit commander.

Once in Afghanistan, Gruber said the unit's mission is to tear down military buildings and recover unused equipment

from past deployments.

"We will be demilitarizing buildings, stopping enemy forces from using that material, and saving the taxpayer's money," Gruber said while support staff worked beside him plotting maps and the day's events. "So far I am overwhelmingly pleased with the noncommissioned officers, and all the Soldiers have been meeting or exceeding standards."

First Sgt. Brian Kelly explained that this training was essential for the Soldiers to be able to keep up with all skill sets, and that the Soldiers were handling the training very well. He also noted that roughly

half the company has prior deployment experience.

"Some of these Soldiers were the first ones in [to Afghanistan], and now they're possibly going to be the last ones out," Kelly said. "Soldiers take pride in putting things together. I was a part of that, and it feels great."

One of those soldiers is Sgt. 1st Class Lucas Kramer, who has served with the 829th for more than 15 years. This next deployment will be his fifth.

"It's exciting, to see how much everything will have changed," Kramer stated while members of his unit fired

their weapons in the background. "There were only 12 of us at first, and we basically helped to build up Kandahar. We built roads, schools, plumbing, just about anything you would need to make life a little better."

Kelly also explained that out of those deploying this time around, only around half of the members of the unit have ever deployed before.

During the March 28 sendoff ceremony, Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, deputy adjutant general for Army, encouraged

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Story and photos by **Pfc. Christopher Enderle, 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment**, and **Vaughn R. Larson, Department of Military Affairs**

829th Engineer Company training for role in closing chapter of Afghanistan War

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the young Soldiers of the 829th to soak up the advice of Soldiers who have deployed before.

“You have been preparing for this for the past 12 to 14 months — but to be quite honest, you’ve been preparing for it your entire military career,” Anderson said. “Seek their experience and glean everything you can. Rely on your training. What you have gained in knowledge and skills and experience during your time in uniform will serve you well as you serve the country over in Afghanistan.”

Many of the Soldiers deploying for the first time are going in without preconceived notions.

“I’ve chosen not to expect anything, just take everything as it comes because the only thing you can expect is change,” said Spc. Samantha Arnold of Dodgeville, a heavy equipment operator.

“I’m just going to take it as it comes,” said Spc. Louis Neal, also a heavy equipment operator from Dodgeville. “I’m looking forward to it — I’m excited for the experience, looking forward to getting closer to a lot of people here and making new friendships.”

“Take it one day at a time,” added Spc. Austin Heath of Brodhead, an electrician with the 829th. “That’s all you can do.”

“I’m glad I get the chance to do this,” Neal said. “When I enlisted I was afraid I was going to be in too late to be able to go over there and make a difference. I want to go over there and do something, I’m excited to do that. And if that’s turning out the lights, then that’s what I’m going to do.”

Pfc. Tanetta Carter of Milwaukee just completed her training in carpentry and masonry last month. She admitted to being a little nervous but was also confident in her training.

“It’s kind of an honor, really, to be 21 and doing something as big as this,” she said. “Just to see the end of this — we’ve been there a long time, and going over there, tearing things down and bringing our troops home, it’s a good feeling.”

Spc. Mark Lewis of Milwaukee, a signal and communications specialist from the 120th Field Artillery deploying with the 829th, said he is keeping an open mind.

“I’m looking forward to a good experience and being able to further advance myself in my job,” he said.

Spc. Nathaniel Hitchcock and his younger brother, Pfc. Johnathon Hitchcock, both of Ashland, each have less than two years in the Wisconsin Army National

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Above, Capt. Kyle Gruber, commander of the 829th Engineer Company, addresses family and friends during a formal sendoff ceremony March 28 at Fort McCoy. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Vaughn R. Larson



At left, Two Soldiers from the 829th help a fellow Soldier to a medical evacuation vehicle during annual training at Fort McCoy March 22. The company’s annual training was conducted as preparation for their mobilization to Afghanistan this year. 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photograph by Pfc. Christopher Enderle

829th preparing for Afghanistan deployment

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Guard. Nathaniel joined because their father served in the Army, and Johnathon decided to join after seeing his brother graduate basic training. They are in the same platoon but different squads — Nathaniel works as a plumber in the unit and Johnathon works in carpentry and masonry.

“We’ll see just enough of each other to keep in contact, but not so much that we’ll [get on each other’s nerves],” Johnathon said.

“It feels great to be part of the team that turns off the lights [in Afghanistan],” Nathaniel said. “And I’m glad to deploy with my brother — a little bit of familiarity. When we get back everything is going to be so different. It will be nice to have someone who’s been there.”

Spc. Hayden Mulrone said that while he was sad that he was leaving his wife, he trusted everyone he was with and couldn’t wait for the great experience that was ahead.

“Family members, I want you to know I understand it’s not so easy for you to say goodbye to your loved one,” Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, said at the sendoff. “Your son or your daughter, your husband or your wife, your mother or your father — I understand the sacrifice you’re about to make and for many of you it’s the second or third, or the fourth or the fifth time that you’ve made the sacrifice. Without your support the Soldiers wouldn’t stay with us, and without the Soldiers we would be nothing.”

Those words likely rang true with Charles and Kim Sippy of Bloomer, whose son, Spc. Michael Sippy, is among those deploying.

“We’re very proud — it means a lot,” said Charles, who served in the Army from 1990 to 1994. “Of course, we’re nervous, a little scared, but we’re very proud, and excited for him.

“He’s only 18,” Charles continued. “He’s been in the National Guard since he

was a junior in high school. He’s one of the youngest in his unit. He hasn’t had a summer home in three years, and now he’s getting deployed. That’s been a little tough, but we’re excited for him.”

Kelly described the 829th as “a really young company,” but noted that morale was high.

“These guys are experts in construction, so the deconstruction should not be a problem for them,” Kelly explained. “I think they’re looking forward to it. What better thing than to say we were among the last people out of Afghanistan and helped give the country back to the nationals?”

Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch related the story of George Washington as a young colonial officer fighting alongside crack British troops in 1755 during the French and Indian War. The French and Indians, using guerrilla warfare tactics, cut down more than 700 of the 1,300 British troops in a two-hour battle near Pittsburgh, Pa. Washington was the only surviving officer on horseback, and discovered after the battle that his coat was perforated with bullet holes, yet he had not been wounded. Washington credited his good fortune to divine intervention — as did an Indian chief who had ordered his braves to fire at Washington, and who had himself fired 17 times at the future leader of the Continental Army. Many years after that battle, the chief met Washington face to face, to meet “the man who is the particular favorite of heaven, and who can never die in battle.”

“That is my prayer for you all today, to be the particular favorite of heaven,” Kleefisch said, “and that the legacy of enduring freedom that Washington fought for that day be also your legacy, and that it may never die in battle.”

Dunbar said that even though the mission in Afghanistan is drawing to a close, there is still important work to do.

“We still have the need for great engineers in Afghanistan, which is why we’re calling on the Army and why the

Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch presents a state flag to Capt. Kyle Gruber, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard’s 829th Engineer Company, and his family during a March 28 sendoff ceremony at Fort McCoy. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Vaughn R. Larson [Click on this photo to see a related video](#)

Army is calling on the Army National Guard in Wisconsin, and why we’re calling on the 829th,” Dunbar said. “There are simply no better engineers to do this mission than those sitting right here in

this room in uniform. So I salute you, Soldiers — you’re outstanding at what you do.” 

- [Training photos](#)
- [Sendoff photos](#)

The 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat team has sent two specialized teams to the Middle East to tackle two missions in one deployment.

The Military Engagement Team (MET) was to operate in Kuwait and Jordan, and the base Defense Operations Center (BDOC) is stationed in Kuwait, where they will augment active duty Soldiers.

Col. David Monk, who will command both teams during the deployment, emphasized the engagement aspect of the mission during a [Feb. 22 sendoff ceremony](#) at Camp Williams.

“Whether it’s on the BDOC, which is really staff augmentation, or on the MET, it’s all engagement,” he explained. “Sharing our expertise with senior leaders, government officials, both from the United States and other countries.”

The name for this deployment, Monk revealed during the ceremony, is “Engage Forward,” blending the focus of the mission with the state motto and the heritage of the Red Arrow — reaching objectives and breaching enemy lines.

Monk said that nearly half of the Soldiers in the “Engage Forward” mission were deploying for the first time.

Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, deputy adjutant general for Army, served on an advisory mission in Iraq from 2005-06, and predicted the MET and BDOC Soldiers would have a great experience on their deployment.

“The opportunities that you’re going to have to engage at multiple levels, both interagency and intergovernmental,” Anderson said, “in addition to the various militaries that you’re going to get exposed to, coupled with all of the cultural opportunities that you’re going to be exposed to — it will be a tremendous growth experience.”

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin described the upcoming deployment as a “very important” mission and “essential” to preserving American freedom.

“We know that America plays an

important role in maintaining peace and stability around the world, and you are essential to that role,” Baldwin said. “I join my fellow Wisconsinites to let you know that we stand behind you — America stands behind you. You have our whole and unconditional support.”

Dunbar agreed with Baldwin’s assessment of the mission.

“If it wasn’t a tough job, America wouldn’t send the Army,” Dunbar said. “If it wasn’t an important job, the Army wouldn’t ask the Wisconsin Army National Guard to go. And that’s what this is about today — a mission has to get done for the United States of America.”

Anderson, Baldwin and Dunbar expressed their thanks to the families in attendance.

“To the family members — I know, I know, I know how difficult this day is,” Dunbar said. “It is never easy to send the man or the woman, the husband or the wife, the son or the daughter, father or mother that you love, away anywhere for the better part of a year — let alone to a combat zone. I know how difficult this is.

“But this is the business we stood up for, and signed up for, and volunteered for,” he continued. “And we know, as we send them out the door, that we have your support. They will be in my prayers every day, and I give you my personal guarantee that we have done everything in our power as an organization to prepare them for this mission.”

Baldwin said she knows military

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32nd Brigade teams tackle conventional, unique missions in Middle East

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families also make a tremendous sacrifice.

“We are here to support you, and we stand with you always,” she said.

Monk said he expected the Soldiers under his command to impress the active duty Soldiers as well as U.S. government and international officials they encounter.

“I think Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers in general have always been in an environment where they knew they had to adapt, and all we had to do, really, to get everyone prepared for this is to just keep them focused on using that flexibility,” Monk said. “The advantage they have is the multiple different skill sets from different military occupations, and multiple skill sets from the civilian side. You combine that military and civilian expertise and you have a phenomenal team.”

Dunbar agreed.

“Soldiers, I am absolutely confident that each and every one of you — whether this is your fourth deployment or your first — is prepared for this mission,” Dunbar said. “You’ve trained hard — I can see the gleam in your eye. I know you don’t want to leave family, but there’s a professional pride in your eyes that anyone who’s ever worn a uniform understands.”

At [Fort Hood](#), Texas, the MET and BDOC teams practiced warrior skills as well as learning language, negotiations and cultural sensitivity training. Before departing the United States, the Soldiers were scheduled to attend a training course at the Foreign Services Institute in Virginia.

“I think their understanding is that as funds are condensed and you can’t do as much with money, the skill of negotiating and building personal relationships and networking is becoming more and more valuable,” said Monk, who will be going on his third deployment. “And we’re going to do the best job that we can to show that level of professionalism that Wisconsin



Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, the deputy adjutant general for Army, speaks to the 32nd Military Engagement Team and Base Defense Operations Center during a command visit at Fort Hood, Texas, March 9. Anderson and other senior

represents to all of the different countries that we visit.”

Monk praised the Soldiers he will deploy with, assembled from the Wisconsin Army National Guard’s four major subordinate commands.

“I can’t say enough about this team,” Monk said. “They’re proactive. They’re motivated. They’re communicative. You couldn’t ask for more as a commander.”

Spc. Whitney Gardner, a native of Barron who is deploying for the first time, said that while she’ll miss her four nephews and her fiancé, she is looking forward to the opportunities presented by

leaders from the Wisconsin National Guard and the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team visited the Soldiers who were preparing for their upcoming deployment to the Middle East. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Joe Trovato

the deployment.

“I think it will be a great advancement in my career,” she said. “I’m looking forward to it. I think it will be a wonderful experience. I’m very excited about it.”

The same was true for Spc. Irene Baumann, an Elkhorn native and a student at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

“I just want to gain more experience with the Army, because I’m only about three years in,” the intelligence analyst said. “I’d be considered somewhat fresh, I guess, so I’d like to learn any possible job and get any experience possible, even if that doesn’t pertain to my [military

occupation specialty]. As long as I’m learning something then I feel pretty excited about it.”

Baumann added that she’d miss her mother’s cooking and care while she was away.

Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Schumacher, of Manawa, will be going on his second deployment.

“The engagements are going to be an awesome opportunity to see different countries, different militaries and different cultures, he said. “I’m excited to learn some new things I haven’t seen before.”

[Additional photos](#)

Small Wisconsin Army Guard unit mobilizes for Afghanistan

Vaughn R. Larson

Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs

Gov. Scott Walker and senior Wisconsin National Guard leaders joined families and friends in sending off a small but unique unit for an important mission to Afghanistan.

Detachment 52 Operational Support Airlift Command, consisting of six warrant officer pilots and a noncommissioned officer in charge of flight operations, will fly a C26 two-engine airplane to deliver critical personnel throughout Afghanistan and the surrounding region in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

According to Detachment 52 commander Chief Warrant Officer 4 Arthur Hebblewhite, the deployment won't be much different from what the pilots did stateside.

"We get people to where they want to go," he explained at the March 6 sendoff ceremony. "There may not be an airline service [in Afghanistan] and there may not be any roads, there's probably one, maybe two mountain ranges in between, but we're still going to get them there."

Command Chief Warrant Officer John Freeman, the top warrant officer in the Wisconsin Army National Guard, said Detachment 52 was selected for this mission based on their efficiency and effectiveness.

"That goes without saying," Freeman told the deploying unit, "because you are a member of the Wisconsin Army National Guard, the best National Guard state in the country. I know you guys will do great things while deployed."

Freeman explained that warrant officers serve at all echelons of the Army as technical experts, combat leaders, trainers, coaches, problem solvers and advisors. Hebblewhite remarked that consisting almost entirely of warrant officers was not the only notable aspect of his unit.

"You've probably noticed we're not the youngest group Wisconsin has sent," Hebblewhite said. "I'm not going to call



The members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's Detachment 52 Operational Support Airlift Command, left to right: Chief Warrant Officer 3 Paul Phelps, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Alan Massman, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Troy Bittner, Sgt. Travis Brimmer, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Thomas Rogers, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Joseph Zewiske and Chief Warrant Officer 4 Arthur Hebblewhite. Detachment 52 consists of six pilots — including three first-time deployers — and an operations noncommissioned officer. Between them, the experienced pilots have logged more than 50,000 flying hours. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Vaughn R. Larson

them old — we're well seasoned. Between the six of us we have over 50,000 flying hours. That's a lot of aviation experience. But that's just the start — these guys are true professionals."

Freeman agreed.

"They are the bearers of the Army values, competent and committed leaders," Freeman said. "That is the very reason Det 52 was picked for this mission. We've never let anybody down on our deployments, and I know for a fact you guys will set the standard for the future."

Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, the deputy adjutant general for Army, spoke of riding frequently in the C26 for official business and his confidence in its pilots.

"I know you have as much a vested interest in that plane landing as I do," he said. "Great things come in small packages, and I think that's absolutely the case when we're talking about Detachment 52. In every case when Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers go overseas,

to an individual and as an organization you set the standard when it comes to performance [and] mission execution overseas."

Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, spoke about the pain of separation.

"I want you to know that I fully realize the difficulty of sitting there today as we're about to send your loved ones overseas into a hostile environment, a combat zone for a combat mission," Dunbar said. "Probably the last thing for you on your to-do list is to send your father or husband overseas. I understand. I want you to know that the mission this country is engaged in is an important mission or they wouldn't have the Army involved, and the Army wouldn't ask the Wisconsin Army National Guard to get involved. They ask us to get involved because we're the best at what we do. These men are the best at what they do, or we wouldn't send them into this zone."

Dunbar and Gov. Scott Walker shared their confidence in the unit.

"This mission is yet another prime example not only of the importance of the Guard here in the state but how incredibly important it is to our nation's defense," Walker said, "and how important it is to continue to have a strong National Guard as part of an overall Department of Defense strategy that we're set at a minimum at least higher than we were before Sept. 11, 2001."

"You are the best of the best," Walker continued, "and yet again you are called up to serve not only your state but your country, and we appreciate that."

Hebblewhite thanked the family members and friends at the ceremony.

"Your support means the world to us," he said. "I look forward to seeing all you folks here in about nine months when we come back." 📷

- [Story online](#)
- [Additional photos](#)



115th Security Forces Squadron returns to Wisconsin

Staff Sgt. Ryan Roth
115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Twenty-six security forces Airmen from the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing, Madison, were welcomed home from a deployment to United Arab Emirates March 2 by Gov. Scott Walker, state military leadership and their families.

"We are appreciative of what they have done," Walker said. "The National Guard is vitally important and we are thankful for your service and the support of your families."

The Airmen deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. Two 13-person squads provided base security during the six-month deployment.

"These Airmen have executed the mission very well," said Col. Jeffrey Wiegand, 115th Fighter Wing commander. "We are ready to support our community, our state and our country because of our citizen Airmen."

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115th SFS completes OEF, Horn of Africa mission

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While deployed, the Security Forces Airmen oversaw 35,000 vehicle searches, conducted 78,000 personnel searches and protected a 16-mile perimeter.

“The National Guard is always ready and always there,” said Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, the adjutant general of Wisconsin. “You and your families should be proud of all you have accomplished.”

“[Our families] are the reason why we worked so hard over there,” said Master Sgt. Jim Larsen, noncommissioned officer in charge of the deployed Airmen.

Staff Sgt. Justin Padley, 115th Fighter Wing Security Forces Squadron fire team member, said he had been planning a surprise engagement since November.

Waiting at the Dane County Regional Airport was Padley’s future fiancée, Wendy Anderson from Sun Prairie.

“I was shocked everyone else knew this was going to happen but me,” said Anderson about her engagement. “It was tough having him deployed but we talked every day and it was worth it in the end.”

Padley summed up his thoughts after a long deployment while standing next to his fiancée.

“I am so thankful for all the support we have received,” said Padley, “and I’m glad to be home.”

[Story online](#)

Staff Sgt. Justin Padley, fire team member for the Wisconsin Air National Guard’s 115th Fighter Wing Security Forces Squadron proposes to his soon-to-be fiancée Wendy Anderson upon returning to Dane County Regional Airport March 2. Above right, Security Forces personnel are reunited

with loved ones for the first time in more than six months. While deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, the Airmen secured 3,500 personnel and \$7.2 billion worth of assets. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Master Sgt. Paul Gorman

Wisconsin engineers power Romanian transit facility development effort



Vaughn R. Larson

Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs

The MK Passenger Transit Center at the Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base in Romania may have been merely a passing-through point for approximately 300 members of the 101st Airborne Division en route to Afghanistan [Feb. 3](#), but it marks a significant achievement for [military engineers](#), including the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 924th Engineer Facilities Detachment.

The temporary air transit facility, built in about five weeks, accommodates U.S. troops heading to or departing from European and Central Asian operating areas by providing essential logistical, transportation, reintegration and morale and welfare services. Staffed by 350 people, the transit center can handle up to 2,000 troops through the end of 2014, or the completion of current missions.

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Above, Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), depart a bus and walk toward a C-17 transport plane on MK Air Base, Feb. 3. Soldiers with the 2nd BCT were departing for a deployment in Afghanistan and were the first group of soldiers to utilize the Passenger Transit Center at MK Air Base as a transition point on their way in and out of the U.S. Central Command area of operations. Photo by Staff Sgt. Warren W. Wright Jr., 21st TSC Public Affairs At right, members of the 924th Engineer Facilities Detachment discuss plans and procedures in response to a broken water main at MK Air Base. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Colleen Anderson



Wisconsin National Guard engineers vital part of team effort behind new troop transit site in Romania

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“This is one of several transportation hubs that will ensure our war fighters get into and out of theater quickly, safely and efficiently, ready to execute missions or reintegrate into their families, units and communities as the case may be,” said Lt. Col. Wayne Marotto of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command. “We envision this as a temporary facility, but it’s vital to the mission.”

The 15-member 924th Engineer Facilities Detachment of Chippewa Falls performed public works department and quality control duties from mid-January through early February. They supported contract construction, tent logistical support, building renovation and remodeling projects, and roadway improvement. They also spearheaded the electrical distribution and force protection planning process, and developed a single tracking mechanism for base construction projects.

“At the onset of the mission, the 924th leadership realized how contracting-centric many of the ongoing projects at MK Romania were,” explained Sgt. 1st Class Zachary Tevis, who works full-time as a contracting officer at the Wisconsin National Guard’s U.S. Property and Finance Office at Camp Williams. “The biggest challenge was being part of the first rotation on the ground and obtaining all of the necessary documents and information needed to evaluate Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR) Services, Inc.-performed contracts, and make recommendations.”

Capt. Scott Johnson, a facility operations specialist employed at Joint Force Headquarters in Madison, learned the importance of military contracting on this mission — particularly when the weather took an unexpected turn. Temperatures dropped from the low 40s to bitter cold, and nearly three feet of snow accumulated over five days, complicating an already time-constrained project.

“You never really wrap your head around the contracting side of things until

you’re right in the middle of it, the levels of bureaucracy in getting roads plowed on a Saturday when the KBR people aren’t there, the military contracting officer isn’t there, but we’re there,” Johnson said. “So we’re trying to find equipment, get roads cleared when there are 4-5-foot drifts out there, and try to keep things moving.”

Capt. Daniel Coburn’s skills were put to critical use as the protracted winter storm damaged the power infrastructure at the Romanian air base. Chief of engineering at the Fort McCoy public works department, his expertise ensured that heat and hot water were maintained amid arctic temperatures and high wind gusts. Tevis acted as liaison between the 924th EFD, the contracting officer representative and KBR during power outages and a water

main break. 2nd Lt. Jeffrey Koehler, an electrical engineer in civilian life, spent two days getting the base back-up power plan working, and then worked to improve the back-up plan.

“We were very flexible — we had a very diverse background,” Johnson said. “We had an amazing HVAC lieutenant there [1LT Scott Delo] who works for Trane and was able to step in and answer lots of heating questions and give positive suggestions. We had good electrical people there that could step up and help keep the base power going.

“They were able to utilize some of their civilian background to have a big impact, which is what the National Guard brings to the situation in general,” Johnson continued. “We bring civilian background

to the fight that is priceless. A perfect example is our HVAC and electrical guys that came in and did base consumption calculations for electrical loads. There aren’t many people wearing the uniform that can do that.”

Halfway through the 924th’s three-week mission, members of the 902nd Engineer Company — part of the Army’s 18th Engineer Brigade — recognized the expertise the Guard members possessed and sought them out for advice. Tevis received a coin from Maj. Gen. John R. O’Connor, commanding general of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command — an informal but valued token of appreciation for good work.

“The biggest reward was watching the projects we developed and designed turn into troop-performed construction projects or KBR task orders,” Tevis said. “Also, I really enjoyed working in the extreme [operations tempo] for a very highly visible base transformation.”

Johnson took on new projects and work orders involving existing structures — tasks beyond the original scope of the 924th EFD’s mission — such as expanding the Morale, Welfare and Recreation facility, expanding and altering the military police station, and assisting the chapel project manager. The 924th also helped with important but not obvious aspects of a transit station, such as establishing bedding plans, developing office space and room-key control plans.

Perhaps most impressive was that the 924th EFD did not begin working as a group until November.

“Of the 15 personnel, 10 hadn’t been there before,” Johnson said. “That’s pretty significant. A lot of the team got a sense of accomplishment and good field experience. Some of [the active component Soldiers] were quite upset that we were only there for three weeks.”

Sgt. Maj. Michael Pintagro of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command contributed to this report.

[Story online](#)

Wisconsin Guard members hit the road in winter storm response

Vaughn R. Larson

Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs

It was a windy, snowy day — and night — for some Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers who patrolled state roadways and aided a stranded vehicle as part of the Guard's response to a strong winter storm Feb. 20-21.

Four Soldiers and two tactical vehicles from the Wisconsin National Guard armory in Hayward were dispatched Feb. 21 to assist a stranded motorist four miles north of Hayward on Highway 63. Civilian tow trucks were unable to reach the vehicle.

Late Feb. 20, six Soldiers and three vehicles — a light medium tactical vehicle, medium tactical vehicle and a military wrecker — from the armory in Spooner, assisted the Wisconsin State Patrol by conducting a health and welfare patrol at waysides by Chetek and New Auburn on Route 14.

According to Staff Sgt. Ray Heilman, the winter force package noncommissioned officer in charge at Spooner, the motorists at the waysides Thursday night required no emergency assistance.

"We checked to make sure they had heat and food and some kind of shelter," Heilman said.

The military convoy moved at a deliberate 10 miles per hour in the snow and strong winds, which made for a slow but safe patrol.

"The nice thing is this is a lot like what we do on route clearance," said Heilman, a platoon sergeant in the 950th Engineer Company. "We go real slow and look."

This was the first time Soldiers at the Spooner armory were called to serve as a winter force package, which is a predetermined set of Soldiers and vehicles or equipment based on skills, availability and location.

"We were excited to get a mission and execute," Weilman said. "Stuff like this makes us better at what we do."

Approximately 150 Soldiers were called to state active duty after Gov. Scott Walker declared a [state of emergency](#) Feb. 19 in advance of the storm. About 70 percent of the winter force packages were staged in northwest Wisconsin. 📷

[Story online](#)

Members of the Spooner-based 950th Engineer Company, working as part of a winter force package, check on motorists at a wayside along Route 14 near midnight on Feb. 20.

Wisconsin National Guard photo



Lance Cpl. Matthew Ehlers exits the cargo area of a Wisconsin Air National Guard KC-135R refueler with the assistance of fellow Marines and a civilian medical professional Jan. 13 at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar near San Diego. 128th Air Refueling Wing photo by Staff Sgt. Jeremy Wilson

Not your ordinary day on the job

Staff Sgt. Jeremy Wilson

128th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

MILWAUKEE — Sunday had started like any other drill day for the U.S. Airmen of the 128th Air Refueling Wing. They reported for duty, listened to briefings, and continued their mission. However, one aircrew consisting of a pilot, co-pilot, boom operator and three crew chiefs, would undertake a different mission.

For the next eight days, the 128th ARW would

participate in a double total force integration aeromedical evacuation mission, bringing injured service members closer to their home-station medical facilities. A multitude of Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard aeromedical units would aid in the transportation of 18 wounded personnel in a multi-transcontinental mission.

At midday, the tanker aircrew stepped out onto the frozen concrete of the ramp as the wind and snow swirled around the airfield at General Mitchell International Airport, Milwaukee. The boom operator opened the

aircraft entry doors and boarded the KC-135 Stratotanker. As the engines came to life, plumes of snow flew into the air and away from the aircraft. Once all pre-flight checklists were completed, the control tower granted clearance and the tanker went airborne.

“This is one of the most purposeful missions that we can support on many levels,” said Master Sgt. Amanda Look during a pre-flight mission brief. “We are doing our

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Refueling Wing goes beyond traditional duties to help wounded troops

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part to help bring someone one step closer to home and their family.”

After a 90-minute flight from Milwaukee to Joint Base Andrews, Md., the tanker touched down, taxied to its parking spot and opened the cargo bay door. A K-loader, preloaded with patient-support pallets, was marshaled toward the aircraft. The operator raised the platform into position and locked into place for the conveyance of its payload.

“Making sure communication is solid is the key to the whole mission,” said Senior Airman John Leithead, a medical charge technician of the aeromedical crew. “No two patients, injuries, conditions, or needs will ever be the same. They all need individualized care and support.”

The newly-formed team of 11 tanker and aeromedical personnel reconvened at the aircraft and prepped for patient arrival. The first leg of the transport mission would soon begin. While the aeromedical team, consisting of two nurses and three medical charge technicians, saw to all of the wounded service members’ needs, the 128th ARW aircrew handled the aircraft.

The sun passed the horizon and peeked over the mountains as a medical transport vehicle approached the awaiting tanker. The gears of the K-loader creaked into motion. The door visibly came into view of the patients and medical staff.

Among the patients was 20-year-old Marine Lance Cpl. Matt Ehlers of Hayward.

Ehlers’ knee was elevated and bandaged to cover his wound, which resulted from a 14-foot fall that sent him home early from his tour of duty in Afghanistan. The deafening hum of the aircraft’s four engines wound down as the medical team prepared to move Ehlers’ litter to the medical transport vehicle.

“I was walking in the early morning



Tech. Sgt. Daniel Nelson, left, and Senior Airman John Leithead, right, both assigned to the 775th Expeditionary Aeromedical Evacuation Flight, Joint Base Andrews, Md., review a wounded service member’s vital signs while monitoring the patient’s heart rate and oxygen levels during the aeromedical transport of patients from Joint Base

Andrews to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, San Diego, aboard a KC-135 Stratotanker assigned to the 128th Air Refueling Wing, Milwaukee, Jan. 13. The two Airmen are part of the five-person EAEF team aboard the KC-135 in support of a total force integration aeromedical evacuation mission. 128th Air Refueling Wing photo by Staff Sgt. Jeremy Wilson

around 4:30, and I was going out to reinforce the post. I fell off like a drop-off and my knee had a pretty big hole in it,” said Ehlers. “By the time I could see what happened to it, I could see the ACL and knee cap. There was no tear or fracture surprisingly.”

During the next five hours in flight, Leithead and the aeromedical medical staff checked on every patient; their well-being, vital signs, and their individualized medical needs. This process continued until the time the patients would be released into the care at their next destination of their journey to recovery

and reintegration.

Ehlers’ relief and elation was apparent in his facial expression as two fellow Marines and a civilian medical staffer carried his stretcher into the medical transport vehicle. The aeromedical team’s mission came to completion as the flight nurse signed the paperwork, releasing Ehlers into the care of the medical staff at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, San Diego.

They didn’t have any too serious injuries on this trip, said Look. “I have seen some really bad injuries coming out of Afghanistan and Iraq and it really pulls

at your heartstrings because you know that they are just doing their job, just like we are doing our job.”

For Ehlers and three other patients, Miramar, would be their first and only stop with this specific crew and the members of the 128th ARW. The remaining patients would continue their aerial trek toward their own destinations, including Travis Air Force Base, Calif. or Joint Base Lewis-McCord, Wash.

After leaving JBLM, a four-and-a-half hour flight across the country arriving

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Tech. Sgt. Maila Butler with the U.S. Air Force Reserve, assigned to the 775th Expeditionary Aeromedical Evacuation Flight, Joint Base Andrews, Md., checks on the well-being of a wounded soldier aboard a KC-135 Stratotanker assigned to the 128th Air Refueling Wing while being transported to another medical facility for further treatment Jan. 13. 128th Air Refueling Wing photo by Staff Sgt. Jeremy Wilson [Click on this photo to see a video story](#)

128th Air Refueling Wing transports wounded troops

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at JBA in the utter darkness of night marked the end of the first aeromedical evacuation mission. The 11-person team departed from the tanker, and continued on with their individualized missions. The Milwaukee crew from the 128th ARW gathered a new team of five medical professionals and ten more patients to start the second aeromedical evacuation mission.

Three days and multiple locations passed by with patients departing at each stop, bringing each wounded service member one step closer to recovery, back into service with their units, and one step closer to being reunited with their loved ones.

Upon arriving back at JBA near midnight, the second medical team, all

the equipment, and PSPs were offloaded from the tanker within an hour of landing. The crew was granted a few hours rest before heading back to their home station in Milwaukee, and to prepare for the next mission.

“Our primary responsibility is air refueling, so that’s what we’re used to doing on a day-to-day basis, whether it’s operational or training,” said Look. “However, on a mission like this we hone in our other responsibilities, which are all of the cargo and passengers and our patients that are in the back of the aircraft.”

Since 2003, the 128th ARW has flown 585 aeromedical evacuation missions. On those missions 1,142 patients have been transported; 521 patients within the U.S. exclusively and 621 patients from overseas war zones and medical facilities. 📷

- [Story online](#)



Volk Field CRTC and the 128th Air Refueling Wing would lose personnel under an Air Force restructuring plan. Wisconsin National Guard file photo

Air Force restructuring plan would impact Wisconsin

The U.S. Air Force announced the budget plan for fiscal year 2015 that would eliminate 39 Wisconsin Air National Guard positions beginning in October 2014.

If approved by Congress, the Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center would eliminate nine full-time positions and 14 drill-status Guard positions under the proposed restructuring plan, while the Milwaukee-based 128th Air Refueling Wing would lose 16 drill-status Guard positions. The total number of Wisconsin Air National Guardsmen would be reduced to 2,261 as a result of this action.

The positions would be eliminated from a variety of career fields.

“Cuts are never easy, especially when they hit a particular unit hard as will be the case at Volk Field,” said Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, the adjutant general of Wisconsin. “But the Wisconsin Air National Guard will remain ready to accomplish its mission safely and effectively while continuing to serve the people of Wisconsin and the nation.”

“Today, I met with the leadership

of the Air National Guard, and we are working to mitigate the impact on Airmen and their families,” he said.

Dunbar hopes to implement the proposed reductions from the Air Force through attrition to lessen the impact on currently serving members of the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

“I appreciate the efforts of the Air Force leadership as they make difficult choices in the face of this challenging fiscal environment,” Dunbar said. “We understand that the Air Force must spread these cuts across the force in order to maintain our critical capabilities and mission requirements.”

The personnel cuts are a result of the President’s Defense Budget for Fiscal Year 2015, which was announced March 4. The Air Force expects to reduce its number of personnel by approximately 20,000 Airmen in 2015. Approximately 400 positions within the Air National Guard would be eliminated across the country in 2015 due to a proposed reduction in the Guard’s overall end strength. 📷

[Story online](#)

KEY West location for real-world training



Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti
115th Fighter Wing

Airmen assigned to the 115th Fighter Wing deployed to Key West, Fla., in support of an F-16 Fighting Falcon training mission Feb. 1-14.

The two-week deployment allowed pilots to train against dissimilar aircraft. It ensured flights wouldn't get canceled due to snow storms or weather advisories, saved wear and tear on the F-16s, and allowed more than 100 Airmen the opportunity for real-world training in their areas of expertise.

Airman 1st Class Nate Hamilton, 115th Aircraft

Maintenance Squadron crew chief, was one of the Airmen selected for the temporary duty deployment.

"I can't believe I got chosen," Hamilton said. "It has been a great learning experience."

According to Hamilton, it was luck of the draw for those who got the opportunity to come down for training. Hamilton has been with the unit for about two years, and this was his first temporary deployment. His knowledge was tested throughout the two weeks.

"We've done just about every repair you could

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Pilots assigned to the 115th Fighter Wing exit the Naval Air Station Key West following a training exercise near Key West, Fla., Feb. 3. The 115th FW came to Key West in February to reduce the likelihood of flight cancelations due to weather. The deployment that lasted almost two weeks allowed the pilots to test their expertise against dissimilar aircraft. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti

Out-of-state training expands opportunities for 115th Fighter Wing

Continued from Page 20

think of on the maintenance end,” Hamilton said.

The maintenance crews were put to the test with multiple jet repairs such as replacing an aft transparency and fuel motor, as well as dealing with anti-skid and hydraulic issues.

“Every single shop has done their part,” said 1st Lt. Brian Wyman, 115th Maintenance Squadron officer in-charge. “This unit has come together as a team and has given extra effort to overcome the challenges we have faced.”

All of the shops demonstrated that same team mentality throughout the

temporary deployment.

The 115th Force Support Squadron, for example, provided daily meals for Airmen on the flightline so they could fuel their bodies while maintaining work schedules.

According to Airman 1st Class Chris Flanagan with the 115th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron engine shop, he and others helped the crew chiefs during launch and recovery operations by inspecting the intake blades, something they wouldn’t typically do back home.

“That team mentality is something I’m proud to be a part of,” Wyman said.

The 115th FW completed 112 sorties during its temporary deployment. 📷

[Story online](#)



BADGERS on the BAYOU

■ *Real-world training allows Wisconsin Air National Guard units to provide real benefits to real people*

Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti
115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

ABBEVILLE, La. — For 10 straight days, National Guard Airmen from more than a dozen different units across the United States — to include the Madison-based 115th Fighter Wing — helped Louisiana residents with their health, dental and optometry needs.

A group of 15 service members from various units were the first to set up for Cajun Care 2014, which took place in Abbeville, La., Feb. 25-March 6.

“We came down three days prior to the arrival of the main body,” said Senior Master Sgt. James F. McCloskey of the 177th Medical Group and Cajun Care 2014 noncommissioned officer in charge. “The early arrival gave us time to prepare.”

Combined, more than 100 Air National Guard and Navy personnel joined them Feb. 23.

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Capt. Erin Lutterman, 115th Medical Group registered nurse, checks the vitals on her patient during Cajun Care 2014 in Abbeville, La., March 2. After the eighth day of the 10-day mission, Air National Guard, Navy and Army personnel had already given free medical, dental and optometry care to more than 2,100 people. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti

Cajun Care provides real-world training

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“We gave them their lodging on the first day, and then we all went to Shucks for a cultural brief,” McCloskey said.

The night at Shucks, a local restaurant, gave the group a chance to integrate themselves into the community by meeting local residents and building a better understanding of the community’s healthcare needs.

The second day allowed the Guardsmen an opportunity to work with and get to know their Navy counterparts. By doing so, they were able to prove their ability to provide needed services to others from a deployed location.

“We have a concept in family medicine, which is my specialty, called team-based care,” said Lt. Col. Franklin “Brad” Meyers of the 115th Fighter Wing medical group and a Cajun Care 2014 participant. “This is the picture of team-based care. It’s not just Air teams and not just Navy teams, but Air and Navy teams working together.”

The Air National Guard and Navy personnel’s team-based care took place throughout Cajun Care 2014, allowing them to service more than 3,000 civilian patients. Due to the demand for services, Cajun Care 2014 operated under a first-come, first-served basis.

Patients started the process by waiting outside the building. They were ushered by Guardsmen into the facility in groups of 30-40.

Once inside, the patients were required to attend 15-30 minute briefings before they were moved to waiting areas to be seen by nurses and doctors.

Meyers was one of the daily briefers.

“One thing we had discussed early on was the importance of doing some patient education, so everyone is receiving 15 minutes of education prior to treatment,” Meyers said. “We routinely briefed the importance of hand-washing, discussed nutritional advice, encouraged exercise,

provided an overview of dental health, recommended tips for preventing falls and encouraged use of bike helmets, seatbelts and car seats.”

According to Meyers, the briefing also gave an overview of eye care, and the need for glaucoma screening and annual diabetic eye check-ups.

Once the Louisiana residents received their briefings, they were each given a different colored craft stick. Red, blue and white craft sticks were used to indicate medical, dental and optometry services respectively.

The medical section began treating patients by simply taking vitals. They checked blood pressure and patient

temperatures, and if they felt it was necessary, also tested blood sugars.

“If their blood sugar is really high, we immediately have to transport them to the hospital for care,” said Maj. Rachael Neisner of the 173rd Medical Group and a Cajun Care 2014 participant. “These people need care and we’re here to do just that.”

According to Neisner, the majority of patients were looking for optometry and dental care.

The optometry portion of Cajun Care 2014 examined patients for vision and glaucoma. If they needed glasses, the glasses were made at the facility and were ready for pick-up the following day.

The dental portion of Cajun Care 2014 spent the majority of their time pulling teeth.

“Their teeth are so decayed they are breaking off when they are pulled,” Neisner said.

The environment down here is completely different than back home for most of these service members.

“On base we’re just going through the motions,” Neisner said. “You have to be healthy to be in the military, so we seldom see problems. Down here you’re working with people who aren’t healthy. We’re excited to be here, and we’re happy to do what we can to help.” 

[Story online](#)

Guard unit mixes media, mission

Sgt. Alexandria Hughes
32nd Brigade Public Affairs

HOHENFELS, Germany — The 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, based out of Madison, left for Hohenfels, Germany, Jan. 16 to provide public affairs support during a training exercise for Soldiers preparing for a nine-month deployment to Kosovo.

Some of the Soldiers training here will replace the Soldiers currently deployed to Kosovo as part of the Kosovo Forces 18 mission. KFOR has been a part of NATO efforts to support peace in Kosovo since June 1999. The Soldiers of KFOR 18 will be continuing the NATO mission to provide a safe and secure environment in Kosovo while ensuring freedom of movement throughout the country.

The 112th MPAD, in conjunction with the Joint Multinational Readiness Center Public Affairs Office, provided realistic media training for Soldiers from the U.S., Romania, Slovenia, and Armenia during their pre-deployment training.

Capt. Randy Ready, commander of the 4th Public Affairs Detachment of KFOR 17 currently deployed to Kosovo, as well as the observer-coach-trainer for the exercise, explained the mission.

“It’s the job of the JMRC PAO to replicate the environment in Kosovo,” Ready said. “This is the last training opportunity for the deploying unit before taking over the KFOR mission.”

Ready emphasized the importance of creating a realistic training environment for the KFOR 18 Soldiers.

“We try to make it as real as possible so that when the next unit moves in to replace the last rotation in Kosovo, they’ve already validated their training,” he said. “They’re prepared, which ensures a smooth transition that’s only possible when the new unit is confident in their abilities.”

The pre-deployment training exercise is

Sgt. Brandon Frederick, 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment broadcast specialist, shoots a broadcast video of a staged riot as a part of the pre-deployment training

not only beneficial to the Soldiers of KFOR 18, but for the 112th MPAD as well.

The 112th MPAD and JMRC PAO were role players during the exercise, honing their skills by conducting interviews, writing stories, taking photos, shooting video, doing stand-up interviews and producing coherent media packages.

“This is a great experience for the 112th MPAD,” said 1st Lt. Joe Trovato, officer-in-charge of the overseas duty training for the unit. “First, we get to experience different cultures and interact with people from different countries, which is something we’d do if we deployed. Not only that, but it’s also great training for our military

occupation specialty competencies too.

“This is also a really good opportunity for the younger Soldiers,” Trovato continued. “With this exercise, the Soldiers get quality training and it allows them to see how media relations play out in a real-world environment like Kosovo.”

Spc. Marena Erickson, a broadcast specialist for the 112th MPAD, expressed her enthusiasm for the hands-on nature of the unit’s training mission.

“I think it’s really important for Soldiers not to sit on their skills,” Erickson said. “They need to use them actively. Without annual trainings like this one, it’s more difficult to be mission-ready.”

exercise for Soldiers of KFOR 18 at Hohenfels, Germany, Jan. 26. 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photo by 1st Sgt. Jim Wagner [Click on this photo to open a related video](#)

“Putting Soldiers in an environment away from home, with all the different cultural and language barriers, really sets us up to be successful in the future,” she continued. “I jumped at the chance to come here. It’s quite an opportunity to travel and see the world, and I know I’m developing professionally and personally.”

“Having National Guard and Reserve units here is great for us,” Ready said. “These Soldiers have public affairs experience and knowledge, they know which questions to ask, and they know how to make these media interactions real. The training value is exponential.”  

[Complete story online](#)

Streamlined process keeps Wisconsin Guard Soldiers ready

1st Lt. Joe Trovato
Wisconsin National Guard

CAMP WILLIAMS — “Always Ready, Always There” isn’t just a catchphrase for the National Guard. It is the result of maintaining the readiness of an organization that can be called upon at a moment’s notice to respond to an emergency here in Wisconsin or deploy to far-flung locales around the world.

In the Wisconsin Army National Guard, they take that duty seriously, and as a result, the state’s Army Guard consistently ranks in the top 10 nationwide for the overall readiness of its troops.

That lofty ranking is thanks in large part to the streamlined Soldier Readiness Processing [SRP] program run by the Wisconsin Army National Guard Medical Detachment. More than 3,000 Soldiers processed through the SRP here during a two-week period in January. An average of 320 Soldiers passed through each day, and over the course of the year, all of the state’s more than 7,000 Army Guardsmen will pass through.

The SRP, which annually validates a Soldier’s dental, medical, and personnel readiness, provides the opportunity to update records, religious preferences, family information, beneficiaries, wills, powers of attorney, and other personnel issues. Soldiers also have the opportunity to review life insurance options and education benefits.

As a result, Soldiers leave the SRP able to focus on their training and mission without having to worry whether their affairs are in order.

“It is peace of mind just to know that your family is taken care of and that we know how to reach them,” said Col. Leah Moore, the commander of the Wisconsin Medical Detachment. “It takes out the distractions of, ‘is my family going to be OK?’”

The goal of the local SRP is to identify and remedy any issues early before units move to mobilization stations to deploy.

A Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldier draws blood from a fellow Soldier during a Soldier readiness processing event Jan. 9 at Camp Williams. More than 3,000 Wisconsin Army National Guard members were scheduled to pass through

the required annual procedure over the course of a two-week period in mid-January. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Joe Trovato

[Click on this photo to see a related video](#)

When Wisconsin units arrive at their mobilization stations, historically they have had very few Soldiers sent home for medical, dental or personnel reasons, because they go through the process annually here at home.

“If they have medical or dental issues, they have to get those deficiencies taken care of, and it takes them away from what they’re really there for and the important training,” explained Col. Tim Coen, the state’s dental officer.

He said Soldiers gearing up for deployment want to spend their time training — not dealing with readiness issues.

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Streamlined process has Wisconsin National Guard in top 10 for Soldier readiness

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Coen and a team of two other Army National Guard dentists saw a steady stream of patients during the SRP at Camp Williams. In younger Soldiers, he said, the primary issue is wisdom teeth, but as Soldiers get older, routine maintenance becomes the primary concern. Coen said historically, dental readiness has had a major impact on American wars.

“Even going back all the way to World War II there were significant issues,” he said. “Vietnam brought out the dental readiness issue a lot because the dental

readiness or dental emergencies were one of the leading causes of troops having to come out of the field.”

Losing a Soldier from a squad because of a severe toothache or dental emergency destroyed unit cohesion and the overall readiness of squad, who come to rely on and trust each other. Losing even one person can have a detrimental effect.

With improvements in screening and prioritizing overall Soldier readiness, losing Soldiers to medical or dental issues is increasingly rare.

Wisconsin began implementing its SRP 10 years ago, as the Global War on Terror

reached a fever pitch. Back then, the Guard would validate Soldiers’ readiness by taking a unit that had a very short notice for a deployment and putting them through a daunting 12-15 hour process.

Today’s process is decidedly more streamlined, efficient and organized. Now, the support staff only works eight-hour days, and individual Soldiers usually get through the entire process in three hours — even though the number of stations has increased since the program’s inception. Units pass through primarily in colder months like January so the warmer months are available for units to focus on

outdoor training.

Thanks to the improvements and efficiencies, Wisconsin Soldiers and units have earned a reputation for high readiness.

“We do now, and we typically rate in the top 10 of the nation comfortably, and often times in the top five of the nation when you combined our readiness with how often we see Soldiers,” Col. Moore said.

Consequently, Wisconsin’s Soldiers remain “Always Ready, Always There” to respond to any mission to meet the needs of the state and nation. 

[Story online](#)

Emergency responders, Wisconsin Guard team up for disaster training

1st Lt. Joe Trovato

Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs Office

National Guardsmen and civilian emergency management agencies teamed up at the historic Richards Street Armory in Milwaukee Feb. 28 to discuss a notional tornado and hazardous materials response scenario.

The tabletop exercise — which featured a tornado touchdown in Mequon and a subsequent train derailment and hazardous materials spill — required National Guardsmen from the Milwaukee-based 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and their civil emergency counterparts to work together in a simulated National Guard call-up.

The exercise marked the first time the 157th worked directly with civilian emergency responders in a training scenario. Conceptual plans existed before, but the brigade had never walked through a full-scale scenario with civilian agencies in the same room.

“In previous military exercises like Vigilant Guard and Patriot, it starts out at such a robust level that it says local responders have exhausted everything [already]. Now come in,” Cregg Reuter, the Wisconsin Emergency Management exercise officer, said. “So essentially they were training in a pretty much military pure environment and at a much higher, later level of the response without laying the groundwork.”

In contrast, the tabletop exercise began with the earliest stages of an emergency, and the National Guard watched as officials from the Mequon Fire and Police Departments and Ozaukee County Emergency Management and Sheriff’s Department talked through their step-by-step process to a point where they ultimately called on the National Guard to assist.

Going through that planning process and learning how the lines of communication would flow in a real-life scenario is critical to the success of an emergency response, Reuter said.

“Really it is a step toward interoperability and bringing two entities together in the civilian and the military to make sure that it works,” he said. “So we’re testing it.”

The goal for the day, he said, was for all involved to learn the capabilities of other organizations, improve communications, find strengths and weaknesses and ultimately identify areas where additional training was needed.

“This is kind of some groundbreaking stuff, and we’re really anxious and hopeful that it’s going to pay dividends and add value and worth for everybody,” Reuter said.



Maj. Paul Felician, of the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, listens during a domestic emergency tabletop exercise at the historic Richards Street Armory in Milwaukee Feb. 28. The Milwaukee-based 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and civilian agencies from Ozaukee County and Mequon joined together to discuss emergency responses. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Joe Trovato

For the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, the tabletop exercise offered an opportunity to hone its plan to respond to a domestic emergency. According to Maj. Paul Felician, the brigade commander Col. John Schroeder set a goal of making the 157th the premiere domestic operations command in Wisconsin.

With that in mind, Felician reached out to emergency management officials in Ozaukee County to plan the exercise.

“Our role in a defense support to civil authorities or domestic operation is to provide support,” Felician said. “And one of the key features of providing support is understanding how those you are going to support operate.”

“We generally have limited access to that when it’s civilians,” he said. “And this provides us that wonderful opportunity to learn what they’re asking for, what they’re thinking and how they envision us supporting them.”

As the exercise players reacted to different contingencies, discussions ensued, and each organization

shared what they would be doing at that point in the emergency response. It amounted to a brainstorming session where each participant learned how each agency approached the situation. Response times, communications, levels of authority and the National Guard’s support capabilities were all key topics in the discussion.

And though the situation involved a tornado, a train derailment and a chemical spill, the discussion and the lessons learned could be applied to almost any emergency situation, Felician said.

“The scenario that we’re dealing with here is essentially a combination of events that have already taken place here in the state of Wisconsin,” he said. “We’ve had tornadoes that have caused this kind of destruction. We have had rail cars overturn and off-gas chemicals. In fact, there was a rail car that overturned a couple years ago in Mequon, so these are very realistic scenarios that we’re dealing with.”

[Story online](#)

Victory on the menu?

Vaughn R. Larson

Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs

OAK CREEK — Below freezing temperatures. A gentle snowfall. The hum of military generators muffled slightly by a formation of military tents.

Only the steady Saturday afternoon traffic along a main street in this Milwaukee suburb, visible behind the tents and generators, contradicted the idea that the Wisconsin Army National Guard's Headquarters Company, 257th Brigade Support Battalion, was preparing their evening meal in a tactical environment.

Even with being in the front yard of their own armory, setting up to compete in the 46th Phillip A. Connelly Awards Program was not an easy undertaking for the unit's food service section. Preparation for the March 1 evaluation began the previous Monday, with contractors plowing a season's worth of snow from the armory grounds.

"But because of the air temperature, the ground froze," explained Staff Sgt. Kyle Edwards, lead cook with the food service section. "So by the time we got to putting the tents up Tuesday, everything was a sheet of ice."

Trying to pound stakes and pegs into frozen tundra was not the only challenge.

"The first few days when we were trying to set up we had high winds, the temperature was right around 5 to minus 5, so trying to make sure no one ended up with frozen toes or frozen fingers, making sure no one got injured was a great challenge," said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Myers, the battalion food service noncommissioned officer in charge.

"Every day was a new challenge, but we overcame all the challenges and drove on."

Headquarter Company's food service section has been through this

before, winning the state and [regional](#) competition last year for the right to compete against four other National Guard and four Army Reserve food service sections in the quest to be named the best mess section in the Army's reserve components. Even though the competition menu has not changed — braised pork chops, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans and mushrooms, tortilla soup and salad — the evaluation was anything but a cakewalk for the food service section members.

"We're all improving," said Sgt. Michael Zahn, the food service section's first cook. "We all have our strong points — it's just working on those things that need work."

According to Chief Warrant Officer 5 Pamela Null, a Department of the Army evaluator from the U.S. Army Reserve Command at Fort Bragg, N.C., the unit was to be evaluated in 10 categories — supervision and training, headcount operations, request and storage of rations, field food safety, command support, staff appearance and attitude, kitchen site selection and layout, how the food was served, equipment use and maintenance, and food preparation and quality.

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Sgt. Michael Zahn, first cook with the food service section of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's Headquarters Company, 257th Brigade Support Battalion, cooks pork chops in a containerized kitchen during a Philip A. Connelly Awards Program evaluation March 1 in Oak Creek. The unit is one of nine competing to be named best food service section in the Army's reserve component. The winner is expected to be announced in May. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Vaughn R. Larson





Clockwise, left to right: Sgt. 1st Class Michael Meyer, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the food service section, conducts a clean hands inspection. Spc. Kevin Liburd, Pfc. Caitlin Giller and Spc. Steven Somer sanitize kitchen utensils. Pfc. Blowstin Holmes sets fresh fruit on a tray prior to the evening meal. Meyer conducts the head count brief. Members of Headquarters Company, 257th Brigade Support Battalion, serve supper out of a containerized kitchen on a bitterly cold March 1 at the unit's armory front yard in Oak Creek. Wisconsin National Guard photos by Vaughn R. Larson



Wisconsin Guard food section in the running for best section in reserve component

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“We don’t try to throw them off — it’s the exact same evaluation at every level,” Null said, noting that she could not comment about ongoing evaluations. “They’re always good teams because they got to this level. They all do well.”

Meyer was confident in the team’s performance on a frigid afternoon.

“I think today has gone quite well, from overall setup to overall execution of the food, execution of the entire

area, serving of the food,” Meyer said. “We hit all our marks, all our times, and the overall food quality is phenomenal. They did a great job with cooking the meal and serving the meal.”

Zahn agreed.

“I think I speak for us all when I say we did an outstanding job today. We weren’t too rushed, we kept our heads together. Overall I think this was our best meal. We’ve learned quite a bit since the beginning.”

After the meal had been served, the evaluators offered some feedback on what they had observed.

“Awesome job for the weather,” Null said. “You guys really did excel in reacting to the weather.”

“You guys were a really good team — we do notice those things,” she continued. “That helps in the cohesion of your team and the meal. It was really impressive — it was actually quite joyful to watch you guys. I didn’t get irritated at all today.”

Five food service sections remained to be evaluated before a winner will be announced sometime in May. 📷

- [Story online](#)
- [Additional photos](#)

BADGER BIATHLONER

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue
Air National Guard

JERICHO, Vt. — A Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldier made a respectable showing at the 39th Annual Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships, a six-day event featuring more than 120 Soldiers and Airmen from 21 states.

Spc. Gregory Lewandowski finished the 10k Sprint race — the first of four events — with an official time of 44:35.6, placing him in the top half of the pack at 31st of 72 senior men finishers.

“I’m in the top half ... that’s awesome,” Lewandowski said of his first-ever championship race.

A “top-half” finisher in a field that includes four prior Olympians is quite the feat — just ask Army Staff Sgt. Sarah Lehto, NG Biathlon Program head coach, who said Lewandowski’s finish in his first event is nothing to scoff at.

“He did a great job representing Wisconsin,” Lehto said. “Although he’s a novice, finishing where he did definitely speaks to his potential and he’s someone we’ll keep an eye on.”

Lewandowski also finished third in the Men’s Novice Sprint Race and the Men’s Novice Pursuit Race — a promising result for the first-year biathlon athlete, of Blaine, Minnesota, who hadn’t cross-country skied since high school.

Following high school, Lewandowski enlisted into the Wisconsin Army National Guard where he serves in the Portage-based Headquarters Company, 132nd Brigade Support Battalion, as a signal support systems specialist. He is also a full-time student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he studies dairy science and genetics.

It’s uncertain how much genetics plays in Lewandowski’s early success in the sport, but he’s attempting to get better with each event.

“They say cross-country skiing is the best full-body workout you can get — I sure believe that after a race like this,” an exhausted Lewandowski said after the race.

A full body workout is only half the equation for competitors however. In a sport where missed shots turn into penalty laps and additional time, Lewandowski acknowledged shooting is his biggest challenge. If he’d made each of his 10 shots in the sprint race, he likely would have finished in the top 15, according to Lehto.



Spc. Greg Lewandowski, of the Wisconsin Army National Guard, skis along a wooded trail in Jericho, Vt., March 3 during the 2014 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships. More than 125 Soldiers and Airmen, including four prior Olympians, from 21 states competed in the weeklong event. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

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Above, Spc. Greg Lewandowski, of the Wisconsin Army National Guard, shoots prone at five targets in Jericho, Vt., March 3 during the 2014 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships. At left, Lewandowski skis along a 12.5km route during a Pursuit Race March 3. Air National Guard photos by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

Wisconsin Guard Soldier represents Badger state at National Guard biathlon

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Army Maj. Christopher Ruggerio, National Guard Biathlon coordinator, stressed that shooting in biathlons isn't your typical marksmanship-type event.

"It is asking them to perform under duress ... it's increasing their heart rate and asking them to shoot accurately at targets 150 feet away," Ruggerio said.

Whether skiing through the woods or shooting on the range, Lewandowski could be spotted easily during competition by a blaze-orange hat that accents his 6'3" frame and, perhaps, proudly displays his

Midwest roots. Ruggerio said he hopes Lewandowski's early success will promote even more participation from Wisconsin in the [National Guard Biathlon](#) program.

"There is a great camaraderie here — everybody is helping each other out," Lewandowski said. "I've gotten assistance from the Ohio guys to help get me zeroed on the range and I'm competing on a relay team with members of both North and South Dakota. You really get the sense that National Guard is national." 🇺🇸

Staff Sgt. Sarah Mattison contributed to this report.

[Story online](#)

BLACKOUT DRIVE

Staff Sgt. Jenna V. Lenski
128th Air Refueling Wing

As Milwaukee residents drive to their homes on a Friday night after work, they pass an uncommon sight on their route — a convoy of military tactical vehicles on a mission to stay together and get to their destination of the Richard Bong Recreation Area to conduct nighttime driving training.

The bright and multi-colored lights of the convoy illuminate the residential route through the city and neighboring communities to the open back roads. The operators are vigilant as they drive close and cautiously together while the front-seat passengers in each vehicle continuously communicate over their radios. Civilians in their vehicles try to stay out of the way of the convoy and a few dodge their way through the pack to get ahead.

Out of the corner of his eye, Master Sgt. Jim Decker, the squad leader, notices something suspicious — a few bright flashes go off in the direction of his vehicle. He immediately contacts the lead vehicle and the other members of the convoy by using their call signs.

“Victor 1 this is Victor 3,” says Decker. “Suspicious activity to the right of the convoy.”

Decker continues to report the activity to the rest of the convoy by using a SALUTE report — a report used by military members to convey pertinent details of out-of-place or threatening activities and objects. This method identifies the size, activity, location, uniform, time, and equipment of the suspicious activity or object.

“One person using camera flash to right of the convoy, wearing a black sweatshirt and jeans, about 5 seconds ago,” said Decker over the radio transmission.

Decker’s intuition and response embodies what the security forces



Senior Master Sgt. Matthew Knight with the 128th Security Forces Squadron adjusts his night vision component to drive a Humvee in complete darkness on the roads of the Richard

Bong State Recreation Area in Kansasville Feb. 28, as part of night driving and night vision qualification. 128th Air Refueling Wing photo by Staff Sgt. Jenna V. Lenski

leadership calls a “warrior mindset,” and is exactly what they want to instill in all of their Airmen through realistic, hands-on training.

Airmen with the 128th Air Refueling Wing’s Security Forces Squadron trained with tactical vehicles from the Army Reserve’s 757th Transportation Battalion, Milwaukee, to qualify in nighttime driving using night vision goggles at the Richard Bong State Recreation Area in Kansasville Feb. 28 and 29.

The tactical vehicle training, which took place over the March unit training assembly, was developed for all the security forces Airmen to get hands-on experience with the equipment they are expected to operate when in a deployed location.

The security forces Airmen also trained

in preparation for an upcoming joint-unit sustainment training exercise at Fort Bliss, Texas.

“Every single thing we do here, we’re trying to instill a warrior mindset; to get them to think about doing this task in a deployed location,” said Capt. Aaron Gulczynski, the squadron commander of security forces. “Not just here at home station in Milwaukee or not just for training down at Fort Bliss.”

On the convoy’s way down to the training site, role players simulated suspicious activity by positioning themselves ahead of the convoy, crouching behind objects, and flashing strobe lights as the convoy passed. The security forces Airmen had to assess the risks and conditions, then respond to the activity.

“If they were under attack, they would

have to be able to consider some of the pressures,” Gulczynski said. “There are psychological things that you have to think through, so you can work through and not freeze up during that situation. Making the training as real as possible helps instill that warrior mindset into all of our Airmen, including our traditional Guardsmen.”

The goal for unit training assemblies is to train on all aspects of their career field, including law enforcement, air base ground defense and ancillary training.

Nighttime training with tactical vehicles and night optical devices was a fun and engaging opportunity for the security forces Airmen, but it also provided them valuable training that was uninterrupted, hands-on, and similar to a mission they might be called upon to perform, Gulczynski said. 📷

WERC supports Milwaukee job fair

More than 200 veterans — including more than a dozen [Wisconsin Employment Resource Connection](#) (WERC) participants — and approximately 70 employers were brought together Jan. 16 at the Goodwill James O. Wright Center on Milwaukee's northwest side for a "Hiring Our Heroes" job fair.

According to Capt. Joseph Ledger, the employment assistance program manager with WERC, the job fair allowed WERC participants to meet with employers in a professional manner, submit resumes and use their "30-second elevator speech" — a self-marketing technique designed to improve their chances of being hired.

"Veterans make great employees," said Reggie Newsome, secretary of the state [Department of Workforce Development](#). "They typically have skills in operating very sophisticated equipment, and with their discipline and strong work ethic they can quickly contribute as team players to the success of a business."

The Department of Workforce Development and the state [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) were event co-sponsors.

"We thank the employers who have made a commitment to hiring veterans, and organizations like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce who bring together employers with veterans who are seeking employment," said John Scocos, Department of Veterans Affairs secretary. "Helping those who have served our country gain access to quality jobs is good not only for the veteran, their family and their community, but it is also good for the businesses and organizations employing them."

Preliminary exit surveys indicated that more than 1,000 resumes were collected, more than 100 interviews were conducted, and 19 jobs were offered.

"The hope is that many other jobs will follow from this event," Ledger said.

WERC is a free resource operated by the Wisconsin National Guard's



Service Member Support Division, available to all service members and spouses in Wisconsin. The Department of Workforce Development's [Office of Veterans Services](#) provided employment and training assistance to more than 7,700 newly registered veterans last year. The state Department of Veterans Affairs will host seven symposiums around the state to educate public and private employers on hiring veterans.

The "Hiring Our Heroes" job fair in Milwaukee was one of more than 650 conducted nationally since the U.S. Chamber of Commerce began the program in 2011.

Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development contributed to this report.

[Story online](#)



Above, state Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Scocos speaks at a Hiring Our Heroes veterans job fair in Milwaukee Jan. 16. Also pictured are Eric Eversole, executive director of Hiring Our Heroes; Reggie Newsome, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development secretary; Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett; and Jim Gibbons, CEO of Goodwill Industries International. At left, one of more than 200 veterans registers for the job fair. Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs photos



'It's unconscionable that we would have any man or woman come back home [from a deployment] and not be able to find gainful employment.'
Gov. Scott Walker

500 and counting

The Wisconsin National Guard's Wisconsin Employment Resource Connection announced its 500th successful job placement at a March 19 press conference at the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs in Madison.



"It's been an amazing journey," Capt. Joseph Ledger, WERC manager, said. "We called this press conference to announce our 500th hire — in my eyes, I look at it as 500 lives changed."

Technically 530 lives, as the employment case managers at four locations across the state enjoyed an especially productive two weeks. The average hourly wage for WERC job placements is \$17.

Capt. Joseph Ledger, employment assistance program manager with Wisconsin Employment Resources Connection (WERC). Wisconsin National Guard photos by Vaughn R. Larson

Sgt. 1st Class Jim Reynolds of Waukesha became number 500 when he was hired by Milwaukee-based Optimum Vehicle Logistics as a service and sales technician. Reynolds was set to retire from the Wisconsin Army National Guard after two deployments and 23 years

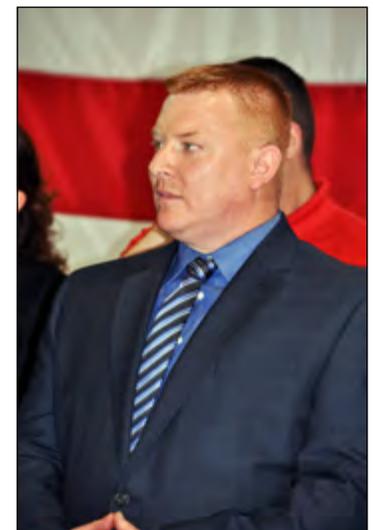
of military service.

"It was a lot faster than I expected," Reynolds acknowledged." I wasn't sure what I was looking for quite yet. They exceeded my expectations. I was going in there thinking about having someone help me transfer my information over, maybe throw me a couple of job postings. I didn't realize what all they had to offer and how far they would go to match you with the actual job."

Reynolds might be a case study in the most effective way to take advantage of WERC. Knowing that he was going to retire from not only the Wisconsin National Guard but his federal technician job, he contacted WERC's

James Reynolds was recognized as the Wisconsin Employment Resources Connection's 500th successful job placement.

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WERC celebrates crossing 500th job placement threshold

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Waukesha office last June. Staff Sgt. Jeff Baldovan helped craft his resume, translating military skills and experiences into civilian skill sets. Reynolds was looking to continue working with military equipment — he finished his National Guard career as a maintenance inspector — as well as use his college training in project management, and Baldovan sent him a job posting from Optimum Vehicle Logistics that seemed to fit the bill.

“I sent a resume at the end of November, I had my first interview in December and my second interview in the middle of January, and a job offer shortly after,” Reynolds said.

Jessica Williams, a Job Connection Education Program (JCEP) contractor working as a case manager at WERC’s Madison location, said Reynolds’ story is not unusual.

“WERC and JCEP really focus on getting to know our participants,” Williams explained. “It’s not like we’re herding cattle. We really get to know the person — what are their skill sets, what are the deployments they’ve had, the education. We really try to understand what the resume is, but also really meeting with them, find out about their interview

Jessica Williams, a Job Connection Education Program case worker partnered with the Wisconsin National Guard’s Wisconsin Employment Resource Connection (WERC) initiative, cuts a cake celebrating WERC’s 500th successful job placement following a March 19 press conference at the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs. Wisconsin National Guard photos by Vaughn R. Larson



**Reggie Newson,
Department
of Workforce
Development**



**John Scocos,
Department of
Veterans Affairs**

skills, and get them in the right direction.”

Gov. Scott Walker encouraged the Wisconsin National Guard to develop an employment assistance program for its service members due to high unemployment in the ranks. In 2012, unemployment in the Wisconsin Army National Guard was estimated at 10.1 percent, while the jobless rate among Wisconsin Air National Guard members was 6.7 percent.

“It’s unconscionable that we would have any man or woman come back home [from a deployment] and not be able to find gainful employment,” Walker said, noting that the Wisconsin Army National Guard unemployment rate in 2012 eclipsed Wisconsin’s high-water unemployment mark of 9.2 percent four years ago.

“Today, we are proud to not only celebrate the WERC program’s 500th hire, but the fact that we’ve pushed that unemployment rate from 10.1 percent to 5.1 percent in both the Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard,” Walker

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LinkedIn expert shares tips for job searches

1st Lt. Joe Trovato
Wisconsin National Guard

Veterans, Wisconsin National Guardsmen and military spouses seeking employment got a boost Feb. 12 if they attended the Wisconsin Employment Resource Connection workshop in Brookfield.

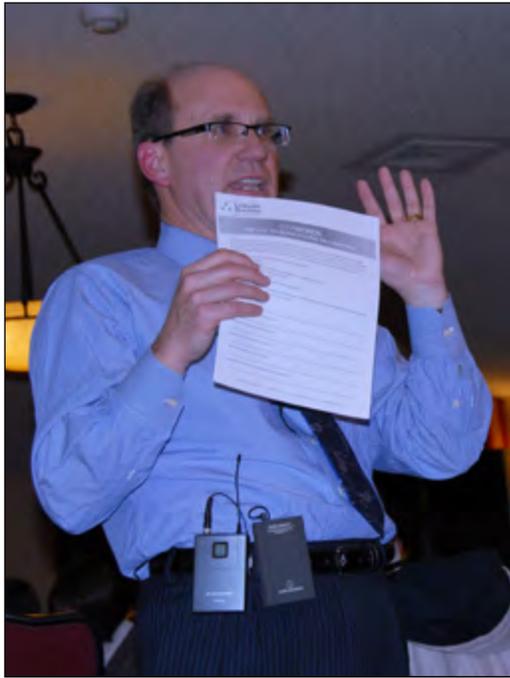
The workshop, held at Westmoor Country Club, featured nationally renowned LinkedIn expert Wayne Breitbarth, who donated his time and spent two hours sharing tips on how to master the online professional networking website. Breitbarth's tutorial also aimed to help service managers who assist veterans in finding employment.

"It's important because LinkedIn is the premiere job seeking tool, and it's not an easy site to navigate on your own," Breitbarth said.

"I just care about these guys," he said of the veterans and service members he hoped to assist. "They helped us, right? So if I can give back a little..."

Returning veterans and service members have faced high unemployment numbers in recent years. Reservists and National Guardsmen have dealt with frequent deployments that pulled them away from employers, and other service members have had difficulty articulating how the skills they learned in the military can translate into the civilian workforce.

The unemployment picture for National Guardsmen has improved as the economy has gained traction and service members have taken advantage of programs like those offered by WERC, which helps coach veterans and service members on resume writing and finding employment. But as more jobs are filled, fewer opportunities exist for those still seeking employment. That's where networking and job



Wayne Breitbarth, an expert on the use of LinkedIn, speaks to veterans, service members, military spouses, and job placement specialists Feb. 12 at the Westmoor Country Club in Brookfield. Breitbarth hoped to teach the group about how to leverage LinkedIn in a job search. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Joe Trovato

a strong local network," Baldovin explained. "So people oftentimes get their jobs through who they know, and LinkedIn is another one of those tools that can help build your network. People have always found jobs through who they know."

Breitbarth provided a wealth of information on how to connect with recruiters and how to expand personal networks on the site. He also explained the importance of translating military skills into civilian ones, using keywords in online profiles and including information that delineates one's profile from the millions of other users on the site.

[Story online](#)

marketing tools like LinkedIn can prove to be of great assistance.

"I believe that we have the best skills that this country has to offer," Staff Sgt. Jeff Baldovin told the more than 60 people who turned out for the event in Brookfield. "But some of us have been punched in the face a few times. We've had some difficulties and tough transitions from military to civilian."

Baldovin is an employment assistance case manager with the Wisconsin National Guard's WERC program. He helped organize the event and found Breitbarth, who authored his own book on how to master LinkedIn as a resource for both job seekers and employers.

Baldovin said that veterans face two major obstacles. One is knowing how to translate military experience and training into the civilian workforce.

"Most skill sets out there are transferrable," he said. "It's just knowing how to do that in the interview and on the resume."

The other obstacle, he said, is building a strong local network.

"Sometimes veterans, especially if they're recently returning overseas veterans, they don't have

Success for job placement program

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continued. "This state now has an unemployment rate among those who served that is less than not only the national average but the state average [of 6.1 percent]. Of course, I'm a little bit persistent — how do we get to where we have nobody unemployed?"

Ledger said the key is the WERC case managers, who have processed more than 700 resumes and maintain a caseload of 600 people.

"The work doesn't stop here," Ledger said. "It's a continued battle, continued education process of employers and service members. On the employer side it's educating them on the benefits of hiring service members, but also showing them the transportable skills from military service members into the civilian side. But it's also educating us and our service members, because we diminish what we get trained on and what we can really bring to the table. The staff does amazing job of working that with the service members."

"I want to commend the entire WERC program for all of their efforts in finding Wisconsin service members meaningful employment," Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, Wisconsin's adjutant general, said. "Their ongoing efforts are a force multiplier that allow our service members to remain ready."

The WERC program has found success in placing current service members and their families from all services into jobs due to strong partnerships with other state agencies like the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Workforce Development and the business community.

John Scocos, secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, described the collaboration between his department, the Wisconsin National Guard, the

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Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, speaks about the Wisconsin National Guard initiative, Wisconsin Employment Resources Connection (WERC) to address unemployment among its service members during a March 19 press conference. When WERC was founded, unemployment among Wisconsin

Army National Guard members was above 10 percent, and nearly 7 percent in the Wisconsin Air National Guard. Today, the unemployment rate in both the Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard is estimated at 5.1 percent, below the state unemployment average. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Vaughn R. Larson

State agencies vow to keep working to reduce service member unemployment

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Department of Workforce Development and the governor's office as "one team, one fight."

"The tribute today is to the Wisconsin National Guard for the work they've done," Scocos said.

Reggie Newson, secretary of the Department of Workforce Development, agreed.

"Gov. Walker continues to make sure that Secretary Scocos and I and Gen. Dunbar are focused like a laser to make sure we can provide the tools and resources to you to be able to get trained, upgrade skill sets and to connect you to employment opportunities in the marketplace," Newson said. "We look forward to continuing working

with you all as we continue to move the state forward in terms of economic development."

Dinetha Thompson, program manager at JCEP, praised the WERC program for its strong partnerships and innovative outreach methods such as the [Business Summit](#) in March 2012 at Lambeau Field in Green Bay to educate employers on the benefits of hiring veterans.

"The importance of today is the military leadership and the state realizing that there's still a long way to go — we still have a lot of unemployed Soldiers," Thompson said. "This program in Wisconsin has been so successful because of the leadership buy-in and the support we get from everybody. It's that support that really enables them to make a difference in a life."

For Dunbar, employment is a readiness issue.

"When our Soldiers, Airmen and their families are unemployed or underemployed, it affects their ability to focus on their mission," Dunbar said. "We ask a lot of our service members, and a key component to the success of our operational Guard will always be our community and employer support."

"I cannot thank the business community enough for their support of our service members," he added. "Having supportive employers who understand the value that a military service member brings to their organization is what makes the Wisconsin National Guard so successful." 

- [Story online](#)
- [Additional photos](#)

Maj. Paul Rickert
Wisconsin National Guard

MILWAUKEE — If the Wisconsin Army National Guard was a major-league baseball team, it would be trying to bolster its roster by calling up hot prospects from its farm system.

And on a January afternoon at Miller Park, those prospects consisted of 30 noncommissioned officers — major-leaguers in their own right — who converged for an Officer Candidate /Warrant Officer Candidate Symposium.

“We have to realize [the importance of] that relationship — the relationship between the warrants, the NCOs and the commissioned officers,” said Lt. Col. Michael Murphy, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard’s Recruiting and Retention Battalion. “We are one unit working together to get the mission done.”

Officers and warrant officers perform different functions in the military. Officers often begin in a leadership role at the platoon level and may command a company or larger element as well as serve in staff duty positions that support a higher command officer. Warrant officers are regarded as highly specialized professionals who operate, maintain, administer and manage the Army’s technical systems, support activities and equipment at all command levels.

Murphy — an OCS graduate himself — highlighted the benefit of officers with enlisted experience and how that experience positively impacts the officer/noncommissioned officer leadership dynamic.

That’s an argument that may carry weight with Sgt. Ava Kielisch of Company C, 132nd Brigade Support Battalion. Her demonstrated leadership qualities resulted in recommendations to consider becoming an officer on the day she was promoted to sergeant.

“I wanted the enlisted time as a sergeant,” she explained, “working with the troops more before [becoming an officer.]”

Kielisch was undecided whether to pursue the officer or warrant officer route, and attended the symposium to help reach a decision.

Murphy said he hoped the symposium would attract more candidates to the state’s officer and warrant officer schools. The Wisconsin Army National Guard presently has 11 candidates attending Officer Candidate School; the Warrant Officer Candidate Program anticipates having 12 candidates this year, which would be the most for a single class at the Wisconsin Military Academy. 📷

[Story online](#)

Mobile maintenance teams help ensure Guard's readiness

**Staff Sgt. Megan Leuck
and Spc. Kimberly Chouinard**
112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

A Kenosha-based Wisconsin Army National Guard unit travelled to Milwaukee March 1 to test a new method of servicing weapons and electronics for a fellow Guard unit.

Company B of the 257th Brigade Support Battalion sent 13 Soldiers from the company's electronics and armament sections to provide checks and services on a variety of equipment belonging to the 157th Headquarters Company.

In the past, the 157th Headquarters, located at the Richards Street Armory in Milwaukee, was required to coordinate and transport their equipment to maintenance shops. This method didn't ensure the quickest turnaround, which is critical when the equipment is needed for future training.

1st Lt. Alex Baldwin, officer in charge of the team, said this new service method alleviates units of having to spend extra time and money.

"We're taking that burden of the transportation away and we're bringing our Soldiers to that equipment which saves a lot of time," said Baldwin. "We can get right down to the mission servicing the equipment."

The Soldiers conducted annual maintenance on night vision devices, weapons and more than 20 radios. The services included checks and services, inspecting for any damage, documenting those damages and providing repairs, if possible. The mission took the majority of the day.

Some members of 257th commented how they were looking forward to the training

Pfc. Jake Islas with Company B, 257th Brigade Support Battalion in Kenosha, uses an image intensifier to look for any obscurities in a night vision device belonging to the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade at the Richards Street Armory in Milwaukee, March 1. 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photo by Staff Sgt. Megan Leuck [Click on this photo to see a related video story](#)

mission and obtaining more hands-on experience.

"We get to do our job," said Spc. Matt Bothe, with the 257th BSB's electronics section. "It helps us with our skills — sharpens up our skills."

Soldiers also noted that periodically they are unable to perform their military occupational specialty (MOS) due to the limitations of resources and equipment to service within their own unit. This new training mission will allow them to perform what they were trained to do.

"It benefits me because I don't work with [radios] often," said Pvt. Cody Mayberry, with the 257th BSB electronics section. "It's good to actually sit down and work on the radios every once in awhile. It's nice."

"It's nice that they actually get to do their MOS," said Staff Sgt. William Dittberner, the 257th BSB's armament section chief.

While the training proved beneficial to the Soldiers in maintaining their proficiency and skills through quality training, it also provided essential support to mission readiness.

"We are going to be using all this equipment during our annual training, and because it is all being worked on, we will be able to use it knowing it is fully functioning, said the 157th's Spc. Gabriella Jacobsen.

The goal is to not only ensure Soldiers are mission capable but that the units are mission capable as well, said Sgt. Kyle Milas, of the BSB's electronic section.

Having radio communication, for example, is an important part of any military operation. Without it, units are less effective.

Pvt. Cody Mayberry, of the 257th, said Soldiers on their own might have difficulty troubleshooting why radios are not functioning properly. But enlisting the help of maintenance specialists ensures that radios and other equipment are mission capable.

The 257th's ground support section conducted the first such maintenance training mission in February when it provided services on generators for a unit in Whitewater. 

[Story online](#)

Military service runs in the family



Vaughn R. Larson

Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs

With six family members currently enlisted — a father and five adult children — Shanle might become a familiar name in the Wisconsin Army National Guard.

As her family looked on, the fifth and final Shanle child, Antonia Marie, took her oath of enlistment Jan. 21 at the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) in Milwaukee.

“Congratulations — you are now a member of the Wisconsin Army National Guard,” said Maj. Craig Jansen of the Wisconsin Army National Guard’s Recruiting and Retention Battalion after administering the oath. “Now, there are no more Shanles to enlist?”

Antonia’s father, Staff Sgt. Ray Shanle, is a Wisconsin Army National Guard recruiter based in Green Bay. But to hear Antonia’s mother Lorianne tell the story, the real family recruiter is her father, retired command sergeant major Lawrence Murray, who completed 30 years in the Wisconsin Army National Guard as the senior enlisted member of the 32nd Brigade.

“Let me tell you a story,” Murray — a member of the Wisconsin Army National Guard Hall of Honor — said in a conspiratorial voice. “I enlisted in early March, 1952 — I had no choice in the matter. My dad says, ‘Get in the car

— we’re going for a ride.’ He drove to the livestock pavilion we had in Waukesha, which was also our National Guard armory. There we met one of my uncles, who was in the 32nd Division in World War II, and another uncle who had two boys the same age as me, so there was three of us there.”

Murray’s uncle Les had served with the 32nd in the South Pacific during World War II, and instructed the three boys that they were enlisting.

“So we were marched inside the armory and we enlisted,” Murray recalled with a laugh.

Staff Sgt. Shanle served for six years in the Marine Corps in the 1980s. About two decades later, his oldest son Raymond looked into also joining the Marine Corps.

“I grew up on a dairy farm, and I wanted to be part of something bigger than myself,” Raymond — a sergeant in Company B, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment — explained. “I wanted a challenge and the reward out of that. I initially went to the Marine Corps recruiting office and talked to them and they said I could refuel jets, and I thought that was okay.”

But Raymond’s grandfather did not think that was okay.

“That was the only time I’ve seen him visibly upset,” Raymond recalled. “He said, ‘You get your butt down to the National Guard office.’ So I did and had a sweet little deal lined up for me.”

Raymond began his military service as a combat engineer, and recently joined the Green Bay-based infantry unit.

“I love it,” he said.

Staff Sgt. Shanle said the National Guard recruiters who signed up Raymond were pretty good at their job.

“They came to our farm, and my wife and I signed the papers for [Raymond] at our kitchen table. And after we signed,

The five children of Staff Sgt. Raymond Shanle are all members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard after Antonia Marie Shanle took her oath of enlistment Jan. 21 at the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) in Milwaukee. From left to right: Sgt. Raymond Leo Shanle II, Sgt. Natasha Rose Shanle, Spc. Caleb Dane Shanle, Pfc. Tyler James Shanle and Pvt. Antonia Marie Shanle. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Vaughn R. Larson

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Sixth member of same family enlists in Wisconsin Army National Guard

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they said, 'So, Ray, when are you getting back in?' I said I was too old and too fat to get back in, and they showed me otherwise."

Staff Sgt. Shanle found himself enlisting nearly a month after his son — after a 20-year break in service.

"I swore in after him to support my son in his decision, and we were obviously heavy in Iraq at that time," Shanle said. "Maturity and leadership — if I could help, that's why I did it."

Natasha Shanle, a sergeant with the 32nd Military Police Company in Milwaukee, was motivated to enlist after Raymond joined.

"He was my role model at the time, and I thought if he can do it, it must be pretty cool," she said. "My grandfather talked about it a lot — I thought it was a real responsible thing to do. Why not serve your country?"

Natasha got her opportunity to serve her country, along with her father and older brother. She served with the 32nd MP Company in Iraq during a 2009-10 deployment, while Raymond deployed with the 951st Engineer Company (Sapper) to Afghanistan in 2008-09. Staff Sgt. Shanle deployed to Iraq with Troop E, 105th Cavalry in 2007-08, and also served as a military contractor in Baghdad from 2010-2012.

Caleb Shanle, a specialist, is the second of three Shanle men assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry. He has been a member of the Wisconsin Army National Guard for nearly two years.

"Growing up I saw my father, brother and my sister all deployed at roughly the same time — that kind of gave me the kick-start."

Caleb wants to make a career of the military, and is looking to find an Active Guard and Reserve job in the 32nd Brigade. He also plans to stay infantry.

"Being in the same company with my brother and then my other brother when

he gets back from training, it will be quite the thrill," Caleb said.

Tyler Shanle, a private first class, enlisted in December and heads to basic training in a few weeks.

"I had a very good job in the private sector and I didn't feel obligated to join," Tyler explained. "But seeing my whole family doing it and the benefits made me want to join."

Antonia said she felt no pressure or obligation to enlist — in fact, her parents indicated that they might have preferred she enlist a little later.

"I probably tried to dissuade her the

most," Staff Sgt. Shanle said. "Her mom definitely made her wait until she was 18."

"We all had discussions about her at the dining room table when she wasn't home [about] when she could or couldn't go in, so this came a little faster than I thought," Lorianne admitted. "But it's her decision, and she's got a good gig going."

"It's always been there and it opens up so many opportunities in life, especially with the job I chose, linguist," Antonia said. "My mom used to be in the FBI at one point and that always intrigued me. I knew this job could open up doors to that kind of thing."

After graduating high school later this spring, Antonia will head to basic training and then to language training before joining the 32nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion as a member of its military intelligence company.

"They all [enlisted] on their own for their own reasons, and I believe for the right reasons — for their reasons, not anybody else's," Staff Sgt. Shanle said of his children. "What's it like? It's phenomenal."

Murray agreed.

"I'm proud of them," he said. "I'm really proud of them." 

[Story online](#)

Guard member's heartwarming good deed keeps angler's family outing on ice



1st Lt. Joe Trovato
Wisconsin National Guard

The sport of fishing is rife with stories of monster walleye that got away, muskies that snapped lures and lines, and perhaps the occasional exaggeration or falsehood. But one recent Wisconsin fishing tale had truth to it, though it too was unbelievable.

Jason Duncan of Tomah planned to spend Dec. 22 ice fishing on Tomah Lake. He planned to take his two sons out along with his girlfriend's two sons in an effort to introduce them to the sport he loved.

On Dec. 21, Duncan setup a permanent shack on the ice. Knowing he'd be back first thing the following morning with his children, he left many of his supplies in the shack overnight. Upon arriving early the next morning, Duncan and his oldest son noticed the door swinging open. They had been robbed.

Poles, tackle boxes, tip-ups — all gone.

The thief left Duncan and the four children without a single pole with which to fish. Determined to get the kids onto the ice to fish, Duncan travelled to his local bait shop, Rosco's, to see what he could replace, but he knew he didn't have hundreds of dollars to throw at new fishing equipment for five people just days before Christmas.

"I don't really have the money to even do this, but I was going to anyway," Duncan, who works at Sand Ridge Secure Treatment Center in Mauston, recalled.

When he explained his story, the bait shop owner offered him a discount on anything he purchased and the opportunity to look through a box of pre-owned equipment someone had dropped off upon moving out of state.

Enter Greg Enerson, a master sergeant in the Wisconsin Air National Guard, and a member of the Guard's 54th Civil Support Team.

Enerson, also an avid outdoorsman, was

A chance encounter and a timely donation from Master Sgt. Greg Enerson, a member of the 54th Civil Support Team, allowed Jason Duncan to purchase new ice fishing equipment for his children and his girlfriend's children. Submitted photo

stopping by the bait shop to say, "Merry Christmas," when he saw Duncan, a complete stranger, desperately rummaging through the old equipment. He could tell immediately that something was wrong, and when he saw the four children waiting to go fishing, Enerson was livid and heartbroken. After listening to the man's story and watching him repeatedly tell his children they couldn't afford the equipment they wanted to purchase, Enerson stepped in.

"He pulls out a \$100 bill," Duncan explained. "He gave it to the owner and said, 'get these kids whatever they need to get back out fishing today, and you guys have a Merry Christmas.'"

"I was just extremely floored, because people just don't do that," he said. Not complete strangers anyway.

The money, coupled with the store's discount, and someone's discarded equipment saved the day for Duncan and the kids he hoped to introduce to ice fishing.

Despite losing all of his equipment — and initially, some faith in people — Duncan gained much more from the ordeal than he lost.

"I lost all this stuff, but I gained a different view of humanity again, and I feel like I gained a friend," he said.

After his random act of kindness, Master Sgt. Enerson returned to the bait shop a few minutes later to give Duncan his business card. His only request was that Duncan take him and his three-year-old son out fishing someday.

The two eventually made plans to go bow hunting together as well.

The \$100 he handed over had been earmarked to buy a new hunting crossbow, but Enerson said he could save up again.

"It was a sad situation, so I just handed over the \$100, and I said, 'I want this to contribute to restocking your fishing supplies, and hopefully you kids will have a Merry Christmas,'" Enerson said.

Like Duncan, Enerson knew he had gained from his own generosity as well.

"To be honest with you, I got a little choked up," he said, acknowledging that \$100 is a lot of money for anyone. "I mean these were just little kids, and they really looked sad. They were ecstatic. I'd be lying to you if I said I didn't feel good about it." 📷

[Story online](#)

Wisconsin Guard, WEM help school children prepare for emergencies

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue
Wisconsin National Guard

School children from across Wisconsin are likely familiar with the frigid temperatures this past winter season — if for no other reason than the above-average amount of school cancellations and temperatures that will make even the tiniest of nostrils freeze together.

For thousands of Wisconsin's 5th-grade students, familiarity will soon turn to education with help from the Wisconsin National Guard, Wisconsin Emergency Management, volunteers from AT&T and other state and federal entities, who partnered to provide learning materials and supplies to nearly 150 schools across the state.

"The real key to this program are the emergency kits so every child gets a starter emergency kit," said Tod Pritchard, public information officer for WEM. "It really jumpstarts that conversation that's so desperately needed in homes all across the state — we all really need to think about 'What would we do if there's an emergency ... are we prepared?'"

For the fourth time in as many years, WEM and Ready Wisconsin hosted a packing event, recently, as part of the Student Tools for Emergency Planning program. A group of philanthropists, the AT&T Pioneers, helped to pack 8,000 of the emergency starter kits as a way to inform and equip children with tools to inspire family conversations about disaster preparedness.

Each kit includes a drawstring

Volunteers from AT&T assemble emergency starter kits for children at the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs Jan. 14 as part of the joint-partnership program Student Tools for Emergency Planning. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Kelly Bradley

[Click on this photo to see the video story](#)

backpack with DVDs, flashlights, emergency blankets and first-aid kits. The Federal Emergency Management Agency also provided printed materials for both students and teachers to teach anywhere from one hour to a full day of disaster preparedness material.

Pritchard said the 5th-grade demographic represents a "sweet spot" in age and curiosity that resonates with the children.

"Those kids love this information. They get it, they understand it — it's not too scary for them," Pritchard said. "We've had a pretty severe winter. That's where this program really comes into focus — it really makes families and kids think about 'Am I really ready?'"

Overall the program is a collaborative effort with part of the funding coming from a grant from AT&T, Walgreens, the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation and FEMA.

The Wisconsin National Guard is a key player in the annual packing event as well. Maj. Paul Rickert, director of public affairs for the Wisconsin National Guard, said preparedness is the key to any emergency.

"The earlier we can get people interested in preparing for what may happen, the better they'll be able to handle it if it does happen," said Rickert. "One of our big missions is preparedness for emergencies within the state, so to help here and to help students understand the importance of being prepared for those same emergencies — that's perfect."

On behalf of Wisconsin Emergency Management and Ready Wisconsin, Pritchard gave praise to the Wisconsin National Guard, AT&T Pioneers and all the other entities that made the event possible.

"This would not happen without them. We are so grateful for their help because we just would not be able to do it without them," Pritchard said. 

[Story online](#)



The Wisconsin Army National Guard held its inaugural All Saints Celebration Feb. 22 in Warrens. The celebration's goal was to continue to build camaraderie and esprit de corps within and among the various branches of the Wisconsin Army National Guard. Wisconsin National Guard photos by Sgt. Sean Huolihan

All Saints blends celebrations from different Army branches

Vaughn R. Larson

Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs

Much like the ceremonial bowl of grog, proud and long-standing traditions blended together Feb. 22 for the Wisconsin Army National Guard's inaugural All Saints Celebration.

The idea to make a single, formal dining and recognition event for all branches of the Army came from Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, deputy adjutant general for Army. The goal, he said, was simple: continue to build camaraderie and *esprit de corps* within and among the various branches of the Wisconsin Army National Guard.

"Because I'm an artillery officer, I have been exposed to the celebration of our patron saint — Saint Barbara — for many years," Anderson said. "The presentation of the Military Order of Saint Barbara and the Molly Pitcher for spouses is a means to publicly recognize field artillerymen for an extra level of excellence in learning their craft. A few other branches within the Army are equally as active in this type of recognition, but not all."

The All Saints Celebration, therefore, was an opportunity to expose Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers to the rich history and traditions of the various Army branches, while also recognizing select Soldiers in a family setting.

The inaugural event appeared to be a success. "I thought it was a fantastic event," said Lt. Col. Brian Wolhaupter, a strategic planner for the Wisconsin Army National Guard. "One of the best things about the event is it highlights that there's really such strong traditions across the force. There is a unity, a brotherhood, a strength to the Wisconsin Army National Guard no matter what branch you're in, no matter what field you're in. It goes beyond work — it's a part of who we are all the time."

Warrant Officer 1 Dennis Trest has attended numerous Saint Barbara events as a member of the 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery.

"It's heartening to see so many people taking an

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Lt. Col. Steven Sherrod emcees the Ancient Order of St. Barbara Award presentation as Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, deputy adjutant general for Army, stands ready.

Inaugural celebration fosters esprit de corps

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interest and pride in their service,” Trest said. “We like that we’re sharing that kind of tradition with the other branches and rekindling that *esprit de corps* that we share in the field artillery with some of the other branches. As a former [military policeman], I didn’t even know we had a [patron] saint until rather recently.”

“It was super getting to know all the other branches of service,” said retired Command Sgt. Maj. Jim Yenchesky, noting that Saint Barbara celebrations tend to be more intimate settings as the participants know each other. “This was nice.”

State Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Shields declared the inaugural celebration an outstanding event.

“It helped take down some of the walls that have grown [between brigades] over the years,” Shields said. “I think, as time goes on, there will be more representation from the other branches.”

While field artillery boasted the largest participation in the inaugural event, Shields noted that the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team had already conducted events at the brigade and battalion level.

“With some predictability in the future, we could maximize the opportunity to use this venue to present awards,” he said.

Several Soldiers and some civilians received awards for distinction within various Army branches at the event:

Samuel Sharpe Award (Ordinance Corps) — Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Krueck;

St. Martin Award (Quartermaster Corps) — Sgt. 1st Class Colin Hackney and Staff Sgt. April R. Hicks;

St. Christopher Award (Transportation Corps) — Chief Warrant Officer 3 Patrick Watson II;

Order of the de Fleury Award (Engineer Corps) — Brig. Gen. Mark Michie and retired Col. James Lewis;

Order of the Dragon Award (Chemical Corps) — 1st Sgt. Jason Wiesner;

Thomas Knowlton Award (Military Intelligence Corps) — Staff Sgt. William

Baebler;

St. Michael Award (Aviation Corps) — retired 1st Sgt. Ted Corsi;

St. Maurice Award (Infantry Corps) — Col. George Rand, Maj. Daniel Walsh, Maj. Raymond Ripberg, Maj. Aaron Freund, Capt. Aaron Arntson, Capt. Nickolas Litchfield, Command Sgt. Maj. John Schiermeister;

Shield of Sparta Award (heroine of Infantry, spouse award) — Mrs. Susan Oakley;

Order of Mercury Award (Signal Corps) — Bronze Order: retired Master Sgt. David Owen, Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Donovan; Silver Order: Lt. Col. Jeffery Alston;

Nathan Towson Medallion (Finance Corps) — Col. Daniel Sailer, Lt. Col. Russell Miller;

St. Barbara Award (Field Artillery Corps)

1st Battalion, 426th Regional Training Institute: Sgt. 1st Class Craig Cook, Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Gehrett, Sgt. 1st Class David Mathes, Sgt. 1st Class George McConville;

1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery: Maj. Jeremy O’Leary, Capt. Matthew Mangerson, 1st Lt. John King, 1st Sgt. Adam Wallander, Sgt. 1st Class Michael Ihrcke, Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Thiele, Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Hamilton, Sgt. 1st Class Steven Schultz, Staff Sgt. Charles Robinson, Staff Sgt. Jesse Hansen;

1st Battalion, 120th Field Artillery: Capt. Jesse Losinsk, Master Sgt. Aaron Johnson, Sgt. 1st Class Derek West, Sgt. 1st Class Danny Dye, Staff Sgt. James Brow, Sgt. Angel Powell;

Headquarters, 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team: Sgt. 1st Class Franklin Barlow, Staff Sgt. Benjamin Van Auken;

Honorable Order of Molly Pitcher (for women who voluntarily contribute to field artillery) — Mrs. Amanda Slagle, Mrs. Robin Lemke, Staff Sgt. Nicole Mayberry;

Ancient Order of St. Barbara Award (Field Artillery Corps) — retired Brig. Gen. Dominic Cariello;

Brig. Gen. Bilo Award (Field Artillery Corps, National Guard) — Capt. Matthew Mangerson;

St. George Award (Armor Corps) — Capt. Jason Reiman. 

Sgt. Sean Huolihan contributed to this report.

[Story online](#)



Above, Col. Tim Lawson presents the St. George Award to Capt. Jason Reiman during the inaugural All Saints Celebration Feb. 22 at Warrens. Below, Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Hamilton is presented with the St. Barbara Award. Wisconsin National Guard photos by Sgt. Sean Huolihan



Fighter Wing launches fitness improvement program

Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti
115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

MADISON — Listen to the radio, watch a TV show or simply have a conversation with friends. Odds are the topic of weight loss will come up when New Year's resolutions are discussed.

Conversations between Airmen at the 115th Fighter Wing are a little different. Yes, they are still talking about exercising and eating right, but losing weight isn't their main objective — passing their physical fitness test is.

"I've always had a passion for fitness," said Tech. Sgt. Melanie McDonald, 115th FW Fitness Working Group organizer and coach. "I see a lot of PT failures and people struggling, so I got together with a couple others and we developed the Fitness Working Group to help each other succeed in our fitness goals."

McDonald joined forces with Master Sgt. Tina Johnson and Senior Master Sgt. Chris Lemke last October and started brainstorming ideas on how they would like to run the group. The 115th FW Fitness Working Group has been growing ever since.

"We're now up to nine active members and about 15 or 16 who've shown interest in the group," she said.

McDonald had an opportunity to discuss the group's ideas with Col. Jeffrey Wiegand, 115th FW commander.

"Col. Wiegand is supporting us 100 percent," McDonald said. "He's asked for us to come up with ideas and equipment we'll need to make this group successful. His vision is our vision."

In a recent commander's call, Wiegand mentioned how excited he is to see the Fitness Working Group implement the four pillars of resiliency — physical, mental, social and spiritual — which can help ensure Airmen enjoy a happy, healthy environment at the 115th FW.

The support the group has received from leadership has opened their eyes to numerous opportunities. They've

discussed a kickboxing class, running groups and even the possibility of a larger gym so Airmen can work out together.

This month, the Fitness Working Group produced their first newsletter called *Minuteman*. The newsletter was distributed via email to full-timers and leadership with the intent it be forwarded to the traditional Airmen. Issues of the publication will also be available on the [Truax Ticker](#).

"The goal of the group and our newsletter is to help people by educating them about fitness and overall wellness," McDonald said.

The newsletter will include articles, website suggestions and even healthy recipes to help Airmen at the 115th FW meet their personal goals and the requirements of the Air National Guard.

Staff Sgt. Jodi Gerth, 115th Medical Group, was featured in the January 2014 issue of *Minuteman* for her fitness accomplishments.

"Training was like a part-time job," Gerth said. "Trying to squeeze in training whenever I could was challenging, but totally worth it."

Gerth completed the IRONMAN in 2013 in less than 13 hours, exceeding the goal she set for herself.

The organizers of the 115th FW Fitness Working Group hope stories like Gerth's inspire Airmen to get active.

"Commanders are counseling Airmen on fitness failures and dates they need to be prepared to retest by," McDonald said. "We're here to help those Airmen pass their PT tests by providing support and guidance along the way."

"The sky's the limit." 

[Story online](#)

Tech. Sgt. Melanie McDonald, left, and 1st Lt. Angie Hellenbrand, members of the 115th Fighter Wing Fitness Working Group, work out together at the base gym on Truax Field in Madison Jan. 9. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti



Five honored at UW men's basketball game

Kelly Bradley

Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs

MADISON — Soldiers are often recognized for the military awards they receive, time in service or if they were injured during combat, but on Saturday Jan 18, five Wisconsin Army National Guard members were honored for their service in civilian life.

Lt. Col. Michael Murphy, Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Kuechenmeister, Sgt. Cassandra Kautzmann, Sgt. Michael Sentkowski and Sgt. Bradley Bartha were recognized at the UW-Wisconsin Men's Badger basketball game at the Kohl Center. Through the Wisconsin National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion, the five were nominated based on their civilian occupations and volunteer activities.

"It's really nice that they do this for us — it makes you feel good," Sentkowski said. "I can tell a lot of work goes into this." Before the game started, Sentkowski even received a silent hug from a random Badger fan walking by.

All were brought to center court before the start of the game and each received a game ball as honorary captains. The announcer spoke a little about each Soldier and the crowd responded with loud cheers and applause.

"It's great that [our commanders] care about what we do outside of the military," Kautzmann said. "It's nice someone pays attention."

Kautzmann is a member of Company D, 132nd Brigade Support Battalion, where she was the 2013 Battalion Soldier of the Year. In her civilian life Kautzmann volunteers with Habitat for Humanity in Southeast Wisconsin and studies political science and sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. She has been selected for a study-abroad trip to Mexico where she will do research on indigenous populations.



Five Soldiers with the Army National Guard pose with Bucky Jan. 18 at the Kohl Center before being recognized center-court as part of a military appreciation game. (From left to right), Staff Sgts. Bradley Bartha, Cassandra Kautzmann, and Michael Sentkowski, Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Kuechenmeister

Currently working as a member of the Wisconsin National Guard Mobilization Training and Assistance Element and as a howitzer gunner with Battery B, 120th Field Artillery Battalion out of Stevens Point, Wis., Sentkowski is an active community member — planning parades and bowling tournaments with the American Legion, coaching his T-ball team, and is an active member of his local Lions Club.

Bartha was selected to represent the 32nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion in the Noncommissioned Officer of the Year Competition in 2013. In his civilian life he is active in many volunteer activities working with numerous military veteran

groups, coordinates veteran participation in the Fourth of July Parade for the towns of Wausau and Merrill, runs Bingo at a nursing home for the residents and families of veterans, and is an active member of the Men of Honor Society in Marathon County.

Kuechenmeister currently serves with the Recruiting and Retention Battalion in Madison as the battalion supply sergeant. Kuechenmeister has been a volunteer fireman and first responder for 16 years with the Chippewa Fire District and the Luck Fire Department. He also coaches for the Frederic varsity baseball team and middle school football team with his time away from the National Guard.

and Lt. Col. Michael Murphy were recognized for excellent military service and community involvement. Recruiters were also on hand prior to the game to pass out 2,500 camouflage Wisconsin Badgers hats. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

In his role as a Soldier, Murphy is the commander of the 2nd Modular Battalion in the 426th Regimental Training Institute at the Wisconsin Military Academy. In his civilian occupation he is the director of the Wisconsin Challenge Academy at Fort McCoy. The Wisconsin Challenge Academy mentors at-risk youth throughout Wisconsin and provides them a second chance at success after high school.

The Soldiers were allowed to bring a guest and given seats to watch the game.

"It is a great honor to be here to represent the military," Murphy said. 🇺🇸

[Story online](#)



Honoring hometown heroes

Staff Sgt. Ryan Roth
115th Fighter Wing

VOLK FIELD — More than 90 Airmen were honored as Hometown Heroes in a Jan. 4 ceremony at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center (CRTC) in front of their families, peers, senior Wisconsin National Guard leaders and local officials.

“These Airmen took time away from their families and work. Each of you being recognized has earned the right to be called a Hometown Hero,” said Col. David Romuald, Volk Field CRTC commander.

The National Guard Hometown Heroes Salute

program recognized Airmen who have deployed in support of Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom for more than 30 days.

Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, brought perspective to the sacrifices of National Guard members as he commented on a long history of excellence.

“In the over 377 years of the National Guard, men and women of the Guard have believed in their mission, defended their community and have been ready to help out when needed,” Dunbar said. “This Hometown Heroes event is your community and your nation saying, ‘Thank you.’”

An Airman admires the award he received during a Hometown Hero Awards ceremony at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, Volk Field Jan. 4. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti

Staff Sgt. Travis Anderson, ground radar systems technician at Volk Field CRTC, deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and was one of many recognized Sunday.

“It is nice to have this appreciation, especially for our families who support us,” Anderson said.

Anderson plans to give his awards to his wife and two daughters as a sign of his appreciation for their support of him.

“We thank you and salute you for all you have accomplished for your country,” Dunbar said. 🇺🇸

[Story online](#)

broken wing



Clockwise, from left: Airman 1st Class Ethan Moffitt, 115th Maintenance Squadron fuel systems mechanic, removes a bolt on an F-16 Fighting Falcon at the 115th Fighter Wing April 5. Once the bolts are removed, Moffitt observes as the wing is strapped to a cart for safe removal. The wing was removed because it failed inspection, and was replaced by a brand new wing. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti



Meritorious Service

Adjutant General chairs National Governor's advisory council

Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, has been named chairman of the National Governors Association Homeland Security Advisory Council (GHSAC).

"It's a privilege to serve as Gov. Walker's Homeland Security Advisor, which complements my responsibilities commanding the Wisconsin National Guard and leading Wisconsin Emergency Management," Dunbar said. "The GHSAC is a diverse group of professionals who represent the nation's governors in the Homeland Security enterprise. I am honored to serve as the chair and to work these difficult issues alongside my colleagues in collaboration with federal and local agencies and the private sector."

The advisory council, formed in 2006, provides a platform for homeland security advisors from each state, territory and Washington, D.C., to discuss and share homeland security information and to keep governors informed of issues impacting homeland security policies at the state or territory level. It meets twice each year — once in Washington, D.C., and once in a select state — and convenes every two weeks via conference call.

Seven operating committees focus on the following homeland security issues: border security, immigration and personal identification; catastrophic planning and preparedness; critical infrastructure protection; grants and funding; information sharing and analysis; information technology, cyber-security and secure communications; and interoperability.

The advisory council works directly with federal agencies pertaining to the development of homeland security policies and strategies impacting states, and through the National Governors Association ensures that the collective voice of state homeland security officials is heard on Capitol Hill.

An eight-member executive committee



Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar

leads the advisory council. Four members are chosen by the National Governors Association leadership, and four are selected by the council membership at large. The executive committee in turn elects the chair and vice-chair.

Dunbar has served on the executive committee since 2010. 

[Story online](#)

Wisconsin Guard members recognized for PA work

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue, a member of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing based in Madison, Wis., was named the U.S. Air Force's Military Broadcast Journalist of the Year in the 56th annual Air Force Media Contest.

LaDue, currently on assignment as news director and combat correspondent with the Air National Guard's [Training and Education Center's](#) Media and



Tech Sgt. Jon LaDue of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing, seen here during his 2013 deployment. Wisconsin National Guard file photo

Engagement Division at McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base near Knoxville, Tenn., also took second place in the Television News Report category for a [broadcast story](#) he produced during a 2013 deployment about a joint health program between the United States and Uganda.

"Honestly, these awards provide a great amount of personal pride and satisfaction to me because they represent a time in my life where I worked hard to excel, both personally and professionally," LaDue said. "At the same time, I almost feel guilty for being recognized for serving a public affairs mission that I'm so passionate about."

LaDue credited his leaders and peers in the 115th Fighter Wing, Wisconsin National Guard and the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa for helping him succeed. He described his recent deployment as a humbling yet proud experience.

"Helping to tell the Air National Guard and Air Force story has become more like a hobby than a job, and I'm so thankful for that," he said.

"This is a tremendous honor, and I am very proud of Tech. Sgt. LaDue," said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general. "I am greatly pleased that the Air Force has discovered what we've known here in Wisconsin for some time — Tech.

Sgt. LaDue knows how to tell a story."

The [Air Force Media Contest](#) is a public affairs competition for active duty, National Guard, Reserve and Air Force civilians. The competition is sponsored by the Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs Office and administered by the Air Force Public Affairs Agency. The purpose of the competition is to stimulate and reward excellence and professionalism in the military public affairs field.

LaDue was judged against the top military broadcast journalists from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard in the Department of Defense Thomas Jefferson Awards. While he did not win the Thomas Jefferson, he remains one of the top five in the Department of Defense for his category.

The Wisconsin National Guard's official publication, [@ease](#), earned a first-place award in the National Guard Bureau Media Contest. That marks the fifth straight year the web-based publication has received top honors from National Guard judges, and the fourth consecutive first-place finish.

"This is obviously a great honor, and a tremendous validation from our professional peers in the public affairs field," said Maj. Paul Rickert, public affairs director for the Wisconsin National Guard. "A publication like this is not an individual effort — it's really like a collective exercise, where everyone contributes to the final product. This award is possible because of the skills of our Soldiers and Airmen who tell the story of the Wisconsin National Guard."

Dunbar expressed his pleasure at the news.

"This national recognition is a substantial achievement," he said. "Without a doubt this reflects directly on the great work of our public affairs professionals — both Soldiers and Airmen — and the execution in our Public Affairs Office. It would be impossible to execute our mission without effective communications. I couldn't be prouder of this team." 

Two Wisconsin Air National Guard members vie for national honors in 2014 Air Force Outstanding Airman competition

Two senior Airmen from the Wisconsin Air National Guard — Master Sgt. Linda Schwartzlow of the 128th Air Control Squadron and Master Sgt. David Coker of the 128th Air Refueling Wing — have been named the top first sergeant and honor guard manager, respectively, in the entire Air National Guard, and will compete against their peers for the 2014 U.S. Air Force Outstanding First Sergeant and Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Annual Honor Guard of the Year.

This is the second consecutive year that Wisconsin has produced the top first sergeant in the entire Air National Guard.

Schwartzlow and Coker were among six Airmen honored as Wisconsin's Outstanding Airman of the Year. The other state winners include Airman 1st Class Jonathan Vargas of the 128th Air Refueling Wing, Airman of the Year; Tech. Sgt. Scott Daentl of Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, Noncommissioned Officer of the Year; Master Sgt. Christian Schweitzer of the 115th Fighter Wing, Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year; and Senior Master Sgt. Patricia Gross, Honor Guard Member.

According to Chief Master Sgt. Gregory Cullen, the Wisconsin Air National Guard's top enlisted member, the six were selected based on their achievements during the 2013 calendar year — including their primary job accomplishments, self-improvement, community service, physical fitness and a records review. The candidates also wrote about being a professional in the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

A five-member panel of chief master sergeants reviewed each Outstanding Airman packet individually. A tally of independent scores determined the state winners.

Daentl, of Bloomington, works at the Hardwood Gunnery Range as an equipment operator, wildland firefighter and target maintainer. He has nearly 10 years in the Wisconsin Air National Guard, and an additional 10 years in the Wisconsin Army National Guard.



Master Sgt. Linda Schwartzlow, Air National Guard 2014 First Sergeant of the Year

He called his selection an honor and a pleasure.

"Very few Airmen are given this opportunity to represent their peers," he said. "It is my intent to be the very best representative."

[Schweitzer](#), of Rio, is a fuel operations section chief at the 115th Fighter Wing. He has been in the Wisconsin Air National Guard since August 2009.

"It feels good to be recognized for my contributions to my unit, and motivates me to keep on growing and working hard," Schweitzer said. "I believe there are many other highly qualified Airmen that could represent the Wisconsin Air National Guard in my category, so I am honored to be nominated and selected."

Schweitzer also thanked his coworkers, supervisor, command leadership and his local community for their support.

Gross, of Milwaukee, is the noncommissioned officer in charge of the commander's support staff at the Combat Readiness Training Center. She



Master Sgt. David Coker, Air National Guard 2014 Honor Guard Program Manager of the Year

has just over 24 years in the Wisconsin Air National Guard, but is a relatively new member of the Volk Field Honor Guard.

"I have learned and trained from the best," she said. "[They] are among the most sharp and patriotic Airmen I have served with. I believe the entire team deserves this award — definitely not just me."

Gross said her selection is one more reminder of why the Air National Guard is an amazing career. Who gets awards for attending veterans funerals, posting the U.S. flag, or folding the flag for a service member's retirement ceremony? she asked.

"Although it is an honor to have been selected for this award, I feel proud and honored to have the opportunity to be on the Honor Guard team," Gross said.

Schwartzlow, of Holmen, has been a Wisconsin Air National Guard member for 15 years. She said she was "taken aback" by her selection as the Wisconsin Air National Guard's First Sergeant of the Year.

"All the first sergeants in the state are



Airman 1st Class Jonathan Vargas, Wisconsin Air National Guard 2014 Airman of the Year



Tech. Sgt. Scott Daentl, Wisconsin Air National Guard 2014 Noncommissioned Officer of the Year



Master Sgt. Christian Schweitzer, Wisconsin Air National Guard 2014 Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year



Senior Master Sgt. Patricia Gross, Wisconsin Air National Guard 2014 Honor Guard Member of the Year

dedicated and committed professionals," she said. "Each have unique qualities and qualifications that set them apart from their peers, and to be selected from amongst this group — I am astonished and honored."

The Wisconsin Air National Guard has had recent success at the national level, with [Senior Master Sgt. Mike Schmalig](#) and [Senior Master Sgt. Jessica Maple](#) being named the Air National Guard First Sergeant of the Year in 2013 and Air National Guard Senior NCO of the Year in 2010, respectively. 📷



Capt. Matthew Mangerson, commander of Battery B, 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery, accepted the 2013 Alexander Hamilton Award for the top National Guard artillery unit during a Jan. 29 ceremony. With Mangerson are Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Moriarty, senior enlisted advisor for the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Okla., left, and Brig. Gen. Glen Moore, deputy commanding general at the Fires Center of Excellence, right. Arkansas National Guard photo by Capt. Barry Eason

Battery B honored as National Guard's best artillery battery

The Plymouth-based Battery B, 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery — also known as the Bravo Barracudas — received the 2013 Hamilton Alexander Award during a Jan. 29 ceremony at the National Guard Professional Education Center in North Little Rock, Ark.

The Alexander Hamilton Award recognizes the year's outstanding National Guard field artillery battery for superb mission accomplishment and overall unit excellence.

"It was an honor to receive the award, and it was nice to be recognized by your peers," said Capt. Matthew Mangerson, Battery B commander, who accepted the award on behalf of the unit. "It means something to have the unit recognized at that level — not just for the battery but for our battalion and for the state of Wisconsin."

Battery B was selected for being the first National Guard unit in the nation to fire the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) in combat during the unit's 2013 deployment to Afghanistan. Previously, only active duty HIMARS

units saw combat.

The professionalism and expertise Battery B demonstrated during their deployment quickly earned the respect and trust of the Special Operations Task Force they supported.

That proficiency as a HIMARS unit played a role in Battery B's selection for the deployment. They developed an aggressive, deliberate and resourceful training plan that is being used for future deploying National Guard HIMARS batteries.

"The selection of Bravo Battery for the Alexander Hamilton award is just another indication of the quality and caliber of the professional Red Legs in the state of Wisconsin, but specifically this unit," said Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, a field artillery officer himself and also deputy adjutant general for Army. "Bravo Battery just recently returned from a historic deployment to Afghanistan functioning as it should — a field artillery battery providing support to forces on the battlefield — and they completed that mission in an exemplary fashion." 

[Story online](#)



Hardwood homecoming for Wisconsin Airman

1st. Lt. Nathan Wallin, a member of the 128th Air Refueling Wing at the time of this photo, was honored at a March 1 Hardwood Homecoming event for service members returning from deployment, sponsored by the Milwaukee Bucks and Waukesha Metal Products. Submitted photo

Veterans, Families, Retirees

VetCon to focus on employment, services

VetCon: A Veteran Employment and Services Conference will take place Saturday, May 10 at the Wisconsin Center in Milwaukee. *VetCon* — presented in partnership with Hiring our Heroes, the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), and the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) — is a conference for veterans and employers who seek to hire veterans that will include a career fair, a benefits expo, workshops such as financial planning and resume writing, as well as provide access to educational and other resources.

Veterans and employers are invited to kick-off the daylong conference at a breakfast. Gov. Scott Walker is the invited keynote speaker. Awards will be presented to employers who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to employ veterans.

“Our service members have dedicated their time and talents to serve our country, and it is our duty to assist them with a smooth transition back into their communities and families,” Walker said. “As a state and as a country we must do all we can to provide veterans with access to the resources they need to be successful, and *VetCon* is one way we can do that while also saying thank you to the men and women who have served our country.”

Veterans can expect to have access to about 150 employers at the career fair. Over the past four years, the WDVA has partnered with various agencies and organizations such as DWD and Hiring Our Heroes to host 67 veteran career fairs statewide, serving nearly 14,000 veterans. Last year alone, over 4,000 veterans and spouses attended these career fairs, many receiving a job offer or a follow-up job interview. Of those who completed a follow up survey about their career fair experience, 55 percent had received a job

offer or follow-up interview.

At the benefits fair, veterans will have access to information such as education and health benefits, claims, service opportunities, as well as information about Wisconsin’s veterans homes, among other resources. In addition, workshops will be provided by the partners and other experts such areas as resume writing, financial planning, interviewing techniques and starting businesses. Finally, panel discussions will take place to help veterans understand education options available to them while maximizing their education benefits and to help businesses and organizations improve efforts to recruit and hire veterans.

“This is a continuation of the excellent partnership we have with Secretary John Scocos from the Department of Veterans Affairs and Secretary Reggie Newson from the Department of Workforce Development,” said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general. “This event helps support our veterans by connecting them directly with employers and showcases the knowledge, capability and leadership our service members bring to the civilian workforce.”

The full schedule of activities and more information about *VetCon*, as well as registration for veterans wishing to attend can be found at www.WisVets.com.

Retiree Activities Office continues to serve

The Retiree Activities Office (RAO) is located in the Office of The Adjutant General at 2400 Wright Street, Room 160, Madison, Wis., 53704. The office is open Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7:30-11:30 a.m., except on holidays.

Our phone number is (608) 242-3115, our toll free number is 1-800-335-5147, ext 3115; DSN number is 724-3115. If you call at a time when the office is closed, please leave a message on our



voice mail. Please be sure to leave your name and phone number. Our e-mail address is: widma.retiree@wisconsin.gov The RAO mission is to act as an interface between the active duty and retired communities, keep retirees and widows of retirees (all ranks and services) informed on matters related to their military status, provide appropriate information and services as necessary including TRICARE, Military ID Cards, Survivor Benefits, Death Reporting and more. The RAO also maintains a list of toll-free phone numbers, Web sites and e-mail addresses for additional information.

Changes to Tricare Prime Care service areas

On Oct. 1, 2013, some beneficiaries lost TRICARE Prime when the [Prime Service Areas \(PSAs\)](#) changed. A new rule allows them to continue their TRICARE Prime enrollment.

Am I eligible?

You’re eligible if:

1. You were disenrolled because your Prime Service Area was eliminated
 2. You live within 100 miles of a military hospital or clinic
- You’ll get a letter explaining this one-time opportunity and your next steps if you meet both conditions.

What does continued enrollment mean?

- You’ll get a new primary care manager from a remaining Prime Service Area
- Your enrollment is retroactive to Oct. 1, 2013
- Any claims processed under TRICARE Standard will be reprocessed under TRICARE Prime

What are my next steps?

To take advantage of this one-time opportunity to continue your enrollment:

- [Re-enroll in TRICARE Prime](#) with your regional contractor.
- Include your payment of enrollment fees back to Oct. 1, 2013.
- Complete Section V of the enrollment form to waive your drive-time standards.
 - Check the box
 - Complete blocks 1, 2, & 3
- The form and payment must be received by June 30, 2014.

You should call your [regional contractor](#) first to:

- Get help getting a new PCM
- Confirm your enrollment fee back-payment amount
- Re-establish your automatic payment

Things to Consider

Before you make your decision, know that:

- You probably won’t have the same PCM that you had before.
- You may have to drive farther to get primary and specialty care.

Inaugural Military, Veterans Conference set

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Continuing Education will host the inaugural Military and Veterans Populations Conference: Building Bridges and Connecting Lives May 21-22.

Local experts will conduct workshops to increase awareness of the needs of military and veteran populations and their families, enhance services for those populations, and build partnerships.

The conference is open to anyone who works with or has contacts with military and veteran populations. For more information, contact Pa Vang at pa@uwm.edu or Andrea Zweifel at andrea@uwm.edu.

Parting shot



Aeromedical technicians with the 775th Expeditionary Aeromedical Evacuation Flight conduct in-flight training Jan. 15 aboard a KC-135 Stratotanker from the 128th Air Refueling Wing. The EAEF integrated with the 128th ARW for a double AE mission Jan. 12-20. 128th Air Refueling Wing photo by Tech. Sgt. James Michaels