

@ease *Express*

Business leaders gain appreciation for Guard mission

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue
Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs

With monthly and annual training dates to serve, schools to attend, professional development to fulfill and the never-ending opportunity to serve overseas, being a Citizen Soldier or Airman in the National Guard can be demanding.

Aside from the service members and their families, perhaps no one realizes these demands more than employers of National Guardsmen.

More than 60 civic and business leaders from seven Midwestern states took a trip to Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center Aug. 19-21 as part of Business and Industry Days, sponsored by the National Guard Bureau.

Many of the leaders walked away from the event with not only a better understanding of National Guard training, but a deeper appreciation for the skills that training provides.

"I came here not knowing what to expect," said Gary Carter, nuclear facility engineer at Michigan's Detroit Edison Energy.

"I never realized how the National Guard is so well prepared to serve our communities ... you just don't see that on the daily news too much."

Establishing positive relationships with employers is important to service members



Civic leaders from seven Midwestern states attending the National Guard Bureau-sponsored Business and Industry Days watch demonstrations of the Air National Guard's chemical war defensive capabilities at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center Aug. 20. The two-day event is designed to give business and industry leaders a better understanding of the Citizen Soldier and Airmen that are employed in their respective states. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Ashley Bell

because it helps to minimize the stress that sometimes comes with balancing military and civilian life.

Col. Gary Ebben, Volk Field commander, said hosting Business and Industry Days provides a great location with wide-scale opportunities to see the varied training the Soldiers and Airmen are expected to undergo.

"It better educates our industry partners on the training their [Guardsmen] get so that when we ask to use them to deploy, they understand what it is they're getting back in return, in terms of leadership development and those types of skills," said Ebben.

Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt III, director of the Air National Guard, emphasized the importance of both sides coming together so the mission gets accomplished and

Guardsmen aren't forced to choose between their civilian and military lives.

"It's all for this unity of effort that you are here," said Wyatt. "We need to work together, for us to learn more about what you do, and hopefully for you to learn more about what we do."

Business and Industry Days events are usually held two times a year. For Carter, two times a year is perhaps not enough.

"I'm really encouraged by what I've seen here today," he said. "I'm just thinking it's too bad that you can't have more employers come through this Business and Industry Days, because it's really an eye-opener." ☞

Read the entire story at
<http://dma.wi.gov/dma/news/2009news/09092.asp>



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From the TAG

A culture of Preparedness. This summarizes much of our culture as Soldiers and Airmen. We, as warriors, prepare for our state and federal missions, and we stand our ground to prevent a bad situation from getting worse.

This month we have two opportunities to do both.

September is Preparedness Month when we place special emphasis on having a plan in case of an emergency. For National Guard members this goes beyond lacing up your boots and reporting for duty. Last year we mandated that all National Guard members have an emergency plan and a kit at home. Your unit training representatives will be reviewing this requirement and advising on how best to complete it for those new to the National Guard.

September also includes Suicide Awareness Week. This past year has been one of extraordinary loss as we have sustained a record number of suicides in our Army. We have responded with improved training and heightened awareness regarding suicide in the service. The Army National Guard is placing special emphasis on prevention this month, and this is an issue I take very seriously. There is not a single member of the Wisconsin National Guard that is expendable, not a single Soldier or Airmen that I can do without. There is no problem so great that cannot be solved if we work together. There is no shame in seeking help. If you see that your battle buddy or wingman needs help, step in and get involved. This goes for your families too – you are part of our family and we are here for you.

You are the most important asset that we have – we simply can not accomplish our mission without you. Losing you would leave a hole and a permanent wound. Losing you to suicide would be unacceptable and unbearable.



Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar
The Adjutant General

The Wisconsin National Guard continues to make its presence felt around the world. The 951st Engineer Company is still clearing the dangerous roads of Afghanistan, and a handful of Wisconsin Guard Soldiers played a key role in the recent Afghan presidential elections. The 115th Fighter Wing is preparing for another deployment to Iraq, and Volk Field hosted a National Guard Bureau event for business and industry leaders. The 128th ACS is performing brilliantly in theater and our 128th ARW is just returning from service for OIF and OEF. Lastly, but certainly not least, the 732nd CSSB is providing tremendous support in theater and our 32nd IBCT continues the difficult work of helping to transition key tenets of government and support to the nation of Iraq.

As always, the Wisconsin National Guard is Always Ready, Always There. We are fully accessible.

I am proud to represent such a fine organization. Carry on.



no Soldier walks alone

The Wisconsin National Guard is observing National Suicide Awareness Week, Sept. 2-8, as part of its overall fight to prevent suicide.

"There is not a single member of the Wisconsin National Guard that is expendable, not a single Soldier or Airmen that I can do without," said Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar, the adjutant general of Wisconsin. "This is a topic I take very seriously.

"There is no problem so great that cannot be solved if we work together," he continued. "There is no shame in seeking help. If you see that your battle buddy or wingman needs help, step in and get involved. This goes for your families too — you are part of our family and we are here for you."

While suicide prevention briefs have always been a part of the Soldier's and Airmen's annual mandatory training, military leaders are working even harder to educate the troops and their families, said Staff Sgt.

Dana Cowell, the Wisconsin Army National Guard's suicide prevention coordinator. Military suicides surpassed the general population's suicide rate for the first time this year and confirmed and attempted suicides among Soldiers last year rose to their highest number since records were first kept in 1980.

"Suicide deaths are preventable," said Maj. Gen. Raymond Carpenter, acting director for the Army National Guard. "As leaders and Soldiers, we must focus attention on providing solutions to reduce this trend and to save lives."

That's why the Army National Guard is currently requiring all Soldiers to complete a three-phase suicide prevention program. Phase one uses an interactive video to facilitate real-life scenario role playing. Phase two involves a 12-minute video, "Shoulder to Shoulder," along with a discussion between first-line leaders and their soldiers. Phase three is an ongoing effort, based on annual suicide prevention briefings as well as deployment support for soldiers and their families.

Cowell said the Wisconsin National Guard is diligently building on the Army Guard's program to include making

education and behavioral health counselors available to all Wisconsin service members and their families through the Service Member

Support Division. The Guard also hosts relationship-strengthening weekends for single and married service members and partner with organizations such as Military One Source and state and federal department of veteran's affairs to make resources available and accessible to anyone who needs them.

According to statistics compiled by the National Guard Bureau, Guard members may be at higher risk of suicide due to perceived lack of access to care and numerous tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, Cowell pointed out that failed relationships and financial problems were the leading causes of suicide among Soldiers. Even more striking, she said, was the fact that 60 percent of suicides in the Guard were committed by Soldiers who had never deployed.

"We have to look at the Guard as a whole," she said, speaking of the concept of a "comprehensively fit service member" that emphasizes physical, emotional, spiritual, social and family fitness.

Both Cowell and Maj. Douglas Hedman, state chaplain for the Wisconsin National Guard, stressed the importance of service members and their families looking out for each other.

"We have to have each others' back," Cowell said.

"The National Guard is a family, and we take care of our people," Hedman said. By paying attention to other members and asking how they are doing, he said problems that might lead to suicide can be detected early and addressed.

"I am glad that we are willing to talk about suicide and break down the stigma that has been associated with getting help," Hedman said.

Cowell said the loss of one Soldier is one too many.

Dunbar agreed. "You [Soldiers and Airmen] are the most important asset that we have — we simply cannot accomplish our mission without you. Losing you would leave a hole and a permanent wound. Losing you to suicide would be unacceptable and unbearable."

Throughout the month of September individual units in the Wisconsin Guard will display informational materials and posters directing members to different resources, in a continued effort to educate and save lives. Multiple resources are also available online at: <http://www.wisconsinmilitary.org/suicide-prevention>



Chief Master Sgt. Teddy Ostrowski, 71st Expeditionary Air Control Squadron maintenance superintendent, is deployed alongside his son, Airman 1st Class Teddy Ostrowski Jr., 71 EACS communications-computer systems operations apprentice. Both are deployed from the Wisconsin Air National Guard in support of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason W. Edwards

All in the family: Father, son deploy together

Airman 1st Class David Dobrydney
379th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

For two Airmen assigned to the Wisconsin Air National Guard, supporting Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom is a family affair.

Chief Master Sgt. Teddy Ostrowski and his son, Airman 1st Class Teddy Ostrowski Jr., are deployed from the 128th Air Control Squadron, Volk Field, to the 71st Expeditionary Air Combat Squadron. As members of the Wisconsin Air National Guard, the Ostrowskis have worked together for the past two years during weekend drills, but this is their first deployment together.

Despite being in the same unit, Chief Ostrowski works during the day and Airman Ostrowski at night. They admit they usually only see each other during shift changes.

"We really don't see each other as much as one might think," said Chief Ostrowski, a native of Tomah. "We had been working here for a little over two months before we actually got together one night for a cold cappuccino when it was [my son's] night off. We spent about an hour and a half talking about things from back home, like possibly going to Wyoming next year on an antelope and deer hunt."

Regardless of not having a lot of time off together, Airman Ostrowski, a native of La Crosse, said the deployment has actually allowed him to see his father more.

"Back at home, I am a full-time student and live about 45 minutes away from my parents," said Airman Ostrowski. "Here, I get to see [my dad] every day." ☺

Read the entire story at

<http://dma.wi.gov/dma/news/2009News/09087.asp>

Wisconsin Airmen secure critical air base

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs

The 31 Wisconsin National Guard Airmen deployed from the 115th Security Forces Squadron have integrated with their deployed counterparts and provided a smooth transition for operations as part of the 376th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron at the Transit Center at Manas, Kyrgyz Republic.

"We play a direct role in securing base personnel, coalition forces and resources here," said Capt. John Wheeler. "We will have an excellent opportunity to leave a lasting and positive legacy for the future and any challenges that lay ahead."

The Transit Center at Manas is a vital air mobility hub for resources, including personnel and equipment, to enter and exit Afghanistan. The base also supports aerial refueling, combat airlift and airdrop, aeromedical evacuation and strategic airlift missions. With such a large array of support functions at the air base, maintaining security and stability is critical.

"The 115th SFS troops are performing at a very high level," Wheeler said. "I am very proud of our men and women and for good reason. They have proven



Tech. Sgt. Joe Klich, Staff Sgt. Nate Silvers, Staff Sgt. Jon Emmerich, Senior Airman Jonathon Jaeger and Staff Sgt. Michael Alvareaz, members of the 376th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron, stand in formation at Transit Center at Manas, Kyrgyz Republic. These five members are joined by 26 of their Madison-based counterparts, from the 115th Fighter Wing, in providing perimeter and flight line defense at the base until their return home early next year. Submitted photo

to be very fast studies of their jobs and are ready to pass that knowledge on to the second and third rotations coming in behind them."

In addition to securing the air base and playing an integral role in personal security operations, the Madison-based Airmen also support humanitarian objectives and work to maintain the positive relationship with the Kyrgyz Republic.

The security forces Airmen visit a local village school every couple of

weeks and help with construction projects and other humanitarian services.

"Our work with the local village can undoubtedly add to our relationship with the host nation," Wheeler said.

The members assigned to the coalition air base serve as a joint force, encompassing more than 1,000 service members and 650 defense contractors from the U.S., Spain and France. ☺

Senior Airman Steele C G Britton, 376th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs, contributed to this report.

115th Fighter Wing deploying to support OIF

More than 200 Airmen from the 115th Fighter Wing are preparing for their deployment to Iraq late next month in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The 115th will deploy its aviation package, which includes a number of F-16 Fighting Falcons as well as pilots, aircraft maintenance specialists and support personnel as part of their scheduled Air Expeditionary Force rotation. Their mission is to support ground forces in Iraq with close air support or other combat capabilities directed by the combatant commander.

The 115th will pair up with Airmen from the Iowa National Guard's 132nd Fighter Wing, Des Moines, to help cover the scheduled 90-day deployment.



A Wisconsin Air National Guard F-16C Fighter Falcon Aircraft performs an afterburner takeoff on its way to fly a combat mission in the skies over Iraq during a deployment in early 2008. The 115th is preparing to return to Iraq for a 90-day deployment. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Daniel Richardson

The unit last deployed its aviation package in January 2008, also to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 115th Fighter Wing currently has 45

Airmen deployed to various locations around the world providing expeditionary combat support in support of OIF and Operation Enduring Freedom. 

Embedded trainers ready to move beyond Afghan elections

Sgt. 1st Class Vaughn R. Larson
Wisconsin Army National Guard

As the votes are tallied from the Aug. 20 presidential election in Afghanistan, the winner appears to be the democratic process.

"All reports leading up [to election day] certainly indicated it was going to be a much worse day than actually happened," said Col. Tim Lawson, who leads a 16-man group of Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers serving a year-long deployment as an embedded training team. "They had a higher turnout than expected and much less violence than we expected. At the end of the day it was a victory."

Lawson's team's mission is to advise the Afghan National Police in the western regional command, an area roughly 25 percent of the country bordering Iran. Much of the recent emphasis has been to ensure the elections were not disrupted by anti-government forces.

"I was biting my nails up to election day," Lawson admitted.

Concerns ranged from the difficulties in making a polling place secure to reconcile the differences in standards between U.S. forces and Afghan police. Because an "Afghan face" was wanted for the elections, Lawson said his troops remained in their compounds while the Afghan National Police, Border Police and the Afghan Army provided security.

Some polling places were moved at the last minute to nearby locations, and a few polling sites in the west experienced disruptions, but Lawson said these did not greatly affect the outcome. He noted that local authorities also made arrests prior to Aug. 20, which appeared to have



Wisconsin Army National Guard Col. Tim Lawson and Afghan National Police Maj. Gen. Sayed Ekramudin man the phones during the Aug. 20 presidential elections in Afghanistan, while Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Chavez, Lt. Col. Galen White, Lt. Col. Richard Borkowski and an interpreter wait in Ekramudin's office. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo

worked to reduce violence at the polls.

"They planned it and executed it," Lawson said. "I underestimated them — a lot of people did."

Now that the elections are over — pending a runoff election, should President Hamid Karzai fail to receive 50.1 percent of the vote — the Wisconsin Guardsmen intend to resume their mentoring duties with the national police, focusing on leadership responsibilities, non-commissioned officer duties and logistics.

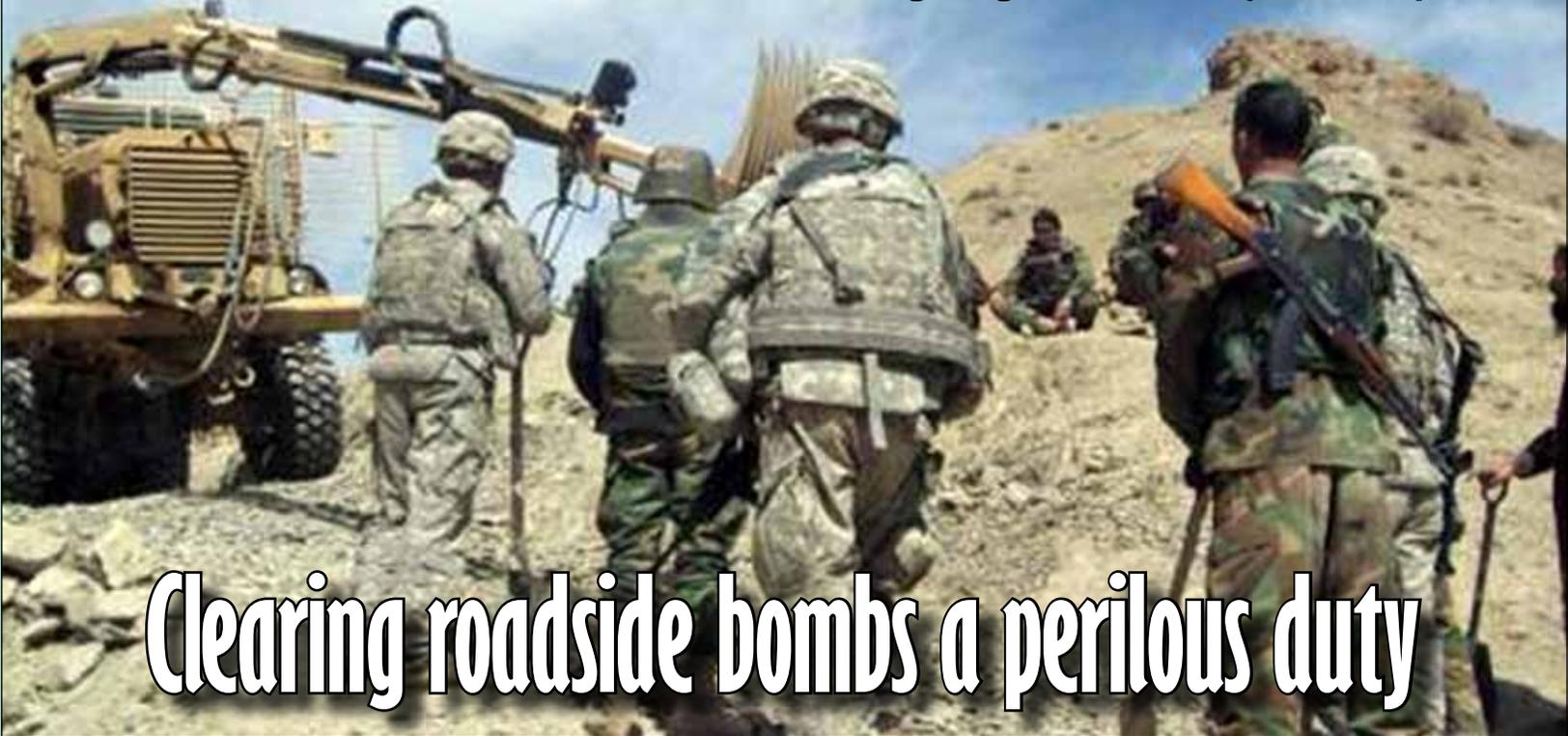
"We have plenty to do," Lawson said.

However, events are unfolding in theater that may change those plans.

Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division may assume the mission Wisconsin Soldiers are presently doing, and Lawson's troops may shift to the north or eastern quadrant of Afghanistan.

"There's some angst right now," he said. "Interesting times, but frustrating times."

Lawson indicated that his team is likely among the last small groups to deploy as advisors to Afghanistan. The Wisconsin Guardsmen serve alongside Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne and the 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the Georgia Army National Guard, as part of Coalition Task Force Phoenix. 



Clearing roadside bombs a perilous duty

Jessica Weinstein
Special to At Ease

WARDAK PROVINCE, Afghanistan — Members of the Wisconsin National Guard's 951st Engineer Company clutched cups of coffee and squinted into the early morning sun as Lt. Mark Bulinski, 28, and Sgt. First Class Chet Millard, 32, briefed on the day's mission: Find and disarm roadside bombs on one of Afghanistan's most lethal highways.

Known as Route Georgia, the 17-mile stretch of road flanked by lush apple orchards and open fields on one side and rugged cliffs on the other offers an ideal setup for insurgents, who lie in wait for coalition convoys before pulling the trigger on improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

In the past month, Route Georgia has become the ground zero of eastern Afghanistan for IEDs, the deadliest weapon used by insurgents to battle U.S. and NATO troops.

Maj. Gen. Mike Scaparrotti, who took charge of more than 24,000 NATO forces in eastern Afghanistan this spring, says that about 70 percent of the U.S. casualties in his region last month came from IEDs and that Wardak Province, just west of Kabul, had the most blasts at 42.

About two hours into the day's journey, the lead vehicle detected something suspicious, and Spc. Mike Booth, 22, who in civilian life works construction in Green Bay, maneuvered his large vehicle called a Buffalo for a closer look.

Staff Sgt. Daniel Burger, 35, from Wausau, then operated a giant robotic claw on the front of the vehicle to look for trip wires and explosives.

"They want me to find it quickly, but it just doesn't work that way," he said.

For two hours, the convoy stopped traffic while the team searched, first by machine, and later on foot, backing up traffic of colorful buses and trucks overflowing with bags of wheat. Before moving on, they found four mortar rounds rigged as IEDs and detonated them safely.

Three hours later, they came to another hole in the road and launched another search. An Afghan National Army unit had found part of a suspected IED, but they needed the coalition's help in extracting the rest. Staff Sgt. Burger found what he thought was a mortar round, but closer examination revealed an empty water bottle.

"If we're told a wire is in place, and we didn't thoroughly look

for it and something happened — I'd take it pretty hard," he said.

The convoy continued, and two hours later, the inevitable happened: An explosion ripped into the convoy's rear vehicle, twisting the axle and rolling it into a ditch. Luckily, everyone walked out safely from their Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle, or MRAP.

"It's like being at the top of a roller coaster, and you lurch forward, then start falling with no brakes," said Spc. Ryan Haring, 20, of Tomahawk, who was driving the stricken vehicle.

"It was the biggest I'd been in," added Sgt. John Johnson, 41, of Lac du Flambeau Reservation.

After hundreds of soldiers died in roadside bombings while riding Humvees in Iraq, the U.S. Army ordered the MRAPs. In Afghanistan, the MRAPs are not good in snow or rugged terrain, but they are saving lives until the coalition can develop and deploy all-terrain versions of the blast-resistant vehicles.

"We trust the vehicles," said Spc. Haring, "As long as we wear our helmets and seat belts, you don't move too much. The worst thing we have is rollovers."

The enemy is adapting here in the Tangi Valley — creating larger and larger roadside bombs. "They've gotten bigger," said Col. David B. Haight, commander of the Army's 3rd brigade, 10th Mountain Division, "They are several hundred pounds, some of them."

Maj. David Stevenson, executive officer of 287th Infantry, 3rd brigade, 10th Mountain Division, said he can see the psychological toll on Soldiers from almost daily IED attacks. "They never know when they're going to get hurt."

"I always expect to get hit," said Sgt. First Class Millard, "When we don't — it's a good day." Although the Wisconsin Guard unit completed the mission without casualties, it was not to be a good day for the coalition along Route Georgia.

Just a few hours after the Guard passed, another convoy got hit.

This time, the MRAP flipped over into a small river, killing 23-year-old Gunnery Sgt. Jerry Evans Jr. of Orlando, Fla., and shattering the legs of two other Soldiers. It happened at the same location where the Guard unit had earlier discovered and detonated its first IED of the day.

"The most common misconception is that once we clear a road — it stays clear," said Sgt. First Class Millard. "Once we lose visual sight of a route, it's no longer clear." ❧



A concrete “T” wall adorned with a logo for the 732nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion Headquarters Company is moved into place at Camp Adder Aug. 3. The wall was designed and painted by 1st Lt. Katie Berberich, 1st Lt. Megan Mladenovich and Pfc. Robert Anderson. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo

State Guard unit plays role in Iraq drawdown

CAMP ADDER, Iraq — The Tomah-based Headquarters Company of the 732nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, Wisconsin Army National Guard, has been in charge of their mission for less than a month, and already the unit is preparing for the drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq.

According to Maj. Kevin Gregar, executive officer for the 732nd CSSB, the battalion-sized element his unit oversees has already transferred approximately 110 pieces of equipment — vehicles, material handling equipment and storage containers — for return to the United States.

“We are gathering information to see how much equipment we need to support a responsible drawdown of troops,” Gregar said, explaining that transferring equipment brings both a sense

of accomplishment and relief. Less equipment also means less maintenance and less responsibility.

“It shows we’re making steps toward the goal,” he said.

Gregar said the 732nd is also refining some procedures to improve efficiency. For example, the 732nd has transferred its convoy security obligation to another National Guard battalion, and now focuses on loading, delivering and managing the supplies for southern Iraq.

“That requires more work from the units, but it helps us troubleshoot and be more proactive in supporting those companies,” Gregar said. “There are some challenges, but overall the subordinate units are happy with how we’re working together.” ☞

Wisconsin Army National Guard general gains fire mission

Since Aug. 1, the Fires Center of Excellence at Fort Sill, Okla. has had a Wisconsin connection.



Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson will “dual-hat” as Wisconsin’s deputy adjutant general for Army as well as the deputy commanding general-Army National Guard for the Fires Center of Excellence. Anderson will advise Maj. Gen. Peter Vangjel, Fires Center of Excellence commanding general, on field artillery

matters affecting fire brigades, regional training institutes and the Army National Guard. The Fires Center of Excellence includes both field artillery and air

defense artillery. Anderson will advise the commanding general alongside Brig. Gen. Ross Ridge, the commandant of the United States Field Artillery School located at Fort Sill, Okla.

“As a field artilleryman, Fort Sill is near and dear to my heart,” he explained.

Anderson began his career in the Wisconsin Army National Guard as a fire support officer with the 120th Field Artillery Battalion, and in time served as battalion commander. He also served as executive officer for the 57th Field Artillery Brigade, and completed artillery officer basic and advanced courses.

His primary responsibilities remain as deputy adjutant general, but Anderson estimated he would spend a minimum of 45 additional days with the Fires Center. Brig. Gen. Dominic Cariello and Col. Kevin Greenwood will stand in for Anderson at Joint Force Headquarters

while he is away. He sees the dual role as a unique opportunity.

“It’s an additional requirement of personal time, but it’s a tremendous personal growth opportunity for me and a chance to build relationships,” Anderson said. “I can support Wisconsin even when I’m out of state. I will not turn off my knowledge of Wisconsin.”

Master Sgt. James Ward, the field artillery subject matter expert for the National Guard Bureau and the chief field artillery instructor for Wisconsin’s Regional Training Institute, anticipates good things from Anderson’s tenure.

“I think he understands the whole transformation of the field artillery,” Ward said.

Ridge and Anderson visited Wisconsin’s Regional Training Institute in late August. ☞

Red Arrow Roundup

Meritorious service

State Soldier part of Best Warrior

A Wisconsin National Guard Soldier was among the best of the best competing for the Soldier of the Year award recently during the Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition at the Warrior Training Center, Fort Benning, Ga.



Spc. John Wiernasz, 950th Engineer Company, Spooner, earned his chance to compete at the national level after winning the state competition at Fort McCoy in March and the regional competition held at Camp Atterbury, Ind., in May. While he did not advance to next month's Department of the Army competition, his efforts still speak well of him and the Wisconsin Army National Guard.

"We are extremely proud of Spc. Wiernasz's accomplishment," said Wisconsin Army National Guard's Command Sgt. Maj.

George Stopper. "[He is] one of only seven Soldiers to make it to that level. Considering there are over 350,000 soldiers in the Army National Guard, this is a monumental accomplishment."

Command Sgt. Maj. Victor Angry, acting sergeant major of the Army Guard, described the competitors as "the best of the best from their states, their regions and of the Guard."

The competition encompassed three grueling days during which participants faced both physical and mental challenges on an average of three hours sleep per night. Soldiers were pushed to their limits with back-to-back events that included an obstacle course, rifle range, land navigation, questions on general military knowledge and a 12-mile ruck march in less than three hours. Command Sgt. Maj. Gregory Slater, sergeant major of the Warrior Training Center, shared with each Soldier and NCO the significance of even reaching this level.

"You've made it this far and that means you're already a cut above the rest," he said.

Stopper agreed.

"The Wisconsin Army National Guard has been represented well by this tremendous warrior, and we look forward to his future with us," Stopper said. "Great Soldiers grow into great leaders, and Spc. Wiernasz has shown his virtually unlimited potential."

Spc. Guy Mellor of the Utah Army National Guard and Sgt. Ryan Brubaker of the Montana Army National Guard were named the Army National Guard's Soldier and Noncommissioned Officer of the Year for 2009, respectively, on Aug. 13 during the annual conference of the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States.

Sgt. 1st Class Jon Soucy of the National Guard Bureau contributed to this report.

Military IDs can't be copied

Recent reports indicate that commercial establishments are photocopying military identification cards and common access cards (CAC) to verify military affiliation or to provide government rates. Photocopying military IDs violates Title 18, US Code Part I, Chapter 33, Section 701 and is punishable by both fine and prison. Many military members, family members and Department of Defense employees are unaware of this law. Commanders and supervisors are urged to ensure everyone in their organization receives this information.

For more information, go to <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/18/701.shtml>



Capt. Paul Gellerup, assigned to Headquarters Company, 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Camp Douglas, passes a water point in the 4-mile Jerabek Challenge memorial run held Aug. 8 at Forward Operating Base Prosperity. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Michelle Gonzalez

Soldiers honor fallen Marine

BAGHDAD – More than 100 service members and civilians honored the memory of a fallen Marine from Wisconsin by participating in the Jerabek Challenge memorial run Aug. 8 at Forward Operating Base Prosperity in Baghdad.

The Jerabek Challenge was created in Hobart, Wis., by Pfc. Ryan Jerabek's parents to thank veterans and service members, and to honor those who have fallen.

Participants from across the International Zone, including 19 Wisconsin National Guard soldiers assigned to the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team headquarters, Camp Douglas, Wis., endured early morning temperatures in the 90s as they ran the 4-mile course. Participants received T-shirts sent by Jerabek's mother.

Six thousand miles away, runners in Hobart, Wis., participated in a similar 4-mile course on the same roads that prepared Jerabek for service in the Marine Corps.

Jerabek died April 6, 2004 during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star for Valor and the Purple Heart.

For more information about these or other stories on the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, visit <http://dma.wi.gov/deployment>

Wisconsin National Guard launches Facebook site

The Wisconsin National Guard is seeking fans — to its Facebook site, which just launched.

“Our goal continues to be to communicate timely, relevant information to our Soldiers and Airmen and their families as well as our customers and stakeholders,” said Wisconsin National Guard’s Director of Public Affairs Maj. Jackie Guthrie. “Facebook is another tool in our toolbox that helps us accomplish that mission.”

“We also recently launched a new website that not only has the latest Wisconsin Guard and Division of Emergency Management News, it also allows to users to subscribe to receive news updates, flag lowering notices and other website change notifications via email or text message,” Guthrie said.

“In today’s fast paced technological society, it is essential that we use the most effective tools to get information to not only our Soldiers and Airmen but also the people of Wisconsin,” said Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar in a recent edition of *At Ease*, the organization’s official publication. Dunbar is the Adjutant General of Wisconsin and commander of the Wisconsin National Guard.

The Wisconsin National Guard’s Facebook site provides several points of entry for users to access information, including photos at Flickr site and videos on YouTube. But most importantly it provides a place for discussions between users.

“We’ve spent several months just watching and listening to social network site users and we know that people want not only to have access to information, they want to share their stories and opinions,” said Guthrie. “The Wisconsin National Guard Facebook page provides that and more.”

The Wisconsin National Guard’s foray into social networking reflects a broader effort by the National Guard as a whole to embrace social media. The National Guard Bureau launched its Facebook site in January of this year and currently has approximately 3,000 fans. The National Guard Bureau is also active in Twitter, Flickr and YouTube.

“If we’re not one of the voices out there, somebody’s going to be there for us telling our story in a way that is inaccurate or that is maybe not the whole story,” said Rick Breitenfeldt, chief of the social media branch in the National Guard Bureau’s



public affairs office. “The conversation is going to be held, and if we’re not involved in the conversation, we’re missing the point of social media: We have to be there, where the people are.”

Despite the benefits, the Department of Defense is mixed regarding an official policy on the use and access of social media.

“The debate is about operational security and balancing the vulnerabilities of an entire network for the largest government department in the United States versus being open and transparent and inclusive,” Breitenfeldt said. “It’s about risk.”

Jack Harrison, National Guard Bureau’s director of public affairs, said the Guard’s guidance on personal involvement in social media is clear: “It’s the same as our guidance would be for any sort of media activity that our Guardsmen involve themselves in. We’re American citizens. We all have the right to speak and speak honestly. ... As military members, we have a responsibility to be professional.”

Despite these concerns, the Department of Defense announced Aug. 17 that its website had been redesigned to use social networking tools to engage the American public, particularly 18- to 24-year-olds.

“We need to embrace these technologies,” said Price Floyd, principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs. “We need to use them because that’s what the young people use these days. We need to communicate with them.”

The new site also links to the Defense Department’s Facebook and Twitter sites. People can post comments and these

engagement tools also will help people in the Department see and hear what the public regards as important.

Floyd said the goal is to encourage commanders to launch their own social networking sites, “so there’s not just one DoD Twitter site, or one Facebook site the military uses, there are hundreds, thousands.”

U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, European Command and Southern Command, for example, have Facebook sites, and there are numerous sites within each of these commands.

He stressed, however, that operational security remains a concern, and cautioned people to be careful when posting information on these sites. The security of the social networking sites is a major

concern to Strategic Command, he noted, and the Marine Corps has banned the use of social networking on official computers.

Recognizing that there are risks involved, Deputy Defense Secretary William Lynn III has tasked the department’s chief information officer to conduct a short-fused study. A report is due to the deputy on Aug. 31 and a policy is to be announced by the end of September.

Wisconsin’s Adjutant General Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar agrees that there needs to be a balance between freedom of speech and security.

“Our Soldiers and Airmen have great stories to tell and social networking sites like Facebook is another place for them to do that, but we want them to do it safely, smartly and professionally,” he said. That’s why he recently signed a policy memorandum advising just that: “As these types of emerging communication technologies replace traditional modes of communication, it is incumbent upon everyone to ensure that our mission is not adversely affected by the use of these new online systems.”

Floyd said officials will look at both the threats and opportunities social networking sites hold for the department. The study will allow defense officials to make a decision on how to move forward and implement a uniform, department-wide policy for dealing with social network sites.

Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill of the National Guard Bureau and Linda D. Kozaryn, American Forces Press Service, contributed to this report.

Camp helps youths appreciate military service



Lt. Col. Kari Wiegand and the Maroon group march like birds across Volk Field on the first day of this year's Wisconsin National Guard Youth Camp. Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs photo by Tracy Fleck

Spc. Eric Liesse
112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP DOUGLAS — Since Sept. 11, 2001 more than 15,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines from Wisconsin have deployed in the global war on terrorism, but it's Wisconsin's youths who got a taste for military life at the 17th Annual Wisconsin National Guard Youth Camp July 31-Aug. 2.

Hosted by the Service Member Support Division, or SMSD, of the Wisconsin Guard, the camp's mission is to teach youths about military life, the importance of relationship building and teamwork, as well as to boost confidence and develop a support network of friends and adults who can assist the youths when they have a friend or family member deployed.

Perhaps one of the best examples of relationship and team building was actually set by the adults that hosted the camp. While the SMSD's mission is to provide a multitude of services to military members and their families, they couldn't do so without the help of several military, veteran and service organizations. One of those organizations is the Wisconsin USO which provided the funds needed for T-shirts, food, supplies and much more to make camp possible for more than 260 kids.

"Youth Camp is a mission of discovery, friendship and teamwork," said Lt. Col. Meg Blankschein, the co-director of the Youth Camp organization. "That's our motto," she added. "It's an opportunity for kids and adults to build friendships that are life-lasting, for our youth and our adults to work as a team to accomplish a mission, and also to have fun."

The latter falls in line with what Blankschein considers her most important rule of the weekend: "You have to be fun to be around. That applies to our adults as well as our kids."

Blankschein has worked with Youth Camp for the past 13 years, and she has been its director for the past nine.

"In '96, we had 60 kids," Blankschein said. This year, the camp boasted a registry of about 285 campers, divided into three age categories — 8 to 10, 11 to 13, and 14 to 17 — to allow for more "age-appropriate" activities.

Over the three days, the youngest campers conquered a conditioning obstacle course at Fort McCoy and a tug-of-war tournament at Volk Field.

"We get the kids up really early in the morning and move them through a series of events," said Maj. Scott Southworth, the lead counselor for 8 to 10 year olds.



Drill Sgt. Steven Dittman, a Wisconsin Army National Guard recruiting and retention NCO, instructs Orange group campers how to render a proper military salute. Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs photo by Maj. Jackie Guthrie

"We really throw a lot at them in one day."

The middle age group formed teams and practiced their problem-solving skills by negotiating several obstacles on the Wisconsin National Guard Drug Control Program's Ropes Course. They also climbed rock walls, participated in a variety of sporting competitions, learned to march and more.

The oldest group began their adventure in the field setting up their "housing." The teens assembled the military tents they would call home for the next 72 hours and took turns "guarding" their camp by patrolling the area at night. They also tackled obstacles in the Drug Control Program's Leadership Development Course which like the Ropes Course, is a station-to-station, team-based obstacle course however, with 11 stations — five of them forcing the teams to cross a shallow pool — the course required acute teamwork and problem-solving skills. For many of the teens, the highlight of the weekend was rappelling off 30 and 60 foot towers.

In addition to the age-specific events, Blankschein said campers had a "Military 101" class in which they practiced basic first aid, tried on body armor and helmets, and received briefings on the National Guard's community, state and nation missions. They also ate in a military dining facility, slept in barracks or tents, traveled in groups by foot or military vehicles and never went anywhere without a "battle buddy" or "wingman."

"[Youth Camp] started as a concept to bring kids together to learn about the life of their parents," Blankschein said. "It lets the youth experience what their loved one experiences on a weekend or a long deployment." However, she was quick to point out that it's neither a recruiting tool nor a basic combat training-like

environment.

"It's all about the orientation of the military environment," she said.

Over the last six years, deployed military family members have become a major focus for the Youth Camp. With approximately 3,600 Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers and Airmen currently deployed, the topic of deployments remains very relevant.

"We're spending a little more time on how they're affected by the current deployments," Blankschein said. "It's certainly not a topic we avoid ... we talk about deployments."

There are a large number of children with family members deployed and the increased numbers of youth at this year's camp hopefully lets other the children know they're not alone, said Southworth.

After the Sunday graduation, complete with marching campers and military drill and ceremony demonstrations, Blankschein hoped the children gained more than a fun weekend away from home.

"I would like that they'd develop a friendship with another military youth and a connection with the military," she said. "I can guarantee that they'll be back home and on each other's Facebook pages. I know that these kids e-mail and keep in touch with each other."

About 95 percent of the staff, approximately 250 men and women, volunteered to help out on their own time and their own dime throughout the 3-day camp.

"They're here because they want to be here for the kids," Blankschein said. "Although the camp is for the kids, we can't do it without the volunteers. And I think the adults also learn quite a bit from the youth." ☺

Jedediah Oehler prepares to rappel down a tower during Wisconsin National Guard Youth Camp Saturday, Aug. 1. Campers were divided into three age categories and took part in age-appropriate activities.

Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs photo by Maj. Jackie Guthrie



Susan Rutkowski slides a plank through a tunnel in the Leadership Development Course Saturday, Aug. 1 during the Wisconsin National Guard Youth Camp. The course emphasizes teamwork to overcome physical obstacles. Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs photo by Maj. Jackie Guthrie

Veterans, Families, Retirees

Nominations open for Hall of Honor

Nominations are being accepted for the 2010 Wisconsin Army National Guard Hall of Honor until Friday, Nov. 13, 2009. This prestigious award represents the highest honor Wisconsin's Adjutant General can bestow upon former Wisconsin Army Guard members for their service.

The 2010 letter of instruction and information on how to make a nomination can be downloaded from the Retiree Activities Office (RAO) web site at: <http://dma.wi.gov/dma/retirees>. Printed copies of the documents are available upon request through the Retiree Activities Office or the Hall of Honor program administrator.

Due to current regulations, the Department of Military Affairs is unable to provide copies of retiree records to non-DoD employees, but copies of needed records will be attached to nomination packets before they are forwarded to the Hall of Honor selection board. Nominators should therefore put extra emphasis on the narrative portion of their nomination.

Questions about the Hall of Honor program and the nomination process can be directed to MSG (Ret) Norman Lenburg at norman.lenburg@us.army.mil or by phone at 608-242-3048 (1-800-335-5147 ext.3048).

Free info line for retirees

Air Force retirees and surviving spouses who are not connected to the Internet can use a new toll-free telephone number to get information on pay, annuities, medical and health care, and other benefits.

The number is (800) 558-1404. Persons with Internet access are encouraged by the Air Force to pass the phone number along to those who do not. Those with Internet access can still use www.retirees.af.mil for benefits information. If the link does not work, copy it to your Internet browser.

On-line family town hall set

Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, will conduct a live one-hour Town Hall meeting for all Wisconsin National Guard families Tuesday, Sept. 15 at 7 p.m. The session will give families the opportunity to ask questions and share thoughts.

Go to <http://dma.wi.gov/TAGLines> now to sign up for an e-mail reminder of this event.

How to Use the Web Site:

- Using your browser, navigate to <http://dma.wi.gov/TAGLines>
- When you go to the site on Sept. 15th, you can provide a name to identify you on-screen when you ask a question or make a comment. You might use your first name, for example, and something to identify your unit.
- There's nothing else to do during the Town Hall other than read, watch and talk with the adjutant general.
- Don't be worried if your comments or questions don't appear right away. We anticipate there will be lots of messages going back and forth, and there are delays between the time you click "Send" and the time it appears in the message window for all to see that are a normal part of the system we are using.
- Our 'autoscroll' feature ensures you're always shown the newest content without having to refresh or scroll your screen. You can turn this on or off by using the controls at the bottom of the viewer window.
- Subtle sound effects alert you to new content as it's published. This can also be turned on or off as needed.

Reminder: In order to facilitate an open discussion with Brig. Gen. Dunbar, please limit sharing this invitation to families of Wisconsin National Guard members.

Reform won't affect VA, Tricare

Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON (AFRNS) — In ongoing discussions about health-care reform, President Barack Obama offered assurance to those receiving medical care through Tricare or the Department of Veterans Affairs: Your benefits are safe.

Eligibility for health care under VA or Tricare "will not be affected by our efforts at broader health-care reform," President Obama told military reporters at the White House on Aug. 4.

President Obama said he also made that point clear after meeting with the American Legion's national commander, Dave Rehbein, and executive director, Peter Gaytan.

"I want to make sure that message gets out to our veterans," the president said. "I think it's very important to get the message out: If you are in the VA system and are happy with your care, great. We have no intention of changing your eligibility."

While a new, national program will not force anyone to change health-care systems, President Obama said it could offer benefits or geographic convenience that might make some veterans elect to join it. A national program "will actually give them more choices, more flexibility," he said.

President Obama cited problems in U.S. health-care delivery systems, which he said cost more than other countries' programs and too often deliver less.

The VA "has probably made more progress than most systems out there in increasing quality" during the past 25 years, and could help shed light on better ways of delivering health care, he said.

But the cost of delivering that care is high even at the VA, and Tricare consumes a big piece of the Defense Department's budget, he said.

With the fiscal 2010 budget reflecting the largest VA funding increase in 30 years, President Obama told American Legion leaders he is committed to ensuring that VA provides America's veterans the highest-quality health care possible.

Meanwhile, he told reporters the VA will increase its outreach to more veterans to make sure they're aware of their medical benefits and other entitlements.

"Although there are hundreds of thousands of veterans who are using our services, we know there are hundreds of thousands more who may not know that benefits are available," he said.

"And we are working really hard to make sure that every single veteran — not just our active force, but also National Guard and reservists — are aware of the benefits that are available to them."

Free tutoring for Guard children

Children of National Guard members are eligible for free on-line tutoring through Army One Source.

Army affiliated students submit a one time registration to obtain their Child, Youth and School Services passcode. Students can then use it to log in from home. They enter the grade level and subject they need help in. They are then connected to the first available subject expert tutor in an online classroom. Students and tutors work together in an online classroom using controlled chat and an interactive white board. Students can send computer files, such as essays, to the tutor for review and assistance. They can also share educational websites.

Educational support is available for kindergarten – 12th grade and college prep.

Subjects supported are all grade levels of math, science, English, and social studies.

For more information, visit <http://www.myarmyonesource.com/ChildYouthandSchoolServices/CYSServicesFreeOnlineTutoring/default.aspx>

Parting shot



Capt. Ben Gerds and Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson wait to take off for an incentive flight Aug. 18 at the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing. Anderson is the deputy adjutant general – Army. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Ashley Bell