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Express

November 2011-January 2012



@ease Express

2010 NGB Media Contest winner

November-January

Volume 3, Issue 6

Official Newsletter of the Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard

<http://dma.wi.gov>

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Green Bay Packers salute veterans, Wisconsin National Guard at halftime



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Remember Kosovo? 157th MEB part of NATO peace-keeping mission

The on-line, interactive *@ease Express* offers many features you may not be aware of. Follow the red caption text to see additional photos and videos. Click on the blue text to open related sites. Click on the opening headlines to view the stories as they appeared on www.dma.wi.gov. Click on the teasers above to go directly to that page.

The pages are designed to print out at 8.5-by-11 inches, giving you the option of reading *At Ease Express* off-line.

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on the cover

32nd Military Police Company Soldiers train on force protection at Camp Atterbury, Ind., prior to deploying in support of a NATO peace-keeping mission in Kosovo. See Page 20 for more information. 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade photo by Capt. Joy Staab

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Celebrating 375 years of service

Allow me to join in the well-deserved celebration of the National Guard's 375th birthday. This is more than an anniversary — it is a testament to the commitment and dedication of our citizens who have agreed to be ready when called for a state emergency or for national defense. That commitment began many decades before the birth of the United States, and it continues to this day.

During my first year as governor



Scott Walker
Governor of Wisconsin

I have had many opportunities to see the Wisconsin National Guard serving our state and nation, beginning with a New Year's Day greeting to the 724th Engineer Battalion which was deployed to Iraq. A few weeks later, the Wisconsin National Guard responded to a severe winter storm, patrolling highways and assisting stranded motorists. In recent

months, engineer Soldiers — some of whom were serving in Iraq earlier this year — reported for state active

duty to help cleanup efforts following damaging summer storms in northern Wisconsin. I saw the selflessness of our men and women in uniform as they left the comforts of home and family to serve overseas, and I saw the love and pride in those families as their Guard member came back home.

There are many responsibilities to being governor, and one of the greatest is that of commander-in-chief of the Wisconsin National Guard. That burden is made easier to bear by the knowledge that the Wisconsin National Guard is superbly trained and led by outstanding officers and noncommissioned officers. I have the highest confidence in the professional men and women who make up the Wisconsin National Guard.

Today's Guard members exhibit the same characteristics found in

Wisconsin's Civil War volunteers. When our state was not quite 13 years old, thousands of its men answered President Lincoln's call to preserve the Union. In all, more than 90,000 men served in the Civil War because of their love of country, their state and their fellow man — but also because they knew an important job was at hand, and their strong Midwestern work ethic would not allow them to sit idly by when the fate of the nation was at stake.

Here in Wisconsin we have seen first-hand the value of the National Guard time and again, and over the past decade so has the rest of the nation.

Congratulations to the National Guard on 375 remarkable years of service, and I look forward to continued excellence.

The National Guard was established on Dec. 13, 1636 in Massachusetts to protect the community. Since then, the National Guard has provided enduring value to America. Our motto is "Always Ready, Always There," which articulates the service of America's Guardsmen who stand ready, every day, to respond to all threats — from natural disasters to terrorism — when called by our nation's governors or our national leadership.

The National Guard is in America's DNA and reflects the wisdom of our founding framers who included the National Guard in our constitution.

Today, the National Guard is combat tested, experienced, and readily accessible. It has exceeded all expectations. Recognizing the extraordinary performance of the National Guard and its critical importance to national security in this post 9-11 world, Congress voted to elevate the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to a full seat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the president signed that bill into law.

As the National Guard celebrates its [375th birthday](#), our legacy remains the same. The Citizen Soldier and Airman — the modern minuteman — prepared to move from our civilian occupations

and pick up a "musket" to defend our community, state and nation. When you call out the National Guard, you call out the community, the family, and the employer, and they ensure that the spirit of America goes with our National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

Always Ready, Always There for 375 years. Far more than a slogan — it represents a commitment. The National Guard is still on point providing enduring value for America.



Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar
The Adjutant General



Sgt. Ira Leslie, a member of the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, holds his 3-year-old son Braeden prior to a sendoff ceremony Nov. 3 at the Richards Street Armory in Milwaukee. Wisconsin National Guard photos by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson



Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch presents a Wisconsin state flag to Lt. Col. Chris Klatt, officer in charge of the approximately 30 Soldiers of the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade who will deploy to Bosnia and Kosovo.

Approximately 30 Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers from the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade left Wisconsin Nov. 4 for about 10 days of mobilization training at Fort Benning, Ga., before arriving in Bosnia and Kosovo, where they will serve as part of NATO headquarters in Bosnia and Pristina, Kosovo.

The deploying Soldiers will work for the U.S. commander assigned to the [Kosovo Forces](#) NATO headquarters overseeing the [international peace-keeping mission](#), which is to maintain a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement for all citizens in Kosovo.

Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar acknowledged,

during a sendoff ceremony Nov. 3 at the Richards Street Armory in Milwaukee, that many people may not be aware of the United States' continuing commitment to Kosovo. He recounted the turmoil the former nation of Yugoslavia experienced following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"All heck broke out in the early 1990s," Dunbar said. "There was a lot of bloodshed and a lot of fighting along religious lines."

The United States became involved, and helped broker the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995. Since then, U.S. troops

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157th MEB Soldiers to serve KFOR mission at NATO headquarters in Bosnia, Kosovo

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have been helping keep the peace in Kosovo and Bosnia.

“This is the United States of America honoring its commitment,” Dunbar said. “In World War I and World War II, in that very part of the world, millions of people died in bloodshed. And since we stepped in, a few handful have died. We’ve been keeping the peace.”

Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch recognized the Soldiers for their service.

“I am thankful that the brave men and women of the 157th MEB are prepared to ensure peace in all ways in Bosnia and Kosovo as guardians of freedom and ambassadors of our great country,” she said. “It is with courage and with pride that they protect a people, make permanent a calm, spread goodwill, and continue to sow the seeds of liberty.”

She presented Lt. Col. Chris Klatt, officer in charge of the deploying Soldiers, with a state flag.

“I hope you will fly it with great pride so that the world knows that champions from Wisconsin don’t just play in Lambeau [Field],” she said. “They also defend us every single day in the Wisconsin National Guard.”

Klatt thanked the Soldiers taking part in the deployment and the people of Wisconsin for their support. He also thanked the families of the Soldiers.

“They serve right along with us,” he said.

Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard, agreed.

“When we talk about the Guard family, we talk about not only those in uniform, but the families and the children that serve right alongside our Soldiers,” he said. “I want to say thank you for your love and support for your Soldiers. I know full well, and you know, that they could not do what they have done up to this time, and what they are about to embark upon again, without your support, without your love, and without your commitment. And my commitment to you and to the Soldiers is that we are not only here for the Soldiers, but we are here for the families.”

Dunbar said that the Wisconsin National Guard has a robust family support network.

“I’m giving my personal pledge that everybody at home is here for your family, so that you can focus on your mission,” he told the troops. “I want the families to know that there’s nothing too big, nothing too small that we won’t give you everything we have. We are a family and we’re here for you.”

Anderson said the deployment experience of the



Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch speaks with members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade following a sendoff ceremony Nov. 3 at the Richards Street Armory in Milwaukee.

Kosovo-bound Soldiers would serve them well. State Command Sgt. Maj. George Stopper urged the younger Soldiers to draw on the deployment experience around them.

“Let them guide you through those instances that you’re going to come up against,” he said. “The first birthday away from home, the first anniversary away from home. They’ve been there, they’ve done it — they’ve made it through. They’ll guide you, also.”

“I ask you to do what we do best as Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers,” Stopper continued. “Go forth and show the rest of the country exactly what you’re made of. Show the world just how phenomenal it is to be a Soldier in the Wisconsin Army National Guard.”

The approximately 30 Soldiers will deploy to Bosnia and Kosovo to serve in NATO headquarters supporting the peace-keeping mission. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson

Go forth and be great representatives to the rest of the world.”

The 157th MEB has already mobilized approximately 180 members for a different role in the KFOR mission. The brigade’s [Headquarters Company and members of the 32nd Military Police Company](#) left Wisconsin Sept. 16, and members of [Company F, 2nd Battalion, 238th Aviation Regiment and the 248th Aviation Support Battalion](#) followed Sept. 24. Those Soldiers are training at Camp Atterbury, Ind., and at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Germany, in preparation for their deployment, where they will serve as the brigade headquarters unit for Multi-National Battle Group East, also referred to as Task Force Falcon. 🇺🇸



■ Return of aviation Soldiers to West Bend marks last Wisconsin National Guard unit to serve in Iraq

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue
Wisconsin National Guard

Nearly 30 West Bend-based Soldiers returned home to family and friends Saturday, marking the end of their year-long mobilization and the end of an era for the Wisconsin National Guard.

Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 135th General Aviation Support Battalion left Iraq early this month and spent the last several days [demobilizing](#) at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J. Gov. Scott Walker, Wisconsin National Guard leaders, family and friends, and other veteran supporters welcomed home Wisconsin's newest combat veterans during a ceremony at the West Bend armory Nov. 19.

"I want you to know this is the last Wisconsin National Guard unit to come home from Iraq," said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, drawing applause from the crowd. "They were safe, they were smart, and they did a great job."

The Soldiers, who spent about nine months in northern Iraq providing medevac support, hail from detachments of companies C, D and E of the 2nd Battalion, 135th GSAB — which is comprised of National Guard Soldiers from several states.

"I was just with those guys for a whole year and I shared everything with them," said Capt. Mark Sier, medevac pilot. "It means a lot and makes me very proud."

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Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gary Beekman, pilot for the 2nd Battalion, 135th General Aviation Support Battalion, embraces his daughter at a welcome home ceremony in West Bend Nov. 19. Roughly 30 others spent nearly nine months in northern Iraq proving medevac support for Operation New Dawn. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

Wisconsin National Guard's last troops in Iraq return home

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Capt. Randall Ramm, officer in charge of the Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers on the deployment, extended thanks to the Soldiers' family and friends.

"Over the last 52 weeks, your Soldiers have accomplished an extraordinary amount," Ramm said.

Walker recognized the Soldiers' great work as well — citing the unit's quick six-minute daytime and nine-minute nighttime response from when they received a call for help to the time they were in the air.

"You got up and made sure someone's life was saved," Walker said. "Thank you for the incredibly well done job."

Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard, praised the Soldiers for their work overseas, and also recognized the job families and friends did at home.

"They could not do what they had to do without your support over these last 52 weeks," Anderson said.

Part of that support was made possible by members of the West Bend Family Readiness Group, which supports the families of all four aviation units in West Bend. The FRG kept in touch with families throughout the deployment process — at one point creating an event on Facebook dubbed, "Deployments suck, let's eat." The lighthearted humor goes a long way to pulling together as a bigger family.

"Knowing there is somebody else who understands is half the issue right there," said Mya Brown, an FRG volunteer.

There was a multitude of support shown at the ceremony. In addition to leadership, family and friends, members of the Patriot Guard, Civil Air Patrol, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve and the 132nd Army Band were all present to welcome home the Soldiers.

Although the West Bend service members are the state's last to serve in

Iraq, nearly 10,000 Soldiers and Airmen have deployed in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn. Since 2003, Wisconsin Guard members have conducted numerous missions in Iraq — including medevac transport, route clearance, detainee operations, base defense, close air support for ground operations and in-flight refueling missions. In the eight years since operations began in Iraq, nine Wisconsin

Guard members made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq.

"As a leader, I believe what we've accomplished in Iraq ... has been extraordinary," Dunbar said.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, every unit in the Wisconsin Guard has deployed forces in support of the global war on terror, many more than once. While operations in Iraq are drawing to a close, the Wisconsin National Guard still has more than 350

Soldiers and Airmen on active duty, including approximately 60 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and about 180 heading to Kosovo for the NATO-led peace keeping mission there.

But for the Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 135th GASB, their mission is complete.

"We got out of there and did something that's never been done before — closing down Iraq." Ramm said. 

Capt. John P. Capra
128th Air Refueling Wing

Airmen, friends and family members welcomed home their commander and fellow wing members Oct. 14 following a four-month long deployment in Western Europe supporting [Operation Unified Protector](#).

Col. Ted Metzgar, commander of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's [128th Air Refueling Wing](#) in Milwaukee, deployed with a number of his staff and commanded active duty, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Airmen.

"It was an honor to have commanded a wing dedicated to the successful completion of its mission," Metzgar said. "I was impressed with the professionalism and patriotism of our Airmen."

While deployed, Metzgar commanded the [313th Air Expeditionary Wing](#) in Western Europe, providing aerial refueling to aircraft supporting Operation Unified Protector — a NATO-led mission enforcing a no-fly zone over the nation of Libya and providing humanitarian assistance to the Libyan civilian population, in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973.

The 128th Air Refueling Wing is home to 12 KC-135R Stratotankers and more than 900 Airmen with a primary mission of aerial refueling. 🇺🇸

Col. Ted Metzgar, commander of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing, signals "thumbs up" in Milwaukee as he returns from a four-month long deployment supporting Operation Unified Protector in Western Europe Oct. 14. 128th Air Refueling Wing photo by Capt. John Capra



Wisconsin Air Guard squadron receives top unit award

The Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Control Squadron, based at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, has been awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for exceptionally meritorious service between Nov. 1, 2008 and Oct. 30, 2010.

Gov. Scott Walker praised the unit during a Dec. 2 ceremony at Volk Field.

"This is only the fourth time since 1948 that this award has gone to this unit, and this is quite an accomplishment," Walker said. "On behalf of all of us here in Wisconsin, we are exceptionally proud of that accomplishment. In a larger context, we are proud of all of you."

Brig. Gen. John McCoy, commander of the Wisconsin Air National Guard, expressed his pride in the 128th ACS.

"It's one thing to talk about how great we are," McCoy said. "But when an inspection comes through ... we come through here at Volk. It's an honor to be here in front of you as the head of the Air National Guard in Wisconsin — the 2,300 men and women of the Wisconsin Air National Guard — and be able to talk about how great Volk is."

The award, presented by the secretary of the Air Force, cites several accomplishments by the 128th ACS, including a deployment to the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing from May through October 2009, where the unit operated the Battlespace Command and Control Center; a 97 percent compliant rating for a June 2010 unit inspection; and an "Outstanding" rating for an August 2010 information security inspection. 



Lt. Col. Gerard Iverson, commander of the 128th Air Control Squadron based at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, hoists the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award during a Dec. 3 ceremony at

Volk Field. Gov. Scott Walker and Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, were on hand for the ceremony. 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photo by Sgt. Alyson Swanke

Senior Wisconsin National Guard leaders recognized Airmen for deployments and meritorious service at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center Dec. 3 and the 128th Air Refueling Wing in Milwaukee Dec. 4.

“Every Air National Guard family member has proudly served and supported the Air National Guard mission,” master of ceremonies 1st Lt. Orman House said at the Volk Field ceremony Dec. 3. “We hope that every spouse or significant other, child and extended family member knows the important role they have in what we do.”

Gov. Scott Walker, commander-in-chief of the Wisconsin National Guard, thanked the Airmen at Volk Field for their service and sacrifice.

“We take it for granted that, come Christmastime we’ll have our families together, and many of you won’t always be together with family,” he said. “We appreciate that sacrifice.”

“You are the best and brightest we have to offer in this state,” Walker continued. “Not just when you’re deployed, but for what you do every day. Thank you for what you’re doing to be willing, prepared and qualified to accept that call when it comes. If we didn’t have the National Guard, we would not be the country we are today.”

Brig. Gen. John McCoy, commander of the Wisconsin Air National Guard, observed that the term “hometown hero” may call to mind sports legends.

“I like to talk about our heroes, and really America’s true heroes,” McCoy said. “They don’t have numbers on the front and back of their uniforms. We truly are the Citizen Soldiers, Citizen Airmen, citizen military that this country depends on.”

Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, told Airmen at Volk Field that Congress recently recommended that the chief of the National Guard be given a seat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and that it was the performance of the Soldiers and Airmen



Staff Sgt. Jacqueline Griffis and Staff Sgt. Ryan Swieter with their Noncommissioned Officer of the Year and Airman of the Year awards, respectively, at Volk Field. 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photo by Sgt. Alyson Swanke

of the National Guard who prompted that action.

“There was a time when our country thought it was better to do all this without the National Guard,” Dunbar said. “Not today — we are part of that team. And you, each and every person in this room, you bring the Air Force values — integrity, service before self, excellence in all we do — to everything you do. I couldn’t be prouder of the men and women in this room.”

Volk Field Airmen of the year were recognized as well. Staff Sgt. Ryan Swieter was named Airman of the Year, Staff Sgt. Jacqueline Griffis was named Noncommissioned Officer of the Year,



Chief Master Sgt. Christopher Chatham, 128th Air Refueling Wing maintenance squadron superintendent, shakes hands with Command Chief Master Sgt. Joe Parlato during a Hometown Heroes Salute Campaign award ceremony Dec. 4 at the 128th Air Refueling Wing, Milwaukee. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Tom Sobczyk

Master Sgt. Michael Mullenberg was named Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, and Capt. Anthony Hart was named Company Grade Officer of the Year. They will advance for consideration at the state level.

Master Sgt. Kenneth Williamson was recognized as the 2011 Honor Guard Member of the Year, and Master Sgt. Brian Gruber received the 2011 Lt. Col. Thomas A. Reis Citizenship Award.

“This ceremony is not about the general officers, command chief or special guests,” Col. Ted Metzgar, commander of the 128th Air Refueling Wing, said. “It’s about you, who have sacrificed so much.”

McCoy agreed.

“It’s important that we recognize the fact that you’ve deployed,” he said. “I truly appreciate what you do every day, either here or abroad.”

“We do the work America asked of us.”

Master Sgt. Jeffrey Venus, a 128th Civil Engineering firefighter, said the Hometown Hero award he received was more for his family than himself. “It’s for their staying home while I was over there,” he said.

“That’s why we do what we do,” added Master Sgt. Mike Schmaling, the first sergeant of the 128th Mission Group.

Schmaling and Command Chief Master Sgt. Joe Parlato were presented with detailed European swords in wooden display cases for their duty and service to both the 128th Air Refueling Wing and the 313th Air Expeditionary Wing.

“These guys, in a figurative way, slew a lot of dragons,” Metzgar said, explaining the “dragons” as continuous and demanding rigors of working in a deployed location while being available to the deployed Airmen of the 313th Air Expeditionary Wing at all times and for all causes.

The Hometown Heroes Salute campaign began in 2008 to recognize Airmen, their families and communities.

Senior Airman Ryan Kuntze, 128th Air Refueling Wing, contributed to this report.

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue
Wisconsin National Guard

Following nearly four years as the Wisconsin Air National Guard's top enlisted leader, Chief Master Sgt. James Chisholm transferred responsibly to Chief Master Sgt. Greg Cullen following an official ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters earlier this month.

Cullen became the 12th command chief master sergeant for Wisconsin as Chisholm prepares to retire following more than 40 years of service in the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

Cullen, a Milton native who now resides in Tomah, has been dreaming for an opportunity like this for a long time. He says he was grateful to be considered among the 38 chiefs eligible in the state.

"I am very excited but very humbled," Cullen said. "We have a lot of outstanding chiefs in the WIANG ... so to be selected among them is truly an honor."

Challenges that faced Chisholm are still challenges that Cullen must face today — a task he says he is up to. Cullen will focus on emphasizing in-residence professional military education, civilian education and recognizing the "outstanding work our Airmen do across the state."

"I'd like to continue what Chief Chisholm and others have started," Cullen said.

Perhaps the biggest challenge Cullen faces, however, is something the entire National Guard faces — unyielding budget constraints and the uncertainty of future missions as the United States reduces its footprint in Iraq and Afghanistan for the first time since 2001.

"There are lots of rumors out there and we want to make sure Wisconsin stays at the top of everyone's list, to keep us relevant in the Guard organization," Cullen said.

This is an issue that leaders from the top are paying attention to.

"It will be a challenge, because the resource spigot is going to dry up," said Gen. Craig McKinley, Chief of the National Guard Bureau said during a speech in August, "and we're the first target that the Air Force and the Army always look to in a time of fiscal constraint."

Cullen, who enlisted as an Air Force air traffic controller on active duty in 1989, most recently served as operations chief enlisted manager at Volk Field



Chief Master Sgt. James Chisholm presents a ceremonial saber to Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, as part of a transition ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters Dec. 2. Chisholm will retire following more than 40 years of service in the Wisconsin Air National Guard and two tenures as the states command chief master sergeant.



Master Sgt. Jennifer Cullen and daughter, Stephanie Cullen, affix new stripes to the uniform of Wisconsin Command Chief Master Sgt. Greg Cullen as part of an official transition ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters Dec 2. Cullen becomes Wisconsin's 12th state command chief. Wisconsin National Guard photos by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

and also filled a public affairs role. He says he has the utmost faith that Wisconsin Air Guard members will continue to serve at the same level as he has seen since joining the Wisconsin Guard in 1996.

"Without a doubt, it is one of the finest organizations I've been a part of," he said. "There is a tremendous amount of talent and ability across the state. Every Airman in every unit seems to exceed the standard."

Chisholm, of South Milwaukee, shares Cullen's sentiment on the state of the Wisconsin National Guard and — as an Airman who has served four decades in the organization — perhaps no one is more versed in the past and current state of the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

"We were pretty rough back when I joined," Chisholm said. "I think we're absolutely on par with [the best units in the force in] everything we're doing and how we perform our missions."

"Every single unit that we have, in my estimation, is looked at as one of the tops in their field," he continued. "I think we are the best and we are absolutely blessed to have the reputation that we have."

Chisholm, who plans to move to Arizona with his wife after he retires, ends his second tour as state command chief master sergeant, having served once before from 1998 to 2001. Chisholm spent much of his latest tour working with national-level organizations so he could bring a vaster wealth of knowledge back to Wisconsin, as well as spread word of the great work the Wisconsin Guard has accomplished to the rest of the nation.

Although Chisholm served as command chief in a traditional sense, he has helped convert the position to a full-time role in the Wisconsin Guard.

"You can see how it is evolving into a full-time position, just like the state command sergeant majors for the Army Guard are full-time," Chisholm said.

The full time position is something Chisholm saw other states utilizing and he quickly brought the advantageous idea to Wisconsin. This is the kind of leadership Wisconsin has become accustomed to under Chisholm, said Brig. Gen. John McCoy, commander of the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

"Chief Chisholm has been an outstanding mentor, leader and friend to the Wisconsin Air National Guard," McCoy said. "He will be missed as he transitions to his new life in Arizona." 📷



Santa peeks into a gift bag during the “Flight to the North Pole” Dec. 10 at the Wisconsin Air National Guard’s 128th Air Refueling Wing in Milwaukee. Approximately 15 families of children with life-threatening illnesses took part in the event. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson

1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson
Wisconsin National Guard

A flight of fancy brought an early Christmas for 15 families of children with life-threatening illnesses.

The annual “Flight to the North Pole” began 27 years ago at the Wisconsin Air National Guard’s 128th Air Refueling

Wing in Milwaukee, in collaboration with the Silverliners — a group of former Eastern Air Lines flight attendants — and the 128th Community Council. The concept has taken off and is now in 20 cities nationwide.

“How long will the flight take?” asked Torre Engstrom, 7, of Milwaukee.

“About 20 minutes,” replied one of the

volunteers before the families boarded a decorated KC-135 Stratotanker designated “Santa Liner” for the day. “We have a special route.”

The “Santa Liner” taxied the families from one part of the 128th Air Refueling Wing base to another. En route, children were given the opportunity to visit the cockpit where they heard a message from

Santa Claus via headphone, and could “fly” the aircraft with assistance from one of the pilots. Once at their destination — Sijan Hall decorated as the North Pole — the families were greeted by Santa and Mrs. Claus, ushered inside where dozens of carolers awaited, and taken to tables for

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128th Air Refueling Wing hosts annual children's North Pole 'flight' in Milwaukee

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a meal and gifts from Santa. Each child received a gift or gifts chosen specifically for them.

"Everything we do is for Mannie," said Michelle Harken, Milwaukee, of her 3-year-old son. "It's always exciting for him to see something new, especially because we can't go anywhere right now. It's nice for him to feel he's going somewhere and to be with other kids."

Nicole Batzko of Milwaukee heard about the program from the chairman of the Milwaukee Against Childhood Cancer Fund.

"I think I'm more excited than they are," she said of her children Isaiah, 13, and Kalyn, 5. "It's really nice having other people doing this for us."

Up to 50 military volunteers and as many as 50 civilian volunteers joined forces for this year's event, and coordinator Senior Master Sgt. Bobbie Coker said it was a team effort.

"We start doing this process in October," Coker said.

Many of the volunteers are seasoned hands at the "Flight to the North Pole," with one volunteer — an elf-garbed Sandy Busalacchi — returning for her 25 year.

"You guys are having more fun than the kids," quipped Lt. Col. Glenn Everson, looking at two volunteer elves playing with one of the children.

"Oh yeah, definitely," they replied.

Tech. Sgt. Jennifer Lychwick, who will take the coordinator reins for the annual event next year, said the appeal is evident.

"Just to see all the smiling faces, how happy they are to be here," she explained. "It's great."

"This is my ninth year," Coker said, adding that she hopes to continue with the program after she retires. "I love doing it for the kids. The feeling of gratitude — this starts my Christmas." 📷



Airman 1st Class David Lake, a crew chief with the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing in Milwaukee, chats with 3-year-old Mannie Harken of Milwaukee during

a "Flight to the North Pole" Dec. 10 at General Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson



At left, a little boy boards the Holiday Express train in Dec. 3 in La Crosse at the BNSF Railway Company. Above, Warrent Officer Mike Breintenfelt, along with his wife, Kathryn and son, Johnny, open their gifts from Santa Claus aboard the Holiday Express train. 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photo by Sgt. Alyson Swanke

Sgt. Tiffany Addair
112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

The holiday season took a memorable turn for approximately 300 service members and their families Dec. 3 — including Wisconsin National Guard members — thanks to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad’s Holiday Express, a vintage passenger train.

For the past four years, BNSF has invited military members and their families as guests on board the Holiday Express, as a gesture of thanks for their service and sacrifice.

“This program is specifically designed to honor military families,” said Andrew K. Johnsen, assistant vice president of state government affairs for BNSF. “[BNSF] recognizes that men and women in uniform make tremendous sacrifices for our nation and we also know service is recognized and praised, but all too often the sacrifices of family members gets lost in the shuffle. This is our way of saying thanks.”

BNSF selects four or five states every year for the Holiday Express. This year

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Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, and Gov. Scott Walker greet Maj. Scott Southworth's son Ala'a after a ride on the Holiday Express train Dec. 3. The train boarded in La Crosse at the BNSF Railway Company and was mobile for about two hours. BNSF Railway has supported the military since the Civil War. 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photo by Sgt. Alyson Swanke

Guard members part of unique tribute to troops

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the train — consisting of 13 cars and the locomotives — visited Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, North Dakota, South Dakota and Kansas.

In addition to the military member and family passengers, Gov. Scott Walker, commander-in-chief of the Wisconsin National Guard, Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, and Matt Rose, BNSF chief executive officer, were on the 90-minute train ride.

“It was an exciting moment watching the reactions of the children as the Holiday Express pulled into the makeshift station decorated with a red carpet and holiday scene,” said Lisa Kluetz, family program director and event coordinator. “Once we boarded the train, it was especially nice that Gov. Walker took time out of his day to say thank you to each military family for their service and sacrifices and, along with BNSF Railroad, create a special and memorable family event.”

Rose said the Holiday Express allows families to put their concerns aside for a moment and enjoy an experience many have not had before — riding a train.

“We have done it for several years over several cities and it is always the same result — a lot of kids and parents with smiles on their faces,” Rose said. “It’s a great way to kick off the holiday period.”

The service members and their families enjoyed refreshments, holiday décor and a surprise visit from Santa, who gave all children on board a commemorative ornament to remember their ride on the Holiday Express.

“Each of the vintage train cars had been refurbished to create the wonderful excursion along the scenic Mississippi



Gov. Scott Walker greets Samuel David Lowrey aboard the Holiday Express train.

“ This is our way of saying thanks. ”
 – Andrew K. Johnsen, BNSF

River,” Kluetz said. “Each train had its own theme, complete with holiday decorations and refreshments. I am sure that the families will be talking about what a special moment that BNSF Railroad created to honor their service.”

Tech Sgt. Brian Benzing, a jet engine mechanic with the Madison-based 115th Fighter Wing, brought his wife, Fawn, and their four children to start off the holiday season.

“It’s a great opportunity to bring our kids,” Fawn said. “[Brian and I] planned on coming, but it was a last-minute surprise for the kids, so they were excited when they found out we were doing this today.”

Sixteen percent of the BNSF workforce includes current service members or veterans. The company donated \$10,000 each to PROUD and Operation Home Front of Wisconsin, two organizations that support military families. Over the course of the route, BNSF donated \$110,000 in support of military organizations. 

2nd Lt. Nathan T. Wallin
Wisconsin National Guard

The Wisconsin National Guard and veterans of all military branches were the champions in Green Bay Nov. 14 when the [Green Bay Packers](#) and more than 73,000 football fans honored their service as part of the annual [Military](#)

[Appreciation Night](#) in conjunction with Veterans Day.

"It was just such an awesome experience," said Tech. Sgt. Kristine Rupp, of Franklin, the Milwaukee-based 128th Refueling Wing's Airman of the Year and one of the service members honored during the game.

The night's festivities began with

country western duo Steel Magnolias singing the national anthem as service members and veterans unfurled a giant U.S. flag across the playing field. Fans joined in by holding up placards that depicted the stars and stripes and spelled out "Thank You Military" and

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A fireworks show concludes the halftime ceremony at Lambeau Field in Green Bay during a Monday Night Football game between the Green Bay Packers and the Minnesota Vikings. The Wisconsin National Guard's 132nd Army Band performed on the field at halftime, part of the Packers' salute to the military in recognition of Veterans Day. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Nathan Wallin

Wisconsin National Guard part of Green Bay Packers' salute to veterans

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"Thank You Veterans."

Rupp, a self-described "big time" Packers fan, was on the field during the National Anthem and held open an enormous American Flag. "Nothing will top that, and I'm very appreciative that [my supervisors] asked me to participate," she said.

The honors continued at halftime, when the Wisconsin National Guard's 132nd Army Band took the field. Fans cheered as the 132nd performed each military service song, while representatives from each branch of the armed forces held aloft large fabric stars emblazoned with the seal of each branch — Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard. The band's rendition of "God Bless America" concluded with a fireworks display, prompting chants of "U-S-A! U-S-A!" from the crowd at Lambeau Field.

In addition to paying honor to men and women in uniform, past and present, the event is part of an ongoing partnership between the Wisconsin National Guard and the Green Bay Packers, highlighting a strong relationship between Wisconsin's hometown Soldiers and Airmen and the hometown team.

"Like the Wisconsin National Guard, the Green Bay Packers are a community-owned and community-backed organization," Dunbar said. "We are two great teams at the top of their game, with unique connections to the American public, working together."

Monday night's tribute was the third annual Veterans Day tribute, and organizers say it keeps getting better.

"This year there wasn't one signature moment, but instead there were a number of different, moving parts and the sum of those parts all added up to a success," Aaron Hart, a corporate sales executive with the Packers and one of the night's many organizers, stated in a Green Bay Packers release.

Oshkosh Defense, Wisconsin Physicians Service and USAA also

assisted with the event.

"At Oshkosh Defense, we are inspired by the brave men and women who serve and protect our nation," said John Urias, Oshkosh Corporation executive vice president and president of Oshkosh Defense. "We're honored to join the Green Bay Packers, the Wisconsin National Guard and football fans worldwide in thanking every Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine and Guardsman for their service, commitment and sacrifice."

The fans at Lambeau Field also showed the same gratitude. Service members

and veterans were met with enthusiastic applause and well wishes as they walked out the entrance tunnel on onto the field. In some instances, the game on the field took a back seat to the military veterans.

"They started cheering as soon as they saw us," Rupp said. "It was amazing how many people thanked us."

"They all wanted to shake our hands," said Sgt. Brandon Swanson of Menomonee, the Wisconsin Army National Guard's noncommissioned officer of the year. "They were almost falling out of their seats and over the guardrails to

shake our hands. It was awesome — it was a once-in-a-lifetime night."

Swanson had never been to Lambeau Field or seen a Packers game in Green Bay — he's seen them play at the Metrodome previously — and he said that the fans' reception made the night even more memorable.

"I'd never had the full 'Lambeau Experience,'" he said.

That experience included a perfect ending for Packers fans in and out of uniform when the hometown team beat the Minnesota Vikings. 



Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard, and Wisconsin Army National Guard officer candidate Aaron Kamnetz use a ceremonial saber to cut one of two birthday cakes celebrating the National Guard's 375th birthday Dec. 13 at Joint Force Headquarters in Madison. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson

There were no candles — that likely would have violated a city fire code — but Wisconsin National Guard members and state Department of Military Affairs employees celebrated the National Guard's 375th birthday Dec. 13 at Joint Force Headquarters in Madison.

Brig. Gen. John McCoy, commander of the Wisconsin Air National Guard, reflected on the National Guard's status as the oldest military force in the Department of Defense, joking that one or two of the people gathered for the cake cutting were at the first muster at the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636.

"We do predate the nation," McCoy said. "The well-trained, organized militia was crucial to where we are today. Who would have guessed then that we'd be here in 2011? Happy birthday to us."

Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard, observed that the National Guard is unique among American military organizations.

"When you think about where our roots lie, where our missions are, really, it's the communities that we reside in," Anderson said. "We are

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National Guard born from humble beginnings

Bill Boehm

National Guard Bureau

The Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded in 1630. More than 5,000 men, women and children made the two-month voyage to the New World, leaving the relative comfort and safety of England behind in an effort to break free of religious intolerance, and to manage their communities the way they saw fit. In doing so, their actions tread new ground in the country that would become the United States of America.

The military organization we know today as the National Guard came into existence with a direct declaration on Dec. 13, 1636. On this date, the Massachusetts General Court in Salem, for the first time in the history of the North American continent, established that all able-bodied men between the ages of 16 and

60 were required to join the militia. The North, South, and East Regiments were established with this order. The decree excluded ministers and judges. Simply stated, citizen-soldiers who mustered for military training could be and would be called upon to fight when needed.

The settlers of the new outposts experienced austere surroundings. With no established or familiar conventions upon which to rely, the colony relied upon male pioneers to provide food, shelter, and defensive protection for the women and children present, as well for themselves. Even with all available hands working, this was a difficult task. Worse, the nearby Pequot Indian tribe proved a restless and unpredictable neighbor, leaving the Massachusetts colonists

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From the start, citizens answered call of duty

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vulnerable to guerilla-style attacks that could decimate the fledgling settlements. In an environment rife with disease, poor sanitation, and harsh weather conditions, all able-bodied members of the Massachusetts colony pulled together out of necessity.

Self-sufficiency proved instrumental. The militia system of self-defense brought from England had the best chance of succeeding for the colonists.

And it did succeed. Soon after the establishment of the militia in Massachusetts, the entire New England region defended itself against the aggression of the Pequot nation. Other colonies such as Connecticut and Rhode Island mustered militia units to fight the Indian tribe, and succeeded in forcing the Pequots to capitulate in 1638. Ultimately, the militia enlisted from the many small villages proved a strong component in building confidence for the settlement as a whole.

Although other colonial settlements

in North America utilized military protection in order to allow settlers safe passage and to defend against aggressors, Massachusetts proved to be the first entity to have its government establish and raise a militia.

That record of service has remained continuous and unbroken, no matter the change in each unit's function as a part of the militia or the National Guard. This distinction qualifies it as the birthplace of the militia in the United States.

Much has changed since 1636, but one thing has not: the National Guard still consists of Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen providing protection from natural disaster, training regularly to uphold high standards of readiness, and also deploying to far-away countries to protect the United States' national interests abroad. Although the country's growth and expansion has made it a large military force around the world, the National Guard still remains a community cornerstone – just as it did when it was given birth on Dec. 13, 1636. 

Wisconsin National Guard joins 375th birthday celebration

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embedded in our communities — we are the communities. When our Soldiers and Airmen are called up to serve, whether in a domestic response or in a federal response, our communities are automatically supporting us because we are being drawn from those communities.”

Staff Sgt. Jeff Krutkowski, Madison, joined the Wisconsin Air National Guard six years ago for educational benefits. As he watched a video detailing the National Guard from 1636 through today, Krutkowski reflected on the Guard's accomplishments.

“It's excellent to see the history,” he said, “where we came from and how we've progressed.”

Anderson said the National Guard was

poised to join the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which underscores the National Guard's contributions to national defense.

“It really tells you just how much our legislators, our congressmen and senators recognize what the National Guard has done throughout its history, but particularly over these past 10 years,” Anderson said.

Officer Candidate Aaron Kamnetz, McFarland, joined Anderson in cutting one of two National Guard birthday cakes. Kamnetz joined the Wisconsin Army National Guard May 20 “to defend the nation and serve my country.” He said the day was filled with tradition.

“Tradition is important,” Kamnetz said. “It shows you where your roots are from, what we mean to the nation.” 



Brig. Gen. John McCoy, commander of the Wisconsin Air National Guard, and Wisconsin Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Jeff Krutkowski use a ceremonial saber to cut one of two birthday cakes Dec. 13 at Joint Force Headquarters in Madison to celebrate the National Guard's 375th birthday. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson

Kosovo

Dominion of tribal alliances. Territory in the Roman, Byzantine and Bulgarian Empires. Contested between regional powers. Conquered by the Ottoman Empire. Center of the Albanian national awakening and revolts of the 19th and 20th centuries. Divided between Montenegro and Serbia, then absorbed into Yugoslavia. Occupation by Italy and Nazi Germany. An autonomous province of Serbia. A declaration of independence. The history of Kosovo is one of conflict and struggle for identity. Can Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers help the new nation stand on its own?





KFOR timeline

1999: First elements of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) entered Kosovo on June 12, two days after UN Security Council Resolution 1244 was adopted. By June 20, all Serbian forces had withdrawn. KFOR was initially composed of some 50,000 NATO troops, with a mandate to deter renewed hostility from Yugoslav and Serb forces, establish security, demilitarize the Kosovo Liberation Army, support international humanitarian efforts and support the international civil presence.

2002: KFOR reduced to around 39,000 troops.

2003: KFOR further reduced troop levels to 26,000 in June, and to 17,500 by year's end.

2004: Renewed ethnic violence erupted between Albanians and Serbs. KFOR troops came under attack, and 2,500 additional troops were deployed to reinforce the existing KFOR strength. At the Istanbul Summit, NATO leaders condemned the renewed violence and reaffirmed their commitment to a secure, stable and multi-ethnic Kosovo.

2007: Despite a comprehensive proposal and a special committee from the UN, no agreement was reached on Kosovo's status. KFOR helped maintain safety and stability during negotiations. In December,

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Preparing for a peace support mission in Kosovo

Spc. Michelle Weissinger squinted her eyes as wind and cold rain pelted her face. The weather is typical of Indiana in late fall and early winter — but more than that, it's typical of where she and approximately 180 other members of the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade will be deploying, right down to the hilly and wooded terrain: Kosovo.

Following sendoff ceremonies in September, the members of the 157th MEB headed to Camp Atterbury, Ind., for several weeks of training with other National Guard units as part of Kosovo

Force (KFOR) 15, a NATO-led peace support mission. The 157th will serve as the brigade headquarters unit for Multi-National Battle Group East, also referred to as Task Force Falcon. There it will oversee operations for the entire Multi-National Battle Group-East, which also includes units from Armenia, Greece, Poland, Turkey, Romania and the Ukraine.

"It's a three-pronged mission," said Col. Jeffrey J. Liethen, an Onalaska, Wis., native and KFOR 15 commander. "We monitor the pulse of the populace, so to speak, keeping track of the feelings and

opinions of the people. We also act as third responders to demonstrations and riots, and maintain freedom of movement for other KFOR forces."

According to Sgt. Angie J. Gross — a Bismarck, N.D., native and human resources specialist with the aviation element of KFOR 15 — one of the biggest benefits of coming to train together at Camp Atterbury is that everyone has learned how to work as one team.

"When we all first got here, everyone

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KFOR 15 members unified through Camp Atterbury training

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had their own little cliques. We are all from different places and even different states altogether,” Gross said. “Now, you see the entire KFOR coming together. You see little things, like how many people sit together at chow time. We are really all coming together.”

Liethen agreed.

“These Soldiers may have come from many different units but, after training here together, they are leaving as one collective unit,” he said. “I am proud of their commitment and progress, and I am proud to serve with them as part of Multi-National Battle Group-East.”

Capt. Luella Dooley-Menet,

commander of the aviation task force, said her team of aviators — who expect to get at least three calls a week for patient and medical supply transfer in Kosovo — are right on pace with training at Camp Atterbury.

“Everyone is doing very well and I’m happy with the way things are going,” she said.

Dooley-Menet said her team has applied a crawl-walk-run philosophy to their training. The Soldiers, from the West Bend-based [238th Aviation Regiment](#) and [248th Aviation Support Battalion](#), are currently being validated on flying night missions by 1st Army — the organization that certifies all units are competent to perform the mission prior to deploying.

Spc. Taria Johnson, of the 32nd Military Police Company, last deployed to Iraq in 2009 where her unit was mostly responsible for detainee operations. She said she is thrilled with the training accomplished at Atterbury.

“It’s actually nice to do actual military police operations,” Johnson said. “We have true scenarios for the mission we’re going to do.”

The MPs will be responsible for all of the law enforcement on post. Nine 32nd MP Soldiers have also been selected to the protective services detachment and will be responsible for safeguarding all distinguished visitors on the post.

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KFOR timeline

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NATO foreign ministers agreed that KFOR would remain in Kosovo unless the UN Security Council determined otherwise.

2008: Assembly of Kosovo declared independence of the Republic of Kosovo in February. NATO leaders agreed at Bucharest Summit in April that NATO and KFOR would continue to work with authorities and to support the UN, European Union and other international actors to develop a stable, democratic, multi-ethnic and peaceful Kosovo. In August, 45 countries recognized Kosovo’s independence; Serbia continued to claim sovereignty of Kosovo as an autonomous province. In December NATO foreign ministers reaffirmed the presence of KFOR in Kosovo, ending the Kosovo Protection Corps and starting the Kosovo Security Force.

2009: Kosovo Security Force began operations in January, one day after the Kosovo Protection Force ceased activities. NATO defense ministers decided in June to gradually adjust KFOR’s force posture to a deterrent presence.

2010: KFOR reduced to 10,200 troops.

2011: KFOR reduced to about 5,500 troops, provided by 22 NATO and 8 non-NATO countries.



Col. Jeffery J. Liethen, commander of the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, passes the unit colors to the incoming Headquarters Company commander, Capt. Eric Okeson, during a change-of-command ceremony at Camp Atterbury, Ind., Oct. 5. 157th MEB photo by Capt. Joy Staab

Changing of the guard for 157th HQ Company

Capt. Joy Staab

157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade

Capt. Bradley Bucher, of Waukesha, formally turned over company command responsibilities of the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade’s Headquarters Company to Capt. Eric Okeson, Chicago, during an Oct. 4 ceremony at Camp Atterbury, Ind.

Bucher — who assumed command in March 2010 and spent a significant amount of time preparing the company for its Kosovo deployment — now is a member of the Joint Implementation Commission, which will focus on border security and working with international forces in Kosovo.

“We celebrate the trust and confidence our leadership has placed in the incoming commander, Capt. Okeson,” said Col. Jeffrey Liethen, 157th MEB commander. “He has his work cut out for him in the difficult task of mobilizing and deploying our unit to Kosovo. He will most certainly

succeed if given the same loyalty and devotion to duty you have provided Capt. Bucher.”

“Thank you for all your hard work — it paid off,” Bucher told the company formation. “Everyone trained hard to prepare for our deployment, and now that we are finishing the final phase of our training, everyone can look ahead and focus on their mission in Kosovo.”

“I would like to thank Capt. Bucher for getting us to where we are today,” Okeson said. “Your hard work is much appreciated.”

“He’ll be missed,” Spc. Jessica Connors said of Bucher. “Capt. Bucher did a really good job at keeping us organized and motivated, but this will be a good experience for Capt. Okeson.”

Bucher is the son of Patsey and Floyd Bucher of Denmark, Wis. He graduated from Pulaski High School in 1988 and Lakeland College in 2004. He has been married to his wife Jennifer for 13 years; they have two sons, Jake and Ryan. 

157th MEB members train for Kosovo mission

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The 157th MEB began its second leg of the training in November at U.S. Army Europe's [Joint Multinational Training Center](#) in Hohenfels, Germany. Expert planners and observer controllers (OCs) have made it a number one priority to ensure that KFOR 15 is ready to face the current situation.

"We sent several OCs from different teams over to Kosovo to observe the latest [tactics, techniques and procedures] and understand the operational environment there," said Capt. John Denney, an OC at JMRC.

That information is then given to scenario writers who develop the events that Soldiers will be challenged with during their training, Denney said. National Guard Soldiers make up the U.S. element of KFOR 15, and they noticed JMRC's efforts to make training as realistic as possible right away.

"Early on in our training, the focus was on a relatively steady state and calm environment in Kosovo," Liethen said. "Things have drastically changed. It's very obvious that the training program here at Hohenfels has been modified to replicate what is actually going on in Kosovo right now so that will definitely be a help in us conducting our mission."

The Guard Soldiers also have the unique opportunity to train with partner nations they will work alongside during their deployment.

"Anytime that we have the opportunity to train with our multinational partners is a huge benefit for both understanding how they operate and understanding the idiosyncrasies of their doctrine compared to ours," Liethen said. "Just being able to communicate with those that speak a language foreign to ours is a big benefit."

Another advantage is the prior deployments and skill sets these Guard Soldiers bring to the table that will aid them in the KFOR mission.

"What we are hoping to do is take



a lot of the experience these Soldiers already have out of Iraq or Afghanistan," Denney said. "We use those basics they have used and put a Kosovo polish on it specific to the deployment they are going to be seeing here shortly."

The transfer of authority to KFOR 15 is scheduled for December, where these Soldiers will have a chance to implement the training they've received and further the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. 

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue, Staff Sgt. Matt Scotten and Lynn Davis contributed to this article.



Above, Master Sgt. Traci Stehula prepares to throw a training hand grenade while training at Camp Atterbury, Ind. At left, Soldiers from the 32nd Military Police Company rehearse Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT) training. 157th MEB Public Affairs photos by Capt. Joy Staab

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo — A Wisconsin Army National Guard brigade assumed responsibility of [Multinational Battle Group East](#) (MNBG E) during a Dec. 10 formal ceremony at Camp Bondsteel.

The [157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade](#) (MEB), based out of Milwaukee, joined 12 other National Guard units and one Army Reserve unit from throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico as part of Kosovo Forces 15. They assumed responsibility from the New Mexico Army National Guard's 111th MEB, based out of Rio Rancho, N.M., which arrived in April.

The [Kosovo Force](#) commander, Maj. Gen. Erhard Drews, transferred responsibility of MNBG E from Col. Michael D. Schwartz, commander of the 111th MEB, to Col. Jeffrey J. Liethen, 157th MEB commander.

“As you know, we are one of many U.S. KFOR rotations,” Liethen said at the ceremony. “Through the years, KFOR rotations have changed, just as Kosovo has changed, but one thing remains the same — our collective commitment to maintain a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement throughout Kosovo.”

“I want to take this opportunity to emphasize that as commander, my objective is to continue to build upon the work done by the Soldiers of KFOR 14 and their predecessors,” he added. “We look forward to working with our multinational partners and continuing to maintain a safe and secure environment for the people of Kosovo.”

Schwartz spoke of the outstanding relationship forged between the many nations in the battle group.

“As I have said many times before to our Soldiers, our multinational partners are not part of the battle group — they are the battle group,” he said. “Without any one member, our mission would have been much more difficult. Together, as a single organization, we accomplished many remarkable feats. We are truly a more mobile, capable force than ever before.”

Drews said he was confident that the future of Multinational Battle Group East would be in capable hands.

“I am more than convinced that you will lead Multinational Battle Group East in the same outstanding manner as did Col. Schwartz,” he said to Liethen.

The U.S. contingent of MNBG E is comprised of approximately 700 troops from 10 states and one U.S. territory. Multinational partners in MNBG E include France, Germany, Hellas (Greece), Morocco, Poland, Turkey, Armenia and Ukraine. 



Left, Col. Jeffrey J. Liethen, left, and Command Sgt. Maj. Brad Shields unfurl the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade's colors.

Below, Col. Michael Schwartz, left, of the New Mexico Army National Guard, Lt. Col. Kerry Morgan and Col. Jeffrey Liethen of the Wisconsin Army National Guard, and Maj. Gen. Erhard Drews, Kosovo Force commander, share a moment prior to a transfer of authority ceremony Dec. 10 at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. Wisconsin Army National Guard photos by Sgt. 1st Class Jim Wagner



Sgt. 1st Class Jim Wagner
157th MEB Public Affairs

The mail clerk is one of the most popular people to deployed Soldiers, and at no time is that more true than during the Christmas holiday season — especially for nearly 200 Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers deployed at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo.

Soldiers from the Milwaukee-based 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB) and Company F, 2nd Battalion, 238th Aviation Regiment arrived a few days before Thanksgiving in support of the United Nations peacekeeping mission as Kosovo Force (KFOR) 15. After approximately three months of mobilization training, mail from home is a welcome sight.

Being away from home during the holidays is always tough, according to logistics officer Capt. Johnathan Koeppen of Milwaukee.

“This is my third deployment and being away from family and friends never gets any easier,” Koeppen said. “It is so nice to pick up a package sent from my family or my friends and read the cards and see how much support I have. It’s a nice break from the action and makes me feel connected to those at home.”

As expected, there is a lot of mail coming from family and friends, said Sgt. Jessica Simmons, a Multinational Battle Group East mail clerk assigned to Task Force Falcon, the headquarters element of the battle group. The Macon, Ga., resident is responsible for sorting and processing mail for approximately 400 people in the battle group.

Simmons and her assistant — Pfc. Clinton Glenn, a driver and administrative specialist on loan from the Joint Implementation Commission section



Capt. Johnathan Koeppen, a deployed Wisconsin Army National Guard logistics officer from Milwaukee, picks up a large delivery of packages Dec. 12 at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. Inset: Army Sgt. Jessica Simmons, mail clerk assigned to Multinational Battle Group-East and a member of the Georgia Army National Guard, processes holiday mail at Camp Bondsteel. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jim Wagner

during the holiday mail surge — deftly maneuver through the cramped space available after Monday’s delivery of packages.

For the Georgia Army National Guard Soldiers, it’s their daily job to take the large stacks of mail that arrive and sort them by section and individual.

Despite being assigned to a hectic duty away from his assigned responsibilities, Glenn said he has enjoyed the work so far, and the perks.

“I get to get my mail before anyone else without waiting,” the Atlanta resident

said with a laugh. “It keeps me busy, but being occupied is a good thing.”

Mondays, according to Simmons, are the busiest day of the week — with the post office closed on Sundays, it means an extra day of accumulated mail. On this particular day, there were 41 pieces of accountable mail items — insured, certified or registered mail requiring a signature —and approximately 120 non-accountable items.

She said the record, currently held by Kosovo Forces 14 from last year, is 122 accountable items in one day. Since there

is no official tally for non-accountable mail, there is no way to measure what the grand total might have been.

But, Simmons said, she expects to see her office get close to that amount before Christmas comes and goes, and she wouldn’t have it any other way.

“Mail is a nice surprise at any time, but during the holiday season it helps bring a taste of home to us,” according to Staff Sgt. Sara Anderson of Eau Claire, Wis. “It’s amazing how receiving mail can immediately brighten up your day and put a smile on your face.”



Just over one month and nearly 175 miles later, approximately 50 members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 724th Engineer Battalion have wrapped up work on a storm cleanup project — Operation Blue Ox — in Burnett and Douglas counties in northern Wisconsin.

"Those select Guard members of the 724th Engineer Battalion have done an outstanding job on a mission of great importance to the citizens of Burnett and Douglas counties," Gov. Scott Walker said. "These highly skilled individuals performed a valuable service."

"This is the Guard at its finest — [serving in the combat zone](#) last year and answering the call at home today," said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin. "A magnificent contribution!"

The Burnett County Board of Supervisors passed a [resolution](#) Oct. 20 thanking Dunbar and the Wisconsin National Guard for their response to the county's appeal for support.

Capt. Paul Cusick, commander of the 950th Engineer Company, 724th Engineer Battalion, said the mission went well.

"Soldiers want to serve," he said. "Helping out in their local community, that's what they thrive on. Whether abroad or at home, that's why they want to be here."

The northern Wisconsin Soldiers for this mission came from the 950th Engineer Company, 106th Engineer Team and the Forward Support Company — all subordinate units of the 724th Engineer Battalion.

Since Sept. 6, Guard members

worked to clear branches and tree limbs from roadsides in Burnett and Douglas counties. The powerful July 1 storm toppled trees across 130,000 acres in six northern Wisconsin counties. The storm debris in the rights of ways posed a safety and fire hazard. Debris clearing efforts ended Oct. 7 with identified routes 100 percent complete. Equipment rented for this mission was cleaned and returned by Oct. 11.

The 950th specializes in route clearance, which in Iraq and Afghanistan means finding and removing roadside bombs and other hazards. Cutting and chipping trees blown down by strong winds, though seemingly safer, has its own dangers, Cusick warned.

"Tree operations is dangerous because when you are felling a tree that is under

stress caused by winds, it's not very predictable which way a tree's going to fall or how it's going to react," he explained. "There's tension built up in the tree. It's not just a matter of pushing a tree this way — the tree's got a vote and it's going to fall whatever way it wants to."

Cusick said that much of the tension in the storm-toppled timber dissipated between the July 1 storm and the beginning of the Wisconsin Army National Guard cleanup project Sept. 6.

"Every tree was still a unique challenge," he said. Timber less than 18 inches in diameter was fed into wood chippers and dispersed beyond the ditch line. Timber too large for the chipper was cut into 100-inch lengths and left for local

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Engineer unit finishes storm cleanup mission

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townships to remove.

Guard members received chain saw training from the Forest Industry Safety and Training Alliance (FISTA), and learned to safely operate large wood chippers and other heavy equipment. The unit had very few injuries to report during the mission. Some of the equipment used for this mission proved so helpful that it may be included in future civil support force packages.

The Soldiers were assembled into two work platoons, led by platoon leaders and platoon sergeants who recently returned from the 724th Engineer Battalion's Iraq deployment. Cusick said that deployment experience paid huge dividends for this mission.

"It was a leadership challenge to ensure guys were rested and did not fall into complacency," he said. "Engineer estimates, engineer recons, fuel operations, maintenance — it was all as much of a challenge as being downrange. These four guys had a high level of competence and they were still in the rhythm, that deployment atmosphere."

Cusick said platoon leadership frequently interacted with local officials who checked on the progress of the storm debris cleanup, drawing on skills honed overseas.

"Right now in the encounters you have in Afghanistan and Iraq, strategic objectives are being handled at the tactical level — platoon leader, platoon sergeant," he said. "When that local town chairman decides to stop by to make sure his objectives are being met, it's all the same."

Cusick praised the state Department of Corrections officials and inmates who supplied labor in the cleanup effort. The inmates, supervised by corrections officers, hauled wood out of the ditch line, and Guard members would then feed the wood into the wood chipper.

"Those guys worked their tail off," Cusick said of the inmates. "They wanted to be there. It allowed my guys to work more on the skilled labor side of things with the machines. It was just a win-win. From the officers down to the inmates, it was just one of the best experiences I think I've had."

Overall, Cusick said the experiences gained from this particular mission were invaluable, especially for a unit just

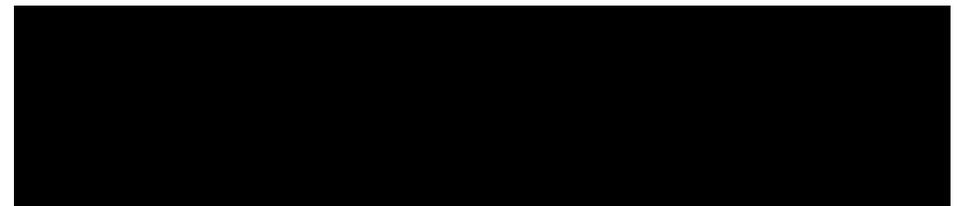
returning from a deployment.

"The big thing moving forward from this year is putting the team back together," he said. "Seeing the mettle of the rear detachment Soldiers just put the 950th much further ahead. Imminent danger, key leader engagements, interagency coordination — it will be years before my unit gets the same level of training value as this mission had. It was phenomenal."

The Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers began the mission as an [Innovative Readiness Training](#) project, which allowed existing federal funds in the training budget to be used. The Department of Defense revoked its IRT approval Sept. 8, and Gov. Scott Walker placed the Soldiers on state active duty. Dunbar engaged leaders at the National Guard Bureau to [restore federal funding](#) Sept. 9 via additional annual training orders. 



The Wisconsin National Guard's Reaction Force uses a skirmish line formation, above, to move anti-nuclear "protestors" away from the security perimeter as part of a validation exercise Oct. 14-15 at Fort McCoy, Wis. This particular scenario called for providing additional security at the Kewaunee Nuclear Power Plant following a notional mechanical failure, and assembling a riot control team to counter a group of anti-nuclear demonstrators. At left, "protestors" sit as obstacles before the skirmish line. Wisconsin National Guard photos by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson



Manning security perimeters and road blocks, and facing protestors — all in a day's work, or two, for the [National Guard Reaction Force](#) (NGRF).

The Wisconsin National Guard's NGRF completed a two-day exercise Oct. 15 at Fort McCoy designed to validate its ability to respond in support

of local authorities in the event of a real emergency. In this exercise the scenario called for a security mission at the Kewaunee Power Station (nuclear power plant) due to a nuclear emergency declaration at the site.

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Wisconsin National Guard validates Reaction Force

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Maj. Joseph Adamson, plans officer with the Wisconsin National Guard's Joint Staff, said the NGRF demonstrated proficiency at roadblocks, check points, vehicle searches and critical site security.

"These guys know the task and they know it very well," Adamson said.

Part of the scenario involved anti-nuclear power protestors who arrived on the scene and became unruly, requiring a crowd control team to assemble and prevent the situation from escalating.

The crowd control team — complete with face shields, body shields, shin guards and riot batons — formed a skirmish line and slowly advanced toward the protestors.

"Under the authority of the Kewaunee County Sheriff, you must vacate the area," a team leader ordered the protestors over a loudspeaker.

Without making physical contact, the skirmish line moved the protestors away from the site to a point down the road where they could safely disperse. Once at that point, the crowd control team lowered its body shields but maintained its line formation, clearly indicating that no harm was intended to the protestors but that they would not be allowed past the skirmish line.

The NGRF is a ready combat arms force which, upon request from the governor or president, provides an initial force package of up to 125 personnel within eight hours and a follow-on force of up to 375 personnel within 24 hours. The NGRF mission rotates each year — this year it is shared by Soldiers from 1st Squadron, 105th Cavalry.

Lt. Col. David May, deputy director of domestic operations with the Wisconsin National Guard Joint Staff, said the validation exercise went well.

"The preliminary results are extremely positive," he said, noting that the official validation was still about one month away. "This was a valuable experience for



Above, a team leader instructs a group of "protestors" to leave the area. At left, the Wisconsin National Guard's Reaction Force maintain their posture as a group of "protestors" departs a noisy but uneventful confrontation, part of a validation exercise Oct. 14-15 at Fort McCoy. This particular scenario called for providing additional security at the Kewaunee Nuclear Power Plant following a notional mechanical failure, and assembling a riot control team to counter a group of anti-nuclear demonstrators.

Soldiers to adjust how they approach tasks that are used in both wartime and domestic operations. They were quickly able to adopt an appropriate posture for a Wisconsin operation." 

The Wisconsin National Guard's [Drug Control Program](#) delivered more than 9.1 tons of expired, unused and unwanted prescription medication to the Drug Enforcement Administration's Milwaukee office following the [National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day](#) Oct. 29.

"That total is an increase of almost 33 percent over the last Take-Back event that was held in the spring," said James Bohn, assistant special agent in charge of the Milwaukee DEA office.

Col. Mark Greenwood, Wisconsin National Guard Counterdrug coordinator, said the Take-Back effort raises community awareness about the problem of prescription drug abuse and helps to mitigate it.

"It appears the Take-Back event this go-around was a big success again," he said.

This is the third such collection event — involving more than 110 agencies — designed to reduce the opportunity for illicit use of prescription medication. The DEA intends to conduct collections approximately every six months until the DEA completes a process for safe disposal of prescription medication.

Six Drug Control Program members picked up pharmaceuticals at State Patrol collection points in De Forest, Fond du Lac, Eau Claire, Spooner and Wausau, and delivered them to the Milwaukee DEA office Oct. 30. Additional Drug Control Program members helped build pallets Nov. 1 to load the vehicles that would transport all the collected materials Nov. 2 to a DEA-approved incinerator in Indianapolis.

Bohn said the Wisconsin National Guard Drug Control Program has been integral in all three Take-Back collection efforts.

"Their commitment to this program was immediate and substantial," Bohn said. "[They] are always prepared, professional and hard-working — certainly one of the main reasons this program is so successful in Wisconsin."

The discarded pharmaceuticals were incinerated in Indianapolis. 



Above, Sgt. 1st Class Paul Wagner of the Wisconsin National Guard's Drug Control Program assists the Drug Enforcement Administration during their Pharmaceutical Take-Back Initiative. At left, members of the Wisconsin National Guard's Drug Control Program assist agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration. The national initiative took place Oct. 29. Wisconsin Air National Guard photos by Tech. Sgt. Thomas J. Sobczyk

1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson
Wisconsin National Guard

The celebration was ceremonial, but the reason for the celebration was significant.

“Today’s ceremony represents the symbolic opening of the Guard Resilience University to all members of the Army National Guard,” Lt. Col. Andrew Ratzlaff, commander of the 3rd Battalion, 426th Regional Training Institute — which operates the Army National Guard’s very first resilience training facility — said Oct. 17.

Resilience, in this sense, is a method of coping with significant challenges and was originally developed at the University of Pennsylvania to help teachers provide coping mechanisms to students. The U.S. Army began teaching resilience skills in recent years in response to an increased need for psychological aid among some Soldiers.

“What we’re doing here is adapting to change again,” said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin. “This is not some namby-pamby feel-good kind of experience. This is about readiness; this is about defending this country. This is about maintaining the courage that you and I are privileged to share in this uniform.”

Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum, director of the U.S. Army’s Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program, praised the National Guard for embracing the concept of resilience and pursuing its own training facility, which officially opened at Fort McCoy in August and offers master resilience trainer courses for up to 60 students once per month.

“Is this part of pre- and post-deployment?” she asked. “No. Is this part of some kind of therapy? No. This is just making people more psychologically fit. Just as we would not wait until someone flunks a [physical fitness] test for them to become physically fit, why in the world would we wait until someone



The Guard Resilience University, a resilience training school located at the Wisconsin Army National Guard’s 426th Regional Training Institute at Fort McCoy, held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Oct. 17. Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch joined Brig. Gen.

Rhonda Cornum, director of the U.S. Army’s Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program and senior Wisconsin National Guard leaders in the ceremonial ribbon cutting. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson

has some psychological crisis or some demonstration of bad coping to give them better psychological fitness?”

1st Sgt. John Peterson, from the Resilience Training Campus at Fort Sill, Okla., and a facilitator for the current master resilience trainer course at Guard Resilience University (GRU), said that teaching resiliency skills is not an indication that the Army is going soft.

“One of the first things I tell the Soldiers is resiliency is not leniency — it’s a process,” he explained. “The process is to make you better. Resilient is not a soft word, and they’ll find out when they go through this course. It’s mental agility, it’s strength of character, it’s understanding your values. There’s nothing soft in those words.”

Ratzlaff recounted how GRU began as a discussion in the back of the room where the ribbon-cutting ceremony was held.

“Little did we know the positive result we were about to set in motion,” he said,

crediting Maj. Sylvia Lopez and Sgt. 1st Class John Battista with the success of the master resilience trainer courses offered at the 426th. “Without their tireless efforts, networking skills and long hours, we would not be standing here today.”

Lopez said that the ceremony represented the culmination of much hard work by many good people.

“You have to talk to a lot of different entities,” she said of raising the idea of a National Guard-operated resilience training facility to the National Guard Bureau.

“They all want the same things, but you need them on the same sheet of music to move forward. Everybody wants the same thing — it’s just how do we get there?”

Lopez said that the resilience skills taught in the course were used to realize establishing GRU in Wisconsin. Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch praised the end result.

“In the private sector we like to tell people that Wisconsin is open for business,” she said. “It is truly an

honor today to show that, in one more regard, Wisconsin is open for business and advancement when it comes to the resilience of our National Guard.”

Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Kletzien of Battery A, 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery, completed the level 1 master resilience trainer course in August.

“It’s something I believe in,” he said, “something I want to be a part of. Overall, it makes you a better leader. You’re able to look at situations differently and not jump to conclusions.”

Peterson said that having resilience skills helps him know he’s solving the right problems.

“It’s easy to go out there and bark out orders, but am I barking out the right orders to the right audience in the right way?” he said. “If I can be a more effective leader, using resilient skills, I can bounce back from anything that’s thrown at me. It’s a win-win — that’s why I love this program.”



Veterans of the 32nd Division recall the year they spent preparing for a potential Cold War conflagration at a 50th anniversary commemoration hosted at the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team headquarters at Camp Williams Oct. 15. 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photos by Staff Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez

Staff Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez
112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Approximately 150 veterans of the 32nd "Red Arrow" Infantry Division and their guests joined Wisconsin National Guard leaders and Soldiers assigned to the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team at the 32nd Brigade headquarters in Camp Williams, Wis., Oct. 15 to commemorate

the 50th anniversary of the year-long deployment spent in preparation for the 1961 Berlin Crisis.

The commemoration included historical displays, video footage from the mobilization, modern equipment displays, scrapbook sharing and culminated with a ceremony.

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Soldiers assigned to the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team display flags from battalions of the 32nd Division in a 50th anniversary commemoration ceremony of the Berlin Crisis held at the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team headquarters at Camp Williams.

Red Arrow commemorates Berlin Crisis anniversary

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For many veterans, the event was an opportunity to reconnect with fellow service members and share their deployment experience from five decades ago to friends, family and current Red Arrow Guardsmen.

"I like to see the guys and reminisce," said Maum Rollie, a Soldier assigned to the 32nd Division's 732nd Ordinance Company from Tomah, Wis., as he looked over a display recounting a train crash he was a part of.

"There are so many of my friends in the 32nd who are gone," said George Rosholt, a mail clerk for Company A, 3rd Battle Group of the 127th Infantry from Milwaukee. "I'm lucky to be standing here today."

In September 1961, the 32nd Division received notice of possibly serving one year of active duty. The division began

mobilizing Oct. 15 of that year and reported to Fort Lewis, Wash., to train.

By February 1962, the division was declared Strategic Army Corps which meant the 32nd Division was prepared for joint Army and Air Force deployments to any trouble spot in the world on short notice.

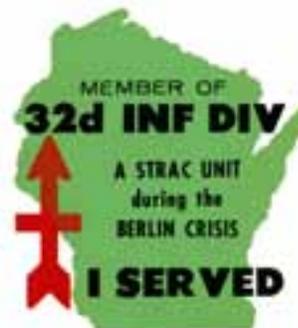
"For that year, it was hell on earth for some Soldiers but after it all we were ready to deploy at a moment's notice," Rosholt said. "The Cuban Missile crisis happened shortly after the Berlin Crisis and I thought we'd be called again," he added.

During the ceremony, Wisconsin Guard leadership spoke to the differences between 1961 and 2011 Red

Arrow Soldiers and applauded the service of 32nd Division veterans.

"Just like you did 50 years ago, Soldiers spend up to nine months on the ground executing the most difficult missions then come home and reintegrate like you did," said Col. Martin Seifer, 32nd Brigade commander. "They try to explain to their family and friends why they wanted to go back and in some cases why they even considered to serve."

"What you did was magnificent," said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin. "I'm proud to be associated with you. I'm proud to stand here with you and I thank you for your service."



Above, Staff Sgt. Matthew Ward, Company A, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry in Menomonie, explains weapon systems currently used by Soldiers to veterans of the 32nd Division during a 50th anniversary commemoration held at Camp Douglas. 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photos by Staff Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez

Carl Birk, a rifle platoon sergeant with Company C, 2nd Battle Group of the 128th Infantry during the Berlin Crisis mobilization stands next to Staff Sgt. Mark Langner, Headquarters Company, 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, who is wearing Birk's old uniform during a 50th anniversary commemoration at the 32nd Brigade headquarters in Camp Williams.

82nd ADT wraps up pre-mobilization training

Rob Schuette

Fort McCoy Public Affairs

A unique mixture of Wisconsin National Guard personnel who will perform a unique but vital agricultural mission in Afghanistan conducted pre-deployment training at Fort McCoy in October.

The 82nd Agribusiness Development Team (ADT) will conduct agricultural development planning, assessment and support activities in Kunar Province to expand legal agriculture/agribusiness,

services, markets, and education to reduce rural poverty, increase employment opportunities in agriculture service industries and improve agriculture education.

Col. Darrel Feucht, 82nd ADT commander, said the unit is comprised of Soldiers and Airmen from the Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard. Feucht brings agricultural know-how to the mission with his agriculture degree from the University of Wisconsin.

Wisconsin joins many other states in providing an ADT to support the Afghan people, he said. Although Afghanistan has gained a reputation for growing opium, the country produces a wide variety of legitimate crops, such as wheat, grapes, and tree fruits such as apricots, almonds, walnuts and mulberries.

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A member of the 82nd Agribusiness Development Team test-fires his M240B Machine Gun before leaving on a training mission at Fort McCoy Oct. 15. The 82nd ADT was at Fort McCoy for its last annual training before deploying in spring 2012. 82nd ADT photos by 2nd Lt. Stephen Montgomery

Members of the 82nd Agribusiness Development Team fire the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon during twilight at one of Fort McCoy's weapons ranges Oct. 11.

Agribusiness Development Team prepares for deployment to help Afghani farmers sow seeds of success

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Unit personnel bring a variety of backgrounds and experience to the mission, he said. The approximately 60 members include security and medical personnel, Feucht said. In addition to military skills, members of the ADT also have experience in agriculture-related fields, including hydrology, veterinary services, entomology, forestry, marketing and farming.

Female team members also will have the role of supporting and developing women's cultural programs, he said.

"We came to Fort McCoy to fulfill our collective military training tasks," Feucht said. "Fort McCoy is close to home for the Soldiers here, and we can do all of the military training we need to do."

The training at Fort McCoy included using the Contingency Operating Locations (Forward Operating Bases), rural village facilities and weapons ranges, he said. A field training exercise also allowed for key leader engagement.

"These locations add to the realism of our training and help get soldiers into the deployment mindset" said Capt. William Benson, operations officer for the 82nd ADT. "This training was about as realistic as you could get to being at a deployed forward operating base."

To further add to the realism, approximately 60 Recruitment Sustainment Program soldiers from various RSP units took part in the field training exercise, playing the part of local villagers, key leaders and even enemy combatants.

"It was great having a lot of people there; it definitely amped up the stress level of the training and made it a lot more realistic," said Nicholas Crochiere, a mechanic assigned to the 82nd ADT. "Normally one or two people will play those parts, but we had an entire village of people on some of the missions that we did."

Maj. Paul Felician, S2-Intelligence,



Members of the 82nd Agribusiness Development Team during an early morning premission briefing at Fort McCoy Oct. 15. 82nd ADT photo by 2nd Lt. Stephen Montgomery

said Fort McCoy offered a number of good training opportunities to prepare unit members for their military roles in deployment. Since ADT members are from a number of different units, the training also provided opportunities for teamwork and cross-training in the various skills needed for the mission.

"They will learn about every piece of equipment we have and learn each other's job," Felician said.

Spc. Kimberly Flock, a medic, helped teach a combat life-saver class to other members of the unit.

"Everyone teaches everybody else what they know," Flock said. "Everyone is cross-trained so we at least have basic knowledge of everything that we do. The practical exercises give us hands-on experience and we can ask questions."

While the Army only require 25 percent of deploying members to be

combat life saver certified, Feucht wanted to ensure all its member were certified.

"Twenty-five percent wasn't good enough for us," said Feucht."

Flock, who has been in the National Guard for three years, said after seeing many of her friends deploy, she was anxious to get deployment experience.

Command Sgt. Maj. Jeff Mand, who has deployed to Iraq, said there were multiple volunteers for the positions, so the best personnel were chosen. Mand, who lived on a farm as a youth, also knows his way around agriculture.

"These are the best of the best, Wisconsin's finest," he said. "I volunteered to go to this mission to serve with Colonel Feucht and take care of the Soldiers."

Staff Sgt. George Nagel of the Air National Guard brings his experience in entomology, or pest management, to the

mission.

"I saw this mission as an opportunity to help people," Nagel said. "It was a humanitarian mission to better people's lives."

Nagel said he will impart knowledge about how to control pests, grow crops, and store crops to have a better food crop for the Afghan people.

As one of two Air National Guard personnel in the mission, Nagel said he had a big training curve to learn the Army Warrior Tasks necessary to perform the mission, including tasks the Air Force doesn't normally do, and combat drills. He does bring deployment experience as he has been deployed to Iraq.

Capt. Sarah Bammel will serve as a hydrologist. She earned a degree in meteorology from the University of Michigan. Bammel's duties will include determining ways to increase irrigation efforts in Afghanistan. Many areas currently use drip-irrigation methods.

Unit members spent an earlier training session learning about their agricultural mission from various agricultural experts, including personnel from the University of Wisconsin Agriculture Department, Feucht said.

Mand said after this training the unit will conduct its mobilization/deployment training at Camp Atterbury, Ind., before deploying to Afghanistan in spring 2012.

2nd Lt. Stephen Montgomery, an Air National Guard public affairs officer, will serve as the unit's public affairs officer and historian.

Montgomery will document the unit's mission and tell its story.

"As the unit historian, one of my big jobs will be to document not only the missions we go on, but all aspects of our deployment for the Army," he said. "I also will serve in the typical role as a Public Affairs officer; taking pictures, writing stories and, basically, telling our unit's story."

2nd Lt. Stephen Montgomery contributed to this report. 

BDU phased out of Airmen wardrobe

Airman 1st Class Jarrod Grammel
23rd Wing Public Affairs

Battle dress uniforms — the standard uniform of the U.S. Air Force since the late 1980s — are gone. Tan combat boots are also gone. These new uniform changes, effective Nov. 1, have generated strong responses from Airmen.

“With the BDUs, I can wear a black shirt and you can hardly tell if I get grease on my uniform,” said Airman 1st Class Joshua Ricker, 23rd Equipment Maintenance Squadron aerospace propulsion apprentice. “The ABUs are terrible for guys who work in maintenance. The sand shirts get grease all over them and turn gray. Also, my belt has black finger prints and smudges all over it from aircraft grease.”

Another Airman fondly remembers maintaining BDUs while at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

“I remember having to stay up late to iron BDUs and shine boots while at the Academy,” said 2nd Lt. Chelsea Hendel, 23rd Mission Support Group executive officer. “There were three people to a room and we would trade items, so one person was ironing and the other two were shining boots. I was usually the one ironing them.

“I will be really sad when they are gone,” she added. “It will be a shock, and I think I’m going to be in denial. I plan on saving all my sets of BDUs and maybe putting them in a shadow box.”

One NCO got his in Basic Military Training and will continue to wear them up to the very last day.

“I wear my BDUs everyday because they are 100 times more comfortable than the ABUs,” said Staff Sgt. Kenneth Olmstead, 23rd EMS aerospace maintenance craftsman.

Unlike Olmstead, who was issued his BDUs, Ricker bought his because he wanted to be part of a tradition before it’s

phased out.

“There is a lot of heritage behind the BDUs,” Ricker said. “My parents wore them, and I wanted to be a part of that tradition. When new Airmen get here who have never seen BDUs, I will be able to tell them ‘I remember shining my boots

and starching my BDUs.’”

While many Airmen are upset about the new changes, others greet them with enthusiasm.

“Personally, I like the ABUs,” said Senior Airman Johnny Liu, 23rd Force Support Squadron assistant storeroom

manager. “They are way easier to maintain, and are warmer in the winter.”

The new changes bring an end to a uniform era with decades of history.

No matter their opinion, all Airmen are expected to follow the new [regulations](#) that began Nov. 1. 



Red Arrow upgrading TOW missiles

Rob Schuette

Fort McCoy Public Affairs

The 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team will be even deadlier on the battlefield, thanks to an important equipment upgrade.

The brigade recently fielded the M41A4 Improved Target Acquisition System (ITAS) for the Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-command-linked (TOW) guided missile systems at Fort McCoy. The fielding — conducted at the Maneuver Area Training Equipment Site (MATES) — included maintenance and operator training.

“The units will take about half the equipment back to their home stations for their training needs,” said Maj. Myron Davis, MATES supervisor. “We will keep the other half here and maintain it. It can be issued out to the 32nd when they come for training, or used by other units as needed. It saves money, time and wear-and-tear on the equipment and vehicles used to transport it by us keeping it here.”

Lt. Col. Alec Christianson, a fire force integration officer and new equipment trainer, said the new equipment is more accurate and has a better guidance system than the equipment it replaces.

“The equipment has been used in [Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom] and helps get the enemy before [the enemy] realize it,” Christianson said. “It’s also so accurate, it helps avoid collateral damage to civilians and buildings.”

Greg Mattson of the ITAS Fielding Team said the new system has simplified the firing rules of engagement for troops using TOW.

“Because this is so accurate, you can engage the enemy immediately with this system without going through all the release authority steps that used to be necessary since it is a direct-fire weapon,”



Soldiers from the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the Wisconsin Army National Guard receive instruction on the Improved Target Acquisition System at a field site at Fort McCoy. The equipment was fielded to the units at the Maneuver Area Training Equipment Site. Photo by Rob Schuette

he explained. “This is a high-priority project to be fielded.”

The Soldiers who received the new equipment were impressed.

Spc. Brian Schroeder, who also works as a technician at MATES, said he had trained on TOW during advanced individual training, which included some training on the new ITAS equipment.

“This is more in-depth and a bigger upgrade than what I had back in 2007,” Schroeder said. “It’s so much easier to work, and you can diagnose problems quicker and get repairs done quicker. This is a lot more accurate and has an improved range, too.”

Sgt. 1st Class Brett Newsome, a maintenance shop technician at Camp

Williams, said the advanced optic system on the ITAS makes spotting and engaging the enemy easy.

“You also can get maintenance or replacement parts done overnight so there will be less downtime for maintenance,” Newsome said. “The new equipment also has an add-on capability to provide for improved [future] capabilities.”

Spc. Nathan Gerke said the ITAS has an advanced zoom on its target laser range field that helps pinpoint the target.

“Once you fired the old equipment, the screen went blank for a few seconds,” Gerke said. “This doesn’t, and helps you track the missile better — which helps you get first-time hits.”

Sgt. Joe Conway said he had used the ITAS equipment during OIF and was impressed with the equipment’s sighting capability.

“I thought the new ITAS was awesome,” he said. “You can see they implemented the ideas we submitted from the field, so it’s even better than what I used.”

The ITAS can be mounted on Humvees and Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected (MRAP) vehicles, or it can be used on a tripod — useful for both mounted and dismounted missions, Mattson said.

Mattson also said that lessons learned in combat, videos and other useful information can be found on the TOW ITAS [website](#) on AKO. 📷

State homeland security report details impact of reduced federal funds

1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson
Wisconsin National Guard

Though federal funding for Wisconsin's homeland security efforts decreased roughly 60 percent in 2011 and promises to drop even more in 2012, state officials said that smart planning has put Wisconsin in position to move forward.

"We consistently have a record of using those [funds] effectively and efficiently," said Gov. Scott Walker. "Obviously we're going to continue to work with our congressional delegation and others in the future so at a minimum we sustain the federal funding that we have, and that good programs we have will be supported in the future. But we particularly appreciate — at a time when the federal government has reduced funds — that we've got a [Homeland Security Council](#) that has been so effective at taking those dollars and spending them the right way."

Walker received the [2011 Wisconsin Homeland Security Report](#) at the end of December. The report highlighted program accomplishments as well as provided an overview of homeland security funding.

As anticipated, federal homeland security funding for Wisconsin decreased — from \$10 million in fiscal year 2010 to \$5.8 million in fiscal year 2011. The decline was expected as a change in how U.S. Department of Homeland Security calculates funding for states and reductions in federal program spending. In addition, the Milwaukee area was cut from the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI). Last year, the Milwaukee Metropolitan area received \$4.6 million in federal homeland security funds.

"The elephant in the room when it



comes to Homeland Security is funding," said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin and Wisconsin's Homeland Security advisor. "We take great pride in trying to invest every dollar as carefully as we can."

Dunbar said that stretching equipment recapitalization over a longer period of time was one way to make do with less funding.

Gov. Scott Walker answers questions about the 2011 Wisconsin Homeland Security Report during a Dec. 21 ceremony at Witmer Hall, Joint Force Headquarters in Madison. Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, presented the report, which details the impact of a federal funding decline, cyber security improvements, intelligence sharing and the Fusion Center, and the Wisconsin National Guard. Members of the Wisconsin Homeland Security Council were at the ceremony. Wisconsin National Guard photos by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson

"As the dollars continue to drop, it's going to be a collaborative decision on the part of the state as to which [programs] we fund and which ones we don't fund," he continued. "I can't answer that for fiscal year 2012 because we haven't gotten the actual numbers from the federal government. I can tell you that I'm very proud of the effort of the team led by the Office of Justice Assistance, as the state administrative agent that is responsible for management of the grants, because everybody's voice is heard and it's a collaborative effort where we check the

egos at the door and really try and do what's right for Wisconsin."

The report also highlighted several success stories, including the [Wisconsin Statewide Information Center](#) (WSIC) — the state's intelligence "fusion center." The WSIC works with local, county, state, tribal and federal agencies, along with the public and private sector, to enhance information and intelligence sharing statewide. In 2011, the WSIC was evaluated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on core operating capabilities and received outstanding marks, making it one of the highest rated centers in the nation.

Dunbar also pointed to the number of exercises Wisconsin took part in during 2011, including [Vigilant Guard](#) — a five-day, state-based exercise sponsored by the National Guard Bureau in conjunction with the U.S. Northern Command. In addition, the state recently released the Wisconsin Emergency Response Plan that includes an annex on cyber threats.

Walker praised Dunbar, the Wisconsin National Guard and the Homeland Security Council for their efforts.

"Part of the reason why you're not likely to see a noticeable change [in Wisconsin's homeland security program], essentially in Wisconsin it was forward thinking, making investments and upgrades and improvements that are now in place," he said. "This was building a system, putting things in place, continuing to ride the investments that were already made. That's a credit to the forward thinking of the members of this council and others who served on it before about making those types of prudent, long-term decisions."

The Homeland Security Council was formed in 2003 to advise the governor and to coordinate the state's homeland security efforts, including collaborating on how to best use federal funding. The 13-member council is made up of representatives from various state agencies and first responders groups. In addition, there are five working groups, each focused on key objectives — cyber, critical infrastructure, information sharing, military support to civil authorities, and interagency coordination. 

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue
Wisconsin National Guard

More than 100 young adults — from 38 Wisconsin counties — celebrated an important milestone in their lives as they officially graduated from the first phase of the Wisconsin [National Guard Youth Challenge Program](#) during an official ceremony Dec. 17 in Mauston, Wis.

Senior Wisconsin National Guard leaders, Challenge Academy staff, family, friends and spectators left standing room only in the Mauston High School gymnasium as each young man and woman took center stage in celebration of their accomplishments.

“Most people strive to be good,” said Kevin Krueger, Challenge Academy acting director. “Cadets, you’re on track to be brilliant.”

The graduates — ranging from 16 to 18 years old — have taken a concerning label of “at-risk youth” and have transformed their progress in life to that of success and promise.

“We have made such a positive step in the right direction,” said Raymond Skudlark, of Athelstane, Wis., and Class 27’s honor graduate. “We all have the tools to do great things.”

Eighty eight of the 103 graduating cadets earned their high school equivalency diploma (HSED). In addition to scholastic success, each cadet received Red Cross certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid. Each cadet also received lessons in philanthropy and community service as the graduating class logged more than 7,000 hours of service work.

The cadets now enter into the 12-month post-residential phase of the program where cadets are encouraged to enter higher education or enter the military. This phase matches each cadet with a mentor from their local community.

“The mentor is there to help the cadets with whatever they have chosen to do,”



Cadets of the 27th graduating class of the Wisconsin National Guard Challenge Academy listen to a guest speaker during a formal commencement ceremony at Mauston High School Dec. 27. The cadets, from 38 different Wisconsin counties, spent 22 weeks in the first phase of the program. More than 85 percent of the students — once labeled as “at-risk youth” earned their High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED). Wisconsin National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

said Mary DeWitt, Challenge Academy admission coordinator. “We also keep in touch with them over the next 12 months and continue to be a resource.”

The goal of the program — by the end of the two-phase, 17-month program — is

to have provided graduates with “values, life skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as productive citizens.”

Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin and the ceremony’s

keynote speaker, told the cadets they are on their way to reaching that goal.

“They call this commencement for a reason ... it’s just the beginning,” Dunbar said. “Cherish this moment — you’ve earned it.”

A seven-year veteran of the Wisconsin Air National Guard is the first recipient of the Thomas E. Wortham IV Achievement Award.

Tech. Sgt. Robert Garrelts, Sparta, a mechanic with the 128th Air Control Squadron at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, received the award during a Dec. 2 ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters in Madison. The award recognizes Wisconsin National Guard member accomplishments off duty.

Garrelts, who joined the Illinois Army National Guard in 1987 and served in various units as well as the Army Reserve before joining the 128th ACS, struggled to express what receiving the Thomas E. Wortham IV Achievement Award meant to him.

"I really wish I could have gotten the chance to meet Thomas and serve with him," Garrelts said.

Garrelts is active with the Sparta Boys and Girls Club, serving as an executive board member and helped the organization raise \$40,000 by volunteering for the club's annual haunted house fundraiser.

"I've seen numerous kids grow up in that house," he said, explaining that he works with Boys and Girls Club members for months constructing the new haunted house interior. Some youth appreciate the adult mentorship, while others learn how to use tools or build walls for the first time, he said.

Garrelts volunteers for the Sparta Fire Department, where he serves as the training officer and fire inspector for a 284-square-mile area of responsibility.

"I grew up around it," Garrelts said. "My dad was a firefighter — he still is. My brother is in a fire department. It's a family thing."

He noted that he has missed some holiday meals answering fire calls.

"I'd rather protect and save life," he said. "Who else is going to do it?"

He also volunteers with the Monroe County Hazardous Materials Team, and



Col. Joanne Mathews reads the orders designating Tech. Sgt. Robert Garrelts as the first recipient of the Thomas Wortham IV Achievement Award, which recognizes the citizen contributions of the Citizen Soldier and Citizen Airman. The award's namesake was a Wisconsin Army National Guard officer, Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran, and member of the Chicago Police Department who was killed while preventing a vehicle theft at his Illinois home. Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar and Thomas Wortham III were on hand to present the award Dec. 2. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson

had volunteered with the Camp Douglas Ambulance from 2008-2010.

Garrelts has been a member of the Volk Field color guard team the past three years, and said every veteran deserves military honors at their funeral. He is also an executive committee member for the Wisconsin National Guard Youth Camp,

where he serves as assistant security director.

The award is named for 1st Lt. Thomas Wortham IV, a member of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's Troop A, 105th Cavalry as well as a member of the Chicago Police Department. He was murdered outside of his parents'

Chicago home May 19, 2010 when four men attempted to steal his motorcycle. The Bronze Star recipient and veteran of two Iraq deployments as well as a tour of duty performing airport security as part of Operation Noble Eagle joined the Chicago

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Fallen hero lives on in Wisconsin Guard award

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Police Department in 2007.

“As impressive as his uniformed contributions were to nation, state and community, they don’t paint the entire picture,” said Capt. Matthew MacDonald, Wortham’s commander in Troop A. Wortham served as president of the Cole Park Advisory Council in Chatham, and worked to make the neighborhood safe for children to play in area parks as a youth mentor and community watch coordinator. His fellow Soldiers learned about these accomplishments after his death.

“In a way, Tom’s humility is the genesis of this achievement award,” MacDonald said. “Tom represents the best traditions of the colonial militias going back to the days of America’s founding. His embodiment of the warrior ethos is enhanced and made all the more impressive by his spirited embrace of what it means to be a citizen in the fullest sense.”

Wortham’s father, retired Chicago Police Officer Thomas Wortham III, was on hand to help present the award, and thanked the Wisconsin National Guard for developing the award.

“It is a great honor to my son and my family and I,” he said. “It’s truly something that we never expected, and we’re truly grateful to all of you for doing this. I think this will keep my son alive forever. Giving this award out every year, young people not even born yet will know who he was and what he stood for. And for that, I thank you.”

“This is Tommy’s award,” MacDonald added. “I’m confident that, long after everyone in this room is gone, the Wisconsin National Guard will continue to find and recognize Soldiers and Airmen in our ranks worthy of his legacy.”

The Thomas E. Wortham IV Achievement Award was announced last year during a [halftime ceremony](#) at Soldier Field, part of a Sept. 27 Monday Night Football game between the Chicago Bears and Green Bay Packers. The Chicago Police Department developed their own version of the Wortham Award, given to police officers.

Garrelts said the award lets the public know how Guard members give back to their communities.

“I’m going to do my best to get the word out about this award,” he said. 📷



Above, Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, presents Tech. Sgt. Robert Garrelts with the Thomas Wortham IV Achievement Award. Below, Thomas Wortham III speaks during the presentation ceremony for the Wisconsin National Guard award named after his son, Thomas Wortham IV, at Joint Force Headquarters Dec. 2. Wisconsin National Guard photos by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson



Hello, Lakota



Wisconsin National Guard photos by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson



Brig. Gen. Scott Legwold, director of the Wisconsin National Guard's Joint Staff, and Brig. Gen. John McCoy, commander of the Wisconsin Air National Guard, look over downtown Madison during an orientation flight aboard a UH-72 Lakota Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) during a senior leader orientation flight Nov. 30 in Madison. The off-the-shelf aircraft, one of two assigned to Detachment 2, Company D, 1st Battalion, 112th Aviation Regiment based in West Bend, will be used for stateside Homeland Security, counter-narcotics and state emergency response missions.



Meritorious service



Samantha Czerkas of Cross Plains, Ryan Skiff of Mauston, Samuel Puchalla of Sheboygan, Taylor Maciosek of Milladore and Starr Spencer of Eau Claire — all Dec. 18, 2010 graduates from Class 25 — completed 10 months of service with the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps Nov. 17. Wisconsin National Guard photo

Five graduates from the Wisconsin National Guard Challenge Academy completed 10 months of service with the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) Nov. 17.

Samantha Czerkas of Cross Plains, Taylor Maciosek of Milladore, Samuel Puchalla of Sheboygan, Ryan Skiff of Mauston, and Starr Spencer of Eau Claire — all Dec. 18, 2010 graduates from Class 25 — completed various projects across the Midwest ranging from building and restoring homes, managing invasive species, mentoring youth, engaging in disaster response, developing trail systems, and restoring parks and recreational facilities.

All five earned the Congressional Award for their achievement in public service, personal development, physical

fitness, and exploration activities. In addition, Czerkas, Maciosek, Puchalla and Spencer also achieved the Presidential Award for completing 100 independent service project (ISP) hours and leading an ISP. All five also earned a \$5,350 educational award to use for higher education.

The National Guard Youth Challenge Program and AmeriCorps NCCC have developed a partnership with the hopes that more cadets will transition into service to community work with NCCC. Currently, there are 15 Challenge Academy graduates from Class 22 through Class 26 who are serving at AmeriCorps campuses around the country. In addition, 16 cadets from the Class 27 residential class are preparing to begin their service in February 2012. 📷

Wisconsin's first provost marshal honored

Maj. Joseph Adamson, police chief with the Horicon Police Department, was recently recognized for his efforts in establishing a provost marshal office in the Wisconsin Army National Guard.

A provost marshal is a military officer in charge of military police or, in this case, installation security. Specifically, Adamson's responsibilities included antiterrorism operations, physical security operations, operations security and law enforcement liaison.

"I took a military leave of absence from my civilian job to stand up the provost marshal office," he explained. "Wisconsin was the 14th state or territory to establish a full-time provost marshal office."

"I can't thank you enough for all your hard work," Lt. Col. David May, deputy director of domestic operations, plans and training with the Wisconsin National Guard Joint Staff, wrote on a plaque presented to Adamson Oct. 21. "Your accomplishments for the state are immense and lasting. You leave a void on the full-time staff that will be extremely hard to fill anytime soon."

During his time as provost marshal, Adamson coordinated and executed security for the National Guard



Brig. Gen. Scott Legwold, director of the Wisconsin National Guard Joint Staff, presents a provost marshal seal to Maj. Joseph Adamson, the Wisconsin National Guard's first provost marshal, during an Oct. 21 ceremony. Adamson returned to his civilian job as Horicon Police Chief after helping stand up the provost marshal office. Wisconsin National Guard photo

Association of the United States [annual conference](#) Aug. 26-29 in Milwaukee. The security detail included members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd Military Police Company, the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Security Force Squadron and 128th Security Force Squadron, the Milwaukee Police Department and the Wisconsin State Patrol. Adamson also planned and executed the first [validation exercise](#) for the Wisconsin National Guard's Reaction Force.

The 28-year military veteran has returned to his duties as police chief, which include oversight and management of the Horicon Police Department. 📷

Veterans, Families, Retirees

Military retiree volunteers needed

The Wisconsin Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Committee is looking for retirees from all branches of service to become volunteers for the ESGR program.

ESGR is a Department of Defense agency, established in 1972, to promote cooperation and understanding between reserve component members and their civilian employers, and assist in resolving conflicts stemming from an employee's military commitment. The ESGR program covers the entire United States and also oversees a committee in Europe.

The Wisconsin ESGR committee is made up of approximately 140 volunteers that donate, on average, up to 4 hours per month for ESGR activities. Most volunteer time takes place close to our members' communities. Some activities include meeting with commanders, first sergeants and service members for reserve component units in Wisconsin — including Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve and Coast Guard Reserve — a few times each year to explain the basics about ESGR, support unit events and provide briefings if needed.

Volunteers can support a number of different activities, including:

- **Employer Outreach:** Work with local employers and educate them about ESGR. Present Patriot Awards and acquire signatures for Statements of Support.
- **Military Outreach:** Educate local military units about ESGR.
- **Ombudsman:** Receive formal training and resolve employer conflicts through informal mediation.
- **Public Affairs:** Work with local media regarding ESGR events and news releases.

Wisconsin is divided into nine ESGR areas — areas 1 through 4 cover southern and eastern Wisconsin, and

areas 5 through 9 cover northern and western Wisconsin. An ESGR volunteer is assigned to every National Guard and Reserve unit in the state.

The Wisconsin ESGR committee meets at least twice a year, with training meetings in the fall and awards banquet in the spring. Volunteers are placed on invitational travel orders and receive per diem for food, lodging and mileage to and from ESGR events, where they will receive training, updates and meet other ESGR volunteers. Volunteers would also receive basic ESGR training upon assignment and attend quarterly meetings in their area. It is understood that volunteers may not be able to attend every meeting or both training weekends.

To become a volunteer, contact the ESGR offices. To reach the Madison office, call 608-242-3169, 608-242-3279 or 800-335-5147, ext. 3169 or ext. 3729. To reach the Eau Claire office, call 715-858-9676. 

Tutoring services offered

National Guard and Reserve families can now receive online tutoring and homework assistance at no charge from www.tutor.com/military. This program connects kindergarten through 12th-grade students with live tutors online, anytime, for help with homework, studying, exam preparation, college coursework and more. The more than 2,500 tutors are carefully screened experts including certified teachers, college professors, graduate students, select undergraduates from accredited universities, and other professionals.

This free service is available regardless of duty status, and is provided as a collaborative effort between the Department of Defense Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Library Program and the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. 



ACT, SAT tests offered to military families

A partnership between eKnowledge, a group of NFL players — including Corey Williams of the Green Bay Packers — and the Department of Defense will distribute more than \$16.5 million of eKnowledge's [SAT/ACT preparation programs](#) to military service members and their families. Active duty, retired, veterans, Guard, Reserve, and all DoD employees and civilians performing military support are eligible for this program.

The program features 120 interactive, multimedia video lessons. Students can organize their test preparation into short study periods to maximize study time. 

Services, hours for Retiree Activities Offices

The Retiree Activities Office (RAO) provides guidance and information to retirees and spouses of retirees, of all ranks and services. The RAO provides information on military status, TRICARE, military ID cards, survivor benefits, death reporting and much more.

Retirees may provide an e-mail address, to include first name, middle initial, last name, retired military grade and branch of service to widma.retiree@wisconsin.gov to be added to the RAO's e-mail data base. The RAO also has a website that provides a lot of information for retirees and can be found at <http://dma.wi.gov/retirees>.

The Madison RAO is located at Joint Force Headquarters, 2400 Wright Street, Room 160, Madison, Wis. 53704. The RAO is open Tuesdays and Thursdays 7:30 to 11:30 a.m. except on holidays. Their phone number is 608-242-3115, 1-800-335-4157, ext. 3115, DSN 724-3115. Contact the RAO with questions or for assistance.

The Milwaukee RAO is co-located with the 128th Air Refueling Wing,

General Mitchell Air National Guard Base, 1835 E. Grange Ave, Bldg 512, Milwaukee, Wis., 53207. Their phone number is 414-944-8212. Their e-mail address is rao.128arw@ang.af.mil. The Milwaukee RAO is manned by volunteers on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. 

Vets4Warriors

The Vets4Warriors peer support line, 1-855-838-8255 (1-855-VET-TALK), provides easy access to supportive, non-attributional conversations with trained veteran peers representing all branches of the military. This team of veteran peers has immediate access to behavioral health clinicians to respond to potentially emergent issues and can offer referrals to local community services, military veteran centers, and military healthcare providers based upon the needs of the Service Member. A variety of services will be provided to include non-clinical (legal, financial) and referrals for clinical services (substance abuse, behavioral health). 

Post-9/11 GI Bill

For all those utilizing Chapter 33 Post 9-11 GI Bill benefits, an update to eBenefits was released that allows students to view their Chapter 33 entitlement and enrollment information. eBenefits enrollees, who have a Premium account, can now view their VA education benefit enrollment information online.

Once logged in, key information is displayed such as your Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility date, your delimiting (or end) date, the amount of entitlement used, and the amount of remaining entitlement. It will also display your enrollment history.

Complete instructions on how to establish a basic and the required premium account are located at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits-portal>. Contact the [Wisconsin National Guard Education Office](#) with additional questions. 

Parting shot



Gov. Scott Walker, Brig. Gen. Scott Legwold, director of the Wisconsin National Guard's Joint Staff, and John Scocos, secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, greet residents of the Veterans Home at King on Dec. 27. The visit—which also included a stop at the Wisconsin Veterans Home in Union Grove—gave the senior state and Guard officials a chance to share season's greetings and present veterans with ornaments from the Christmas tree at the state capitol. Wisconsin National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Nathan Wallin