

Cease Express

Patrol base named for Wisconsin Guardsmen turned over to Iraqi forces

SAMARRA, Iraq — The changing role of U.S. forces in Iraq was evident across the entire country June 30, but in Samarra it also created a poignant moment for those who remembered Wisconsin Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Todd Olson.

Olson, who died Dec. 27, 2004, of wounds he suffered in action in Samarra early in his tour with 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, was honored at a ceremony turning a Samarra patrol base over to the government of Iraq. The outpost, Patrol Base Olson, had carried his name for more than four years.

“We have won this war because of men like Staff Sgt. Todd Olson and the efforts and sacrifices of all of our Iraqi brethren in attendance today,” said Army Lt. Col. Samuel Whitehurst,

commander of the
25th Infantry
Division’s
2nd
Battalion,
35th
Infantry
Regiment,
3rd Infantry
Brigade Combat
Team.

As Patrol Base Olson was turned over to Iraqi forces, its name was changed to Fond’k Albo Hera. The Arabic name translates into English



U.S. soldiers salute the memory of Wisconsin Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Todd Olson while Iraqi forces raise the flag of Iraq at the turnover of Patrol Base Olson in Samarra, Iraq, June 30. The base had been named in honor of Olson, who was killed in an attack in Samarra in 2004. It is now called Fond’k Albo Hera. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jazz Burney.

as “Lake Hotel,” recognizing the military post’s previous use as a hotel and casino on the shore of a small lake on the city’s northern edge.

The U.S.-Iraq security agreement calls for the withdrawal of all U.S. combat troops from Iraq by the end of 2011. One of the agreement’s provisions called for U.S. combat forces to move out of Iraqi cities, towns and villages by June 30, 2009. Patrol Base Olson was among more than 100 combat outposts vacated by U.S. forces over the past nine months.

“Today we are witnessing a transition that does not divide us, but further unifies us

in our combined vision to protect and serve the Iraqi people and specifically the people of Samarra,” Whitehurst said.

And for the former hotel-casino — named, until June 30, for Todd Olson — it’s back to the future.

“This facility represents the tourist potential for the city of Samarra,” said Army Maj. Kareem Montague, the battalion’s executive officer. “Our desire is to return this asset back to the city. To do this, we first must reduce our presence here and turn it back over to the government of Iraq.”

A Multi-National Corps-Iraq news release contributed to this story. ☞



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From the TAG

Wisconsin Guard's great Soldiers and Airmen continue to serve around the world as well as here in Wisconsin.

We currently have more than 3,600 Soldiers and Airmen deployed for overseas contingency operations and all are performing superbly. I am very proud of Wisconsin's finest.

As you know, serving in the National Guard is more than being a Soldier or Airman, it involves being a responsible member of the community — our community. "Going green" has been a national initiative of the National Guard since 2001 and the Wisconsin Guard is part of that effort and continues to implement eco-friendly ways to carry out business. Check out what the 115th Fighter Wing is doing to at Truax Field Airbase in Madison. A more recent development is our efforts to go "paperless" with our command information publications such as *BAM (Badger Air Militia)*, *The Tankard*, and *At Ease*.

Solar panels, windmills and sustainable design and development are some methods already in use in other states. Additional ways in which the Wisconsin National Guard is helping preserve the environment will be explored in future issues of *At Ease*.

Of course, the Wisconsin National Guard also impacts the world by deploying some of the finest Soldiers and Airmen in the nation. A patrol base in Iraq named for a fallen Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldier was recently turned over to local control, underscoring Wisconsin's role in the recovery of that nation.

The Wisconsin Air National Guard has sent one unit to help fuel the fight on terror, while another unit demonstrates how Guard members bring a unique and vital blend of skills to the fight. In Afghanistan, a handful of Wisconsin Army Guardsmen are



Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar
The Adjutant General

preparing the national police for the upcoming presidential elections.

The Wisconsin National Guard plays a significant role in building friendships across the world, as seen by the 115th Fighter Wing delivering four F-16 Falcons to Greece, and by the continuing partnership with the nation of Nicaragua.

On the home front, the Wisconsin Air National Guard's Volk Field hosted a two-week international exercise, and the 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery of the Wisconsin Army National Guard proved it was made of true artillerymen during its first live fire in four years. Wisconsin sent its first group of Army Guardsmen to the Air Assault Course at the National Guard's Warrior Training Center at Fort Benning.

As you can see, the Wisconsin National Guard continues to be Always Ready and Always There.

I'm proud to represent you — keep up the great work!

GUARD GOES GREEN

Not offset but online: Wisconsin National Guard dispatches go digital

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

“Bye-Bye *BAM*,” began a recent post on the **115th Fighter Wing’s website** signaling October’s monthly newsletter as the final print product, and the transition to an online publication.

But the *Badger Air Militia*, better known as *BAM*, isn’t the only Wisconsin Guard publication going “green” — *The Tankard*, from the **128th Air Refueling Wing** and *At Ease*, the Wisconsin Guard’s official command information publication, has also made the switch from hard copy to an online publication.

Discontinuing publishing printed command information publications is part of the **Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs and National Guard’s** communications plan to maximize use of limited resources while communicating essential, sometimes life saving, information to internal and external audiences.

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

For the *BAM* and *The Tankard*, the ultimate decision to go paperless came from Air Force Instruction (AFI) 35-101, which recently stipulated that Air Force funds cannot be used to publish newsletters or yearbooks.

Many considerations factored into the decision to publish *At Ease* exclusively online, according to Maj. Jackie Guthrie,

director of public affairs. Cost was one — a different sort of “green” benefit — but getting timely, relevant information to our audiences was key to the final decision, she said.

In the past, “going to press” involved several steps between writing the story or taking the photograph and opening the glossy pages of *At Ease*. Sidestepping the physical printing process makes the final product much more immediate and timely for the reader, and accessible anywhere the Internet can be found.

Audiences of all publications will reap the advantages of this transition, Guthrie said. News is not only more timely but also available in multiple formats including video. Readers can download articles, pictures and videos and “share” via online social networking sites such as Facebook. The websites can also be accessed on the go via web enabled mobile devices.

The eco-friendly side to online publishing coincides with giving the consumer a direct say in how to access the final product. The online format allows the reader to print as few or as many pages as desired — like a personal “on-demand publishing” venue. Overall, this can mean a great reduction in paper and ink consumption. Likewise, distribution of an online product is accomplished with a few keyboard strokes, as opposed to the fuel and other resources required to print, package and deliver hard copies to homes across the state and nation.

Consumers can also decide when they want to receive products — immediately through a **subscription** that sends a text or email whenever the website is updated; daily by visiting the **website**, or monthly via the **@Ease Express, BAM or Tankard**.

The Wisconsin Guard isn’t alone in going paperless. **National Guard Bureau** also discontinued printing the “*On Guard*” and replaced it with an online version. And hundreds of civilian outlets are creating “e-editions” of their newspaper — exact replicas of the paper product in digital format — that can be read on a computer, mobile hand held device and e-readers.

Along with online publishing, the Wisconsin National Guard is busy exploring how to reach new audiences through social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Flickr — just another method for the Guard to be “Always Ready, Always There.”



Ed Jilbert, 115th Civil Engineering Squadron facility maintenance specialist, installs a light emitting diode fixture in the CE squadron building. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

Truax Field sees the light

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue
115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

TRUAX FIELD — When Airmen of the 115th Civil Engineer Squadron tell people they are “going green,” there is an emphasis on going, as in ... ongoing.

Despite already being the first, and only, Air National Guard base of 92 to purchase 100 percent of its power from renewable “green” energy sources, the 115th Fighter Wing refuses to rest on its successes. With an immeasurable and indefinite end-goal of reducing Truax Field’s energy footprint, the Wing continually looks at ways to not only reduce energy consumption, but explore other renewable energy methods as well.

Currently, Truax Field has a partnership with a local energy company, Madison Gas & Electric, to purchase all of its energy from wind farms in Wisconsin and Iowa. This means the 4.5 million kilowatt-hours consumed at Truax Field each year won’t be coming from traditional coal power plants that emit environmentally harmful pollutants.

The 115th Fighter Wing is MG&E’s fourth largest consumer of renewable energy, but it is the second largest customer that purchases 100 percent of its energy from renewable sources.

The Wing has completed many projects already and even more are in the works.

Read the entire story at <http://www.115fw.ang.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123153305>



Wisconsin Airmen fuel fight on terror

The Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing continues to support the global war on terrorism with fuel.

Approximately 50 Airmen and four KC-135 Stratotankers left Wisconsin for Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, where they will provide refueling support to C-17 Globemaster III cargo and transport aircraft who deliver supplies to Iraq and Afghanistan. The 128th ARW will rotate forces in and out of Turkey until they relinquish command in September. By the end of the deployment approximately 200 Airmen that support the in-flight refueling and provide communications, personnel, maintenance and information management support will have contributed to the ongoing war on terror.

This scheduled deployment is part of the U.S. Air Forces' Air Expeditionary Force concept that identifies units in advance for probable deployment.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, every unit in the Wisconsin National Guard has deployed Soldiers and Airmen in support of the global war on terrorism. ☞



Airmen from the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing wait to receive briefings during pre-deployment processing June 30. The unit recently deployed to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Ryan Kuntze

Badger Airmen bring unique skills to mission

Senior Airman Michael Matkin

379th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

SOUTHWEST ASIA – A ground theater air control systems unit from the Wisconsin Air National Guard deployed here in May, bringing experience and expertise to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. The 128th Air Control Squadron from Volk Field joined forces with their active-duty counterparts at the 71st Expeditionary Air Control Squadron in Southwest Asia.

"Our unit has a lot of experience, which is common among members in the Guard. For instance, I have 10 years active-duty experience and have worked on older systems that had some of the same components as the newer systems," said Senior Master Sgt. Kevin Pradarelli, 71st EACS ground radar systems technician noncommissioned officer in charge. "This knowledge gives us an edge in maintaining the new equipment."

In his civilian job in Greenfield, Pradarelli works as an electrical engineer. His civilian career gives him a wealth of program management and planning experience, such as setting up processes.

Unit leaders agree that the civilian experiences Guardsmen bring to the deployed environment are skills that are not normally acquired through military training.

"Guard service members bring to the theater of operations their life experiences from their civilian jobs," said Lt. Col. Gerard Iverson, 71st EACS director of operations. "We have members that range from college students to electrical

Guard service members bring to the theater of operations their life experiences from their civilian jobs.

— Lt. Col. Gerard Iverson

engineers. They bring these unique skill sets they have in their civilian life to the theater of operations and they can use these skills to troubleshoot, implement ideas and improve processes – a lot of people do not understand that."

"They bring these different skills with them and, in some cases, they may not directly use those skills, but they could be easily called upon to use them," Iverson, a Tomah native, said.

Master Sgt. Jessica Maple, 71st EACS air surveillance technician, works as a full-time surgical technician in the civilian sector. She said that working in the operating room has prepared her for working in a high-stress environment often found in the military. She said that although she doesn't use her medical training in the military, she would be able to help her wingman if ever there were a medical emergency.

Other 128th ACS service members said that they have also been able to use their civilian employment skills in their military careers.

"As a United Postal Service driver, I have learned to use my time efficiently and

with a sense of urgency and this directly applies to my life in the military," said Master Sgt. Randall Brown, 71st EACS first sergeant. "I have also carried other traits from my civilian job, such as being organized and disciplined, planning out the day and prioritizing duties. Also, at UPS I am just a regular employee, but in the military, I am a first sergeant. I can use these special skills to empathize with Airmen; I know what it is like to be on the other side of the desk," the West Salem resident said.

"Not only do civilian skills come in handy in the military environment, but Guard service members are also able to better their civilian workplaces with the skills they learn in military training," Iverson said. "We have a radio maintainer who is almost [Air Force Smart Operations 21] Green Belt certified and he can take that into his civilian life and look into improving the processes of his civilian job."

Working in the military has helped another Guard member in her civilian career. Maple, from Mosinee, said her military training has taught her discipline, attention to detail and to follow orders without question, which is important when working in a hospital environment.

Staff Sgt. Nicholas Sanders, 71st EACS ground support equipment technician from Savannah, Ga., said that the U.S. Air Force core values, such as service before self, have helped him in his civilian job. ☞

Read the entire story at
<http://dma.wi.gov/dma/news/2009news/09072.asp>



Members of the Royal Netherlands Air Force Operational Healthcare Department prepare to load a patient onto a waiting C-130 during Operation Global Patriot Exercise being held at Fort McCoy and Volk Field in Wisconsin through July 27.

Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Cadet Arturo Gamez

Air Guard hosts full-scale joint exercise

Spc. Eric Liesse and Pfc. Alyson Berzinski
112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORT MCCOY – Fort McCoy and Volk Field, Wisconsin’s two largest military installations, are no strangers to extensive training exercises. However, it’s rare when the bases get as many service members in one spot for one operation as they have now.

For two weeks in July, McCoy and Volk are conducting Wisconsin Air National Guard’s annual international Operation Global Patriot exercise, hosting roughly 3,000 National Guard Troops from 45 different states and six different coalition nations. The exercise’s overall training goal is for different coalition nations and National Guard units to work together in real-world scenarios.

“Patriot is an opportunity for joint operations to occur,” said Army Col. Timothy Gowen, commander of 29th Combat Aviation Brigade of the Maryland Army National Guard. Gowen’s brigade has about 950 soldiers from five different states involved in the Patriot exercise.

As an aviation unit, Gowen’s 29th CAB is working extensively with National Guard Airmen for many training exercises, including daily runs and walkthroughs of medical evacuation aircraft.

“It’s an opportunity for us to receive support from them, and for us to give [support] to them,” Gowen said of the Airmen.

Army and Air Guard members working together are not the only joint-service aspect of this operation, however.

“It’s very interactive,” said Capt. Maarten Morsink of the Royal Netherlands Air Force Operational Healthcare Department. This is Morsink’s sixth time attending Operation

Patriot; this year he is with about 75 other RCAF Troops. “We learn from each other and I think it’s a good thing to work internationally.”

During Operation Patriot, Morsink is involved with coordinating and negotiating planes and helicopters to keep a steady flow of mock-patients throughout Volk Field.

However, the 29th’s main focus is bringing together all of its subordinate battalions, Gowen said, as the unit is scheduled for a deployment in roughly two years. The 29th’s command jumped at the chance to be involved with Operation Patriot, they jumped at the chance.

“We were looking for something exactly like this,” Gowen said. The size and involvement of the operation would allow the 29th to “hone themselves” as a single combat unit, as Operation Patriot is allowing the 29th to stay relatively autonomous from other units.

Although the brigade is training on everything from weapons qualifications to convoy and movement operations, all were dwarfed by the 29th’s “capstone” centerpiece training mission set for July 20, putting almost every 29th CAB unit into play.

“We’re trying to get every battalion we can involved with the capstone,” Gowen said. The mission will send several UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters into the air, filled with Soldiers from the Maryland National Guard’s C Troop, 1-158th Cavalry Scout Regiment. After a short ride, the Scouts will dismount and tactically assault a mock village named Bayquobah, extracting mock al Qaeda operatives portrayed by actors and Air Force personnel. 📷

Read the entire story at
<http://dma.wi.gov/dma/news/2009news/09075.asp>

Special delivery strengthens ties

Capt. Suzanne VanderWeyst
115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Four pilots with the 115th Fighter Wing proved developing the bonds of comradeship with coalition partners can occur in the most unique situations when they delivered four F-16 Fighting Falcons to Araxos Air Base, Greece, on June 20.

Lt. Cols. Bruce Fischer, Matt McCunn and Doug Read and Maj. Bart Van Roo flew four new F-16s purchased by the Hellenic air force. This is the fourth F-16 contract they've had with Lockheed since the base began their conversion from the A-7 Corsair to the F-16.

As the pilots taxied in on a fresh asphalt taxiway into a shiny new hangar finished the day before, they were each met by the Greek pilots of the newly delivered F-16s. From the initial shaking of hands and trading of patches, to a formal reception in the hangar, the 115th FW pilots said they were received by the 116th Combat Wing members like they were part of the family.

"It's certainly very rare to get an opportunity to do something like this ... to bring F-16s to one of our allied partners there and have instant friends when you land, even though we have never met them before," said Fisher, 115th Fighter Wing Air Sovereignty Alert commander.

Even with all the countries Lockheed delivers aircraft to, Van Roo, 176th Fighter Squadron assistant director of operations, said the rarity of the experience is so high because there are so few deliveries that any one pilot would get to do.

The opportunity for the 115th FW pilots arose in part from Read's former working relationship and ongoing friendship with the current 116th CW commander, Col. Kostas Vouzious, who was his squadron commander during a one year remote active duty tour at Araxos Air Base. When the Greeks purchased their second F-16 contract with Lockheed in 1997, part of what they paid for was two American instructors to come over and train them for a year on the aircraft. Read was one of the instructors who flew with one of their squadrons.

However, it was another relationship he made while stationed in Greece that brought the prospect of the F-16 delivery to his attention. During his year there, Read met the Lockheed rep that lived in Greece, Ken Hayes, who just moved back to Greece recently to manage the current purchase. Both Read and his wife are good friends with Hayes and his wife and keep in touch with each other.

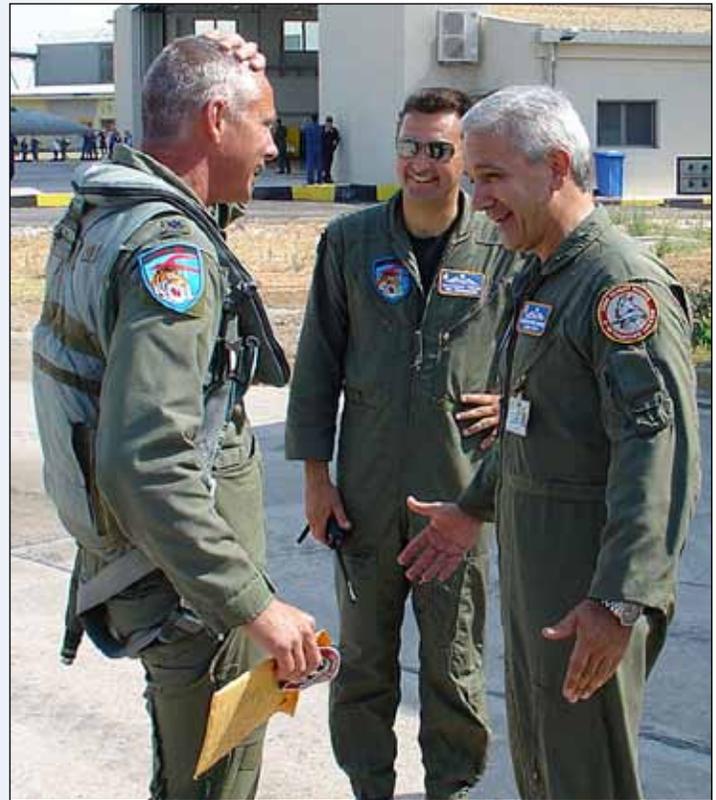
"When I found out Kostas was the wing commander, I thought it'd be nice if we could go over and take him some airframes," said Read, 115th Operations Support Flight commander. "So when the Lockheed folks got back to us and said not only do they have one but four [aircraft] to take over, we welcomed [the opportunity]."

The reception of all the 115th FW pilots given by Vouzious and the 116th CW was characteristic of the same Greek hospitality Read recalled experiencing during his previous time there.

"The relationship is really the neat part of the whole thing because ... we can learn a lot from them in terms of hospitality," Read said. "They just have a wonderful level of hospitality they extend to you when you're over there."

The extension of that hospitality was shown also to the spouses, Lt. Col. Anne Fischer, Kelly McCunn and Wendy Read, who were able to fly separately, at their own expense, and be there for the reception of the four pilots.

"When I was stationed there in 1997, there was an opportunity to take my family over and have them with me, it would just be at my expense, and when I first met Col. Vouzious, he was absolutely insistent that I do that because they wanted to welcome the family over there and extend the hospitality to them," Read said. "The family thing is very important to them, and having Wendy go back and the other wives go, that shows."



Lt. Col. Doug Read, 115th Fighter Wing Operations Support Flight commander, is greeted by 116th Combat Wing commander Col. Kostas Vouzious upon arrival to Araxos Air Force Base, Greece June 20. The reunion between the two friends, who worked together when Read was stationed there 12 years ago, occurred during an F-16 Fighting Falcon delivery by four 115th pilots to the Hellenic air force. Photo submitted by Clye Williams

The day after the pilots arrived, the Greek squadron hosted a family get together. They shared about flying, family, what they do in their country, how they're going to use the aircraft and they training they do.

"It was neat to really get to know them a little bit even if it's only for a few days, and see how they're going to use them, what they think of us and our training and what they think of their training," Van Roo said. "There's a level of trust there with what we're doing, in particular since Colonel Read had been there and worked with several of the guys who happened to be at this wing ... so we got some special insight into it all."

A level of trust that McCunn, 115th FW Air Sovereignty Alert director of operations, said extends all the way to the current Hellenic air force chief of staff who was the 116th Combat Wing commander when Read was there.

"The relationships go both ways because the impressions [their leadership] got from Lt. Col. Read, which were obviously favorable, will certainly influence their thoughts of the USAF," McCunn said.

In the end, all the pilots described the most valuable aspect of the experience being the relational ties between two coalition air forces they were able to strengthen.

"I think it's really important for us to get outside the walls and the borders of our country and go to places, meet other people and see how they do things," Fischer said. "If we were ever to wind up going and fighting alongside these people it sure is nice to have something to fall back on, even just a little insight, knowledge and understanding of the people you may be working with." ☺

Fire and smoke obscure a Multiple Launch Rocket System vehicle, known as a Self-Propelled Loader-Launcher, during live-fire exercises at Fort McCoy June 18. This was the first such exercise for the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 121st Field Artillery Battalion in four years. Wisconsin Army National Guard photos

121st Battalion stays on target

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

The mark of a qualified artilleryman is if he can hit his target from a great distance, even if obstacles obscure the target.

For the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 121st Field Artillery Battalion, the great distance was four years since the last live fire exercise. The obstacles included an overseas deployment which did not require artillery skills, supporting the pre-mobilization training for the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and losing personnel to attrition as well as to augment the brigade deployment.

"We actually had 133 Soldiers on the ground for live fire, and that was it," said Lt. Col. Brian Wolhaupter, outgoing 121st commander.

Despite these challenges, the 121st Battalion recently completed a successful live-fire annual training at Fort McCoy. Ten multiple launch rocket system crews were certified, as were three fire direction control crews, and 72 rockets were fired during a 36-hour period.

Many of the Soldiers at this year's field exercise had no prior experience with a live fire exercise, while others had no experience inside the rocket launcher. Wolhaupter credited Maj. Matt Beilfuss, who wrote the training plan for the live fire exercise, Sgt. 1st Class Jamie Preder, battalion fire direction chief, and Sgt. 1st Class Adam Wallander, battalion master gunner, with focusing the training to ensure that 10 launcher crews and three fire direction crews certified.

"We took it by the numbers," Beilfuss said. "We were realistic. We didn't focus on survival tasks – we focused on core tasks."

The key was time management, Preder said. In addition to maximizing drill training days, Preder developed a web-based MLRS safety program through Army Knowledge Online (AKO) to allow soldiers to download training documents and take the



An ammunition crew with the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 121st Field Artillery Battalion download rocket pods as part of live-fire training at Fort McCoy.

artillery safety exam on their own time.

Preder said that the battalion took advantage of opportunities as they presented themselves – such as working with the 1158th Transportation Company to move the rocket launchers to the field for live fire, thus reducing the risk of maintenance issues interfering with training.

Beilfuss praised the NCOs in the firing platoons for their efforts as well.

"They were able to pick it up after four years of not doing it," he said. "They figured it out."

Preder said this certification was critical, as National Guard units are evaluated on how they may best be used in the global war on terror.

"If you can't show sustainment of skills, why keep that skill set?" Preder explained.

Wolhaupter, who was selected to be the military science professor for the UW-Whitewater ROTC program, called this annual training the cornerstone of his command.

"Everything I asked them to do happened, and more," he said. "This is what I am supposed to enable the battalion to do – field rocket fires. I was determined to find a way to be able to do that again."

"Despite the challenges we faced, we were able to meet our mission," he continued. "We're true artillerymen. I can't think of a better way to end my time with the 121st." 🇺🇸

Red Arrow Roundup

Soldiers run 5K in Iraq

BAGHDAD – Approximately 30 deployed Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team headquarters, Camp Douglas, endured dust-filled air and early morning temperatures that soared into the 90s as they celebrated Independence Day by participating in the Red Arrow Independence Day 5K run July 4 at Forward Operating Base Prosperity in Baghdad.

Ninety people from across the International Zone participated in the run. Each participant received a United States flag to carry during the run and a certificate for participating. Award certificates were also presented to first place competitors in each of three categories.

Capt. Douglas Kolb of Lyndon Station finished fourth overall with a time of 20 minutes 55 seconds.

“This is the second time in my life where I’ve run a race around one of Saddam’s palaces for the 4th of July,” Kolb said.

Maj. Jelora Coman of Tomah tied for second place in the female category with a time of 29 minutes 5 seconds. 🇺🇸



Col. Tim Lawson, Wisconsin Army National Guard, returns a salute during a ceremony at the Afghan National Police Academy in Harat July 17. Lawson and 15 other Wisconsin Guardsmen are part of a task force training and mentoring Afghani police. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo

State Guardsmen prepare for Afghan elections

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

With the Aug. 20 presidential elections looming, Wisconsin Army National Guard Col. Tim Lawson is emphasizing one message to the Afghan National Police: The world is watching you.

“This is their show,” Lawson said. “This is very important. They understand it – they get it.”

Lawson heads a 16-man group of Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers who recently began a year-long deployment as an embedded training team, advising the Afghanistan National Police in the western regional command, an area roughly 25 percent of the country bordering Iran.

The Wisconsin Guardsmen are part of Coalition Task Force Phoenix, serving alongside soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division and the 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the Georgia Army National Guard. The Wisconsin Soldiers come from units across the state, with the majority from the state Joint Force Headquarters in Madison.

Lawson said his Soldiers have already established themselves and have developed great relationships with police there, working at police stations in the Harat area. Some of his Soldiers bring civilian police experience to this mission, but Lawson said that people skills and leadership skills are more valuable than infantry or artillery skills for this job.

“It really comes down to sitting down with somebody,” he explained. “[Afghanistan police have] been very receptive. They do thank us for being in their country trying to help them. They understand the sacrifices we’re making.”

Lawson said the Afghan National Police do many of the same tasks as peace officers in the United States, but also have a greater military posture. For example, machine guns are mounted on the rear of their police vehicles. Next month those police will be expected to ensure free and fair elections in a country facing a resurgent Taliban insurgency.

It’s too early to make predictions, but Lawson sees the potential for positive gains.

“There is a lot of difference that can be made,” he observed. “I think we can help.” 🇺🇸



Citizen soldier

Vice President Joe Biden congratulates Spc. Flavio Cottrell after Cottrell became a United States citizen in a July 4 ceremony at Al Faw Palace on Victory Base. Vice President Biden and the top commander in Iraq, Gen. Raymond Odierno, swore in 237 U.S. service members as the nation’s newest citizens. Cottrell is assigned to Battery B, 1-120th Field Artillery in Stevens Point.

Wisconsin Army National Guard photo

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

Meritorious service



Eight members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard graduated from the Warrior Training Center's Air Assault Course at Fort Benning, Ga. July 3. They are, front row (left to right): Spc. Amy Beyer, Second row (l-r): Pvt. Nicholas Johnson, Pvt. Travis Greenwold, Pvt. Curtis Anderson and Pvt. Jon Peterson. Back row (l-r): Sgt. Joshua Baranczyk, Sgt. Thomas Christensen and 1st Lt. Kristopher Allen. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo

Wisconsin Guardsmen complete Air Assault School

Eight Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers graduated from the U.S. Army Air Assault Course July 3 at the Warrior Training Center, Fort Benning, Ga. This was the first group of Wisconsin Guard members to attend the course under a new initiative.

According to Master Sgt. Joshua Reed, a recruit sustainment program team non-commissioned officer, the National Guard Bureau opened the Warrior Training Center in January 2006. The center trains four 12-day classes of approximately 210 Guard Soldiers each per year in such air assault skills as rappelling, setting up landing zones, and how to properly sling-load equipment.

Reed said the Army National Guard's Air Assault Course Initiative provided the eight Soldiers with the opportunity to earn their air assault badges.

"The biggest thing is for M-Day Soldiers," he said, referring to soldiers who do not work full-time for the National Guard. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime chance. It offers the opportunity to learn a technical skill and leadership skills."

Reed said now that the word is out, Wisconsin will send up to 30 Soldiers each to courses in August and September.

Reed said the Air Assault Course Initiative was launched last December, as a cooperative effort between the Warrior Training Center and Army National Guard Strength Management, to provide unique and desirable training opportunities that would retain Soldiers in the Army National Guard and attract new enlistments.

"They were absolutely thrilled," he said of the first group of Wisconsin Guardsmen to attend. He added that while the initiative may not show immediate dividends, the enthusiasm of course graduates can spill over and result in new Soldiers joining the Guard.

The Soldiers, and their units, are: 1st Lt. Kristopher Allen, Sun Prairie, and Spc. Amy Beyer, Oshkosh, both of Headquarters Company, 147th Aviation Battalion; Sgt. Joshua Baranczyk, Madison, and Sgt. Thomas Christensen, Madison, both of Detachment 1, 107th Maintenance Company; Pvt. Curtis Anderson, Eau Claire, and Pvt. Travis Greenwold, New Richmond, both of Headquarters Company, 724th Engineer Battalion; Pvt. Nicholas Johnson, Superior, and Pvt. Jon Peterson, Woodbury (Minn.), both of the 950th Engineer Clearance Company. 🇺🇸



Col. David Been, commander of the 379th Expeditionary Operations Group, presents Wisconsin Air National Guard Capt. Jeannie Horn with the "Company Grade Officer of the Month" award for June. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo

State Airmen recognized in theater

Capt. Jeannie Horn, of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Control Squadron, received the "Company Grade Officer of the Month" award for June 2009 during a brief ceremony July 17. Col. David Been, commander of the 379th Expeditionary Operations Group, presented the award.

Horn was recognized for her role in transferring control of Operation Enduring Freedom airspace and weapons control to the 379th Expeditionary Air Wing, to which the 128th ACS is presently assigned on its Southwest Asia deployment. Several construction and maintenance achievements were cited that allowed the 379th to keep 187,000 square miles of air sovereignty.



Also recognized that day, Staff Sgt. Daniel Koepke, a ground radio technician with the 128th ACS, was promoted to Tech. Sgt. July 17. Fellow noncommissioned officers Tech. Sgt. Oleg Katsnelson and Senior Master Sgt. Charley Rydmark presented Koepke with his new rank. 🇺🇸

Veterans, Families, Retirees

GI Bill transfer to families eyed

The Post-9/11 GI Bill takes effect Aug. 1, but in the meantime, servicemembers may submit a request to transfer benefits to their spouses and children now.

“Transferability of Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits has been the most requested initiative we receive from our servicemembers,” said Bill Carr, deputy undersecretary of defense for personnel policy, “and we believe it will assist us in retaining highly qualified military personnel.”

Career servicemembers on active duty or in the selected reserve on Aug. 1 may be entitled to transfer all or a portion of their unused entitlement to one or more family members.

For servicemembers and spouses who might want to continue with their studies, the Post 9/11 GI Bill can be used for all levels of degree programs, including a second degree, a master’s degree or even a doctorate.

Defense officials advise servicemembers to transfer at least a month’s worth of GI Bill benefits to every dependent before they leave service to lock in an opportunity to change the number of months transferred at a later time.

Any family member not approved for transferability before a member retires or separates will be denied the opportunity forever, unless the member re-enters service. Likewise, veterans who remarry or have more children after leaving service will not be able to transfer GI Bill benefits to these new family members.

“It’s recommended that soldiers add all family members as potential beneficiaries of their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits, said Bob Clark, the Defense Department’s assistant director for accession policy and military personnel policy. Once servicemembers retire or separate, he explained, they can no longer add new family members as potential beneficiaries.

Tuition is not the only benefit extended to potential college-goers. For students attending school more than half the time, the Post 9/11 GI Bill also pays housing costs, up to a rate equivalent to the basic allowance for housing rate for an E-5 with dependents in the ZIP code where the school is located. ☞

Hall of Honor nominees sought

The Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs Office will be accepting nominees for the 2010 Wisconsin Army National Guard Hall of Honor next month. Instructions and nomination forms will be available at Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office (Room 209, 2400 Wright Street, Madison) and online at: <http://dma.wi.gov/dma/Retirees> in late August. For more information contact 608-242-3048 or 1-800-335-5147, ext. 3048. ☞

WMA retirees honored

Two retired non-commissioned officers – Sgt. 1st Class James Wheeler and Command Sgt. Major Richard Strathmann – will be inducted into the 426th Regiment and Wisconsin Military Academy Hall of Fame Saturday, Aug. 22 at 11 a.m. The ceremony will be held at the 88th RSC (Building 60), Fort McCoy. ☞

Retiree Activities Office

The Retiree Activities Office provides information to retirees and widows 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, name, retired military grade and branch of service to widma.retiree@wisconsin.gov to be added to the RAO’s e-mail distribution list.

The 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. Contact the RAO with questions or for assistance at 608-242-3115 or toll-free at 1-800-335-5147. ☞

Women Veterans conference set

The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs will host “Women Veterans – Facing the Challenges,” the third Annual Wisconsin Women Veterans Conference, Friday, Sept. 18 through Sunday, Sept. 20 at the Wisconsin Military Academy, 90 South 10th Ave., Fort McCoy, Wis.

The conference will feature presentations, workshops, and static displays, and will provide information for and about women veterans, including federal and state benefits, programs, and services for veterans and topics of interest including employment, education, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and reintegration.

Registration sign-in will take place at the Wisconsin Military Academy from 4 to 6 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 18 and from 7 to 8:30 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 19. Registration forms are available online (or can be mailed to those calling to register) and must be returned to WDVA by Aug. 31.

For more information, visit the WDVA Women Veterans webpage to access the conference agenda and register online at www.WisVets.com/womenvets, or contact WDVA’s Women Veterans Coordinator Gundel Metz at 608-266-1312. For information on WDVA programs and services visit our home page at www.WisVets.com or call toll-free 1-800-WIS-VETS (1-800-947-8387).

The WDVA is seeking nominations for the second annual Wisconsin Woman Veteran of the Year Award, to be presented during the Women Veterans Conference.

The Wisconsin Woman Veteran of the Year Award recognizes women veterans who have compiled a record of exemplary service as a military service member, a veteran, and outstanding member of the community.

Nominations will be accepted from any Wisconsin resident, veteran, County Veterans Service Officer or veterans service organization or group. Nominations may be submitted at any time during the year for the annual award. Completed nomination forms must be received by the end of the month that precedes the Women Veterans Conference. The deadline for the 2009 award is Aug. 31.

To see more information about the award to include the previous recipient, visit www.WisVets.com/WomenVets. ☞

‘Ready Family’ workshops offered statewide this month

The Wisconsin National Guard’s Service Member Support Branch will host “Ready Family Connections” and “Ready Family Maintenance” events throughout the state to promote readiness, health and wellbeing for service members and their families.

“Connections” workshops last four hours, while “Maintenance” workshops last eight hours. Both workshops offer a variety of presentations and information.

Topics can include but are not limited to: Stress manage-

ment during deployment, helping children deal with deployment, financial readiness during deployment, Military OneSource, family wellbeing, anger management during deployment, the upside of deployment, understanding combat stress, coping skills, time management, consumer awareness, taking care of yourself, creative problem solving, life in balance, getting ready for the return, and reunion

For information about a workshop near you, visit http://www.wingfam.org/readyfamily/Ready_Family.asp ☞

Wisconsin Guard battalion is nation's best

IRAQ — A Wisconsin Army National Guard infantry battalion currently serving on active duty in Iraq has been selected as the top battalion in the nation's National Guard. Eau Claire-based 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry will receive the Walter T. Kerwin Jr. Award for Readiness and Training as the outstanding National Guard unit for 2009.

The award will be presented in October at the annual meeting of the Association of the United States Army in Washington, D.C.

First Battalion, 128th Infantry is now in Iraq, about midway through a one-year mobilization that began in February.

"This is one of those things that happens when you least expect it," said Lt. Col. Leland Ward, the battalion commander. "All I know for sure is this is something that no one individual can claim. It is the collective effort of everyone from the Soldiers of the battalion to the leadership at the 32nd Brigade and state headquarters," Ward said in an email from Iraq.

The Kerwin award is named for Gen. Walter T. "Dutch" Kerwin Jr., a former Army vice chief of staff who was the first commander of U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) when it was established in 1976. FORSCOM was charged with ensuring the readiness and training of all Army units — active, Guard and reserve — in the United States.

Ward gives special credit for the award to his battalion's non-commissioned officer corps.

"In this 'Year of the NCO' I would be remiss not to mention our focus on first-line leaders and their daily effort to ensure the attention to detail required to maintain our readiness rate and mission focus," Ward said.

First Battalion, 128th Infantry is headquartered in Eau Claire and includes Detachment 1 of the Headquarters Company in Abbotsford; Company A in Menomonie; Company B in New Richmond and Detachment 1 of Company B in Rice Lake; Company C in Arcadia and Detachment 1 of Company C in Onalaska; and Company D in River Falls.

The battalion has about 600 Soldiers assigned to units presently operating in Iraq at Forward Operating Bases Future, Cropper and Liberty near the Baghdad International Airport, and at Ashraf. The battalion's missions are expected to be completed in January 2010. ☞



Gen. Moises Omar Halleslevens, head of the Nicaraguan military, and Brig. Gen. Jorge Alberto Miranda, chief of the Nicaraguan army air force, observe as Capt. Joseph Walter of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing details the cockpit of an F-16 Falcon. Capt. Gilberto Ruiz, who served as an escort for the Nicaraguan officers, looks on. The Nicaraguan Chief of Defense staff visited Wisconsin May 22-24 as part of the ongoing State Partnership Program between Wisconsin and the Republic of Nicaragua. The military exchange has been in place since 2003. Department of Military Affairs photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

Nicaraguan defense chief visits Wisconsin

Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs

The Chief of Defense and other top military leaders from the Republic of Nicaragua visited Wisconsin July 22 through 24 as part of Wisconsin's State Partnership Program.

Gen. Moises Omar Halleslevens, head of Nicaragua's military (or *ejercito*), along with top *ejercito* air and army leaders, visited Wisconsin's Joint Force Headquarters, Truax Field, Fort McCoy, Volk Field, the 54th Civil Support Team and the state capital building.

"We are deeply honored to have you here with us," said Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, to the Nicaraguan leaders upon their arrival. "We will try to squeeze every bit of Wisconsin into these two days that we can ... because we are proud of Wisconsin and we want to share that with you."

While touring the 115th Fighter Wing at Truax Field, the leaders were able to get up close with an F-16 fighter jet and an RC-26 multi-purpose propeller aircraft. They also toured a KC-135 in-flight refueler from the 128th Air Refueling Wing. The Nicaraguan army has an air component, but it is not as expansive as the U.S. Air Force inventory.

The aircraft were a new experience for Halleslevens, who said he enjoyed the tour.

A large portion of the *ejercito's* mission is to support the Nicaraguan national police in the fight against narcotics trafficking. While touring the RC-26, the *ejercito* leaders asked drug control program members about their mission and appeared keenly interested in the aircraft's advanced photographic turret capability.

Also like U.S. forces, the *ejercito* includes commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers. The NCO concept is somewhat new to the *ejercito*, and Wisconsin Army National Guard leaders have been providing guidance to their Nicaraguan counterparts.

"So many things are similar in leadership that [social status] doesn't really matter — a leader is a leader," said Wisconsin Army National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. George Stopper, who has visited Nicaragua three times. He said the partnership between the two militaries has rewards for both services.

"I think that we've made great strides in distilling in [the *ejercito*] the value of a NCO," Stopper said. "Having to interact with a different culture and seeing how other leaders do things makes us better leaders as well."

Halleslevens said that the partnership benefits all three components of the Nicaraguan military. "Nicaragua gains more from this exchange," he said through an interpreter.

The Wisconsin National Guard's partnership with the Republic of Nicaragua is entering its seventh year, but Wisconsin's relationship with the Central American nation dates back to 1964. ☞

Parting shot

A crew from the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 147th Aviation, along with civilians from the Friends of Bruce Mounds, Incorporated secure a chairlift support beam after a sling load for Clark County's Bruce Mounds Ski Resort on July 21. The 147th gained valuable real-world training from the good deed. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Cadet Arturo Gamez