



@ease
Express

**Special
Edition**

HALFWAY HOME



More than seven months after they entered active duty in the U.S. Army — and now about halfway through the time they will spend in Iraq — the 3,200 men and women of the Wisconsin National Guard's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team are focused on missions ranging from transporting detainees from what was once the largest theater internment facility in the country... to securing forward operating bases... to furnishing a shabby school in Umm Qasr... to transferring Baghdad's International Zone back over to the Iraqi government.

And these are just a few of the brigade's dozens of missions at locations throughout Iraq.



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From the TAG

As we begin a new fiscal and training year this month, I am reminded of the myriad seasons we go through as members of the Wisconsin National Guard. Whether they are training, fiscal or deployment cycles, all have beginnings, middles and ends.

This month we'll take a look at some beginnings, such as the 115th Fighter Wing beginning its deployment to Iraq. As it flies the Iraqi skies, other Wisconsin units continue with their ground missions — such as the 732nd Combat Support Sustainment Battalion headquarters, which has been in country for a few months now, and the 32nd Brigade Combat Team, which is in the middle of its deployment. This issue features the Red Arrow Brigade. The Embedded Training Team is in the middle of its deployment to Afghanistan, while the 951st Engineer Company is closing in on its return flight home. The 128th Air Control Squadron will return in October from its deployment.

What doesn't end is our commitment to being always ready and our willingness to serve. The dedication on display each and every day by our Airmen and Soldiers is truly humbling. Each day there is another reason to be proud of the individuals who are the Wisconsin National Guard. What you will read this month is but a small sampling.



Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar
The Adjutant General

As September was drawing to a close in Iraq, more than 3,300 soldiers of the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team passed the halfway point of the eight months their boots will spend on the ground here.

Augmenting the 32nd Brigade are other Wisconsin units: The 257th Brigade Support Battalion, the 32nd Military Police Company, the 108th Forward Support Company, the 829th Engineer Company, the 1158th Transportation Company, and Battery A of 1st Battalion 121st Field Artillery. They are all wearing the "Red Arrow" patch as well.

Red Arrow soldiers from the Wisconsin National Guard are doing amazing work in the difficult and dangerous environment of Iraq. They have closed the largest detention facility on earth at Camp Bucca, they are guarding detainees and treating them with the dignity that reflects our values as an Army and a nation, they are overseeing the training of a professional corps of Iraqi corrections officers that will ensure humane treatment of prisoners continues long after the U.S. departs Iraq, they are transporting detainees to court appearances, they are protecting

From the front lines



Col. Steven J. Bensed
Commander,
32nd Brigade Combat Team

their fellow soldiers and Iraqi citizens from harm, and they are securing and administering the International Zone in Baghdad — the center of gravity of the nation of Iraq and seat of the Iraqi government. Most of the brigade's missions here are unrelated to what our units would normally do, but these are National Guard soldiers who brought with them their Wisconsin work ethic and the rich skills and experiences of their civilian lives.

Our units have been working 24 hours a day since they arrived here in early May, and our soldiers have endured difficult conditions, searing (but now getting cooler) desert temperatures, blinding dust storms — all of this under threat of hostile action in an active combat zone.

Although they have passed the halfway point, our soldiers remain focused on their missions while they serve far from home doing a difficult and dangerous job as well as it can be done.

On the pages of this @Ease Express you can read about a few of the many things Red Arrow soldiers were doing all across Iraq during the past month.

Lt. Col. Tim Donovan
32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team

At Camp Bucca in southern Iraq, Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers helped put the theater internment facility (TIF) there out of business — moving all of the fewer than 800 detainees who remained at Bucca at the end of August to other facilities (see story, page. 7).

This work included Soldiers of the Appleton-based 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry, along with Alpha and Delta Companies of the 132nd Brigade Support Battalion, which were recently tasked to support the internment facility and to assist with detainee transfers. Alpha Company is from Janesville and Elkhorn, Delta is from Baraboo and Madison.

As Camp Bucca's theater internment facility emptied out, many of its transferred detainees will be watched over by other Wisconsin Guard troops at Camps Cropper and Taji near Baghdad.

The 105th Cavalry's Watertown-based Bravo Troop is one of the Wisconsin units serving at Camp Cropper, near Baghdad International Airport. The approximately 130 troopers rotate between manning entry control points and operating as a quick reaction force (QRF) for Cropper and the western portion of Victory Base Complex. The rotating assignments allow Soldiers a change of scenery and a little variety in their duties

"Our QRF periodically conducts exterior patrols of our area of operations outside of Victory Base in order to detect vulnerabilities and become more familiar with the area in the event that they are called to respond to an incident outside the wire," said 1st Sgt. Thomas Bruss of Bravo Troop. "This gives our Soldiers some opportunity to see the country and interact a little with the local population. Many of our Soldiers enjoy having that opportunity."

Also serving at Camp Cropper are Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry from New Richmond and Rice Lake, and Stevens Point's Bravo Battery, 1st Battalion, 120th Field Artillery.

"The roles the Soldiers have taken on have an important impact on this high-visibility mission," said Bravo Company's commander, Capt. Andrew Johansen. "The immediate reaction force (IRF) is the TIF's mobile security force and is made up of Soldiers and Iraqi corrections officers. The IRF Soldiers conduct daily roving missions to ensure the security of the compounds and the perimeter fence and wall have not been compromised."

Bravo Battery's executive officer credits "confidence and old-fashioned hard work" for his unit's standard-setting contributions at the Camp Cropper TIF. "Bravo Battery's relentless pursuit of excellence is seen in every task our Soldiers perform," 1st Lt. Jesse Losinski said.

"All of these jobs are important to the overall strategic mission in Iraq and will



Sgt. Brad Smith, Portage, supervises the movement of detainees at the theater internment facility on Camp Bucca. The detainees are transferred to other TIFs in Iraq where they will either continue serving their sentence or be released.

Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Spc. Tyler Lasure



Wire mesh and steel bars obscure Soldiers of the 32nd Military Police Company as they conduct a cell inspection at a theater internment facility near Baghdad.

Wisconsin Army National Guard photo

have an impact for years to come," said Bravo Company's Johansen.

Lt. Col. Leland Ward, commander of 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, noted that his battalion's Soldiers remain alert to the ever-present dangers of operations in a war zone, but are increasingly focused on their mission of rebuilding the country. Most of the battalion's troops are supporting theater internment facilities or training Iraqi corrections officers.

"Nearing the midway point in the tour,

they have conducted missions related to the rule of law in Iraq," Ward said. "Our Soldiers continue to take pride in sharing our unit and state heritage. Red Arrows and state flags are posted and fly everywhere you find our Soldiers."

Red Arrows can also be found in Baghdad, where violent explosions rocked two neighborhoods outside the International Zone on the morning of Aug.



19 and killed more than 100 Iraqis. Many of the victims were employees of the Foreign and Finance Ministries, or were near the government facilities when suicide bombers detonated powerful homemade bombs. Although 32nd Brigade Soldiers in Baghdad heard or felt the explosions and saw the smoke plumes, no Wisconsin troops were in danger from the attacks which occurred on the other side of 12-foot concrete blast barriers that separate the International Zone from the rest of the city.

Inside the International Zone, the 32nd Brigade headquarters is operating as Joint Area Support Group—Central, responsible for securing and administering the International Zone and for returning many of the IZ's properties back to the government of Iraq. The JASG—C has already turned over 10 IZ properties to the Iraqi government in the past three months. These include "Believer's Palace," a Saddam Hussein-era underground bunker complex disguised as a palace, along with the former coalition press center and a number of contractor-occupied properties. By the time the Red Arrow troops leave here in January, they will have transferred over many of the remaining properties and nearly 100 more acres to Iraq.

While the 32nd Brigade Headquarters is working to return property to Iraq's government, other units are donating directly to the Iraqi people.

Appleton's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry is on its second tour here, so Soldiers and unit leaders knew firsthand what the people of Safwan and Umm Qasr needed to improve their lives and to build a better future for their children.

As soon as the battalion arrived in Iraq, space in shipping containers was reserved to store donations sent to the unit by Soldiers and their families, and from Fox Valley civic organizations, churches and businesses. A half ton of school supplies, clothes, toys, personal hygiene items and first aid supplies has already been shipped and donations are still coming. They were to be handed out once Ramadan concluded and school resumed in mid-September. The battalion also helped furnish several poorly equipped schools in the Umm Qasr area. Camp Bucca detainees built 207 desks as part of a vocational training program, and the 2-127th's Soldiers delivered them to the schools.

"These items help the Iraqis understand that we are here in partnership with them and to support them," said the battalion's executive officer, Maj. John Oakley. "Our hope is that it will have an effect on reducing the threat level to American service members."

Soldiers of Fort Atkinson's Alpha Troop, 105th Cavalry, see a bit more of Iraq on their security-related mission than most of the 32nd Brigade's troops. In a recent newsletter to families in Wiscon-



Above, Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry meet with local government officials as they plan for the delivery of desks to several schools in the Umm Qasr area of southern Iraq. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo



At left, 32nd Brigade headquarters Soldiers, medical staff and Iraqi government officials conduct a preliminary walkthrough inspection of Baghdad's Ibn Sina Hospital. The hospital, operated by U.S. forces for the past six years, will be turned over to the government of Iraq. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Lt. Col. Tim Donovan

sin, 1st Lt. Mark Weigel wrote: "Your sons, husbands and brothers continue to get the job done with style out here in the boondocks. We're supporting our team and maintaining high morale. Our driving routes take us through cities and mountains and we bring our Wisconsin 'can-do' attitude wherever we go."

Weigel said his Soldiers had to become a close, family-like team because they are located so far away from other members of the troop. "For the most part, we're self-sufficient," Weigel wrote. "But we still make a regular run to the nearest

FOB [forward operating base] to pick up packages from home, see a doctor or dentist, shop at an Army PX or withdraw some necessary cash."

Army life — especially in a combat zone — is austere, but Alpha Troop's first sergeant reports in the family newsletter that many Soldiers are benefitting from what he calls "the disciplined lifestyle" in Iraq. Even though they get "three squares" a day in great combat zone dining facilities, most Soldiers have lost a bit



of weight since they left Wisconsin. The Alpha Troop record is held by a Soldier who has shed 42 pounds so far.

“Moms, dads, wives, girlfriends... you may not recognize some of your Soldiers when we come home,” 1st Sgt. Curtis Patrouille warned.

The support deployed Soldiers get from the home-front continues to be excellent and much appreciated.

Back home in Watertown, the local VFW and American Legion posts got together Aug. 11 for a spaghetti lunch at the VFW hall. A care package assembly line was set up, and members of the two veterans services organizations, their auxiliaries, National Guard families and community volunteers worked to assemble, package, label and ship care packages bound for their hometown Guard unit in Iraq.

In all, 170 of these packages were received between Aug. 23 and Aug. 28. That’s more packages than Watertown’s Bravo Troop has Soldiers.

“They all wanted to do something nice and they wanted to make sure every Soldier received a care package,” said Bravo Troop 1st Sgt. Thomas Bruss in Iraq. “Our mailroom was overflowing for a few days until we could hand them all out.”

A month earlier Bravo Troop received two pressure washers acquired and shipped by a small group of Watertown area veterans doing their part to support the hometown troops with something they could use.

While it’s not uncommon for Soldiers to receive small care packages from their Wisconsin hometowns, friends and families, it is rare for a Soldier to get more than 300 pounds stuffed into seven oversized boxes. Sgt. Frank Merola, a news photographer for a major network television operation, was called up from his home in New York City as an Individual Ready Reserve filler for the 32nd Brigade’s public affairs section. Merola’s co-workers at the network shipped more macaroni and cheese, snacks, books, foot powder, drink mixes, coffee and wet wipes than anyone had ever seen



Soldiers from Troop B, 1st Squadron, 105th Cavalry check the condition of a bridge during a force protection patrol Aug. 21. Pictured are Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Texidor, 2nd Lt. Michael Olson, Spc. Ahmed Abdalh, and Sgt. Lee Jones. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by 1st Sgt. Thomas Bruss



Spc. Miranda Wilson of the 829th Engineer Company works on an engine at the company’s motor pool, located on Camp Stryker, just outside the Camp Cropper gate.

Wisconsin Army National Guard photo

delivered to a single Soldier here. Merola shared it all, of course. The downside is that his fellow Soldiers have to look at all the Fox News caps, New York Yankees gear and “I ‘heart’ NY” stuff that now clutters an already cluttered workplace.

Once September arrived, most of the scorching 120-plus degree summer temperatures were behind the Red Arrow

troops here. A 10-day forecast for Baghdad promised temperatures would slowly drift down to a high of only 102 degrees. And when daytime highs finally dip below 100 degrees in the weeks ahead, it will be the first time temperatures have not been in triple digits for these Soldiers since the 32nd Brigade left Fort Bliss in April. ☺

Red Arrow Roundup

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

Wisconsin Guardsmen hold the hill in southern Iraq

Spc. Tyler Lasure

32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team

CAMP BUCCA, Iraq – From atop one of the only hills in southern Iraq, a team of Wisconsin National Guardsmen keeps a watchful eye over the surrounding area.

Soldiers of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry, Fond du Lac, and Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2-127, Appleton, man an outpost on Safwan Hill, far from the comforts of nearby Camp Bucca. The Soldiers on the hill provide security for communications towers there and have a birds-eye view to help other units in the area.

“Having that overhead view is a real good thing for the guys on the ground,” said Spc. James Hegner, an infantryman with Headquarters Company, 2-127. “Knowing that we’ve checked it out beforehand, I think gives them more of a warm and fuzzy on the inside.”

Life on top of the hill is different than life back at camp. Soldiers on Safwan Hill don’t have the comforts of camp life: there isn’t a large chow hall like the base has, instead Soldiers rely on one cook; there is no conventional gym, instead Soldiers set up a bench press and rack of dumbbells; there aren’t enough rooms for spacious living quarters, instead Soldiers sleep six or more in a room.

Even with all these inconveniences, Soldiers enjoy their time away from the base. “I really enjoy that it’s small, you are away from the flagpole,” said Staff Sgt.



Pfc. Kevin Lewis, Kaukauna, mans an M-240B machine gun at one of the guard towers on Safwan Hill. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Spc. Tyler Lasure

William Poor from Juneau, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the hill, and a squad leader for Company C. “I’m in charge of the entire hill; it’s great to be in charge of something again.”

For two Soldiers in Poor’s squad, manning the hill is a family affair. Spc. Kyle Bestul and Spc. Kory Bestul are brothers from Marytown, who work at the outpost together.

“It’s a good time, I enjoy it; he is an interesting character,” said Kory, an infantryman with Company C, 2-127, about working with his brother.

“It’s pretty sweet, actually. I get to hang out with him,” added Kyle, who serves in the same company.

These Soldiers will continue to watch over the area until their return to Wisconsin sometime in January 2010. ☮

Caring and sharing: Preschool program sends packages to deployed troops

Spc. Tyler Lasure

32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team



In Wisconsin, Linda Hughes (far right, in red), a teacher at Rascals and Rockers day school, and her students prepare packages for deployed troops as part of lesson focused on community outreach. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Mary Flynn

BAGHDAD – Troops all over Iraq get care packages from groups or anonymous individuals, but 2nd Lt. Johnathan Meyer, an officer who screens applicants for entry into the International Zone in Baghdad with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, has known the woman who sent this package since he was a toddler.

“She was my preschool teacher,” said Meyer, who grew up in Neenah. “It’s kind of a unique situation; it’s kind of funny that she is still taking care of me 28 years later, through all I have been through.”

The package is from Linda Hughes, a teacher at Rascals and Rockers, a Christian day school for children up to 12 years old in Cambria, Wis. She has taught there for 42 years, including when Meyer was a young student. Today she is the coordinator of the service learning project “A Case of Caring and Sharing” which sends care packages to troops throughout the world.

Hughes and her students prepare the packages as part of a lesson focused on community outreach and developing a sense of volunteerism in the students.

“We do a lot of projects in the community so they grow up caring and willing to help someone in need,” said Hughes. ☮

Wisconsin Guard Soldiers help close Camp Bucca



Sgt. Joseph Vanbuskirk, a guard with Company A, 132nd Brigade Support Battalion, and a native of Glenbeulah, keeps an eye on detainees while they are prepared for transfer. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Spc. Tyler Lasure

IRAQ — What was once the largest detention facility closed the week of Sept. 13 at Camp Bucca, in southern Iraq, with help from the Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers deployed with the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

Since June, Soldiers of the Janesville-based Company A, 132nd Brigade Support Battalion and Fond du Lac-based Company C, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry have been conducting guard force missions and detainee transfers. These missions included transporting hundreds

of detainees at a time from Camp Bucca to internment facilities in and around Baghdad.

Several platoons of the 32nd Military Police Company have also assisted in detainee transfers. “The members of 2nd Platoon have received high praise for their professionalism in handling the detainees with dignity and respect while ensuring their safety during the transportation process,” said 1st Sgt. Scott McDonnell of the 32nd MP Co. “They work long and difficult hours to meet this mission but

continue to perform the mission with a high level of motivation.”

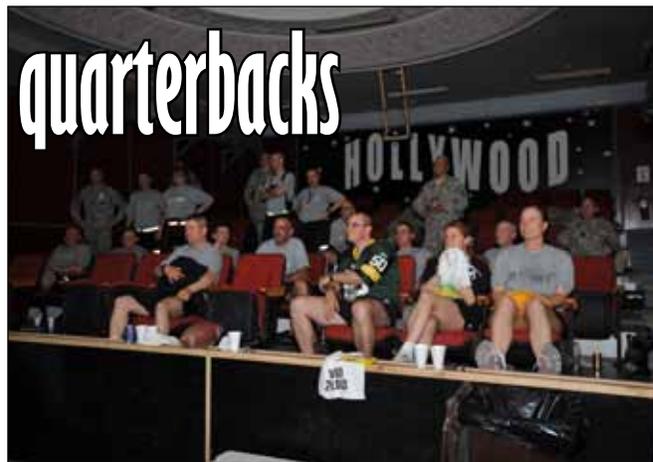
Red Arrow Soldiers are also involved in determining where detainees go from Camp Bucca.

Because detainees currently held in U.S.-run detention facilities will only be transferred to Iraqi facilities that meet minimum international standards, the 32nd MP Company’s 1st and 3rd Platoons are completing assessments to ensure Iraqi prisons meet those standards for Iraqi prisoner custody and care. 

Monday morning quarterbacks

With 3,200-plus Wisconsin National Guard troops in Iraq, including approximately 140 in the JASG-C, there was a lot of interest here in the Green Bay Packers regular season opener against their rival, the Chicago Bears. The trouble is, these cheeseheads are 6,282 miles and eight time zones away from the Frozen Tundra.

But in Baghdad, about 30 troops got up before dawn to watch the game, which was broadcast live on the Armed Forces Network beginning at 3:15 a.m. Baghdad time. Many soldiers wore jerseys over their PT uniforms to show support for their favorite players. Not one Favre jersey was spotted. 





Col. Steven Bensend (left-center) and Command Sgt. Maj. Edgar Hansen (right-center) talk with Soldiers from Company C at an observation post on Camp Ashraf. Company C runs several outposts in the area. Wisconsin Army National Guard photos by Spc. Tyler Lasure

Red Arrow leaders visit Soldiers stationed at remote bases

Spc. Tyler Lasure

32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team

CAMP ASHRAF, Iraq — With 27 units spread throughout a country the size of California, the commander of the Wisconsin National Guard's 32nd Infantry Brigade, Col. Steven Bensend, can't just hop in a Humvee to visit his troops. Instead, he orders up a couple of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and takes key staff members along by air.

On one recent visit, Bensend's Black Hawk helicopters dropped into Camp Ashraf, where Soldiers from the Arcadia and Onalaska-based Company C, 1-128th Infantry are serving at Forward Operating Base Grizzly. Company C is charged with operating observation points, escorting distinguished visitors in their area, providing personal security details for meetings and movements outside the FOB, and performing resupply patrols.

"The troops here at FOB Grizzly are busy in a very unique mission that is unlike any other in Iraq," said 1st Lt. Rhett Zietlow, a platoon leader with the company. "There is no cut and dry day-to-day type of mission; it is continually evolving due to the overall political sensitivity and humanitarian nature of it. There is no pattern to these missions as they could all happen on the same day if the situation



Col. Steven Bensend answers questions from Arcadia and Onalaska's Company C during a visit to Forward Operating Base Grizzly Sept. 18. Bensend and other leaders from the 32nd Brigade met with troops to check on morale.

would require it."

The company's accomplishments didn't go unnoticed by the brigade's top enlisted Soldier, who was along on the visit.

"These Soldiers are doing well and doing a great job on a difficult mission," said Command Sgt. Maj. Edgar Hansen after his visit to FOB Grizzly.

The visit allowed the top leaders in the

brigade to see how their troops were doing at the small and remote FOB. It was also an opportunity for Soldiers to ask the commander questions about the deployment.

"It was a great chance for our Soldiers to share their views and input on what we are doing," Zietlow said.

Company C is deployed to Iraq with the 32nd Brigade and is expected to return to Wisconsin in January. 🇺🇸



Charlie Abrahamson, of Boy Scout Troop 39 in Moraine Park, Ill., practices radio communications in an M1088 tractor truck with assistance from Sgt. Melissa Bergel of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 1157th Transportation Company, based in Oshkosh, during the Great Lakes Centennial Jamboree held at the EAA grounds in Oshkosh. Also pictured are Matt Arito and Isaac Husemann, of Troop 39. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Vaughn R. Larson

Wisconsin Army Guard supports Boy Scout Jamboree

The Boy Scouts Great Lakes Centennial Jamboree at the Experimental Aircraft Association grounds in Oshkosh Sept. 25-27 brought back fond memories for Capt. William Kesselring.

Kesselring, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 1157th Transportation Company, first experienced scouting much later than most – as a West Point cadet. The military academy hosted area Boy Scout troops each year at its training grounds, and cadets served as sponsors.

"I'm still friends with some of the people I met then," he said.

Kesselring headed up the approximately 100 Wisconsin Guard Soldiers who supported the Jamboree by manning static displays, operating an inflatable obstacle course and a small compass course, and interacting with the Scouts.

"I volunteered to come here," said

Staff Sgt. Mark Bolwerk of Bravo Battery, 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery. "This sounded like a lot of fun, and it's been a blast."

Bolwerk and others answered a myriad of questions from Scouts and their leaders, such as: "Can I drive that?" "How much does that tire weigh?" "How fast can that vehicle go?" "Why does the National Guard need combat vehicles?" "Are those real rockets?" and "When does the helicopter get here?"

The Black Hawk helicopter from the West Bend-based 832nd Medical Company (Air Ambulance) may have been the most anticipated National Guard display, but the others saw a steady flow of visitors throughout the day. Scouts crawled in and around a Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS), Heavy Equipment Transport (HET) truck and an M1088 tractor truck, Humvees and a

Humvee ambulance, a Joint Incident Site Communication Capability tent and the inflatable obstacle course. The National Guard Bureau's Mobile Event team operated the American Guardians combat simulator trailer for Scouts 16 years and older.

According to Jim Weiland, public relations director for the Great Lakes Council Centennial Jamboree, more than 10,100 Scouts attended the Jamboree.

"It went really well," Weiland said. "I don't think we could have done it without [the Wisconsin Army National Guard]. Not only did they provide a great service with water and tents, but everybody was helpful and polite. They couldn't have been nicer to deal with."

The Wisconsin Army National Guard role at the Jamboree is in keeping with the long-standing tradition of military support of the Boy Scouts of America. 🇺🇸

Wisconsin Air Guard's 115th Fighter Wing earns top readiness rating

The Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing in Madison was pronounced "NORAD Mission Ready" — the highest available rating — following a surprise inspection of its alert forces last week.

An Inspector General team from the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) came to Madison Aug. 26 and presented what they called the most intense scenario they have ever given in an alert forces evaluation. 115th Fighter Wing

alert pilots responded to a complex, multiple-aircraft scenario involving threat simulations and real-world safety considerations.

As a result of the evaluation, the unit's command and control function was highlighted as a "best practice" for exceptional coordination with related military and civilian agencies.

The 115th Fighter Wing has been constantly on alert since Sept. 11, 2001, and currently maintains the alert mission under Operation Noble Eagle, the United States' air sovereignty program. 🇺🇸

Wisconsin Air Guard unit sends fighter jets to Iraq



The glow from the afterburners of multiple F-16 fighter jets adorn the night sky over Dane County Regional Airport early on the morning of Sept. 22. The 115th Fighter Wing launched 14 F-16s as part of the wing's scheduled Aerospace Expeditionary Force rotation that began the prior week, when approximately 200 of the unit's members deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs photo by Master Sgt. Paul Gorman

The 115th Fighter Wing launched 14 F-16 fighter jets Sept. 22 as a part of the Wing's scheduled Air Expeditionary Force rotation that began when approximately 200 Airmen deployed to Iraq days earlier.

The F-16s flew to a stopover location in Europe for a pilot rest period before continuing to theater. Take-off times correlated with specified arrival times at their destination.

The Airmen are expected to serve for approximately two months before being relieved by the Iowa Air National Guard from Des Moines. The 115th has

previously deployed their aviation package in support of Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom in December 2004 to Southwest Asia, and June 2006 and January 2008 to Iraq. Their mission is to support ground forces in Iraq with close air support and other combat capabilities directed by the combatant commander.

This is an historic situation in that the Wisconsin National Guard has more than 3,200 Soldiers on the ground in Iraq and they are among those the Wisconsin Air National Guard may support while in-theater. ☪



Pilots from the 115th Fighter Wing step to their F-16 Fighting Falcons after receiving a pre-departure briefing. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Ashley Bell

Members of the 115th Fighter Wing bid farewell to family and friends prior to leaving for Iraq Sept. 17.

Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Ashley Bell

Pedal power program popular with pilots, maintainers

Tech. Sgt. Don Nelson
115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Sharing the road with cars is something bicyclists are very familiar with. For one group of bicyclists in Madison, sharing the road with vehicles and jet airplanes is just part of their job.

Known as one of the most bicycle-friendly cities in the U.S., Madison is host to a unique bicycle community at Truax Air National Guard Base. Airmen from the 115th Fighter Wing consider these two- and three-wheeled modes of transportation as an essential part of their mission.

Pilots and maintainers on the unit's F-16 Fighting Falcons use bikes on a daily basis traveling from the hangars and shops to where the jets are parked on the flightline. Users say that the bikes are a great resource for the high tempo operations they often are involved with.

"It is a life saver," said Tech. Sgt. Rob Brinks when describing his favorite three-wheeled orange bike. "I can haul all kinds of things like tools and head sets while doing it with a little bit of flair."

In addition to convenience, bikes also offer a measure of conservation for the unit as well according to Master Sgt. Darrell Miller, an F-16 crew chief. Typically, trucks and other vehicles are used to transport personnel to places where aircraft maintenance takes place.

"Using bikes is cost-effective and helps reduce the usage on our vehicles," Miller said. "The short starting and stopping distances are also hard on the diesel engines as well."

Many maintainers use the bikes to save time due to the long walks often



Senior Master Sgt. Al Drickell and Tech Sgt. David Byzefski, F-16 crew chiefs with the 115th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, discuss flightline operations. Drickell, a crew chief supervisor, sits atop a custom bike he personally bought to communicate with crew chiefs working the flightline here.

required to get to the airplanes. It also helps members maintain fitness levels, said Master Sgt. Robert Blodgett, an F-16 weapons system specialist.

Some of the units have their own fleet of bikes while other members bring in their own. Senior Master Sgt. Al Dickrell, an F-16 crew chief supervisor, realized early on that a bike would be useful.

"I was only on the job for a week and I realized I could not do this entirely on foot," Dickrell said. "My feet were very tired at the end of the day and knew right

then that I had to get a bike that was specific to me."

While Dickrell said that his bike is critical to his daily routine of getting important information to his crew chiefs, there are more basic needs that the bikes are useful for.

"The bikes are helpful for something as simple as a guy needing to use the bathroom," Dickrell said. "Being able to get to the bathroom quick from the flightline very much enhances the mission." 🌱



Technical Sgt. Nicole Crivello, left and Master Sgts. Patricia Gross and Angela Petri from the 128th Air Refueling Wing were honored by the city of Cudahy for potentially saving the life of Linda Provollo, center, on Sept. 15. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Wallin

Airmen help save stricken woman

Senior Airman Ryan Kuntze
128th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs Office

Three Air Force recruiters performed emergency cardiopulmonary resuscitation on Cudahy resident Linda Provollo on July 22.

The recruiters were going off-base to visit a local coffee shop when they saw an elderly lady frantically waving her arms and trying to direct attention to Provollo, who was unconscious on the ground, said Tech. Sgt. Nikki Crivello, a production recruiter at the 128th Air Refueling Wing.

Crivello said the recruiters were in a van and, upon seeing the unconscious woman, stopped in the road. Master Sgt. Patty Gross, the recruiting and retention non-commissioned officer-in-charge at Volk Field, and Master Sgt. Angela Petri, the recruiting office supervisor at the 128 ARW, immediately jumped out of the van and rushed across the street, Crivello said.

Petri, a former member of the medical squadron at the 128th ARW, began to perform CPR and was assisted by Gross for about two minutes when the city EMTs arrived.

"It felt good to help because the woman's friend didn't know CPR," Petri said. "We gave her a chance. It felt like we were supposed to be there." 🌱

Roughly 30 Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers, led by 64th Troop Command commander Col. Darrel Feucht, take their office oath to become officers during the halftime show at Lambeau Field Sunday, Sept. 13. The halftime of season-opening game against the Chicago Bears was Military Appreciation night, honoring both new officers and the 2009 Soldier of the Year. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Spc. Eric Liesse



Packers fans honor Wisconsin Army Guard Soldiers

Staff Sgt. Gretel Weiskopf
Wisconsin Army National Guard

Echoing applause greeted approximately 30 Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers as they marched across Lambeau Field during the halftime of the Green Bay Packers' game against the Chicago Bears.

The Soldiers are the Wisconsin Army National Guard's newest commissioned and warrant officers and future leaders of the troops. The Soldiers have spent the last two-years attending training and completing educational requirements to qualify them for their new roles. Their hard work paid off as they took the oath of office on the field — pledging to the governor of Wisconsin and the president

of the United States that they will faithfully carry out the duties assigned to them.

Col. Darrel Feucht, commander of the Wisconsin Guard's 641st Troop Command, led the ceremony witnessed by family and more than 70,000 cheering fans.

2nd Lt. Nicholas Plocar, a newly commissioned officer from Howards Grove, said he looked forward to taking the oath in front of the fans. "To see all the appreciation the community gives us, that really gives me a sense of pride."

Plocar was able to share the moment with his parents, Scott and Linda, who also took the field at halftime and witnessed their son become an officer in

the Wisconsin Army National Guard. This was not their first visit to Lambeau Field, but admitted this was a "cool" experience.

This special event was coordinated by the Wisconsin Army Guard's recruiting and retention marketing department as part of an ongoing partnership between the Packers and the Guard. While an officer's commissioning ceremony is an important milestone in a Soldier's career, doing it Lambeau field makes it extra special.

"The Guard is made up of Wisconsin's hometown heroes and we are honored to pay tribute to them along side our hometown team," said Lt. Col. Russ Sweet, director of recruiting and retention. The commissioning ceremony is just one of several events the Guard and Packers have planned for this season. 



Wisconsin Soldier of the Year garners Lambeau Field honors

Looking back, Spc. John Wiernasz may not have realized that becoming the Wisconsin Army National Guard's Soldier of the Year would be a year-long effort.

Wiernasz, of the Spooner-based 950th Engineer Company, began preparing for the company-level Soldier of the Year competition back in January. He won the state competition at Fort McCoy in March, as well as the regional competition at Camp Atterbury, Ind. in May. In August he was one of seven Guard members to vie for the Army National Guard Soldier of the Year title at the Warrior Training Center, Fort Benning, Ga.

Wiernasz did not win the national title, but his Soldier of the Year gig was not over yet. Sunday, Sept. 13, he was recognized for his accomplishments before more than 70,000 cheering fans during the halftime of the

Green Bay Packers' football game against the Chicago Bears.

"I never expected anything like this," he admitted. "It is much appreciated."

Wiernasz marched onto the storied tundra of Lambeau Field, flanked by inflatable Army National Guard mascots, as a video of Kid Rock's song "Warrior" — a tribute to the Army National Guard — played on the jumbotrons.

Wiernasz said he did not view the public salute as a personal tribute, but one intended for his unit and the Wisconsin Army National Guard as a whole. He credited the members of his unit who helped him prepare for the various levels of competition, as well as state Command Sgt. Major George Stopper for his support past the state level.

Wiernasz offered some advice to Guard members thinking of competing for Soldier of

the Year.

"Make sure you have the time," he said. "You really have to go all out, or you won't get anything out of it."

"A lot of it is physical," he continued. "The more I worked out, the better. Even the mental stuff was physical."

Going up against top competitors, Wiernasz said he tried to "be a sponge" and soak up as much experience as possible. One thing he learned was the importance of sponsors — not financial benefactors, but senior Soldiers who serve as a combination coach and assistant — to individual competitors.

"I saw other Soldiers who really stressed out," he recalled. "I was able to focus on each event. My sponsors helped me relax."

Wiernasz said that the finalists in the National Guard-level Soldier of the Year

competition drew close.

"It was more of a team thing," he explained. "The guys who lost were so happy for the guys who won — it made [not advancing] okay. The guy who won deserved to win — he was amazing."

In addition to Soldier of the Year, a Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year is chosen from the competition. This year's winners at the National Guard level were Spc. Guy Mellor of the Utah Army National Guard and Sgt. Ryan Brubaker of the Montana Army National Guard.

Wiernasz said he gained confidence from the Soldier of the Year experience. But even as he prepared for his moment at Lambeau Field, he hoped to gain something else.

"Perhaps it will settle down after this," he said. 



Spc. John Wiernasz, the 2009 Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldier of the Year, responds to the cheers during the halftime show at Lambeau Field Sunday, Sept. 13. The halftime of the Green Bay Packers' season-opening game against the Chicago Bears was also Military Appreciation night, honoring both Wiernasz and approximately 30 candidates taking their oath of office. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Spc. Eric Liesse

Wisconsin Army Guard school seeks stronger partnership with Fort Sill

In field artillery parlance, massing fires means that multiple cannons aim at the same target for maximum effect.

In much the same way, officials with the Wisconsin National Guard's Regional Training Institute at Fort McCoy hope that closer coordination with the U.S. Field Artillery School at Fort Sill — the Fires Center of Excellence (FCOE) — will result in can't-miss training for both Guard and active Army Soldiers.

To that end, Brig. Gen. Ross Ridge, commandant of the United States Army Field Artillery School, visited the Wisconsin RTI Aug. 29, accompanied by Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, Wisconsin's assistant adjutant general for Army as well as the deputy commanding general - Army National Guard, for the FCOE.

"It was a home run," said Col. Kenneth Koon, commander of the 426th Regiment which operates the RTI, and also the 16th commandant of the Wisconsin Military Academy which houses the RTI. "It was exactly what we wanted to achieve. To have the chief of the field artillery school come to our schoolhouse was a significant event."

This marked the first time an active component school commandant had visited any National Guard RTI, Anderson said. The Wisconsin RTI is designated as the field artillery subject matter expert for the National Guard — Koon referred to the school as the "Fort Sill of the National Guard."

Shortly after arriving at the RTI, Ridge began discussing how the active duty and National Guard schoolhouses could work together, and spoke of breaking down barriers between the two components.

"We may be better served by a closer relationship," Ridge said. "You should be able to leverage the same things we're developing, so the same thing we have in the classroom at Fort Sill is available here."

Anderson said that hardware and software improvements could provide quick results to the RTI in the short term. Improved connectivity, for example, would allow for distance learning opportunities so that portions of various courses may be attended by students in multiple remote sites.

Ridge described a university concept in which the field artillery school at Fort Sill was the main campus, and schools such as the Wisconsin RTI served as extension campuses. Koon suggested to Ridge that active duty Soldiers may choose to attend classes here due to the compressed schedule. National Guard schoolhouses typically feature longer class days and continue classes over weekends to meet the required instruction time in the fewest days, Koon said. A recent change in funding procedures will make it easier for



Col. Kenneth Koon, right, of the Wisconsin Army National Guard briefs senior artillery officers and non-commissioned officers Aug. 29 regarding the Wisconsin Regional Training Institute at Fort McCoy. Also pictured are, left to right: Brig. Gen. Ross Ridge, commandant at the U.S. Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Okla.; Command Sgt. Major Daniel Willey of the U.S. Field Artillery School; Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, deputy commanding general - Army National Guard at the U.S. Field Artillery School, and also Wisconsin's assistant adjutant general for Army. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Vaughn R. Larson

RTIs to be reimbursed for training active Army Soldiers.

Koon outlined the various training provided at the Wisconsin RTI. In addition to field artillery training, the RTI conducts schools for officer and warrant officer candidates, combat lifesaver training, and boasts a unique simulation center offering training for weapons, vehicles and convoys. The schoolhouse also can send teams of instructors to remote sites, and recently dispatched a team to Kosovo to teach infantry certification to 83 students there. The Wisconsin RTI has been named a Center of Excellence, and the school's basic non-commissioned officer course also received a Center of Excellence rating.

Koon said the Wisconsin RTI was not typical, but not unique.

"It's that flavor that's missed by the active component — all the things we do," he said.

The potential for sharing resources and expertise seemed to appeal to Ridge.

"Instead of me setting up something at Fort Sill, how can I leverage the RTIs to set up these courses?" he asked. "We have an opportunity with the transformation of the Fires Center of Excellence — we need to find a way to exploit this."

Anderson agreed. He said one of his first focuses as deputy assistant commandant will be to visit with other regional training institutes "so we're not

double-tapping," or duplicating efforts.

Koon saw many positives from the visit.

"The field artillery is far and away on the leading edge of building the 'university' concept," he said. "It's really exciting that [Ridge] sees us as an extension of his university."

"I think one of the main things Brig. Gen. Ridge gained from the visit was the personal perspective of the RTI's capabilities, facilities and professionalism of its cadre," Anderson said. "Now he can fully understand why Wisconsin's RTI has that [Center of Excellence for field artillery training] designation."

Koon noted that National Guard field artillery units have not always been regarded on equal terms with active Army units, despite the fact that approximately half of the Army's artillery is in the Guard.

"Brig. Gen. Ridge has indicated a desire to be more inclusive," Koon said. "We have an awful lot to offer."

Ridge expressed interest in better partnering between the Fires Center of Excellence and the various regional training institutes.

"Within the context of constrained resources and competing needs, it is imperative to complement each other's training programs," Anderson said. "Brig. Gen. Ridge's visit gave him a first-hand viewpoint of where we can link those capabilities." ❧

Veterans, Families, Retirees

Supermarket of veterans benefits set

A veterans' benefits "supermarket" will be held Wednesday, Oct. 7 from noon-7 p.m. and again on Thursday, Oct. 8 from 8 a.m.-noon in Marshfield at the National Guard armory, 319 W. 29th Street.

During this event, veterans can establish eligibility for state veterans benefits (DD Form 214 required); apply for state and federal benefits; receive information about loans, education benefits and employment opportunities; get assistance in obtaining military medals and records; obtain information about nursing home care; pre-register for burial in state veterans' cemeteries.

Veterans can also learn about the wide range of benefits available, including health care, loans, compensation and pension, education, job training, aging services, funeral honors and more.

Family members of veterans and deployed service members are encouraged to attend.

For more information, contact the Wood County Veterans Service Officer at 715-421-8420 or the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs at 1-800-947-8387, or at www.WisVets.com.

Women Warrior welcome planned

A "Welcome Home" event for all women who have served in the military will be held Thursday, Oct. 22 from noon-8 p.m. at the Bong Memorial, 305 Harbor View Parkway in Superior.

The purpose of the day-long event is to honor women for their service and to ensure that they are aware of benefits they have earned. The term "veteran" can be misleading and often misunderstood. If you are a woman who has served any amount of time in the service, there may be programs you qualify for. Small group sessions include a review of recommended screenings and immunizations for women, and state and other benefits.

For more information, contact Jeanne Rounsville at 715-398-2955 or Jeff Hall at 715-398-2902, or e-mail jeff.hall@va.gov.

Wisconsin Warrior Summit slated

The Wisconsin Warrior Project will hold a summit Thursday, Oct. 22 beginning at 8:30 a.m. at the Milwaukee County War Memorial, 750 N. Lincoln Memorial Drive.

The Wisconsin Warrior Summit is dedicated to coordinating a comprehensive community response to the mental health needs of veterans and their families. Keynote speakers and breakout sessions will be used to inform clinical professionals, veterans and their families as well as the public on the needs of veterans and their families, as well as the treatment programs in place to support them.

For more information, visit www.dryhootch.org.

YMCA military outreach initiative

The Armed Services YMCA and Department of Defense Outreach Initiative offers YMCA memberships to eligible military families and personnel who may not have access to a nearby military facility. Eligible military families and personnel include family members of deployed National Guard members. Note: Eligibility is for Title 10 personnel only.

In addition, the Outreach Initiative offers respite child care services for children whose parent or guardian needs temporary respite from their role as primary caregiver in the absence of a deployed spouse. Visit http://www.ymca.net/about_the_ymca/military_outreach_initiative_respite_child_care_services.html to find out more.

To receive membership benefits from the YMCA Military Outreach Initiative, eligible military families and personnel should follow these steps:

1. Contact Military OneSource at www.militaryonesource.com or 800-342-9647 to confirm eligibility and receive an eligibility form.
2. Find a participating YMCA in your area.
3. Fill out and bring your eligibility form, Military ID and any other required documentation (generally your Deployment Orders or Military Service Headquarters approval letter) to a participating YMCA for verification (please do not leave copies of these documents at the YMCA).

The Department of Defense will underwrite memberships at participating YMCAs for an initial six-month period for each eligible family and service member. Membership renewals in subsequent six-month intervals (up to 12 or 18 months depending on eligibility) will be funded based on a military family's or service member's ability to meet the participation requirement of eight visits to a YMCA each month.

VA OKs emergency school checks

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki announced Sept. 25 that the VA will disburse emergency aid checks for up to \$3,000 to be given to student veterans who have applied for educational benefits under the Post 9-11 GI Bill and have not yet received their government payment for tuition, housing and textbook payments.

Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary John A. Scocos said, "I applaud VA Secretary Eric Shinseki on his initiative to authorize emergency checks for our veterans. It is indeed about doing what's right for our veterans and their families."

The emergency aid checks being issued due to a backlog of about 25,000 pending claims will start being distributed on Friday, Oct. 2, when students can go to a VA regional benefit office with a photo ID and course schedule to request advance payment of their education benefits. Because not all of these offices are located near students, the VA expects to send representatives to schools with large numbers of student veterans and work with veterans service organizations to help students with transportation needs.

A list of those VA regional offices is available at www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/offices.asp. In Wisconsin, the Regional Office of the Veterans Benefits Administration is located in Milwaukee, at 5400 West National Avenue, phone 1-800-827-1000 (see <http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?ID=360&dnum=All>).

To learn more about veterans' education benefits for Wisconsin veterans, visit www.WisVets.com/Education or call toll-free at 1-800-WIS-VETS (1-800-947-8387).

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.

Parting shot



Wisconsin Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Jason Klingbiel, serving with the 447th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron, connects a fuel hose from an R14 fuel unit to the bottom loader of his R11 fuel truck at Sather Air Base in Iraq. The Madison native is on a personal mission to break a record by pumping more than one million gallons of fuel during his deployment. Klingbiel is deployed from the 115th Fighter Wing. U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Johnny L. Saldivar