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Prairie Soldier

The Joint Newspaper of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard

Governor taps Lyons to be 32nd adjutant general

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Col. Judd Lyons

Colonel Judd Lyons, 47, was selected by Gov. Dave Heineman to be the 32nd adjutant general, Aug. 7.

He was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and sworn in as commander of the 4,800-member Nebraska Army and Air National Guard and director of the Nebraska Emergency Management during an Aug. 23 ceremony at the Nebraska National Guard air base.

"Colonel Judd Lyons has demonstrated that he has the ability and the

See LYONS on 4.

Kadavy named Army Guard deputy director

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Maj. Gen. Timothy Kadavy

The Nebraska National Guard's adjutant general is headed to Washington, D.C., to become the new deputy director of the Army National Guard.

Maj. Gen. Timothy J. Kadavy, 45, assumed command of the Nebraska National Guard on Nov. 3, 2007, when he succeeded retired Lt. Gen. Roger Lempke as the 31st adjutant general. In his new position, Kadavy will now

See KADAVY on 4.

Annual Training 2009

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

Room With A View: Sgt. Hector Lima Bermudez, a crew chief with the 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion in Lincoln, Neb., dumps water from a "bambi bucket" onto a simulated fire from a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter during the GSAB's annual training, June 10, at Camp Ashland, Neb.

Helicopter unit tackles unique challenges during June exercise

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Staff Photojournalist

Sixty-four members of the 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion used their June 6-20 annual training at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln to complete some critical training tasks.

The training was meant to increase the knowledge and overall proficiency of GSAB Soldiers. For example, members of the 2-135th GSAB completed Army warrior tasks, conducted maintenance and refueling support for the unit's UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, and flew several training missions.

The 2-135th GSAB actually has several units assigned to the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, the largest being Company C, 2-135th GSAB. According to Maj. James Siedenburg, commander of Co. C, 2-135th GSAB, his unit's primary mission is to provide medevac support using the Black Hawks.

"We refer to it as a lifesav-

See GSAB on 3

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Offutt Guardsman adds another title to resume

■Nebraska Air Guard master sergeant top senior NCO in U.S. Air Force

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

A Nebraska Air National Guard sergeant serving in the 170th Group at Offutt Air Force Base has been named the top senior sergeant in the U.S. Air Force.

Master Sgt. Tyrone Bingham, the chief host aviation resource manager at Offutt Air Force Base, was recently named the Air Force's Outstanding Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year. The announcement means that Bingham is the top senior sergeant in the entire Air Force, which consists of approximately 491,000 active, reserve and Guard Airmen.

The award comes on the heels of another announcement in April when Bingham was named the top senior NCO in the Air National Guard.

"It's still surreal," said Bingham, a native of Hopkinsville, Ky., who graduated from Oscoda High School in Michigan. "I'm just trying to grasp the reality of all that has happened."

"I'm definitely honored."

Bingham's military career began in 1995 when he enlisted into the U.S. Air Force. After assignments in Virginia, Texas and Missouri, he joined the Missouri Air National Guard, serving in assignments with the 131st Fighter Wing and another unit at Jefferson Barracks, Mo.

He transferred to the Nebraska Air Guard in 2005 to take an assignment with a newly-created Air Guard organization at Offutt Air Force Base, in Bellevue, Neb.

At Offutt, Bingham is responsible for ensuring that pilots and

See BINGHAM on 18.

Nebraska infantry regiment, fallen commander honored 65 years after historic fight

Lt. Col. Alfred Thomsen
3rd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment, commander mortally wounded on July 30, 1944

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

ST. LO, France, — After 65 years of waiting, Soldiers of the Nebraska National Guard's 134th Infantry Regiment finally got their moment in the sun during a drizzly late afternoon ceremony, July 18, in this beautiful Norman city that was once the site of one of the fiercest battles of World War II.

Prairie Soldier *Exclusive Coverage*

For about an hour this normally bustling community of 25,000 residents came to a standstill as hundreds gathered in misty rain at the base of the city's ancient rampart walls to recognize the 35th Infantry Division near the location where members of the 134th Infantry Regiment entered the city on

See ST. LO on 13.

National Guard heritage painting by Keith Rocco

Cornrows To Hedgerows: The 134th Infantry Regiment's battle to seize Hill 122 near St. Lo, France, in July 1944 was depicted in the 1996 National Guard heritage painting by Keith Rocco. The regiment, which was part of the 35th Infantry Division, helped liberate the critically important city of St. Lo, France. The Nebraska National Guard infantry regiment finally received credit for helping liberate St. Lo, France, on July 18 during a ceremony in Normandy.

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■Air crews practice survival skills in July 24

U.S. Army Photo

City Of Rubble: Infantrymen from the 134th Infantry Regiment, 35th Infantry Division, wind their way through a maze of rubble to enter St. Lo, France, in July 1944. The 134th Infantry Regiment, which began World War II as a Nebraska National Guard infantry organization, was among the first American units to enter St. Lo after a bloody battle to seize the critical city. The 35th Infantry Division, of which the 134th Infantry Regiment was a part, was finally honored for that feat on July 18 when a monument was dedicated on the city's rampart walls, seen directly ahead of the pictured infantrymen.

Fallen Nebraskan memorialized in Norman village

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

LE MESNIL ROUXELIN, France – For a few moments, July 17, retired Col. James A. Huston was no longer a 91-year-old World War II veteran.

Instead, the former intelligence and operations officer from the 3rd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment, was once again a 26-year-old first lieutenant leading a group of people through the tangled hedgerows of Normandy in search of an important objective, just as he had 65 years earlier.

Unfortunately, much had changed over the decades. Many of the hedgerows have been removed to give the local French farmers more room to plant their crops. New houses and gardens have sprouted around what on July 30, 1944, was a bloody, confused battlefield, remembered by the survivors as simply "Bloody Sunday."

Lt. Col. Alfred Thomsen

On this morning, though, the sounds of battle were no longer. Instead, the sounds of peace – passing cars, twittering birds, mooing dairy cattle, barking dogs – replaced the sounds of machineguns, mortar shells and artillery explosions.

Walking down a lane, Huston looked around, trying to make sense of the modernity. To his side, one of his French guides pointed toward a lane approximately 100 yards away. Looking at his guide, Huston said sternly with the directness of a 26-year-old infantry officer: "No, it wasn't down there. It was right here… right here up this lane."

Houston's guide tried once again to guide the veteran further down the main lane, explaining that the morning's objective couldn't have been where Huston was pointing.

"I'm telling you I know where I'm at, where I was at back then and it's right up there, " he said, pointing at a driveway that wrapped around a shuttered Norman house.

Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

'Right Over There...' Retired Col. James A. Huston (center) points out the location where the late Lt. Col. Alfred Thomsen, Omaha, was mortally wounded on July 30, 1944, to Thomsen's son, Neal (far left,) during a July 17 visit to Conde-sur-Vire, France.

"But this is private property," the guide protested. "We can't go up there."

"It was private property the last time I was here, too, and that didn't seem to bother the homeowners," he said, smiling with quick wide grin.

Then, with a swiftness that belied his advanced age, Huston moved up the driveway and disappeared around the house. A few moments later, the rest of the contingent followed.

Standing in a shaded garden, Huston took a few moments for his eyes to adjust to the filtered light of the surrounding hedges and trees and then, looking outward from the fenced yard, he smiled quickly. Pointing first with his cane and then with his finger, he turned back to companions and announced: "Right there."

"I was set up under that tree. And over there… over near that hedgerow...," Huston said, using his hand to indicate a second hedgerow about 50 yards in front of 'his' tree before turning to talk to one particular member of his 'patrol,' "… that is where your dad was hit."

Huston's fellow traveler was Neal Thomsen, 79, from Indianapolis, Ind. His father was the late Lt. Col. Alfred Thomsen of Omaha, Neb., who had commanded Huston's battalion, part of the 134th Infantry Regiment, 35th Infantry Division, in July 1944 when the organization fought to liberate the strategically critical St. Lo, France.

During the bloody and confused July 15-18, 1944, battle, nearly one out of every three regimental Soldiers was either killed or severely wounded.

It was Nebraska National Guard regiment's first taste of combat. It would not be its last.

After helping take the city on July 17-18, 1944, the regiment spend several days defending St. Lo from a near constant onslaught of German artillery and mortar shells before it was ordered south toward the Vire River to protect the flanks of Lt. Gen. George Patton's 3rd U.S. Army, which was already cutting through the German defenses into the Brittany peninsula.

The movement was part of an effort that would eventually place the German defenders in an unsustainable pocket between the American, British and Canadian armies.

That is what had taken Thomsen's battalion to Conde-sur-Vire on July 30, 1944.

It was here that Thomsen was mortally wounded when a German artillery round exploded above his command post as his battalion fought a bloody engagement against entrenched Germans.

Thomsen died 16 days later in England from a blood clot caused by his wounds.

Nearly 65 years later, Thomsen's sacrifice was memorialized in granite when the tiny village of Le Mesnil Rouxelin, a tiny hamlet of about 550 that lay on the right-hand border of the 134th's Infantry Regiment route into St. Lo, unveiled a monument in memory of the fallen Nebraska Guard commander.

"Lieutenant Colonel Thomsen was a hard man, but brave; respected and admired by his men, always implied with an accurate sense of duty," said Andree Chan, president of the current 35th Division Association in Normandy who was instrumental in getting the memorial to Thomsen created. "The admiration by his men is so deep that they informed us of their wish that an homage is owed to him here where he saved the battalion from a possible massacre without taking his life into account."

"This very important hero among heroes has sacrificed his life for our liberty," said Chan, who, as a young girl hid with her parents as the battle raged around their home near St. Lo in 1944. On the late afternoon of July 17, 2009, she addressed a crowd of several hundred people who had

See THOMSEN on 12.

Photos by Maj. Kevin HYnes

Honoring A Fallen Nebraskan: Members of the Nebraska National Guard color guard stand with French color bearers during the July 17 ceremony honoring the late Lt. Col. Alfred Thomsen in Le Mesnil Rouxelin, France. Thomsen was mortally wounded on July 30, 1944, while fighting the Germans in Normandy.

Remembering a Father's Sacrifice: (From left) Neal Thomsen, son of the late Lt. Col. Alfred Thomsen, stands next to Benjamin de Girard, mayor of Le Mesnil Rouxelin, France, and retired Col. James Huston and Huston's wife, Anne, after the July 17 ceremony in which the citizens of Le Mesnil Rouxelin dedicated a monument in honor of Thomsen's father.

THOMSEN continued from page 11.

gathered in a drizzling rain near the Le Mesnil Rouxelin square to dedicate the granite memorial that stood beneath French and American national colors and a field of waist-high corn. "The honor given to him today is more than justified."

The mayor of Le Mesnil Rouxelin agreed, saying that the men of the 134th Infantry Regiment that Thomsen helped lead helped end four years of terror at the hands of the German occupiers.

"During four years of trying to obey the orders of the enemy invaders, we were deprived of the liberties of cars, radios, but also food, clothes and most of all… freedom," said Roland Lerouge. "For four terrible years, until the sixth of June 1944, we waited."

"This period of our history will remain forever in our memory and will be commemorated every single year," Larouge said. "The fights were awful and murderous. Step by step you conquered back our land. And for our city, thanks for the 35th Division (Santa Fe) we got back our freedom."

For Neal Thomsen, who was 14 when he opened a telegram informing his family of his father's death, it was a moment he'd waited to see for much of his life.

"This may sound funny, but he's at peace now," said a visibly moved Thomsen, who had been near tears as he thanked the villagers for the honor given to his father. "This brings closure to what I didn't know about his passing. He's got the monument he's waited for for 65 years."

Huston was also visibly moved by the memorial.

"In dedicating this monument to the memory of Colonel Thomsen, we dedicate ourselves to the principles for which he fought and died," Huston told the assembled crowd. "He was the embodiment of bravery, of a sense of purpose, a sense of humor. And those principles and those traditions honor both his family and all of the Soldiers who served with him."

Prior to the late afternoon ceremony, Thomsen spent most of the day touring some of the significant sites of the 134th Infantry Regiment's battle into and out of St. Lo in July 1944 with Huston. For Huston in particular, the day's events were extremely meaningful.

A native of Indiana, he had not only served as the fallen commander's intelligence officer, he also had developed a friendship with the Nebraska Guardsman during their training in the United States and England.

Huston remembered his former commander as not only a brave Soldier, but also as a man who loved to invent things and tell jokes.

"He loved to sit around and exchange stories… jokes," said Huston, who after the war, became a noted historian and wrote extensively about Thomsen in his 1950 book *"Biography of a Battalion."*

"He had this thick notebook and any good joke he ever heard, he would put it down. Then he and the executive officer would sit around and talk. We would say that they sounded like two old maids chit-chatting back and forth."

In Huston's book, he also recalled how Thomsen, who served as a blacksmith for the Union Pacific railroad in Omaha before the war, loved to invent things. For example, he developed a way to send messages up to a truck from a jeep during a convoy by putting a clothespin on a stick He also created his own clothing.

Honored Guest: Staff Sgt. Randy R. Freye, Troop B, 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance,) signs a book during a visit to a farm house near Conde-sur-Vire, France.

Special Trip: Staff Sgt. Jacob Robinson takes Staff Sgt. Joseph Dunlap's photograph near a monument dedicated to the 35th Infantry Division in Conde-sur-Vire, France.

"Disgusted with the perpetual shortness of raincoats, he obtained two of the waterproof garments and had the lower half of the second sewed onto the bottom of the first," Huston wrote in Biography of a Battalion. "It fell all the way to the heels of his shoes; when he wore it he looked as though he were peering out of the top of a pyramidal tent."

"The men would refer to things of the Colonel's in making comparisons in the superlative: an especially large tent or balloon was 'as big as Colonel Thomsen's raincoat'; a massive pack or bulky load was 'as heavy as Colonel Thomsen's bed roll'; a big collection of papers was 'as thick as Colonel Thomsen's notebook'…"

At one point during their tour of the battlefield, Huston directed Thomsen and his wife Doris along the road where the elder Thomsen led his battalion into battle on July 15, 1944.

Also following were Brig. Gen. David Petersen, current assistant commander of the 35th Infantry Division, and seven members of a Nebraska Army Guard color guard from the 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) who traveled to France to represent the current historical lineage holders of the 134th Infantry Regiment.

According to Huston, the 3-134th Infantry had initially moved into position on the outskirts of Villiers Fossard to relieve two battalions of the 29th Infantry Division's 115th Infantry Regiment.

On the morning of July 15, 1944, 3-134th Infantry held the line as the regiment's two other battalions passed by to launch the attack toward Hill 122, a prominent plateau overlooking St. Lo that the German's had turned into a key observation point, which helped them defeat several earlier American attacks.

Several hours later, with the battle raging in the fields ahead and casualties mounting, Thomsen received the order to move forward. Within a short distance down the road, however, Huston said the battalion realized that the German defenders were now moving in to cut off the offensive.

Nearing a bend in the road, barely a football field length away from the start of the march, the battalion began receiving incoming artillery rounds. Huston said he was sent forward with several other Soldiers to see what lay in front of them.

Climbing atop a hedge he saw Germans moving in the fields in front of them.

Huston said he soon received a message that Thomsen was impatient and had ordered the battalion forward.

Rounding the bend, the battalion – which was marching along in a column on either side of the road – suddenly saw a German tank move out of the field in front of them. As the rest of the battalion scrambled for cover, Thomsen jumped up into a raised meadow, pulled out his .45 caliber pistol and fired five bullets at the tank.

"…And the tank turned around and fled," said Huston.

Because the battalion was spread out on the road and was in danger of running into a potentially disastrous ambush against tanks, the executive officer – who was now out of contact with Thomsen – ordered the battalion to return to its starting point.

Thomsen would finally make his way back to the battalion command post several hours later after crawling through the frontlines under near constant bombardment. He then called the regimental and division headquarters – which were insisting upon a resumption of the attack – and insisted that the Germans were still in front of them very much in force.

Without American tank support, he argued, the attack would be suicidal.

"He was never afraid of anything and he had a sense of purpose," said Huston. "When he was given an objective, he tended to reach the objective and people never questioned his judgment."

"He looked out for us," he added. "If he received an order that was not practical because of the situation, he always wanted to know what we were doing for reconnaissance. He would protect us that way."

In the end, Thomsen won the argument, gaining permission to delay the attack until the next morning when armored support arrived.

According to Neal Thomsen, having the opportunity to spend time with Huston was an experience of a lifetime.

"It gives me a sense of closure after 65 years of not knowing the details that I'm now getting. It's quite an experience," he said.

Thomsen said he was equally impressed by the citizens of the French communities he visited.

"I've got a greater appreciation for what the French citizens suffered and gained as a result of what we did," he said.

Talking With A Veteran On His Battlefield: Staff Sgt. Joseph Dunlap (far left) and Sgt. Cody Trindle (far right) talk with retired Col. James A. Huston while walking along the road that Huston's unit — the 3rd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment — took as it started its fight toward St. Lo, France, on July 15, 1944.

On Patrol: Members of a U.S. Army reenactment group from Belgium prepare to conduct a "patrol" through St. Lo, France, July 18. The reenactment group brought a number of vintage vehicles, including two Sherman medium tanks, that they drove through the streets of the Norman city to celebrate the 65th anniversary of its liberation after four years of German occupation.

Finally: Brig. Gen. David Petersen, assistant 35th Infantry Division commander and deputy adjutant general of the Nebraska National Guard (far right,) joins other dignitaries in St. Lo, France, as they applaud the unveiling of a plaque honoring the 35th Infantry Division at the site near where patrols of the 134th Infantry Regiment, Nebraska National Guard, entered St. Lo on July 18, 1944.

Color Guard: Six noncommissioned officers from the 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) stand at attention before the start of the July 18 ceremony during which a monument dedicated to the Soldiers of the 35th Infantry Division was unveiled on the rampart walls of St. Lo. The Soldiers are members of a Nebraska Army National Guard unit that holds the historic lineage of the 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment.

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the evening of July 17-18, 1944.

Prior to the war, the 134th Infantry Regiment hailed from 13 Nebraska cities and was the main combat organization of the Nebraska National Guard.

Called to duty in December 1940, the Soldiers spent the next 40-plus months training for combat and undergoing numerous reorganizations before finally entering the front lines of the month-old Battle of Normandy in mid-July 1944.

Commanded by North Platte native Col. Butler Miltonberger, the 134th Infantry Regiment's first assignment of the European War was to seize the critical Hill 122 — so named because on a map it rose 122 meters above sea-level.

The hill served as a lynchpin to the German's defense in the St. Lo region, allowing the Germans to defeat several earlier attacks because they controlled the high ground over the city and the major roads that intersected there.

Attacking behind a rolling artillery barrage in the early morning darkness of July 15, 1944, the 134th Infantry Regiment seized Hill 122 and nearby St. Georges-Montcocq after fierce fighting and by the evening of July 17-18 was sending patrols into the northwestern sections of St. Lo, which had been devastated by more than a month-and-a-half of constant bombardment.

While the Nebraska regiment was successfully making its way into St. Lo, American elements of the 29th Infantry Division were also attacking into the city along a separate path further to the east.

The 29th would be given official credit for liberating St. Lo, France, causing a controversy between the two organizations that still exists today.

> *"Our real monument, which we share with our sister divisions and all of the other American forces, is to see a strong and prosperous and free France and the other countries we came to liberate."*
>
> ***— Retired Colonel James A. Huston***
> ***former member of the 134th Infantry Regiment***

All that was forgotten this afternoon, however, as retired Col. James A. Huston, who had been a 26-year-old battalion intelligence officer in 1944 and was one of the first officers to lead a patrol into the shattered city, sat next to several other 29th Infantry Division veterans who had traveled once again to Normandy to be part of the 65th anniversary celebrations of the liberation of St. Lo.

Sitting in a special tent reserved for the aged warriors, the Soldiers listened as local community dignitaries and Brig. Gen. David Petersen, assistant commander of the 35th Infantry Division and deputy adjutant general of the Nebraska National Guard, spoke of the infantry divisions' numerous accomplishments before unveiling a rectangular plaque that officially recognizes the 35th Infantry Division's part in the liberation of St. Lo.

The dedication was one of three ceremonies held to mark the 65th anniversary of the liberation of St. Lo.

"The 29th and 35th Division belong to the battalion of our glorious liberators," said Francois Digard, mayor of St. Lo. "All of their Soldiers had in common an exceptional courage and the same ideal: go forward and bring peace back."

"Today, 65 year later, we know that it is through this union of brave men that we owe our liberty," he added. "In front of history there are St. Lo's heroes and the city of St. Lo and its inhabitants are proud to be able to honor them worthy of their sacrifice and bravery."

According to Andree Chan, president of the current 35th Division Association in Normandy who was integral in having the plaque placed in St. Lo, the recognition is long overdue for the Soldiers of the Midwestern division who came so far to return freedom to France.

"The goal is reached today," said Chan, who as a young girl fled her home with the rest of her family when the battle approached their village near St. Lo in 1944. Hiding from the battle, they were ultimately liberated by members of the 35th Division. "The city of St. Lo shows its appreciation to the 35th Division at this place."

"The place of this marker is appropriate because it is on the arriving roads of the first patrols," said Chan. "This marker honors action, valor, honor and commitment to the same cause... the one against tyranny and in favor of liberty."

Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Honoring The Liberators: A group of children, dressed similarly to the way the children of St. Lo, France, dressed in July 1944, pose for a photograph near the new 35th Infantry Division monument in St. Lo, France. The children assisted officials in laying flowers at the site where 134th Infantry Regiment Soldiers entered St. Lo, France, 65 years earlier.

The St. Lo ceremony came a day after a similar ceremony at the village of Le Mesnil Rouxelin. There, a monument was unveiled in honor of the late Lt. Col. Alfred Thomsen, a 134th Infantry Regiment battalion commander from Omaha who led his organization through the bloody fighting into St. Lo.

During that battle, one out of every three 134th Infantry Soldiers was either severely wounded or killed in the battle.

Thomsen was mortally wounded on July 30, 1944, near Conde-sur-Vire and died 16 days later in England.

Thomsen's son Neal was also in attendance at the ceremony, sitting next to Huston as the plaque honoring the 35th Infantry Division was unveiled.

Petersen once commanded an infantry company in the 1-134th Infantry and recently served as the commander of the Nebraska Army Guard's 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, which holds the historical lineage and honors of the old 134th Infantry Regiment. He said it was an honor to be part of a ceremony honoring the efforts and sacrifices of so many past veterans of the 35th Infantry Division.

"This is a very special event," said Petersen, adding that he was extremely proud to have the opportunity to represent the division at a ceremony where former members of the organization were finally given their long overdue honor.

"I grew up hearing the stories of St. Lo. It's good to be here when those Soldiers, who sacrificed so much here, are finally given the honors that were due to them 65 years ago."

After the war Huston became a noted historian and author of numerous books including several about the 134th Infantry Regiment. He also worked

See ST. LO on 14.

Nebraska color guard members overwhelmed by mission

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

For six Nebraska Army National Guard noncommissioned officers, a recent week-long mission to Normandy, France, was both the journey of a lifetime and a chance to help honor their military forefathers during more than a dozen ceremonies tracing the 35th Infantry Division's battles across this colorful region of France.

"This has been a great opportunity to showcase our NCOs," said Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela, adding that the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) Soldiers who represented the Nebraska Army National Guard in France were chosen using a number of factors.

First, the 1-134th Cavalry holds the direct lineage to the original 134th Infantry Regiment that fought in Normandy in July 1944 and was among the first American units to send patrols into devastated St. Lo France. Second, because the Army is currently celebrating 2009 as the Year of the NCO, Valenzuela said officials wanted to use the mission as a way to demonstrate the highly professional nature of Nebraska's noncommissioned officers.

Finally, he said, it was a way to thank the six sergeants – all of whom have deployed overseas in the recent past – for doing such tremendous work for their units.

"We wanted to make sure that we selected the right NCOs," Valenzuela said. "That's why we asked the squadron to select six of their best NCOs to thank them for doing such a good job."

Representing the 1-134th Cavalry were: Staff Sgt. Jacob Robinson, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop (Lincoln); Staff Sgt. Joseph Dunlap, Troop A (Hastings); Staff Sgt. Randy R. Freye, Troop B (Fremont); Sgt. Jerad E. Blocker, Troop B (Fremont); Sgt. Alan Rosenthal, Company C (Beatrice); and Sgt. Cody Trindle, Company C (Beatrice).

Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Omaha Beach Cemetery: Members of the Nebraska National Guard color guard stand in formation in front of the memorial at the American Cemetery near Omaha Beach, France, July 19, before the start of a ceremony honoring the fallen Soldiers of the 35th Infantry Division.

While in Normandy, the Soldiers participated in the unveiling of a monument in Le Mesnil Rouxelin honoring the late Lt. Col. Alfred Thomsen, Omaha, who was mortally wounded south of St. Lo on July 30, 1944. They also participated in the unveiling of a monument honoring the 35th Division near the spot where members of the 134th Infantry Regiment entered St. Lo on the evening of July 17-18, 1944.

Additionally, the Soldiers participated in 11 other ceremonies in villages and communities liberated by the 35th Division in July and August 1944. They also assisted members of the 35th Division Association in Normandy – a French group committed to preserving the history of the 35th Division – place flowers on 245 35th Infantry Division Soldiers' graves at the American Cemetery near Omaha Beach and 109 division graves at the American Cemetery near St. James, France.

According to the Nebraska Soldiers, having the opportunity to participate in the ceremonies was an extreme honor.

"It just kind of gives me a greater sense of pride," said Dunlap. "Holding the colors and honoring some fallen comrades… it just verifies your role as a Soldier and makes you understand what people have fought and died for."

Blocker agreed.

"For the last week it's given me a lot more respect for what past vets have gone through," he said, adding that he was overwhelmed by the French civilians who constantly kept thanking him for being there. "It was awesome. It was something that I wished everyone would have a chance to go through and see what we did. It gives you more respect for the 35th Infantry Division patch."

Honoring A Fallen American: Staff Sgt. Joseph Dunlap and Benjamin de Girard, 12, pause to pay their respects to a fallen American 35th Infantry Division Soldier at the American cemetery near St. James, France, after placing a single rose on his grave.

Valenzuela said he was overwhelmed by how important the liberation still is to Normandy.

"It's been 65 years – *65 years* – since the liberation of St. Lo and they celebrate it as if its been just last year," he said.

Dunlap agreed.

"As far as honorable and noble things in the military that anyone could do or get selected to do, (this mission) definitely has to rank up there," he said. "I feel extremely honored to have been selected to go to this ceremony.

ST. LO continued from page 13.

tirelessly with Chan and the members of the 35th Division Association in Normandy to have the 35th Division officially recognized in St. Lo.

"You see how many monuments have already been erected in different places, but St. Lo never had one," said Huston. "Now they have one."

According to Huston, he always felt that it was important to have the 35th Division's part in the battle recognized. "We considered that our first big battle… our first objective," he said.

He said he was particularly impressed by the care that the Normans took in locating the new monument. "The placement of the monument to the 35th I thought was perfectly placed because it's exactly at the end of the street where our people entered St. Lo," Huston said. "It's going to be seen by lots of people."

Huston recalled how much St. Lo has changed in the 65 years since he was ordered by the late Lt. Col. Alfred Thomsen, commander of the 3rd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment, to take a lieutenant from each of the battalion's companies and lead a patrol into the battered city.

Leaving in full sunlight, the officers formed a diamond as they walked from stone to stone through the once vibrant community that had been transformed after weeks of bombardment into a city of ghostlike shadows, patrolling until darkness descended.

"You were sickened by the complete destruction of the central part of the city," Huston recalled. "There was nothing but rubble. You couldn't identify streets. You couldn't walk on a street. No vehicles could move."

Today, even though the city has been rebuilt, numerous tributes to the battle still remain. Like the battered cathedral that still bears the marks of the bombing. Or a World War I statue that was peppered and sliced by shrapnel. Or the remains of the police station where hundreds of French civilians, including numerous members of the resistance, perished during the initial Allied bombing on June 6, 1944.

Like the 134th Infantry Regiment, which sacrificed dearly in less than a week of bloody, fearsome combat to seize the critical city, Huston said the French civilians also sacrificed greatly during the battle.

"Everyone (today) has such a good attitude. The people all seem friendly and joyful and appreciative… they're very appreciative for everything we've done," Huston said. "And you have to remember the sacrifice that they suffered… the bombings and the German occupation. So many of them were in the resistance and helped us along."

Huston said looking at what St. Lo and the rest of France and Europe have become in the 65 years since the war is the true lasting tribute to the American Army in Europe.

"Pericles in ancient Athens said 'Future generations will build monuments to our achievement.' And we see many monuments here built to our achievements as the 35th Division," he said.

"But our real monument, which we share with our sister divisions and all of the other American forces, is to see a strong and prosperous and free France and the other countries we came to liberate," he said.

"That's the real monument. That's the real satisfaction; to see things going the way we hoped they would when it was finished."

Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Folding Old Glory: Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela (center) and Staff Sgt. Randy Freye fold the American flag at the end of an emotional day at the American Cemetery near Omaha Beach, France, before a crowd of onlookers.

Guardsmen fold flag at Omaha Beach cemetery

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

As a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard honor guard, Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela has participated in dozens of ceremonies and has folded the American flag countless times during military funerals.

On July 19 Valenzuela and Staff Sgt. Randy Freye had the opportunity of a lifetime when they were asked to fold the American flag at the American Cemetery near Colleville, France, overlooking the historic Omaha Beach.

The request came shortly after members of the Nebraska Army National Guard honor guard rendered services at the cemetery during a wreath-laying ceremony honoring the fallen members of the 35th Infantry Division and then helped members of the 35th Division Association in Normandy place single flowers at the more than 200 35th Division graves in the cemetery.

With dozens of curious visitors watching, Valenzuela and Freye carefully and crisply folded the American flag, bringing the duty day at cemetery to an end. Both Soldiers said they were so focused on doing a proper job that they didn't take time to think about the significance of the opportunity until some time later in the day.

"I think we did well," said Freye, a member of Troop B, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) from Fremont, Neb. "I was focused on doing the ceremony because I was really nervous about not screwing up… It wasn't until after we got done that I realized this is probably something I'll never get to do again."

"It was pretty cool," he added.

Valenzuela echoed those thoughts.

"I don't think there's any greater honor than folding the U.S. flag on U.S. soil in a foreign country," said Valenzuela, command sergeant major for the Lincoln-based 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade. "At the time they asked us to do it, I was more concerned about doing it right and not embarrassing ourselves so that people have a bad image of the Army."

"It hits me now that Staff Sergeant Freye and I are both pretty honored to have gotten to do it," he added.