@ease Express

December 2009

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Transforming 'At Ease' into information multiplier

With this issue, we've taken everything you know about *At Ease* and turned it on its side.

In July the decision was made to publish *At Ease* on-line, which saved the time and expense of printing a paper-and-ink version. By doing this, we have been able to produce *At Ease* on a monthly basis. This decision also freed us from restrictions such as even page counts — a convention that makes sense for traditional commercial printing, but is not essential if the end product is read on-line or reproduced using desktop printers.

And now we've found a way to pack even more into *At Ease*.

Advances in the software we use to assemble this publication now allow us to produce a more active newspaper. For example, if you move your mouse cursor over many of the photos in this issue, you will see a second image appear. If you see two different captions for one photo, that's your clue that you can see a second image.

But there's more: Select images in this issue are linked to video products. Click on the image to see a related video story.

The page design was changed to a landscape view, to better fit most computer screens. The size remains the same — 8.5 by 11 inches — so that readers who wish to print out some or all pages can still do so. Only the original images —those seen before the mouse passes over a particular image — will print.

What hasn't changed, however, is our mission: to provide our readers with information on the great things going on each month in the Wisconsin National Guard and Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs.

Lt. Col. Jackie Guthrie
Director of Public Affairs,
Wisconsin National Guard

Click on this photo to see video footage of Thanksgiving Day in Baghdad for deployed 32nd Brigade Soldiers.

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Official Newsletter of the Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard

http://dma.wi.gov

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From the TAG

Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said recently that after transforming into a dependable and reliable operational force, the National Guard should not be allowed to return to a strategic reserve.

"I've seen an awful lot of troops in theater … who … unless somebody told me they were in the Guard or the Reserve or active, I couldn't tell because in the fight, everybody is the same: side by side, shoulder to shoulder and making such a difference," Mullen told the National Guard's Senior Leadership Conference Nov. 19. He described the Guard's transition as "absolutely spectacular."

I could not agree more. Having seen thousands of Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers and Airmen deploy in support of the global war on terror as well as other military missions, and hearing how our men and women perform their missions with professionalism and excellence, I know first-hand how valuable the National Guard is to our nation. The Wisconsin National Guard is no exception. Our Soldiers and Airmen perform with dignity and poise, and have never failed to complete the mission.

One prime example is the battle-tested 951st "Sapper" Engineer Company, who recently returned from a very difficult and dangerous mission to Afghanistan. They were given some of the toughest assignments in their task force because they proved they were up to the challenge – repeatedly. These soldiers, with equal measures of Wisconsin work ethic and National Guard ingenuity made the 951st Sappers the "absolutely spectacular" warriors that Adm. Mullen spoke of.

Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar
The Adjutant General

The 115th Fighter Wing also set high standards during its recent deployment to Iraq, to include exceeding the average for maintaining aircraft readiness. In another part of the Middle East, the 115th Security Forces Squadron remains vigilant providing base defense. Meanwhile, back in Wisconsin, the rest of the 115th Fighter Wing flawlessly supported President Barack Obama when he visited Wright Middle School in Madison on Nov. 4.

We still have fellow Guard members in the fight. The 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and its supporting elements, continues to accomplish its myriad missions across Iraq, while the headquarters element of the 732nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion performs outstanding work in OIF theater. Lastly, in Afghanistan, our Embedded Training Team continues to prepare the Afghan National Police to secure their own nation.

Hard to believe it is December and the holidays are upon us, but it is true.

Most of us know what it is like to spend special days away from our families and we know how special it is to share those moments once again upon our return. These moments are paid for in full by the sacrifices of our Soldiers and Airmen's time, comfort and safety, and our families have earned those moments through the many adjustments that our absences have required.

I ask you to make the most of these moments, and I also ask you to remember your fellow Guard members who will spend the holidays away from their families and friends. Thank you for your service — it is a privilege to serve with you. I ask God's blessings on you all and humbly pray that God will continue to bless our great nation.

The Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard's *At Ease Express* newsletter is an authorized publication for members of the Department of Defense. Contents of At Ease are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, or the Department of the Army or Air Force. The editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of the Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs Office.

Photo 1: Sgt. 1st Class Scott Spurgeon greets returning members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 951st "Sapper" Engineer Company, based in Tomahawk and Rhinelander, upon their arrival in Mosinee on Saturday, Nov. 21. Wisconsin National Guard photos by Sgt. 1st Class Vaughn R. Larson

Photo 2: Master Sgt. Chet Millard, of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 951st "Sapper" Engineer Company, is given a "killed in action" bracelet commemorating unit member Sgt. Ryan Adams, who died of injuries from a rocket-propelled grenade attack in Logar Province Oct. 2.

Battle-proven Sappers return to Wisconsin

The Soldiers of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 951st "Sapper" Engineer Company were in high spirits Saturday [Nov. 21] as two coach buses pulled away from the Central Wisconsin Airport in Mosinee, en route to Tomahawk and Rhinelander.

The air was thick with war stories as three Soldiers sent home with injuries — Spc. Matthew Berth, who received his Purple Heart medal from President Barack Obama; Spc. T.J. Fecteau, shown in the Oct. 12 issue of TIME Magazine, injured in a Sept. 8 attack; and Sgt. 1st Class Scott Spurgeon, a platoon sergeant injured in the same attack that claimed the life of Sgt. Ryan Adams on Oct. 2 in Logar Province — rejoined their brothers in arms for the bus ride to Tomahawk, one of two communities in which the unit is based.

The 951st performed a vitally important but dangerous mission. Sappers traditionally work with explosives, either blowing things up or defusing things they don't want to blow up. For this mission the unit cleared supply routes of roadside bombs, taking to the dangerous Afghanistan roads in mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicles. The unit also scouted key terrain features for suitable alternative travel routes, and gathered biometric data — name, date and location of birth, home of record, iris scans and fingerprints — from local residents.

To understand how dangerous their mission was, consider a portion of the medals awarded during this combat tour — 100 combat action badges, four combat medic badges, 15 Purple Hearts, 21 Bronze Star medals, four Bronze Stars with Valor device, five Army Commendation medals with Valor device. According to their higher headquarters, the 951st performed the most dangerous and difficult missions of any element assigned to Task Force Pirate.

As the buses approached the city of Tomahawk, where approximately 30 of the unit's Soldiers are based, the announcer on a local radio station reported that the Soldiers were near. Soon people could be seen lining the roads, signs and flags in hand. A portion of Wisconsin Avenue in downtown Tomahawk was closed off to allow the Soldiers to step off the bus and greet grateful residents, who roared their appreciation like fans at Lambeau Field.

The mood quieted as the buses pulled into a cemetery, and the Soldiers filed out bearing red, white and blue roses to pay their respects to the family of Sgt. Ryan Adams. Capt. Brian Barth, unit commander, presented the family — father Pete, mother Jalene and sister Amanda — with a Bronze Star with Valor device posthumously awarded to Sgt. Adams. In turn, Pete gave each Soldier a memorial packet containing an angel pin, an elastic green bracelet and a photo of Sgt. Adams, likely from his days in basic training.

One more show of respect for Sgt. Adams remained. As the buses entered Rhinelander, Barth and Fulton stopped to visit the Veterans Memorial marker outside City Hall, where Adams' name was freshly engraved.

Hundreds of people lined the streets of Rhinelander to cheer the Soldiers as they passed, and hundreds more jammed the Rhinelander High School gym for the brief welcome home ceremony, emceed by Spc. Berth.

Capt. Barth commended his unit in front of family and friends.

"I want to tell you that these Sappers have seen the toughest circumstances to work under, and they handled it in the most professional way," Barth told the audience.

Senior leaders in the Wisconsin National Guard also praised the Sappers for their courage and determination.

"I want you to know how absolutely proud we are of your service," said Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard. "They bore the brunt of what the Task Force Pirates were given, because they were the finest Soldiers within that task force."

Brig. Gen. Donald Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, ranked the Sappers high in the pantheon of Wisconsin Guard units.

"The 951st is one of Wisconsin's finest," he said. "They performed superbly. They once again put Wisconsin's mark on the defense of this country."

Wisconsin Air Guard unit returns

Photo 1: Gov. Jim Doyle greets members of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing Nov. 12 as they return to Madison from a two-month deployment to Iraq. Wisconsin Air National Guard photos by Master Sgt. Dan Richardson

Tech. Sgt. Matthew Stai, an aircraft armament systems craftsman with the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, holds his son Ethan after returning home from a two-month deployment to Iraq Nov. 12.

Photo 2: Jared Lenzendorf, son of Maj. James Lenzendorf, an F-16 pilot with the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, holds a sign as he waits patiently for his dad at a reunion ceremony Nov. 12.

Members of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing returned to Madison Nov. 12 following a two-month deployment to Iraq.

A steady stream of smiling faces exited the plane and shook hands with Gov. Jim Doyle, Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, and Brig. Gen. John McCoy, deputy adjutant general for Air. Most echoed the sentiment uttered by Tech. Sgt. Todd Cottrill.

"It went great," he said moments after exiting the plane. "We did really well — better than expected."

Lt. Col. Erik Peterson, deployment commander, agreed.

"The mission was 100 percent successful," he said.

The unit deployed approximately 200 members and 12 F-16 fighter jets in September as part of its scheduled Air Expeditionary Force rotation. The unit supported ground forces in Iraq with non-traditional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions — essentially helping look for insurgents and roadside bombs — as well as convoy and troop support.

Peterson thanked each member of the 115th as they left the plane "for their good attitude and great work during the entire deployment."

According to Lt. Col. Chris Rodel, public affairs officer for the 115th Fighter Wing, the deployed aviation package flew 417 missions and tallied 1,625 flying hours during what he termed as a safe, uneventful deployment with no significant actions reported. He noted that the unit's aircraft maintainers kept the fighter jets at a higher rate of readiness than the average in Iraq.

Peterson recently met with Col. Steven Bensend, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd Brigade Combat Team, during their Iraq deployment.

"They're looking forward to coming home, too," he told Gov. Doyle.

Approximately 20 members of the 115th volunteered to stay in Iraq and assist the 132nd Fighter Wing, Iowa Air National Guard, who have taken over the mission. The fighter jets are expected to return sometime in December.

Most of the 115th Fighter Wing maintained day-to-day operations at its Truax Field base in Madison.

Wisconsin National Guard ground, Air commanders meet in Iraq

IRAQ — While more than 3,200 Soldiers of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team have their boots on the ground in Iraq, some of their fellow Guardsmen from the state's Air National Guard have their jets in the sky overhead. It isn't often that aerial support for Army Guard ground troops comes from an Air Guard unit from the same state, but for the past two months about 300 members of Wisconsin's Madison-based 115th Fighter Wing are in Iraq with about a dozen F-16 fighters.

The two top commanders — Army Guard Col. Steven Bensend and Air Guard Lt. Col. Erik Peterson — met at an air base in Iraq as the fighter unit was nearing completion of its mission here.

"It really hits home because you are protecting, you're helping the guys that you fight with every day back home, the guys that you live with everyday," Peterson said. "You're basically putting a face to the people on the ground that you are supporting."

Bensend called it "very comforting" to know Wisconsin Air National Guard troops are helping to protect the Soldiers of his 32nd Brigade.

"Knowing that there are Wisconsin pilots in those planes protecting us is a great feeling," Bensend said. "Not very often do we get to say 'Yeah, I know that guy…and he knows I'm down here.'"

It takes a lot more than just pilots to keep the F-16s flying. Most of the approximately 300 Air Guard personnel provide support on the ground to keep the jets in the air. They also understand the troops their aircraft are supporting are fellow Wisconsinites.

"It definitely gives you a purpose when they are your own guys," said Staff Sgt. Tim Blommel, an egress systems maintenance specialist who was working on one of the jet's ejection seats inside a maintenance hangar.

Photo 1: Lt. Col. Erik Peterson (left) explains the mission of the 115th Fighter Wing to Col. Steven Bensend at an air base in Iraq. Wisconsin Army National Guard photos by Spc. Tyler Lasure

Photo 2: Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers of the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team look over one of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's F-16 fighters at an air base in Iraq.

The 115th Fighter Wing is not deployed in its entirety, with most of the wing maintaining operations at Truax Field in Madison. The deployed fighter package's mission includes around-the-clock overwatch, reconnaissance, and both counter IED and counter mortar support.

"I think it's a pretty great experience for all of us," Peterson said. "You know every time we come over here we are focused on helping the guys on the ground and we see that as our primary mission while we are here."

"If we know that we've saved just one life, that makes it for us," Peterson said.

The troops on the ground agree.

HAIL TO THE CHIEF: Wisconsin Guard supports presidential visit

The first visit by a sitting president to Madison in 59 years began at the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing, based at Truax Field in Madison.

President Barack Obama's time at the base was brief — he exited Air Force One, smiled and saluted Col. Joe Brandemuehl, 115th Fighter Wing commander, before greeting Gov. Jim Doyle and Jessica Doyle, Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz, Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk and Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett. The president then entered his limousine and the motorcade departed for Wright Middle School, the destination of his visit.

But preparing for a presidential visit, even a brief one, takes time and considerable coordination between agencies. Brandemuehl was impressed with how compartmentalized the planning process is.

"The Secret Service, Marine One, Air Force One, the White House staff — everybody has their expertise and they don't go outside their lane," he explained.

The day began early, and even the local civilian media arrived hours before Air Force One touched down. Local law enforcement provided additional security at the fighter wing. The joke on base was that security was so tight that not even a mouse could move.

Brandemuehl said that there wasn't an area on base that wasn't involved with President Obama's visit. The base security force worked closely with the Secret Service, the unit fuel truck refueled Air Force One, F-16 fighter jets were moved to make room for Air Force One. "That's just what you saw today," he said. Two F-16s which began a training mission Wednesday morning could not return to Truax while Air Force One was there, and landed at Volk Field. They were expected to return to base Thursday.

In addition, the Wisconsin Army National Guard supported the visit with site survey and reconnaissance flights by its aviation unit in Madison. The 54th Civil Support Team — augmented by CST personnel from the Minnesota and Illinois National Guard — also performed vehicle sweeps and air sampling. Personnel from the Provost Marshal's Office assisted with area security, and the Guard's public affairs team provided press and protocol support.

Brandemuehl said he was humbled to greet the president when he arrived.

"I was representing not only the Wing, but the National Guard and the state," he said. "I was the face of everyone in the base and the state that supported bringing his aircraft here."

PHOTO 1: President Barack Obama greets Col. Joe Brandemuehl, commander of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing, as he prepares to enter his limousine to visit Madison's Wright Middle School Nov. 4. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Dan Richardson

Prior to the president's arrival, military personnel on base were able to get a close look at one of the VH-60N presidential helicopters, better known as Marine One when the president is on board. According to Marine Maj. Brian Gahagan, pilot, the helicopter —part of a fleet of 28 — was at the base to support the president's visit.

"This is the best part of the job," Gahagan said as he explained the presidential aircraft to Airmen, Soldiers and civilians.

PHOTO 2: VH-60N Marine One stands ready in an aircraft shelter of the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, during a visit by President Barak Obama Nov. 4. His arrival marked the first time a sitting president has visited the city of Madison in nearly 60 years. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Paul Gorman

According to Brandemuehl, feedback about the visit was positive.

"We provided exceptional support," he said. "[The White House staff] said this is one of the best locations, in terms of support, they've come to in the past several years.

"There's a lot that goes into it, but our people are doing what they were trained to do," he continued. "People knew what they needed to do and they did it. That's why we excelled at orchestrating this."

Air Guard security forces four-wheel their way through training

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

Photo 1: Airman 1st Class Justin Padley (left) awaits his turn to navigate a hill with his All Terrain Vehicle during a training course of instruction at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center Nov. 1. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Christen Bloomfield

Photo 2: A member of the 115th Fighter Wing Security Forces jumps his All Terrain Vehicle over an obstacle at Volk Field. 115th SF Airmen attended this training course to learn how to operate an ATV in various environments, a requirement for their job. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Dan Richardson

VOLK FIELD – Training on a Wisconsin Air National Guard drill weekend incorporates many different activities. For the members of the 115th Fighter Wing Security Forces Squadron, that training includes an opportunity to "rip it up" in the dirt for a couple hours on the back of an all-terrain-vehicle at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center's ATV training area.

Force protection is a major component of the mission of a security forces Airman and ATVs are used as a tool to further their efforts, according to Tech. Sgt. Max Fortin of the 115th SFS. Fortin is one of the trainers certified by the ATV Safety Institute to instruct both civilian and military people on how to operate a 450-plus pound four-wheeled machine.

Security forces members are required to know how to operate an ATV in various environments. While 115th SFS Airmen do receive some minimal training at Truax Air National Guard Base in Madison, the terrain is not varied enough to give the rider a complete feel of what the machines are capable of.

"Training at Volk is just a better environment because of the terrain and the amount of space available for training," Fortin said. "We can teach more uses of the ATV and better ways to ride here."

The training course is designed to teach the most inexperienced rider the basics of operating an ATV. The course taught at Volk typically includes some of the newest security forces Airmen whose experience ranges from never having ridden an ATV to experienced racers.

Fortin said the training is very important to everyone, even those who have ridden all their life because the security forces job may require the rider to operate the machine in a way that the rider has never experienced before. The only way to train to for those situations is to ensure they are comfortable with the ATV, he said.

"I teach them to be humble however, because an ATV is capable of much more than I am able to train them to do," Fortin said. "They must learn to operate them safely and respect the machines."

For first timers, the course can seem pretty daunting. Within the first 20 minutes of the class, the riders are taught all the basics of the ATV and are spinning their wheels in the dirt. For fresh-out-of-technical-school Airman 1st Class Taho Mou, a 115th SFS member, this training was his first opportunity to ride an ATV.

"I am 5-foot 1-inch tall and weigh 140 pounds and this ATV has a lot of power," Mau said. "I do ride motorcycles, but this is a little different."

Another new member to the 115th SFS family is Airman 1st Class Anthony Craft. However, he is not new to ATVs, having ridden these machines since he was little and races them as a civilian.

"Even though I have ridden ATVs most my life, this training is good because it applies directly to my job," Craft said. "The military ATVs are utility machines that have much more power and are heavier than the sport ATVs I typically ride, so this class is very important for me."

Because the ATVs are such an essential part of the security forces career field, this training goes beyond just the basics of operation of the ATV. As part of their technical training for their career field, all the security forces Airmen learn various scenarios where having an ATV will give them an advantage over an adversary.

"The ATVs are useful because we can bring more equipment to an operation than we could on foot," Fortin said. "We can also go places with these that we can't go with trucks."

Photo 1: Airman 1st Class Angela Peterson, fire team member with the 115th Fighter Wing Security Forces performs a functional check of her radio equipment prior to beginning a combat training exercise at Volk Field, Air National Guard Base, Camp Douglas on Nov. 7. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Tech Sgt. Don Nelson

Photo 2: Senior Airman Leigh Downing (right), fire team member with the 115th Fighter Wing Security Forces pauses to relay coordinates to her squad leader Staff Sgt Adam Dax during a combat training exercise at Volk Field on Nov. 7. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Paul Gorman

Wisconsin Air Guard forces engage 'enemy'

Airman 1st Class Ryan Roth
115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

VOLK FIELD — Nearly 100 highly trained enemy troops from the People's Liberation Forces attempted to infiltrate Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center to disrupt base military operations. Security Forces were the last line of defense.

"You have no support. Besides standard protocol, the rules of engagement are like X-Box. Kill them all," said Master Sgt. Todd Weinberger, the non-commissioned officer in charge of training from the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, as he stood before the men and women of the 115th Security Forces Squadron and briefed them on a threat that needed their immediate attention.

Thirty members of the 115th FW SFS teamed up with members of the 128th CRTS SF at Volk Field to partake in a training exercise Nov. 8 designed to integrate newer members of SF and improve combat training skills.

"This was a great opportunity to see what we received from technical school," said Lt. Col. Brian Buhler, commander of 115th FW SFS. "We need to make sure our Security Forces members stay sharp in their combat training skills."

To accomplish the day's mission, Security Forces must prevent the enemy from gaining a foothold in the area. Security Forces organized into fire teams and patrolled the woods around the base in search of the enemy, making sure to practice the skills that one day could save their lives.

"This drill weekend was about SF working to integrate young Airmen into the fold," said Staff Sgt. Adam Dax, a fire team member from the 115th SFS. "Technical school teaches needed techniques but working together in a squad with the unit brings valuable experience."

A 360-degree perimeter of security must be maintained at all times when SF are in a fixed position or when they are moving.

As one fire team maneuvered the landscape in search of the enemy, their squad leader Dax made corrections to experienced and newer Airmen alike.

As SF worked together on team movements and practiced battle drills they become more comfortable working with each other and more proficient with executing their duties.

"Eventually the squad leader has to speak or direct the troops less because his fire team members know what is expected," Weinberger said.

The terrain at Volk Field is a combination of many different training environments including thick forest, open fields, ponds, marshy areas and hills. Leaves lay everywhere, fallen from the empty trees above. As the squad moves forward, their movements are broadcast with each crunch beneath their combat boots.

"Consideration of breaking twigs, the sound of crunching leaves and talking are some the things troops should be aware of as they move through that type of environment," Weinberger said.

Each fire team is typically comprised of about 13 Airmen and armed with M4 rifles and a M249 Squad Assault Weapon.

New Airmen benefit from length of service by senior non-commissioned officers with a variety of backgrounds. The unit has plenty of knowledge including service members who have experiences in the Army, Marine Corps and civilian law enforcement work, Dax said.

The suns sets before the day's operations cease. Still training, the SF partake in a convoy movement that encounters an enemy ambush at a fork in the road. The dry taste of dust and diesel fills the back of a truck as SF sit in back; eyes peeled looking for the enemy.

Suddenly small arms fire from the PLF erupts 60 yards off the road. As Airmen jump out of the cargo trucks to take up fighting positions, squad leaders yell cover and flanking commands, while the Airmen listen and develop their combat skills.

There are a lot of things Americans don't realize that makes the U.S. worth fighting for.

— Staff Sgt. Hannes Stieg

Veteran Guard member now a U.S. citizen

Staff Sgt. Hannes Stieg, of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 732nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion headquarters element, has something special to be thankful for — his new status as a U.S. citizen.

"It's been a long time in the making," he said from Camp Adder, Iraq where he works as a transportation management non-commissioned officer. "It's a huge accomplishment."

Stieg, 29, was born in Friedrichrohda, East Germany. His family moved to West Germany Nov. 9, 1989 — the night the Berlin Wall came down. After his parents separated, Stieg's mother met an American teacher in West Germany, and they married. When he was 12, Stieg's family moved to Tomah. As their initial six-month visitor's visa expired, Stieg's family decided they liked living in Tomah and applied for permanent alien resident status, which was granted about one year later.

Stieg enjoyed hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities, which helped him blend in with his new neighbors. He said that he never looked at himself as not being a citizen, and at age 17 joined the Wisconsin Army National Guard. His experiences abroad helped him to appreciate his adopted country.

"There are a lot of things Americans don't realize that make the U.S. worth fighting for," he explained. "There are a lot of great people — the values they have, the way they treat each other is different from other places. And the opportunities we have here."

The National Guard was Stieg's opportunity to pay for college, and it also proved to be his opportunity for citizenship. He began the process during his first Iraq deployment, as a member of the Sparta-based 107th Maintenance Company, but the deployment ended before the paperwork was completed.

"I kind of dropped the ball," he acknowledged.

He began the citizenship process again with his second deployment, after learning from military lawyers that the process is expedited for deployed troops. He completed his paperwork and studied for the naturalization exams, which he said was not easy.

"I don't think the average American could pass that test without studying," he said.

Stieg and many other deployed service members took their oath of citizenship during a ceremony Nov. 11 in Baghdad, an event he described as "awesome."

"These people didn't grow up in America," he said. "To see all these people believing in the U.S. as something worth fighting for and worth more than they came from makes me realize how special this country is."

Staff Sgt. Hannes Stieg, a transportation management non-commissioned officer deployed with the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 732nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, based in Tomah, became a U.S. citizen during a naturalization ceremony Nov. 11 in Baghdad. He was born in East Germany but moved to Tomah when he was 12. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo

Public affairs team embeds with Security Forces for realistic training

Capt. Suzanne VanderWeyst
115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

VOLK FIELD — "Cease fire!"

The firefight ends. Squad leaders gather their members for accountability and make sure all have enough water and ammo for what they may encounter next. Master Sgt. Dan Richardson recognizes the opportunity to record an interview.

He brings one of his squad members behind a large rock, integrating in the brevity of the moment both the need to conceal and cover and find good lighting for his video shot. The sun is starting to go down and Richardson knows this might be one of the last interviews he can get for his broadcast story. In the pressure of the moment, there's no room to forget details like having the video camera on the wrong settings.

Though the rounds shot were blanks, the scenario was just as serious for Richardson and two other 115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs members engaging in a first-time experience of embedding with Security Forces during a 115th Security Forces Squadron combat skills training exercise at the Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, Nov 7.

Their mission was to get the story under the stress of learning how to navigate in a combat environment, while simultaneously providing Security Forces Airmen training on escorting people who aren't necessarily security experts, said Richardson, 115th FW PA manager and broadcaster.

"We didn't really know what to expect when we came up with this idea a few weeks back," Richardson said. "It was good training for us to work on being able to do our job while under the pressures of looking out for threats, making sure you're back behind the person who's escorting you and doing exactly what they need you to do."

Opposite Richardson's squad, Master Sgt. Paul Gorman gathered photo imagery and Airman 1st Class Ryan Roth recorded print interviews while attached to the 2nd Squad composed of Airmen from the 115th SFS and the CRTC SF.

Photo 1: Master Sgt. Dan Richardson (left), broadcaster with the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, videotapes as Senior Airmen Nathan Ortiz engages in a firefight during a Security Forces exercise at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center Nov. 7. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Don Nelson

Photo 2: Airman 1st Class Ryan Roth, journalist with the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, watches his field of fire for threats during a Security Forces exercise at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center Nov. 7. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Paul Gorman

Each squad had to first navigate through difficult terrain on combat patrols, meet their required checkpoints and deter threats, all within a strict timeframe. The routes were orchestrated in such a way that the two squads would inevitably cross paths and engage in combat. Once the patrols ended, both squads mounted vehicles and convoyed to their final objective where they came under ambush and heavy fire.

"I thought it was unique," Roth said. "Being a journalist, you're always trying to get the story from the person you're interviewing except we're part of the story now. We're with them and you know exactly what they're talking about because we experienced their patrols, what they did in navigation, the importance of 360 defense and all of it. It was great!"

However, Roth said he also found it difficult to ask the right questions and find the story while being part of the greater mission of the patrol and convoy. Lessons learned for next time.

Beyond the advantage of an insider viewpoint, PA members gained experiential understanding of equipment needs in combat situations where they may need to lay prone in defense position or dismount a vehicle quickly.

"The greatest benefit for a PA photojournalist or broadcaster is learning how to handle the equipment and a firearm simultaneously and what apparel or accessory equipment you can use that will make that prospect of being able to handle both more feasible and useful," Gorman said. "I learned a lot of things we have and that I tried here don't work and as a result, I know what to look for next time and how to make that process run smoother. I think that's tremendously beneficial."

From Security Forces' leadership viewpoint, the concept of embedding PA in their combat skills training held similar value.

"The reality is you see civilian news agencies with military and the idea that we have kind of a noncombatant you're responsible for, who doesn't necessarily have all the training, brings an added responsibility for the squad leader and the members of the squad," said Master Sgt. Todd Weinberger, 115th SFS unit training manager. "It's certainly a good training tool for public affairs personnel to be with ours so our Security Forces can get a good taste of what that might be like."

Though none of the 31 SF Airmen going through the training have ever had to embed media within their unit when deployed in a combat environment, Weinberger said training should be forward thinking.

"It's the idea that we always train for the possibilities of the potential of something happening and certainly this is an added chapter to what our responsibilities include and things we have to consider," Weinberger said.

Families of deployed Wisconsin Guardsmen continue to give back

Volunteers from the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's Family Readiness Group are still moving forward with plans to give back to their units' home communities. And if lead volunteer Janell Kellett has her way, the community service initiative will continue even after the Red Arrow Soldiers are back in Wisconsin.

"'Moving Forward, Giving Back' is a continuous cycle — you're always doing it," Kellett said of the campaign which began in May 2008, when the brigade began preparing for its current Operation Iraqi Freedom deployment. "It will never stop. We don't want it to be just for the deployment."

The initiative was developed to bring together families of Soldiers who have deployed in the past with families experiencing their first deployment, as well as to provide a focus outside of deployment concerns.

"By focusing on what we can do for others, it really has helped us get through this deployment," she explained. "It gets you through the next few weeks, and then the next few weeks, and then the year. When I think about the next event, it really makes me happy — during a deployment, there's not much to make you happy."

Typically, family readiness groups for the subordinate units of the 32nd Brigade have assisted service organizations with their projects, and partnered with local food and coat drives. Other projects include raising nearly $1,900 for breast cancer research, sponsoring an "Angel Tree" family for Christmas, donating bags of school supplies to the Waupun School System, painting a United Way building, placing flags around Auburndale, planting trees for Earth Day in Sun Prairie, hosting a children's carnival at the National Guard armory in Portage, working the Red Cross station at the central Wisconsin State Fair and cleaning highway roadsides.

"I've been really impressed with our volunteers and families," Kellett said. "It's been very motivating for [them]. I don't know if they were expecting the positive results they got."

Kathy Schmidt, right, prepares to emplace flags around Portage for Independence Day with fellow volunteers Aiden and Lexi Grawvunder (foreground). Schmidt is lead volunteer for the Alpha Battery, 1st Battalion 120th Field Artillery family readiness group, part of the network of family readiness groups in the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. The groups are participating in a community service initiative called "Moving Forward, Giving Back" while their family members are deployed. Submitted photo

One recent example is Project: Iraqi Freedom, a massive drive for food, clothing and school supplies to be delivered to more than 400 Iraqi children and their families. Members of the 32nd Brigade family readiness groups collected more than 3,200 pounds of donated food, clothing, shoes, hygiene items, games, books, soccer balls and toys, donated from individuals and groups throughout Wisconsin and across the country.

Maj. John Oakley, deployed with the brigade's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry, told family group volunteers in a recent e-mail that the project did more than just help out Iraqi families.

"I believe that, in conjunction with the water, security and building projects, this was just another way to help build and restore a nation," Oakley wrote, "and ultimately help to bring all of the men and women serving in the armed forces back to their families."

Another recent project, conducted at the Oct. 18 Tailgating with the Troops event at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison, resulted in 790 pounds of food and $160 cash collected for Second Harvest Food Bank, which will provide more than 1,750 meals.

Kellett has asked for volunteers from throughout the Wisconsin National Guard, both Army and Air, to assist the Salvation Army in their bell-ringing campaigns in Appleton, Chippewa Falls, Eau Claire, Fond du Lac, Green Bay, Kenosha, Madison, Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Sheboygan and Waukesha. She is seeking volunteers for two-hour shifts Nov. 20 until Dec. 24. Her goal is for volunteers to ring bells for a total of 10,000 minutes — one minute for each Soldier and Airman in the Wisconsin National Guard.

Family volunteers will also assist the Allied Food Pantry in Madison with packaging and delivering Thanksgiving dinners Nov. 21.

"We don't want to give the impression that we want something from you," Kellett said. "We want to help — we want to work with you, to give back."

This is what military families have always done, she continued.

"[Military families] are contributing to the community, to the National Guard and its mission," she said. "When we serve, we serve as a family — it's not just the Soldier."

Kellett praised the family readiness group lead volunteers as well.

"It can be a full-time job," she acknowledged. "Even when you're not 'working,' you're thinking ahead. It's very time consuming, but nothing that the people who did this before us didn't have to do. I know our military leadership appreciate it — it feels good to know they appreciate our volunteers."

Community members looking to support the troops are encouraged to contact the family readiness group at their local armory, or the Family Program Office at 1-800-292-9464.

128th Air Refueling Wing to get improved weapons trainnig site

Senior Airman Ryan Kuntze
128th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

Construction is underway at the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing base at Milwaukee's Gen. Mitchell Field, where the current Combat Arms Training and Maintenance range will be replaced with a $957,000 expanded range facility.

Replacement of the CATM range started around the middle of October and progress has been steady, said Bill Jasinski, the 128th Civil Engineer Squadron real property manager.

An upgraded facility was necessary to consolidate the range facilities inside one building, Jasinski said. The expanded facility will be 4,000 square feet, whereas the previous range facility was only 1,200 square feet, he said.

The old CATM range only allowed for eight students per class, while the new range will allow security forces to train more Airmen per class and reduce the number of classes taught each year, according to Tech. Sgt. Anthony Harvey, a 128th Security Forces combat arms instructor.

The expanded range will also include a combat arms training simulator, offering Airmen an opportunity for remedial weapons training without the use of live ammunition, Harvey said.

During ammunition shortfalls, the CATS system can be used to qualify Airmen on a weapons platform, Harvey said. This situational adaptation for the CATS system will only be available for select personnel, though, he said.

"The Combat Arms Training Simulator will allow us to train for specific scenarios," Harvey said.

Such scenarios include quick-reaction environments, where a threat has to be identified and properly engaged in a very short period of time.

"Nothing is better than live fire training, but this will maintain the necessary shooting skills," Harvey said.

Weapons skills gained by using the CATS system will provide a comfort level for Airmen, Harvey said,which they can take overseas to forward operating locations.

The CATS system is not limited to 128th Airmen, either.

"Our plan is to allow local agencies to use the simulator," Harvey said.

The expanded CATM and CATS range is expected to be complete by June 2010.

Members of the Milwaukee-based 128th Air Refueling Wing Headquarters Element, Wisconsin Air National Guard, take part in the Veterans Day Parade in downtown Milwaukee Nov. 7. As a show of support for the holiday, military members of the 128th volunteered to walk in the parade and spend time with the community.
Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Jeremy Wilson

Wisconsin Air Guard members part of Veterans Day parade

Senior Airman Ryan Kuntze
128th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

Twenty-two Airmen from the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing joined locally-stationed service members and several veterans groups from throughout Southeastern Wisconsin during a Veterans Day parade Saturday, Nov. 7.

The parade took place in downtown Milwaukee, starting at 11 a.m. at the intersection of Fourth Street and Kilbourn Avenue, and ending at the War Memorial on the lakeshore. Following the parade, state service members joined other veterans for a luncheon at the War Memorial.

"The public support was outstanding," said Lt. Col. Winston Hainsworth, the 128th Air Refueling Wing comptroller. "What I found interesting was the public thanking us, and us thanking them for supporting us today."

Red Arrow Brigade Soldiers making a difference as end of deployment in sight

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

BAGHDAD — When detainees at Camp Cropper want to get under the skin of guard force Soldiers from the 829th Engineer Company, they employ a tactic that would be more at home along the St. Croix River than inside a theater internment facility in Iraq: they needle the Wisconsin Guard troops about Brett Favre's success as a Minnesota Viking.

It seems the Green Bay Packers logos that sprouted up all over Camp Cropper since May tipped off detainees that Packer fans were in the house. It's a small world.

The 3,200 men and women of the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team have accomplished a lot during their time in Iraq so far: big accomplishments like closing the largest detention facility on Earth at Camp Bucca; small accomplishments like winning the flag football championship at Camp Cropper.

And wherever they are serving in Iraq, Red Arrow Soldiers are making a difference.

Here is what some of our units want their Wisconsin hometowns to know about their service in Iraq — the big things, the small things, and all of the individual and organizational accomplishments in between.

Company A, 132nd Brigade Support Battalion (Janesville, Elkhorn)

Few Soldiers on forward operating bases in Iraq deal with a more diverse group of customers than those who work in the convoy staging lanes. At Camp Bucca, this is a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week operation that supports all military and civilian convoys either entering or departing the southern Iraq base. In a typical day, staging lanes personnel from Alpha Company, 132nd Brigade Support Battalion receive and stage as many as 40 civilian trucks that haul everything from fuel to mail to hamburger patties for the camp's Burger King restaurant. By deployment's end, the Janesville and Elkhorn-based troops will have processed more than 3,000 trucks with drivers from Vietnam, Pakistan, Turkey, India, the Philippines, Iraq and Kuwait, to name a few.

Photo 1: Children at a school in Safwan lined up in October to receive gifts sent to them from six U.S. states and distributed by soldiers of Appleton's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry. About 3,200 pounds of donated materials were collected for residents of Safwan and nearby Umm Qasr in southern Iraq. Submitted photo

Photo 2: As close to "Miller Time" as they can get in Iraq, Spc. Cliff Cornell and Sgt. Andrew Wagoner make a trash run through Compound 3's Main Street. Packers logos can be seen all over Camp Cropper and detainees frequently joke about Brett Favre's success as a Minnesota Viking to tease the 829th Engineer Company's guard force. 829th Engineer Company photo

Spc. Michael Vallarta, West Allis, describes the most challenging part of this mission as "dealing with people who don't speak English, and then they get mad at you for not understanding what they are saying." Vallarta said the language barrier can cause both sides to get frustrated with each other, and cultural differences make it even more difficult for female Soldiers who often have a harder time getting male truck drivers to follow their instructions.

The best part of the staging lanes mission, according to Spc. Ashley Mullis, Whitewater: "It's bonding with other Soldiers." Mullis says it is much easier to get to know the other Soldiers in the unit when they work closely together every day.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry (Appleton)

Soldiers from Appleton's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry knew from their 2006 deployment that residents of the southern Iraqi cities of Safwan and Umm Qasr led difficult lives, so even before the battalion's current deployment began, plans were underway to help them.

More than 3,200 pounds of school supplies, toys, clothes and hygiene items were donated from Wisconsin and five other states, and by August the packages started rolling in from families, co-workers, businesses, church groups and community organizations.

The items were divided up and delivered to each of the cities at the end of October.

"It was amazing to see the number of children lined up, their eyes all excited as they paraded through the line receiving the items," said Maj. John Oakley, Appleton. "With the donations we were able to help 400 families."

32nd Military Police Company (Milwaukee, Oconomowoc)

A dozen Soldiers of the Milwaukee and Oconomowoc-based 32nd Military Police Company were recently honored by Brig. Gen. David Quantock for their efforts in transporting 2,882 Iraqi government prisoners during one eight-day period in September. Quantock reminded the Soldiers of the importance of their mission and the vital role it plays in turning over the last of the detainees in U.S. custody to the government of Iraq and moving the U.S. closer to closing all of its theater internment facilities in Iraq.

As the 32nd Brigade's Soldiers head into the final two months of their time overseas, the change of seasons in Iraq is attempting to prepare them for their return to Wisconsin. The high temperature in Baghdad Nov. 18 was only 62 degrees and the overnight low is forecast to be down around 40.

They'll be ready for Wisconsin.

Read the entire story at http://dma.wi.gov/dma/news/2009News/32_BCT_09-026.asp

A bright idea for 128th Air Refueling Wing

Capt. John Capra
128th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

The 128th Air Refueling Wing is improving its energy efficiency by replacing older, less efficient street lights with new high efficient Light-Emitting Diode (LED) lights. In an effort to reduce the base power demand, this initiative is in response to a presidential executive order requiring all federal agencies to reduce energy intensity by three percent each year, totaling 30 percent by the end of fiscal year 2015 compared to the baseline set in 2003.

Gen. Mitchell Air National Guard Base, home to the 128th Air Refueling Wing, recently replaced 114 street lights on its installation which consume about 50 percent less energy than the previous high-pressure sodium light fixtures. The new lighting also provides more sustained lumens (brightness) and offers a wider color spectrum which contributes to a safer and more secure installation.

The corner of Freedom and Mission Ave at the 128th Air Refueling Wing, Wisconsin Air National Guard is illuminated by new LED street lights 4 Nov, 2009. The Wing is improving its energy efficiency by replacing older, less efficient street lights with new high efficient Light-Emitting Diode (LED) lights. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Jeffrey Rohloff

At right, new LED lights recently installed at the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing in Milwaukee will provide more sustained lumens (brightness) and offer a wider color spectrum which will contribute to a safer and more secure installation. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Capt. John Capra

Getting arrested

F-16 tests runway cable system at Volk Field

With a weight of 29,000 pounds and a speed of almost 110 MPH, Lt. Col. Nick Radney, a pilot with the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, brings an F-16 Fighting Falcon safely to a stop after a test of the Barrier Arresting Kit 12, a system designed to be "hooked" by an aircraft if needed to stop the aircraft. Wisconsin Air National Guard photos by Tech Sgt. Don Nelson

Airman 1st Class Ryan Poth
115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

VOLK FIELD CRTC — An explanation of what a BAK-12 is might as well be written in Greek for many people, but when explained using a comparison from the movie "Top Gun," it might be translated more clearly. The year was 1986. Lt. Pete "Maverick" Mitchell circled the USS Enterprise as he prepared to land the aircraft. On the flight deck was a cable, tightly strung across the metal deck. As Maverick approached, he released an arresting hook from the rear of the aircraft. When the hook and cable connected, the system had one purpose: to safely stop the pilot and plane.

Just like on an aircraft carrier, a cable is run across most military runways to stop certain aircraft. Unlike an aircraft carrier, a Barrier Arrestment Kit-12 at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center is used only as a last resort when pilots are unable to stop an aircraft on their own.

Members of the 115th Fighter Wing from Madison and the 128th Air Control Squadron at Volk Field recertified two BAK-12 systems during the October guard drill weekend here.

"Each BAK-12 must be certified once a year and put through a comparable test that it would receive in a real-world landing where an aircraft has difficulties stopping," said Master Sgt. Darrell Miller, a crew chief from the 115th FW.

A BAK-12, just like an aircraft carrier arrestment system, can save a life, prevent the loss of military equipment and give assurance to pilots should their aircraft experience maintenance issues.

"The BAK-12 has to accommodate all possibilities," said Lt. Col. Nick Radney, an F-16 fighter pilot from the 115th. "There are lots of different aircraft that use Volk Field. If an aircraft has an emergency situation, the pilot knows he will be able to stop the aircraft on the runway."

With a weight of 29,000 pounds and at a speed of almost 110 mph, Radney and the F-16 he piloted came safely to a stop after both tests of the BAK-12, one on each end of the runway.

As a former Navy pilot of F-18 Hornets, Radney has experience using cables to land on aircraft carriers. Unlike a carrier landing, however, the F-16 came to a smooth stop over a distance of 1,200 feet.

F-16s are unable to use a carrier-based arrestment system due to the design of the plane. A carrier arrestment system is designed to stop an aircraft in less than 350 feet. An F-18 is more bulky than an F-16, which gives the F-16 much better maneuverability but also makes it unable to take the strain of a carrier landing, Radney said.

Photo 1: Staff Sgt. Jordan Jensen, a crew chief with the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, resets the tail hook on an F-16 Fighting Falcon that is used to "hook" the Barrier Arresting Kit 12 cable installed at the end of each runway, a system designed to stop an aircraft.

Photo 2: The Barrier Arresting Kit 12 cable installed at the end of each runway is designed to stop an aircraft.

The BAK-12 cable has to accommodate many different types of aircraft and many different speeds, whether it is a very light and small aircraft or a heavy aircraft fully loaded with fuel and munitions.

There are many aircraft that can utilize the barrier system should they need it, Radney said. Included are planes with a tail hook system like the F-15 and F-16, and even many foreign aircraft, he added.

For a pilot, the BAK-12 gives peace of mind and ensures the plane will come to a safe stop.

"One of the great things about having the barrier system out there is that no matter what potential maintenance problem might occur, as long as I can get myself back to the field, I can get myself stopped with the arresting hook," Radney said. "Thankfully, I have never needed to use the arresting hook because of the fine maintenance crew and the quality of the F-16."

Meritorious service

Brig. Gen. John McCoy, deputy adjutant general for Air, presents a plaque to retired Brig. Gen. John Croft during a Nov. 7 ceremony to mark Croft's induction into the Wisconsin Air National Guard Hall of Fame. Wisconsin Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jamie Mills

Croft inducted into Hall of Fame

Retired Brig. Gen. John R. Croft, Crystal Lake, Ill., was inducted into the Wisconsin Air National Guard Hall of Fame during a Nov. 7 ceremony at The Esquire Club in Madison.

Croft was commissioned through the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) program, where he was a cadet colonel, commander and distinguished graduate, and began his military career as a second lieutenant in 1972. He served more than six years of active duty in the U.S. Air Force and flew as a KC-135 tanker pilot in the earliest flight tests of the air refueling system for the C-5. He left active duty and joined the 128th Air Refueling Group of the Wisconsin Air National Guard in 1979. He flew 46 combat support missions during the Persian Gulf War, including two missions on the first day of the war. He later served as operations officer and director of operations at State Headquarters. In 1999 he was operations group commander for the 128th Air Refueling Wing when it deployed for the Kosovo conflict. Following a brief term as wing vice-commander, he was assigned as state Air Guard chief of staff in March 2001, an assignment he held until his retirement in 2004.

Croft's superior leadership, devotion to Airmen who served under his command and his dedication to the 128th Air Refueling Wing and the Joint Force Headquarters left a profound impact on the legacy of excellence for those units.

Croft is the 59th inductee to the Wisconsin Air National Guard Hall of Fame, which was established in 1982 to honor the special contributions officers and enlisted members make to the overall success of the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

Soldier earns NGB award

A senior non-commissioned officer assigned to the Wisconsin National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters in Madison received the 2009 Chief, National Guard Bureau's Outstanding Achievement Award for his contributions to the National Guard's state mission.

Master Sgt. Damien Schuerman, current operations NCO in charge with the joint staff's operations directorate, said he was selected for his contributions to the Wisconsin National Guard's domestic operations during the 2009 fiscal year.

Schuerman was nominated for the award by his supervisor, Maj. David May.

"He's been involved in every domestic-level response — you name it — for the past year," May said. "The Kentucky ice storm, 'Operation Fargo,' all the way back to the [2008] floods, he's been the critical guy in every response activity."

May said Schuerman plays a key role in developing personnel in the directorate, as well as revising policies and procedures, and functions as the senior enlisted advisor.

Schuerman said it was an honor to receive the award.

"Professionally, I realize it is an individual award, but [I] also know that I am a member of a team. Without the efforts of those Soldiers and Airmen, I could never have earned this award."

Schuerman also cited his wife for her understanding of the time and effort required to accomplish his job.

Schuerman received the award Friday, Nov. 20 during the National Guard Bureau's joint senior leader conference in the Washington D.C. area.

Soldier now a citizen

Sgt. Anna Duncan is congratulated by Lt. Gen. Charles H. Jacoby Jr. after she is sworn in as a citizen of the United States Nov. 11 at Al-Faw Palace near Baghdad. Duncan, a native of the Caribbean island nation of St. Lucia, is assigned to Kenosha-based Company B, 257th Brigade Support Battalion. Submitted photo

Tricare H1N1 immunization policy

Immunizations against the H1N1 virus will soon be available, and people are eager to take precautions. Tricare Prime, Standard and Extra beneficiaries can get their shots from network and non-network providers without paying a deductible or making a copayment.

A temporary waiver allows retired Tricare Prime enrollees to get the H1N1 immunization from non-network providers without a referral or authorization, eliminating point-of-service charges. Prime enrollees will not be charged a co-payment or cost share. Tricare for Life beneficiaries must follow Medicare rules regarding H1N1 vaccine. Medicare will pay for administering the H1N1 vaccine, but not the H1N1 vaccine itself if it is supplied to providers free of charge. Payment will be subject to normal billing and payment rules that apply to influenza vaccine.

Preventive medicine is a very important part of Tricare's goal of keeping retirees and families healthy, said Rear Adm. Christine Hunter, deputy director of the Tricare Management Activity.

"To that end, we make getting vaccinated as convenient and affordable as possible," she said. "Beneficiaries should talk to their primary care manager if they have any questions about the H1N1 vaccine or other vaccines."

The vaccine for the seasonal flu is not expected to protect against H1N1, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; therefore, immunization for the 2009 H1N1 strain is recommended. Both vaccines can be administered on the same day.

CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends that everyone get the H1N1 vaccine, but for certain groups the vaccination is more critical. These include:

- Pregnant women;
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months;
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel;
- Everyone between the ages of 6 months and 24 years;
- People ages 25 through 64 with chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems; and
- Older people with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, asthma or HIV.

Tricare Web site: Visit http://tricare.mil/flu or go to the Department of Defense Pandemic Influenza Watchboard: Visit http://fhp.osd.mil/aiWatchboard/index.jsp

Pearl Harbor Day planned

Each year the governor proclaims Dec. 7 as Pearl Harbor Day in Wisconsin. Ceremonies are being planned to take place on Dec. 7 at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King at 7:30 a.m. and at the Wisconsin Veterans Home in Union Grove at 10:30 a.m. To see information about the remembrance of Pearl Harbor Day, go to www.WisVets.com/PearlHarborDay.

New Tricare pharmacy benefits

The TRICARE Management Activity is introducing significant new enhancements to beneficiaries as it combines its mail-order and retail pharmacy contracts into one new contract called TRICARE Pharmacy.

The improvements to the TRICARE Pharmacy program include the Specialty Medication Care Management program in the mail-order pharmacy; expansion of the Member Choice Center providing assistance to help beneficiaries to switch their military treatment facility prescriptions to mail-order; and one call center phone number: 1-877-363-1303.

The Specialty Medication Care Management program is for beneficiaries using the mail-order pharmacy for their specialty medications. It is structured to improve their health through continuous health evaluation, ongoing monitoring, assessment of education needs, and management of medication use.

"TRICARE beneficiaries will be pleased to know that to get this improved benefit they don't have to do anything," said Rear Adm. Thomas McGinnis, TRICARE Management Activity's chief pharmacy officer. "No calls, no paperwork. Beneficiaries don't have to re-enroll, all co-pays stay the same and the network remains essentially unchanged."

Express Scripts currently handles millions of prescriptions each year through mail-order and retail pharmacies. For more information visit www.tricare.mil/pharmacy or www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE, or call 1-877-363-1303.

Vietnam vets to be honored

On May 21-23, 2010 a special welcome home celebration for Wisconsin's Vietnam Veterans will be held at Lambeau Field in Green Bay. The weekend will include numerous activities to welcome home and thank Vietnam Veterans and their families. To learn more about the event and to register for updates visit www.lzlambeau.org.

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**.

Marriage workshops scheduled

The Wisconsin National Guard is sponsoring a number of Marriage Enrichment Weekends in 2010.

The class is designed to assist couples with reintegration and reunion by enhancing communication skills. Education will include icebreaker activities and will blend instruction and practical exercises.

Priority is based on the first to register; however, commanders are encouraged to ensure all their married service members are aware of this opportunity and may prioritize within their command if they are aware of a particular member's need.

This is *not* marriage counseling but an educational opportunity to learn new or improve upon existing, communication skills.

The State Family Program will administer the PREP weekends and our Army and Air National Guard chaplains who have been trained in PREP will instruct. There is no cost to the service members for these weekends. Commanders are authorized to send members in an IDT status. The Family Program will contract the hotel and all meals and ensure the travel vouchers are completed to reimburse the spouse for mileage. A credit card is required upon check-in for incidentals.

Workshops are scheduled for Jan. 29-31 at the Osthoff Resort in Elkhart Lake; April 23-25 in Appleton; May 21-23 in Egg Harbor; and July 23-25 in Waukesha. Child care is not provided.

Questions may be addressed to Carolyn Morgan in the Family Assistance Center, Tel: 608-242-3414 or 800-292-9464.

Parting shot

Spc. Ryan Lee Haring is mobbed by well-wishers as fellow members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 951st "Sapper" Engineer Company greeted family and friends in the streets of Tomahawk Nov. 21. Approximately one-third of the unit, which returned to Wisconsin following 10 months in Afghanistan, is based in Tomahawk. Wisconsin Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Vaughn R. Larson