PRAIRIE SOLDIER SPECIAL FEATURE

PATRIOTS in Stripes

The Nebraska Army National Guard simply couldn't do its mission without the hundreds of professional noncommissioned officers that make up its ranks. From the command sergeants major who are responsible for looking out for the morale and welfare of their troops, to the supply sergeants who makes sure that Soldiers have the equipment they need, to the medical sergeants who maintain Soldiers' health and treat their wounds, to the drill sergeants who ensure that Soldiers start their careers on the right foot, the Nebraska Army National Guard depends on the quality and professionalism of its NCOs to make sure that the hard jobs get done right the first time. They literally are the backbone of the Army.

As part of the Army's continuing Year of the NCO observance, the Prairie Soldier spotlights the work that Nebraska Army National Guard NCOs do on a daily basis to ensure that the Nebraska Army National Guard is ready, trained and capable to do its mission.

Getting Guardsmen started on right foot

Kearney sergeant helps new recruits blossom into professional Soldiers

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

2009 YEAR OF THE NCO
Strength from within

Drill Sgt. (Staff Sgt.) Troy L. Lewis
Hometown: Kearney, Neb.
Job Title: Drill Sergeant, Recruit Sustainment Program, Kearney, Neb.
Years of Service: 10-and-half
Family: Wife: Angie Lewis; Son: Talyn

Few people ever forget their first drill sergeant or the memory of seeing that "Smokey the Bear" hat for the first time.

Often, too, memories of that drill sergeant are accompanied by some pretty traumatic thoughts about what it was like during those first few days and weeks of military service.

"It's an intimidating factor for a lot of new Soldiers," Staff Sgt. Troy S. Lewis said recently, smiling as recalled his own memories of basic training some 10 years earlier.

Back in 1999, Lewis had just graduated from Pleasanton High School in Pleasanton, Neb. A new member of a Nebraska Army Guard armor unit based in Kearney, Neb., Lewis later realized he really wasn't ready for the rigors of basic training.

"When I got to basic training, I had no idea of what rank structure was. I didn't know anything," he said.

That's not the case anymore in today's Nebraska Army Guard.

Once a person enlists into the organization, they are assigned to one of five regional Recruit Sustainment Program sites across Nebraska where they then spend their drill weekends learning various different skills and essentially how to be a Soldier up until the time they graduate from Advance Individual Training and are sent to their units.

When Lewis joined the Guard, though, RSP didn't exist. Instead, individual units were responsible for getting their enlistees ready for basic training and AIT, with varying levels of success.

"When I first enlisted – and it's nothing bad on the unit… they were a Combat Arms unit and were busy with their mission – so I was kind of learning, but off to the side," Lewis said.

"I never really received any instruction on how to do anything."

Today, Lewis is doing his best to make sure his experience isn't repeated by the newest generation of Guardsmen.

He's a drill sergeant assigned to the Kearney, Neb., RSP site where he oversees approximately 70 new enlistees and a cadre of six part-time instructors.

It's a huge job.

"Basically, from the time Soldiers enlist, we take over their paperwork, their training, any medical issues, any legal issues," said Lewis, a native of Kearney.

"What we're trying to do is make the transition from civilian life to military life as easy as possible."

According to Lewis, who said he never imagined he would one day wear a drill sergeant hat back when he attended basic training, his march to becoming a drill sergeant actually began shortly after graduating from AIT as a motor transportation specialist.

He soon became a recruiter assistant where he helped local recruiters transport prospective enlistees to and from meetings and appointments.

"Basically, it was pretty low level stuff," he said.

Lewis, whose cousin was a Nebraska Army Guard recruiter when he enlisted, soon began learning more and more about recruiting, like how to fill out the volumes of paperwork required during the "prospect" to "enlistment" phases.

"I wanted to become a recruiter," he said.

That changed when Lewis' unit, then known as Company B, 735th Main Support Battalion, was mobilized in April 2003 for what would become a 16-month deployment to Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

When Lewis returned, the recruiter he'd worked for earlier had been reassigned to help build the newly conceived RSP in Nebraska. Sgt. 1st Class Chad Bruce soon contacted Lewis.

"He asked if it was something that I would like to come and check out," Lewis said. "He thought I might be good at it."

Lewis' first impressions were anything but good, though.

"I went and did it and did not like it," he said. "It was a completely different pace than I was used to."

However, after a few more drill weekends, Lewis said he realized that he had a knack for working with newly enlisted Soldiers.

"It turned out that I enjoyed what I was doing," he said. "I just had not had the chance to work with Soldiers who had not been to basic training yet."

Working with the new enlistees, Lewis soon realized he needed to do more and to learn more so that he could better prepare the young Guardsmen.

"I realized that I had been to basic training eight-and-a-half years ago. So, I'm trying to tell these new Soldiers what basic training is like today from eight-and-a-half years ago," he said.

In order to do a better job, Lewis applied for drill sergeant school. On Jan. 1, 2006, he left for nine weeks of drill sergeant training at Fort Benning, Ga.

"They call it basic training on steroids," Lewis said, "which it was."

Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Guiding Influence: Drill Sgt. (Staff Sgt.) Troy S. Lewis oversees an Army Physical Fitness Test for new members of the Nebraska Army National Guard during a June weekend drill at the Recruit Sustainment Program in Kearney, Neb.

> *"As an NCO with 76 eyes on you on a drill weekend, you have to be on the top of your game."*
>
> ***— Drill Sgt. (Staff Sgt.) Troy Lewis***

While at the school, Lewis said he had to learn how to "strictly instruct," how to counsel, how to give classes on a myriad of military subjects by memorization. He also spent weeks out on various ranges, actually teaching initial entry Soldiers a variety of skills.

"The hands-on experience down there was amazing," said Lewis, who added that he's never enjoyed public speaking.

Lewis said he also learned about the importance of being a professional and committed noncommissioned officer.

"As an NCO, we're not only instructing them on what to do, we're doing it with them," he said during a brief break during a rainy June drill morning, taking an occasional look behind his shoulder as a group of about a dozen RSP Soldiers took a physical fitness test in the Kearney readiness center's physical fitness room. "If we don't know what we're doing, we're training them wrong."

"As an NCO with 76 eyes on you on a drill weekend, you have to be on the top of your game," Lewis added.

That means often having to take the extra step to give new recruits the counseling, the training and the time they need to reach their own personal goals.

Sometimes it also means giving some encouragement and motivation to recruits who need it. Other times it means spending extra time helping new Soldiers maintain their physical fitness.

"We get them where they need to be," he said as he prepared to go on a rainy run with the recruits taking their PT test.

Since returning to Kearney as a drill sergeant, Lewis said he's learned that he loves watching scared recruits blossom into confident and skilled Soldiers within a matter of a few short months.

"The experience and just seeing Soldiers who come in here who some people might think that they don't have a chance and six months later they come back from basic training and AIT with certificates of appreciation, honor graduates and numerous other things… it's just tremendous."

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

Lifesaving Tools: Sgt. Andrew Jarvis, a health care technician with the 313th Medical Company in Lincoln, sits by some of the tools of his trade in an Army ambulance. Jarvis put his civilian employment experience as a paramedic to use in the Nebraska National Guard.

Keeping calm under pressure

Medical sergeant says skills from civilian experience help in often chaotic military climate

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Staff Photojournalist

2009 YEAR OF THE NCO
Strength from within

Sgt. Andrew Jarvis
Hometown: Bellevue, Neb.
Job Title: Health Care Technician, Lincoln, Neb.
Years of Service: Three
Family: Single

The son of a registered nurse he was always intrigued by medicine, so becoming a paramedic was an easy choice.

When he decided to join the Nebraska National Guard, there was only one job he would settle for – health care technician.

Sgt. Andrew Jarvis, a Bellevue, Neb., native with the Lincoln-based 313th Medical Company, joined the Nebraska Army National Guard as a health care technician to put the skills he has learned in his civilian employment to use for the military.

A traditional Guardsman for three years, Jarvis has worked as a critical care paramedic for Rural Metro Ambulance for four years and Bellevue Fire and Rescue for 10.

That civilian experience has allowed him to keep his lifesaving skills current and very valuable to the Nebraska National Guard.

"I wanted to do a job that I do all the time," said Jarvis.

See MEDIC on 18.

Grand Island aviation sergeant loves helping others in need

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

When Jennifer Bakker decided to join the Nebraska Army National Guard five years ago, she enlisted with one simple goal in mind: she wanted to help people.

Today, as an aviation operations sergeant assigned to Grand Island's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 376th Aviation (Security and Support,) Bakker is still assisting people – both as a Guardsmen and in her civilian career.

"I joined because I like helping people," said Bakker recently in June while sitting near her battalion's Tactical Operations Center at Camp Ashland, Neb., where Soldiers from her battalion were practicing for a potential hurricane relief mission. "In my civilian side, I help people find new jobs. In the Guard, I'm in a security and support battalion where we get to go help people who have basically went from normal everyday life to winds and water destroying their everyday lives."

"We get to help them through one of possibly the most horrible times of their lives," she added. "They may never know who are, but we get to be that asset that brings them water, that brings them the support that they need."

Bakker, who grew up in Lincoln before moving to Grand Island, originally joined the Guard's Troop F, 1-167th Cavalry, as a helicopter refueling specialist. When the battalion reorganized a few years ago, she decided to accept a new job as an aviation operations specialist.

Typically, when the battalion operates in a field environment, Bakker spends most of her time working in the organization's Tactical Operations Center, more commonly referred to as a TOC. There, teams of aviation and operations specialists work around the clock keeping track of such things as the progress of the different ground and aerial missions, where battalion personnel are located at, how communications are flowing throughout the organization.

Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Nerve Center Sergeant: Sgt. Jennifer Bakker sits in the 1-376th Aviation's tactical operations center where she and other aviation operations specialists keep track of the on-going missions as well as the locations of battalion personnel and equipment during their annual training at Camp Ashland, Neb.

2009 YEAR OF THE NCO
Strength from within

Sgt. Jennifer Bakker
Hometown: Lincoln, Neb.
Job Title: Aviation Operations Sergeant, Grand Island, Neb.
Years of Service: Six
Family: Engaged

It's a big job. And it's also an extremely important job, said Bakker.

"We let the battalion commander know what his aircraft are doing," said Bakker, while showing off the various systems that the TOC personnel use to give their commander the information he needs to make quick, informed decisions.

For instance, there are radio logs that are constantly updated. Computers also keep track of information coming and going. Additionally, unit helicopters and vehicle missions are tracked on a huge map.

"(The information) all comes back to us so that when the battalion commander comes in and goes, 'Where are my people?' 'Where are they at?' 'What's going on?' we have it all displayed for him and are ready to go."

As a TOC sergeant, Bakker is responsible for making sure that the younger Soldiers receive the training and the hands-on experience they need to do their jobs.

The same goals, she added, that her battalion leaders hoped to accomplish during this year's annual training at Camp Ashland, Neb.

"We help them to prepare for those missions," she said. "Right now, it's a lot of learning… it's taking the missions and saying, 'Okay, how would we play this out if it was real?'"

"It's about picking up on our strengths and making sure that those weaknesses that we do have become strengths."

In a nutshell, she said, it's what being a noncommissioned officer is all about.

"An NCO is important because they are a leader. Without leadership, nothing would get done," Bakker said.

"An NCO has a vital role to not only make sure that the tasks that are done are completed successfully, but also to make sure that the people they are overseeing are okay," she added.

"There are a lot of things that happen when you're in the military that aren't just job-related. Even if its just three weeks down in Louisiana or you're deployed overseas, you are responsible for making sure that your Soldiers are doing well physically, emotionally and mentally."

Taking care of people. For Sgt. Jennifer Bakker it's more than just a slogan.

It's a way of life.

Brigade intelligence sergeant says code must be part of leaders' lives

By Spc. Koan Nissen
Staff Writer

2009 YEAR OF THE NCO
Strength from within

Staff Sgt. Lucas Smith-
Hometown:
Wood River, Neb.
Job Title: Senior Intelligence Sergeant, Lincoln, Neb.
Years of Service:
11-and-half
Family: Single

For more than 200 years, the missions of the United States Army have been diligently executed by professionals of a time-honored corps known as the backbone of the Army.

Staff Sgt. Lucas Smith is one of those professionals.

One need only look at Smith's resume and leadership style to truly appreciate what the Army expects from its leaders.

Smith, who deployed to Bosnia in 2002, returned to Nebraska in 2003 only to volunteer for another overseas deployment a little over a year later. There was never any doubt that he'd volunteer to deploy again, he said, adding: "We stick together."

Formerly a cavalry scout, Smith is now a senior intelligence sergeant in Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance.)

Having first served as a scout, Smith says, "I know what the guys up front need to know. I know both sides of the picture."

Among his many titles, one might call Smith a Soldier's Soldier. He regularly puts the needs of his people above his own and can be found encouraging subordinates to do better and perform at their best. "I always make sure my people know what the maximums are."

Photo by Capt. Andrew Nelson

Map Training: Staff Sgt. Lucas Smith stands next to a map showing the intelligence overlays he prepares as an intelligence sergeant for the 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance.)

Originally from Wood River, Neb., the 29-year-old staff sergeant now calls Lincoln home.

For Smith, the NCO creed is more than just a motto to be recited; it's a way of life. He said he discovered the true meaning of being an NCO through two deployments.

In spring 2005, Smith deployed to Ramadi, Iraq, and served as the Hum-Vee gunner for the commander of the 2nd Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard. He and many others in Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry, had recently returned from Bosnia and did not have to go overseas again.

They went anyway.

"We couldn't let our younger guys go without us," Smith said. "We're a family."

The NCO Creed says all Soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership and NCOs are tasked to provide it, putting the needs of their Soldiers above their own.

Words like "teach," "train"

See SMITH on 18.

Warrant officer workshop builds upon successes

Chief's Business

By Chief Warrant Officer 5 Steve Weber
Nebraska Army National Guard
Command Chief Warrant Officer

Sometimes it seems that all the hard work and coordination required to conduct a warrant officer call might possibly be too much to accomplish, yet at the end of the day when all is done, after all the briefings, shared experiences, networking and positive feedback, you know it was all worthwhile.

On July 18, 76 warrant officers and 11 warrant officer candidates attended a Warrant Officer Call Workshop at Camp Ashland for warrant officer professional development.

Brig. Gen. William Kuehn provided command guidance and presented a State Legion of Merit to Chief Warrant Officer 4 Robert Hansel and an Army Commendation Medal to Chief Warrant Officer 2 Tollie Yoder. Several other chiefs were presented with General Kuehn's coin for excellent performance.

All of us in the Warrant Officer Corps thank General Kuehn for his almost 40 years of leadership, his exemplary service, his support of Nebraska's warrant officers and we wish him well in retirement.

Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Burch also attended the workshop and he talked about the "Year of the NCO" as well as new information on the "Quality Boots Indicators" initiative. I commend Command Sergeant Major Burch for his outstanding leadership of Nebraska's noncommissioned officers and I support the deserved recognition of NCOs in the Nebraska Army National Guard.

Fifteen different chiefs briefed a full range of topics representing the work warrant officers are doing to support the mission of the Nebraska Army National Guard. Briefing slides are posted to the CCWO Website.

The current warrant officer class provided lunch (a fund raiser requirement of Warrant Officer Candidate School) and we appreciate their hard work.

Maj. Gen. Timothy Kadavy stopped by in the afternoon and commended the group for attaining the goal of 100 percent warrant officer strength, making Nebraska one of only three states to attain that number. General Kadavy said Nebraska's success can be attributed to leadership creating a climate where NCOs desire to become a member of the Warrant Officer team.

He thanked all of us for being professional Soldiers and for our service in the Nebraska Army National Guard.

It's been an honor to serve with Major General Kadavy and we wish him well in his new assignment as the deputy director of the Army National Guard.

As General Kadavy leaves Nebraska and assumes responsibilities at the National Guard Bureau, he can know that his leadership has left an undeniably profound and positive effect on all Soldiers in the Nebraska Army National Guard.

I salute General Kadavy for his untiring support of all Soldiers and warrant officers. I'm excited for all of the Army National Guard and also proud to have a Nebraskan and a friend leading the way ahead at NGB.

Veteran, significant other support groups form across Nebraska

VA Update

By Bonnie Bessler
Transition Assistance Advisor

Fellowship groups have formed in Nebraska to help veterans and their spouses resolve issues related to combat stress and readjustment from trauma while on active duty

The goal of the group is to help individuals cope more effectively with a wide range of issues including: family and relationship discord, depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, impulse control, decision making, styles of communications and self-medication.

The group is also designed to assist members in coping with the impact of the combat experience and understanding how the war currently affects their lives while also providing them with an opportunity to interact with, support and learn from one another.

The discussion of issues, situations, and experiences are held strictly confidential.

The following support groups are hosted by the Lincoln and Omaha Vet Center. For more information contact the appropriate Vet Center. (L) Lincoln – (402) 476-9736, (O) Omaha – (402) 346-6735

Beatrice, Neb., (L): 1st & 3rd Tuesday, 6:30 p.m., Southeast Community College, Adams Hall;

Geneva, Neb., (L): 1st & 3rd Thursday, 7 p.m., Library;

Hastings, Neb., (L): 2nd & 4th Tuesday, 6 p.m., Crossroads Mission (702 West 14th Street);

Holdrege, Neb., (L): 2nd & 4th Thursday, 7:30 p.m., TierOne (4th and Burlington);

Kearney, Neb., (L): 2nd & 4th Wednesday, 7 p.m., Central Community College;

Lincoln, Neb., (L): Anger Group, 2nd & 4th Tuesday, 6 p.m., Lincoln Vet Center (3119 "O" Street);

Omaha, Neb., (O): Every Sunday, 2 p.m., Vet Center, 2428 Cuming St

Scottsbluff, Neb.: 1st Monday, 6:30 – 8 pm, Western Nebraska Community College (HATC Bldg B132); (Hosted by Western Nebraska Veterans and Families Coalition; For more information contact Marcia at (308) 635-6152 or Chris at (308) 635-6042)

For more information about these fellowship groups or other veteran transition benefits and programs, contact Bonnie Bessler, transition assistance advisor at (402) 309-1543.

Courtesy Photo

Top Sergeant: Master Sgt. Tyrone Bingham poses for a photograph in his office while deployed overseas. Bingham was recently named the top senior noncommissioned officer in the entire U.S. Air Force.

BINGHAM continued from page 1.

crewmembers are current in all their required training and flying hours while also managing their flight records. He supervises both Guard and active duty Airmen in his present position.

Bingham recently completed a 120-day deployment to the Persian Gulf. Approximately a year earlier he deployed to Afghanistan with a C-130 unit from the Rhode Island Air National Guard.

Bingham said much of the credit for his recent success lies with his fellow Air Guardsmen at Offutt Air Force Base.

"It's good to represent a world-class unit like the 170th Group," he said. "I've known they are world-class for a long time now, but it's nice to help other people learn more about what the Nebraska Air National Guard is doing here at Offutt. We're such a new unit, very few people realize how big of a role we play here."

"Really, everybody I work with here deserves credit for this award. They have made me who I am today," Bingham added.

According to Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy, adjutant general for Nebraska, the entire Nebraska National Guard is extremely proud of Bingham's accomplishments.

"Master Sgt. Bingham's accomplishments and recognition is indicative of the Airmen quality we have in the Nebraska Air National Guard. He is very deserving of this recognition and we could not be prouder of him," Kadavy said.

Bingham will be formally honored later this year. Details of that ceremony are still pending.

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and "lead" are everyday vocabulary for Smith.

"I'm in the mindset of doing things for the team and not focusing on me," he said.

Smith credits the Army for who he is.

"I wouldn't be who I am today without it," he said. "The Army has given me many opportunities to travel the world and see things beyond Nebraska and the surrounding states."

Smith said the role of an NCO should not be taken lightly and should be on the mind of anyone wearing strips at all times.

Placing the needs of one's Soldiers above personal needs is "a way of life and how you have to live," Smith said.

More importantly, he added, it's also about knowing how important sergeants are to the overall mission of the Army.

"If officers make the plans, then the NCOs are the ones who execute them."

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"That way when I come do my military job, I'm proficient in it. I wouldn't want to do a job as a mechanic… when I don't work on vehicles at home. It's a skill. If you don't do it, you lose it."

As a health care technician, more commonly known as a 'medic,' Jarvis is a first responder to injured service members. Basically, the paramedics of the military, he said.

"We provide emergency care to Soldiers," said Jarvis. "We're not nurses, we're not doctors, but we can provide first line emergency care."

Considering the importance of his military occupation as a noncommissioned officer, Jarvis said he understands why NCOs are so important. NCOs provide mentoring and training to the lower-ranking enlisted Soldiers, said Jarvis.

"They are the link between the upper leadership and the lower enlisted."

The experience an NCO brings is very important to the medical field as well, said Jarvis.

"The NCOs have more experience working in the medical field," said Jarvis.

"You know how to handle the stressors better. As a younger enlisted, something might happen (where) they get overwhelmed, whereas you've seen it before and know it really isn't that bad. You can calm down and you can work through the situation."

Jarvis said he relies on his years of civilian and military paramedic background for confidence to remain calm in those stressful situations. He hopes to pass that on to the less experienced enlisted Soldiers that may be in his charge.

"As an NCO you have that experience, that confidence," said Jarvis.

"You can exude that confidence over to the younger Soldiers and that will help boost their confidence. If you're calm, they're calm."

Serving in the Nebraska National Guard instills a sense of pride, said Jarvis.

And working as a medic means a lot to him and the military.

"I'm proud to be and American Soldier," said Jarvis. "I'm proud to serve for the country and our freedom."

As a medic Jarvis said he knows that he can be placed in life-or-death situations that can have an enormous impact on lives. He said he hopes he affects them for the better.

"Anytime I can help somebody it makes me feel good," said Jarvis. "It makes me feel that I've changed their life for the better."

Whether he's helping a Soldier or a civilian, every patient Jarvis deals with makes an impression on him.

"I think any patient that I take care of affects me," said Jarvis.

"Whether it's the little old lady that just needs some company, to the patient that's probably not going to survive the trip. If we don't have medics people don't survive."

Jarvis will be able to showcase his skills and experience when he is deployed with the 313th Med. Co. to Iraq in October.