Soldiers talk live with President Obama

■ Illinois Soldiers support inauguration

By Mike Chrisman
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Illinois Soldiers had a once in a life-time experience during President Barack Obama's Inauguration in January.

Deployed Soldiers with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) spoke to Obama live from Afghanistan during the inaugural ball Jan. 20. Obama thanked the Illinois Soldiers for their service and asked them a crucial question: Chicago White Sox or Chicago Cubs fans?

Soldiers included were Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Bowman of Plainfield, Staff Sgt. Eric Olvera of Chicago, Sgt. Bernardo Guillen of Melrose Park, Spc. Geovanna Guerra of Chicago, Spc. Courtney Howard of Chicago, and Spc. Eunice Hernando of Aurora.

Additional Illinois Soldiers supported the historical inauguration during the parade and inaugural gala.

Tech. Sgt. Doug Mattsey, Airman with the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria and tuba player for the Air National Guard Band of the Midwest, was part of the military band marching approximately two miles in downtown Washington, D.C in front of millions of people.

"It's really neat to be part of this monumental step for our country," said Mattsey. "We are hurdling over racial divides and I think that is why this year's inauguration is such a popular event."

U.S. Army courtesy photo courtesy

SOX OR CUBS?: **Deployed Illinois Soldiers from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team spoke to President Barack Obama live at the inaugural ball Jan. 20. While Obama thanked the Soldiers for their service, he also asked them a crucial question: Chicago White Sox or Chicago Cubs fans?**

Mattsey, a full-time band director for Macomb Junior High School, volunteered to play his tuba during the parade. He represented the Illinois Air National Guard performing with bands from all five branches of the armed forces. A majority of the performers were from military groups across the nation's capitol.

The Macomb resident spent a week of January in Washington, D.C., practicing with the band and returned home briefly last week to see his family and the students in his class before the inauguration. Mattsey said his students were ecstatic about his opportunity and asked a lot of questions.

"They were really excited," Mattsey said. "Some of them have never left their hometown, let alone left the state or flown anywhere."

Along with Mattsey and the 33rd IBCT Soldiers, five Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers were selected to present the colors for the Illinois State Society Inaugural Gala Jan.19.

The Illinois State Society hosts the gala every four years in honor of the president-elect and vice president-elect. The gala is a non-partisan event to celebrate Illinois history, culture, science, technology, commerce and social traditions.

"This is a great opportunity and a chance to make my family and children proud," said Sgt. 1st Class Jason French of Virginia. "History can only be made once and I am very proud to be able to be a part of something like this."

The Illinois State Society has hosted Inaugural receptions since the 1800s. The first black tie reception was held for Ronald Reagan's second Presidential Inauguration in 1985, which was when the group began to host Inaugural Balls.

Staff Sgt. Steven Starks of Peoria, participated in the Inaugural Gala in 2005 and had a chance to meet then, U.S. Senator-elect Barack Obama during the event. Starks was part of the 2009 honor guard and said it was an honor to represent Illinois and have a chance to dine with elected officials from Illinois.

"It's almost like we are supporting one of our own," Starks said when talking about the history of another Illinoisan being sworn in as president.

French and Starks were joined by Sgt. 1st Class James Rade of Peoria, Staff Sgt. Timothy Sanders of Mount Zion, and Sgt. 1st Class William Milligan of Illiopolis. Milligan was excited to be able to participate in this monumental occasion.

"It's a very historical time in our nation's existence," Milligan said. "It's pretty awesome to be tasked out and be part of it. It's something we can all be proud of."

President Obama visits Peoria, Springfield

By U.S. Army Spc. Lalita Laksbergs
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois National Guard provided support during President Barack Obama's visit to Illinois Feb. 12, providing security, and logistical elements in Springfield and Peoria.

Soldiers and Airmen worked with White House personnel, the Secret Service and local first responders, during the president's visit.

Supporting elements included the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria; 183rd Fighter Wing in Springfield; Detachment 1, Company C, 1st Battalion, 376th Aviation in Decatur; 5th Civil Support Team in Bartonville; and Army Aviation Support Facilities based in Peoria and Midway Airport in Chicago.

In Springfield, Maj. Gen. William Enyart, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard; Maj. Gen. Dennis Celletti, Assistant Adjutant General – Army; and Col. Michael Meyer, Commander of the 183rd Fighter Wing, shook hands and spoke briefly with President Obama at the bottom of the stairs as he exited Air Force One.

The president passed by his awaiting motorcade and walked over to greet the media and approximately 100 Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen who were waiting to welcome the Commander in Chief.

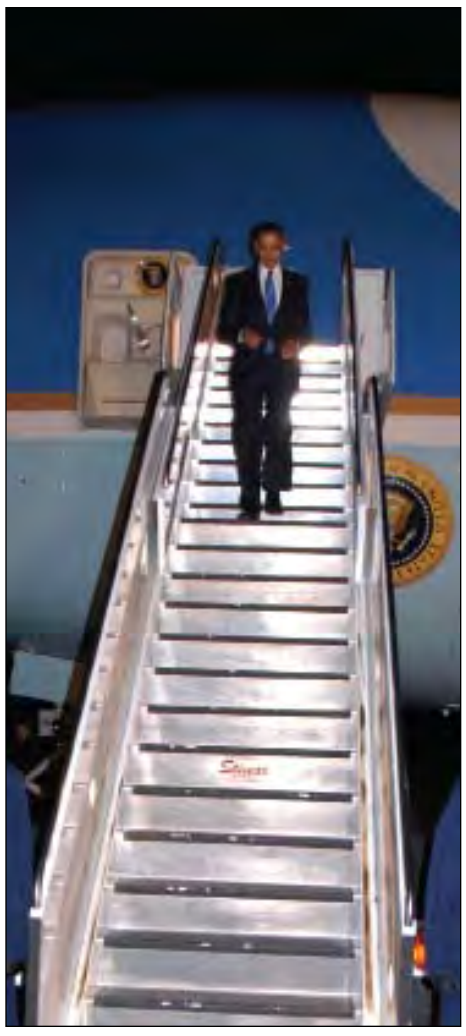
"I thought it was an exciting opportunity to meet the President of the United States," said Master Sgt. Matthew Allen, a New Berlin resident and Production Recruiter in the Illinois Air National Guard. "This was the first, and maybe only, chance I will have to meet the most powerful man in the free world.

The president walked down the stairs and it looked like he was going to go to the motorcade, but then he deviated from that plan and walked over to greet us," Allen said. "He has a rock-star persona and an extraordinary charisma that I could not help but get caught up in."

Obama arrived in Springfield late in the day to participate in a dinner at the Crowne Plaza Hotel commemorating President Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday and left Springfield immediately after.

U.S. Army photo by Spc. Lalita Laksbergs, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

ONCE IN A LIFETIME: **(left to right) Col. Michael Meyer, Commander of the 183rd Fighter Wing of the Illinois Air National Guard, Maj. Gen. Dennis Celletti, Assistant Adjutant General of the Illinois Army National Guard, and Maj. Gen. William Enyart, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard, salute Air Force One as it taxied at Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport on Feb. 12. The Illinois National Guard greeted President Barack Obama as he arrived in Springfield to attend a dinner commemorating the 200th Anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's birth.**



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Lalita Laksbergs
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

COMMANDER IN CHIEF: **President Barack Obama descended the steps after Air Force One arrived at Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport in Springfield on Feb. 12. President Obama was greeted by a contingent of Illinois National Guard command on the tarmac, and took time to briefly visit and shake hands with more than 100 Illinois Soldiers and Airmen.**