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Prairie Soldier

The Joint Newspaper of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard

New Grand Island aviation facility dedicated in May

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

State, local and military leaders helped usher in a new era of Nebraska Army National Guard aviation when they officially opened the Guard's new Army Aviation Support Facility #2 in Grand Island, May 28.

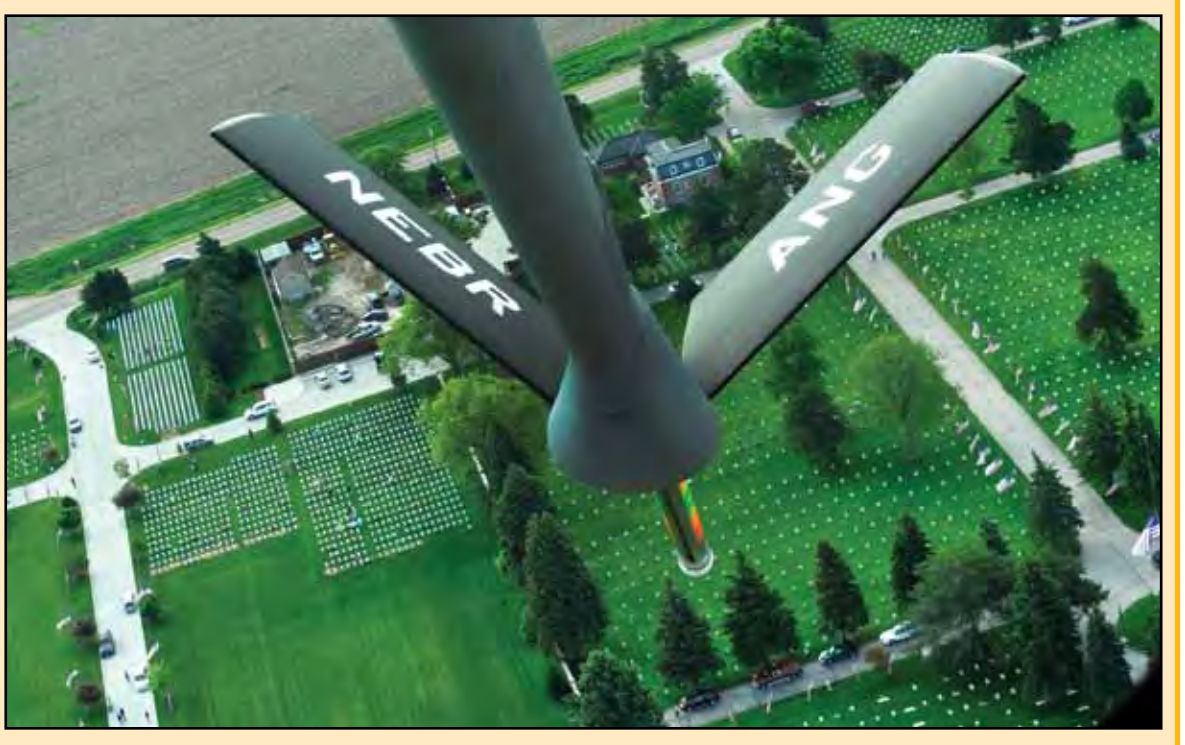
"Grand Island and Nebraska… we should be very proud. This is an absolutely major facility," said Gov. Dave Heineman before he and other officials cut the ribbon to the new $19.2 million facility.

The new 1,000 square foot aviation facility, now home to five Nebraska Army National Guard aviation units, was designed to house six CH-47 Chinook helicopters and four smaller OH-58 Kiowa helicopters. It includes a massive hangar as well as maintenance and operations space, and improved storage space. The facility also includes 396,000 square feet of parking apron space.

Heineman complimented officials from the Nebraska Army

See GRAND ISLAND on 8.

Honoring Nebraska's Heroes



Saluting America's Veterans: A Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker boom flies over a serene Fort McPherson Cemetery in western Nebraska on Memorial Day.

Air Guard crews continue Memorial Day tradition

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

There's something strangely serene yet exhilarating about flying face down over the rolling Nebraska countryside, soaring approximately 1,000 feet over greening fields, rocky canyons and rolling sand hills at a speed of 230 knots.

First of all there's the changing colors as one travels from east to west and then back east again across the state: purple lilac bushes, the deep greens

See MEMORIAL DAY on 3.

Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Watching Nebraska Roll By: Master Sgt. Mark Fusco, a 173rd Aerial Refueling Squadron boomer, monitors his equipment during the May 25 Memorial Day flight.

Nebraska Soldiers wished well before starting latest Iraqi Freedom mission

By David Nore
Public Information Officer

More than 1,500 family and friends turned out for the 1195th Transportation Company sendoff ceremony held May 12 at the Kearney Event Center, home of the Storm USHL hockey team.

Similar events took place in McCook and Lexington for Soldiers assigned to Detachments 1 and 2 of the 1195th Trans. Co.

"We had a considerable turnout at each location, McCook and Lexington. A lot of people showed their support for our Soldiers," said Capt. Eric Baptiste, 1195th Trans. Co. commander.

At the Kearney site, Soldiers

See SENDOFF on 4.

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Wakefield sends 12 seniors into Nebraska Army Guard

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Years from now the Wakefield Community School Class of 2009 might want to consider holding its class reunion at the Nebraska Army National Guard armory in Wayne.

That's because 13 Wakefield seniors – nearly one-third of the graduating class of 44 students – have enlisted into the military service. And of that number, 11 have joined the 189th Transportation Company in Wayne and Norfolk, while one other has joined another Nebraska Army Guard unit as a medic while a second has enlisted into the active Air Force.

According to Nebraska National Guard Recruiting and Retention Command officials, that means the 2009 Wakefield Community School Senior Class has the largest group of Nebraska Army Guard enlistees – both by number and percentage – of any other school in the state this year.

"I couldn't believe it when they told me that there were 13 kids going into the service and 11 of them were coming to the 189th," said Capt. Troy Dannehl, 189th Trans. Co. commander.

"I'm surprised," he added. "If 11 kids would've come out of a Class A or Class B school, it wouldn't have surprised me. But to have almost one-third of a class joining the services, that's pretty amazing."

Wakefield, Neb., population 1,353, is located in the rolling hills of Dixon County, approximately 10 miles from Wayne where Detachment 1, 189th Tran. Co., is located. According to Sgt. 1st Class Dale Alexander Jr., recruiting and retention sergeant for Wayne area, he never expected to achieve

See WAKEFIELD on 6.

Guard sends 'Buddy Platoon' to basic training

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Kendra B. Thilliander stood nervously in a quickly warming wood panel-lined room, fidgeting slightly as she strained to listen as Capt. Nathan Loose gave her and about two dozen other new Nebraska Army Guard recruits one last pep talk.

"Listen to your noncommissioned officers at basic training, at your (Advanced Individual Training) and when you get out to your unit," said Loose, operations officer for the Omaha Military Entrance Processing Station and commander of the Guard's Company A, 1-376th Aviation, in Grand Island. "Those individuals will be the ones who are directly impacting your building of skills."

"Sometimes you may or may not realize the guidance is being given for a specific goal, but it is," Loose added. "Be assured, they will give you the skill sets

See PLATOON on 5.

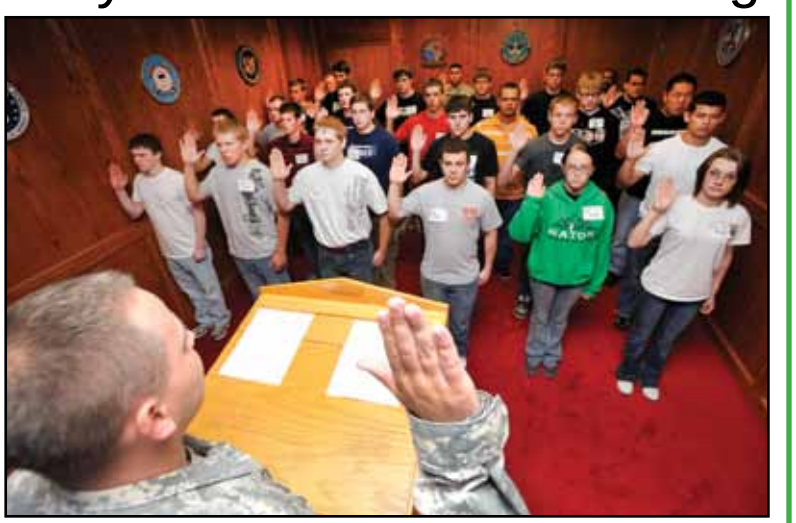

Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Buddy Platoon: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's "Buddy Platoon" reenact their oath of enlistment under the direction of Capt. Nathan Loose, May 21.

Nebraska Air Guard master sergeant honored during Washington events

By David Nore
Public Information Officer

A Nebraska Air National Guard master sergeant from Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., as part of the 170th Group was recently named the Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year for the entire United States Air National Guard.

Bingham

In June, Master Sgt. Tyrone Bingham, a member of Nebraska Air Guard's 170th Group

See BINGHAM on 13.

Deploying Airmen wished farewell in May

By Senior Airman Brandon Kusek
Staff Writer

■Ceremony designed to help affected Air National Guard families learn where to receive critical information, support

Deploying Airmen, mostly from the 155th Civil Engineering Squadron, and their families received an official sendoff May 3 in the 155th Civil Engineer Squadron classroom at the National Guard air base in Lincoln.

The members received words of encouragement and support from some of the top members in the Nebraska Air National Guard while also learning about the support system available to them through the Airmen and Family Readiness Center.

"This is where preparation and training means opportunity. So, as you get ready to go out and help Airman, take a good attitude and work ethic, and go out and do a great job," said Brig. Gen. Jon Fago, Joint Force Headquarters chief of staff-Air.

Col. Richard Evans, 155th Air Refueling Wing commander, said the Airmen were undoubtedly ready for the deployment after having learned numerous valuable lessons during the wing's recent operational readiness inspection. "We should be about as ready as we've ever been to go out and do good work for our country."

The sendoff wasn't just about words of encouragement from leadership. It was also about providing comfort to the families of deploying Airmen, said Karen Jordan-Anderson, wing family program coordinator. She said it's important for families to know they have a support network available in Lincoln.

Photo by Senior Airman Brandon Kusek

Wishing Airmen and Families Good Luck: Brig. Gen. Jon Fago, Nebraska Air National Guard chief of staff, speaks to members of the 155th Civil Engineering Squadron and their assembled families during a sendoff event held May 3.

"We're here to do what we can to make sure your families are taken care of at home so you can do your job over there," she said while describing some of the different programs available for the Airmen's spouses, children and other family members.

Robin Johnsen, wife of Staff Sgt. Jason Johnsen, 155th CES pavement and equipment operator, was in attendance with her husband and two children.

She said she's nervous and anxious because this is her first experience dealing with a deployment. She added that the information she received at the sendoff was very helpful.

"This was really good for me to connect with other families within the squadron and meet others that are in the same situation," she said.

Officials also stressed the importance of keeping up with communication between deployed members and their families.

Tech. Sgt. Christian Bradley, 155th CES, and his wife have a 'Yahoo!' group for the deployed members and their families as a way to help them better keep in touch. The group, which will be self-monitored by members of the squadron, will offer another opportunity to provide information to the affected families.

"If someone isn't able to necessarily get to a computer or phone, but runs into someone from the squadron who can, this will allow them to post 'I saw so-and-so today and they're doing alright', in a closed and safe environment," Bradley said. "We want to be able to bring as much peace of mind as possible.

"You may have family close by," Bradley said, "but this is family too and we take care of family."

SENDOFF

continued from page 1.

milled about before the official start of the ceremony — talking to the people who had gathered in their honor, talking to friends, taking pictures. Many others passed the time by simply talking about the things that Soldiers talk about, like how the sooner they left the sooner they wouldbe back.

"The biggest thing is that they are ready to get started," said Baptiste. "Many see the ceremony and see that it is one step closer. We know that it is one final goodbye until we return, so it is more of a finality to see the ceremony."

The Soldiers would depart for Fort Stewart, Ga., the next day to continue approximately 45 days of post-mobilization training prior to departing to Iraq. Once there, they will be attached to an Oregon Army National Guard Brigade Combat Team.

Baptiste said once in Iraq, his unit will primarily be responsible for providing convoy security along with transportation duties. That, of course, is subject to change, he added.

The unit is made up of a number of Soldiers who have deployed before, many of whom deployed together.

"I have a unit with almost half of the Soldiers that have deployed before." said Baptiste.

Sgt. 1st Class Robert Swantz, platoon sergeant for the 1195th Trans. Co.'s second platoon, said the returning deployers make up a core group of experienced Soldiers within the unit.

"Honestly, it started back in 2005 when I had a group of squad leaders and squad members (on deployment to Kuwait)… we made a dedication to each other that if we would deploy again I would stay in and they would stay in," he said. "So we started preparing back then that there would be a possibility that we would deploy again."

Schwantz said even though some of the faces have changed since 2004 when the unit, then known as Company B, 735th Main Support Battalion, deployed, the support the Soldiers are receiving from the local communities is just as visible today as it was then.

"It is amazing how much you really notice it in the smaller communities," said Schwantz. "Especially in smaller communities in Lexington and McCook. It just really amazes me how much support you get from them. They all treat you like family – really treat everyone like family – when you are gone. So it takes a lot of the worries away from you as a Soldier."

Swantz and his wife Mary, who sang a touching rendition of the National Anthem for the Kearney ceremony, have six children. They said their family relies heavily on family support, both in their extended personal family group and the National Guard family group.

"Most generally the community of Gothenburg is supporting my family. Most of my family lives here and our church group is here, so we have a really good support group right here in our home town," Swantz said.

"It is hugely important," said Mary Swantz. "We couldn't be as successful as we are without our families. We live five blocks from my parents and one-and-a-half blocks from his parents."

During the official sendoff ceremony, the 1195th Trans. Co. Soldiers listened intently from the floor of the ice arena, which normally would have been surrounded by Kearney Storm Hockey sponsor signs, as a group of distinguished guest speakers that included Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy and Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy, Nebraska adjutant general, wished them well.

"I have seen your training you have received at Camp Roberts (Calif.) and you are more than ready to deploy," Kadavy told the Soldiers. "You are one of the most outstanding units in the Army and the most outstanding unit Nebraska has sent to war to this point."

Photos by David Nore

Thunder Dome: More than 1,500 friends, family and visitors met at the Kearney Event Center, home of the Kearney Storm USHL hockey team, to honor departing Soldiers of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1195th Transportation Company. Military and governmental leaders and dignitaries formed at one end of the 'ice' while the Patriot Guard completed the oval at the opposite end.

Quiet Time: Sgt. Candace Coon, 1195th Transportation Company, attends an informal formation held by 1st Sgt. Bob West at the Kearney Event Center with her son Jonathan in her arms, just prior to the start of the sendoff ceremony for her unit in Kearney, Neb., on the evening of May 12.