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Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Season's Greetings

Army Guard medics wished farewell in October

See story and photos on 5.

Nebraska Guard finishes strong recruiting year

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

Nebraska Army and Air National Guard recruiters enlisted nearly 600 new Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen in Fiscal Year 2009, ending the year on a strong note.

According to Nebraska Army National Guard recruiting officials, the Nebraska Army National Guard recruited a total of 471 new Soldiers during Fiscal Year 2009, which ended on Sept. 30.

The Nebraska Army National Guard ended FY 2009 with a total strength of 3,783 for an overall strength of more than 99 percent.

Nebraska Air National Guard recruiters also excelled in FY 2009 recruiting by enlisting 95 new Airmen into the force.

The Nebraska Air National Guard ended the year with a total strength of 1,000 for an overall strength of 103 percent.

According to Brig. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, the recruiting efforts have placed the Nebraska National Guard in a strong position to continue to be prepared to support a wide array of natural or man-made domestic emergencies in Nebraska or other states while also continuing to fulfill contingency missions around the world.

"I'm very proud of the work that our Nebraska Army and Air National Guard recruiters have done this past year. Today's Nebraska National Guard is stronger, better equipped and better trained than at any other single time in our organization's history and I'm excited by the opportunities that lie ahead

See RECRUITING on 8.

Holiday on the Rails

Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Meeting The Big Guy: Noah Newton, 2, talks to Santa Claus, Dec. 4, while riding on the Burlington Northern Sante Fe Railroad's Holiday Express. According to Ann Newton, Noah's mom and wife of Sgt. Wes Newton, the trip was unforgettable. "It's his first train ride and his first time meeting Santa. It was awesome."

National Guard families enjoy unique railroad treat in December

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

"The thing about trains... it doesn't matter where they're going. What matters is deciding to get on."

— Conductor
Polar Express (2004 Warner Bros.)

Several hundred Nebraska military members and their family had a unique opportunity to get the holiday season started on the right foot – or rather track – recently when they were given a free 90 minute-long holiday-themed train ride, courtesy of BNSF Railroad.

Speeding along the Nebraska tracks aboard a specially outfitted "Holiday Express" train, the military families were treated to hot chocolate, cookies and even a visit from Santa Claus, who gave each child a specially created BNSF train-themed ornament.

"It's a lot of fun," said a wide-eyed Jackson McNally, 4, as he sat next to his 1-year-old brother Ashton and his father, 2nd Lt. John McNally, a member of the Lincoln-based 1167th Brigade Support Company, Dec. 4.

"It's really pretty," he added, looking around at the vintage passenger car that

See TRAIN RIDE on 18.

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Air Guard support services consolidated into one squadron

By Capt. Camara Minks
Staff Writer

Members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing's services and military support flights stood before their respective commanders for the last time in Lincoln, Nov. 14, as they prepared to combine into a single force support squadron.

During the 20-minute ceremony,, the two commanders relinquished command of their affected flights and retired their flags.

Then the commander of what had been the 155th Military Support Flight took command of the new combined 155th Force Support Squadron by accepting the consolidated organization's new flag from Col Richard Evans, wing commander.

Both flights, which had been standing in separate formations, were then physically combined, weaving both togher as a single formation.

Capt. Pamelia Geistlinger, new 155th FSS commander, then took a few minutes to address the members of newly formed unit.

"If there's one constant in the military, it's change. We hear that adage all the time, but we must accept it if we're to remain relevant as individuals and as an organization," said Geistlinger.

The active Air Force has already completed the organizational transition designed to put many areas that need each other to function smoothly, both at home and when deployed, under a single, streamlined control. The merger is designed to both cut costs and simplify processes important to military and family members on base.

Officials say it will not affect the outstanding service already given to customers by both sections.

"For instance, casualty affairs, mortuary affairs and the family program office work closely together, but fell under different flights," said Geistlinger during the change of command. "But ultimately each area is responsible for the care of our fallen or wounded warriors and their families and will now be one cohesive team."

According to Geistlinger, the change affects 46 military and civilian personnel on the base. Officers will have new job titles, but the enlisted members will keep their current positions. Unit officers will

See CONSOLIDATION on 2.

Guard's top chefs aim at national title

By Mark Roland
Unit Public Affairs Representative

Call it the military's version of the "Iron Chef."

Competing on a grassy plain in central Nebraska while the sounds of Nebraska Army Guard Soldiers conducting marksmanship training echoed in the distance, the food service section of the 267th Support Maintenance Company, Nebraska Army National Guard, showcased their culinary abilities before a national judging panel while competing for the 42nd annual Phillip A. Connelly Award for Excellence in Army Food Service, Oct. 17, at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

Working together under the ever-watchful eyes of the national inspectors, five 267th Maintenance Co. cooks prepared a meal for 50 Soldiers in a field environment using the unit's mobile kitchen trailer, essentially a kitchen

See COOKS on 3.

Photo by Mark Roland

Serving a Feast: Spc Matthew Plantenberg (right), a cook assigned to the 267th Support Maintenance Company, Nebraska Army National, serves an evening meal for hungry Army Guard Soldiers, Oct. 17, during the national judging competition for the 42nd Annual Phillip A. Connelly Award for Excellence in Army Food Service.

Recruiter thanks Lincoln teacher by arranging trip for her, sick husband

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

Cindy and Dean Hoehne had things pretty good.

"Of course we had our normal worries, but it was just a pretty easy-going normal life," said Cindy.

Cindy, a career-coach teacher at Lincoln's North Star High School, and Dean, a night merchandiser at Sam's Club, have been married more than 24 years and have two children, James, 22, and Sarah, 19.

As a career-coach teacher, Hoehne provides students with as much information as possible about available opportunities so they can begin planning their future

See TEACHER on 8.

INSIDE

■Medics complete training at Fort Hood, Texas 4

■Medical specialists complete training requirements during deployment to England 7

■Seward riggers conduct cargo drop operation 11

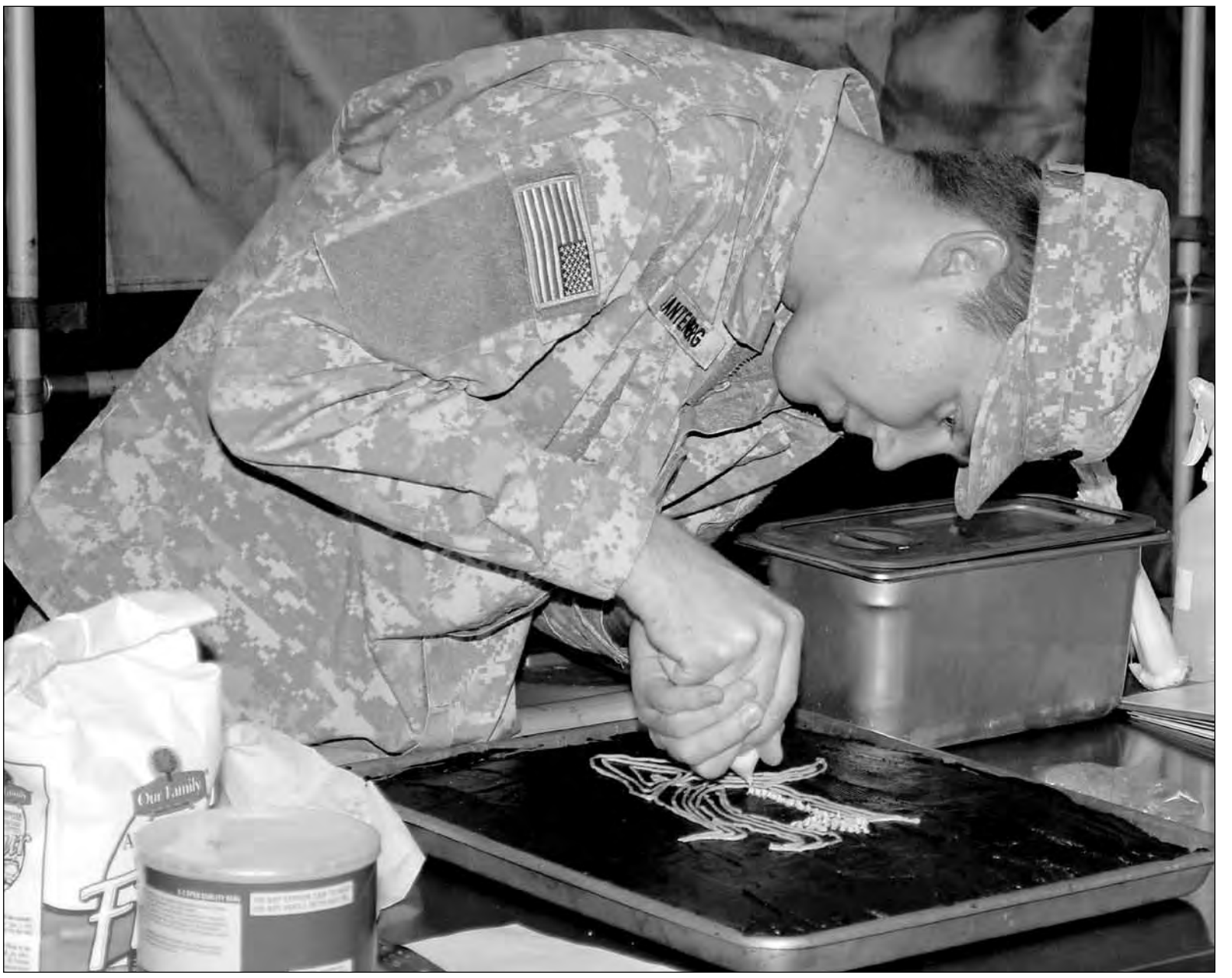
■Year in Review 12,13

■Nebraska Guard promotes Larry the Cable Guy 23

By The Numbers: A sample tray showing the precise serving portions for each part of the Oct. 17 meal hangs in the 267th Support Maintenance Company's mobile kitchen trailer during the Connelly Competition national inspection.

Modeled For Success: Sgt. Javier Arias, head count specialist, puts the finishing touches on a sand table model the 267th Support Maintenance Company used to brief Connelly Competition inspectors.

Photos by Mark Roland



Husker Cake: Spc. Matthew Plantenberg, a cook with the Lincoln-based 267th Support Maintenance Company, Nebraska Army National Guard, recreates his unit's Cornhusker patch in icing on a cake for the evening meal's desert.

COOKS continued from page 1.

on wheels.

Along with being evaluated on their cooking abilities, the Soldiers also were graded on 10 separate areas ranging from cooking and sanitation procedures to their adherence to Army administrative, safety and supply regulations.

Simply getting to this point meant that the section, which was representing Region 5 in the Army National Guard's National Field Kitchen Category, had to conduct hours of training and practice on the unit's mobile kitchen trailer to develop the level of expertise needed to be competitive.

"At first it was to get some experience for my cooks on a (mobile kitchen trailer), some field training," said Sgt. Katherine Smith, first cook for the maintenance company. "When they go to (advanced individual training) the MKT is already popped open. They just show them what it looks like. When they actually get to cook on it, it was good experience for them."

"It just grew from there," Smith said. "When I learned that it was the first time Nebraska competed in five years, it became really important to do our best."

The work must have paid off because the cooks had already won the state and regional competition.

Still, this was the national competition, which meant that the Soldiers had to take their efforts to an entirely different level.

According to Chief Warrant Officer 2 Tollie Yoder, company food service officer, the work actually started at the beginning of the year when the unit decided to compete in the competition.

"When we first talked about competing (the cooks) said 'It would be easy, I cook.' I had to explain to them that it's more than just cooking… it's site setup, power plan, field sanitation issues, rodent disposal, sanitary issues, taking care of ration accounting, ration accessibility, ration control, portion control, trash management, water distribution point, and water purification tasks."

Smith said the training and preparations made a major impact on the unit's success.

"When we learned that you have to do more to do it, it was like 'Alright we can do this.' Then it became really hard because we realized that we couldn't do it with just five cooks."

Instead, Smith said, it took the entire unit to help the cooks prepare for the various stages of the competition.

That level of support especially came in handy when the night before the regional competition a thunderstorm blew in, sending the Soldiers to tornado shelters while four-and-a-half inches of rain fell on the training site, flooding the area the mess section had spent days preparing for the competition.

The unit halted training and moved the site to a downrange location and completely set up the new site in one day.

"That was very challenging, but they overcame it," Smith said

The October competition also marked the last time these Soldiers would be together as a team.

Two cooks have transferred to another maintenance company and are preparing for deployment next year, while another will become a wheeled mechanic in a detachment closer to home and stay in the unit. Smith will also soon change jobs because of her full-time military position.

Still, that didn't make the Soldiers work any less hard. In fact, it actually caused them focus that much more on making sure the inspection went well.

"We all knew this was like our like our last hurrah," Smith said, "and the section wanted to do really well. Out of all the cooks I've ever worked with, this is probably one of the best because we got along so well. We all hope we will be able to work together in the future."

After completing the inspection, the cooks now are participating in a different type of competition… the waiting game. They should find out how if their work paid off in December when the results are released.

Smith was optimistic.

"I think we set the bar really high. I think the biggest thing is that we couldn't have gotten this far without the unit's support and everyone in the cook's section really, really, really appreciates the help the unit gave us."

Sharpening Up Equipment: Spc. Adreann Janacek, a 267th Support Maintenance Company cook, sharpens a knife as part of her preparations for the evening meal, Oct. 17, at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

Water Inspections: Spc. Sean Hanger, Field Sanitation Team member, tests for chlorine concentration of a water sample taken from a water buffalo during the 267th Support Maintenance Company's participation in the 42nd annual Phillip A. Connelly Award for Excellence in Army Food Service, Oct. 17 at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb.