Chief's message: National Guard's 373rd birthday

On December 13, our National Guard celebrates 373 years of service. This continues a heritage that began in 1636 when the Massachusetts Bay Colony's militia companies were organized into three regiments, the North, South and East Regiments, and became our first organized defense forces.

Today, units like the Massachusetts Army National Guard's 101st Engineer Battalion, which traces its lineage back to those first regiments, will mark the occasion from Iraq. They, and tens of thousands of others like them, continue to build on this proud heritage as they serve overseas and perform missions their predecessors in the Massachusetts colony could never have envisioned.

At the same time, we continue to support our governors here at home, performing critical missions to defend the homeland against attacks on our own soil and support our civil authorities when disasters strike.

The National Guard has never been more central to our nation's defense or more important to the success of our Army and Air Force. The respect and gratitude shown by the American people for our Citizen Soldiers and Airmen have never been greater. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Citizen Soldiers and Airmen who continue to ensure the National Guard is *Always Ready, Always There!*

Happy Birthday National Guard!

CRAIG R. MCKINLEY

General, U.S. Air Force

Chief, National Guard Bureau