

CHRONICLING THE 460,000+ MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NATIONAL GUARD

# ON GUARD

WINTER 08/09 • VOLUME I • ISSUE 1

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Guardmembers support new  
commander in chief's big day

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INAUGURAL ISSUE



# ON GUARD

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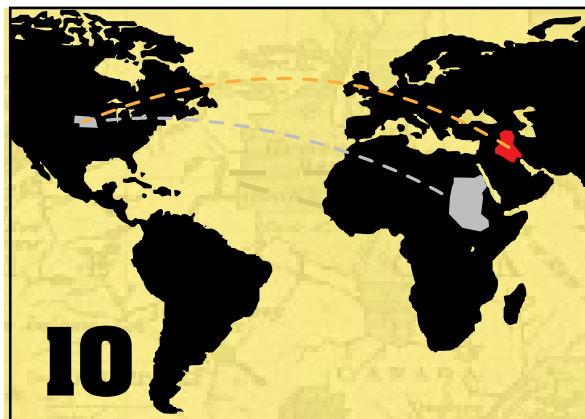
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**COVER:** Iowa National Guard Soldiers from Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry Regiment, 34th Infantry Divisions reconnoiter possible checkpoints to be used for security efforts during the presidential inauguration in Washington.

Their recon ended near Capitol Hill, where the Soldiers took the opportunity to pose for a group photo in front of the Capitol Building. (Photo by Pfc. Cassandra Monroe)





## From the editor:

It is with great pleasure that we present the first issue of On Guard magazine, chronicling the amazing and inspiring work of Citizen-Soldiers and -Airmen.

Instead of finding the On Guard newspaper in your break room at the armory or on the coffee table in the commander's office, we've delivered this new electronic magazine right to your e-mail in box.

With our Web site providing up-to-the-minute news on everything Guard, this e-zine will showcase in-depth feature articles and captivating photography of its people and missions.

On Guard-online will illustrate what wearing the uniform and serving the president *and* a governor is all about. From what it's like to rescue someone stranded in a flood, to taking on the Taliban in Afghanistan – it will cover the Guard's domestic missions and warfight overseas.

The decision to change to an electronic magazine came about because of several factors.

As you may know, the last issue of the On Guard newspaper hit newsstands last October, ending a proud, 25-year-plus run. We put a lot of time and energy into producing it, but by the time it got to the armories and wings and then finally read by a Guardmember, the news it held was already history. In addition, the costs of printing and mailing went up dramatically recently.

So we thought about how to get the biggest bang for our buck in regards to command information. An online magazine that could be e-mailed to everyone in the National Guard made the most sense.

As our director put it: "Our goal is to reach much more of our audience and provide the most timely, accurate and interesting news and information to National Guard members and their families, retirees and civilian employers. It is time to move The On Guard into the 21st century."

So enjoy this issue and read about how the Louisiana Guard is helping the New Orleans Police Department keep their streets safe; how a retired Guardsman remembers flying the Huey in a famous battle in the Vietnam War; how a Soldier on the front lines of the War on Terrorism sees his deployment differently after growing up in the civil strife of Sudan; and how military police cope with one of the coldest assignments in all of the military.

On many of the spreads we've added links to more photos and information, so move your cursor around the page and check them out. In the future, we plan to make the magazine as interactive as possible, giving the viewer a rich and multimedia experience.

P.S. For all of you who were expecting Master Sgt. Bob Haskell's page 2 column, sorry, he's happily retired.

-Master Sgt. Greg Rudl

## ON GUARD

THE NATIONAL GUARD ONLINE MAGAZINE  
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**SUBMISSION**  
E-mail your stories and photos for possible inclusion. We prefer that photos be high-quality digital (300 dpi or more) and e-mailed to: [Editor.OnGuard@ng.army.mil](mailto:Editor.OnGuard@ng.army.mil)



**OUR HISTORY  
OUR HERITAGE  
OUR NATION  
YOUR GUARD**

For 372 years, the National Guard has faced many challenges – challenges that have included natural disasters, civil disturbances and the threat of terrorism. When called on, your Guard was always there. Today, there are new challenges that must be faced, and your Guard is transforming the way it works. As a result, we have never been better prepared to serve our country, with the flexibility to successfully meet the changing demands of the 21st century. No matter what comes next, you can count on the men and women of the National Guard to proudly respond to the calls of their states and nation. As they have been for 372 years, your Guard will remain *always ready, always there.*

**Your National Guard.**  
**Established December 13th, 1636.**

*Always Ready, Always There.*  
**THE NATIONAL GUARD**  
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# Historic support for President Barack Obama's Inauguration



A D.C. National Guard Soldier provides security at the Lincoln Memorial on the National Mall in Washington during the inaugural opening ceremonies. Thousands of Guard men and women provided military ceremonial support, a tradition dating back to George Washington's 1789 inauguration. (Photo by Master Sgt. Cecilio Ricardo)

## States provide peaceful, orderly, and memorable transition

By Army Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill

**“W**e’ve always depended on the National Guard,” Al Roker said. The weather anchor for NBC’s Today show spoke during a break between live remote segments from the parade staging area outside the Pentagon on inauguration day.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, “Suddenly, the National Guard took on a whole new meaning,” Roker said. “So it’s only fitting that at one of the most secure inaugurals, the National Guard would be involved. When it comes down to our security, both domestically and internationally, the National Guard is obviously an integral part of that.”

While National Guard members from a dozen different states and the District of Columbia provided communications, transport, traffic control and medical and logistical support to civilian authorities staging the inauguration, other Citizen-Soldiers and –Airmen joined servicemembers from all components who were marching in the inaugural parade.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Gardner, with the District of Columbia National Guard’s recruiting and retention command, was one of the marchers. “This is historic moment, and I wanted to be a part of history,” Gardner said. “The National Guard is the oldest military organization in the country. It’s fitting that the National Guard is represented.”

## It was the largest ever National Guard support for an inauguration, with roughly 10,000 providing communications, transport and more

The National Guard made its largest contribution to a presidential inauguration since Minutemen gathered for the First Muster in Massachusetts more than 372 years ago.

“This is a historic first,” said Air Force Gen. Craig McKinley, the chief of the National Guard Bureau. “The National Guard is contributing not only to the federal response overseas, but we’re also working very closely with our states and our governors.”

The day began as early as 2 a.m. for servicemembers, and their duties ran into the evening. But troops said they would not trade the opportunity, and many said they were deeply proud to be a part of the inauguration on both a personal and professional level.

Air Force Senior Airman Jodi Leininger came to the Military District of Washington at the start of the year for a two-month mission to document the military’s contribution to the inauguration for historical purposes.

As a result, this self-proclaimed “small-town girl” from a graduating class of just 48 students who serves with the 180th Fighter Wing, Ohio Air National Guard, got to photograph the president-elect during the run-up to the inauguration.

“That was, to me, like the biggest opportunity of my life,” Leininger said. “Having the opportunity to take a picture of our first African-American president – my new commander in chief – was exciting.”

It was 20 degrees and windy outside the Pentagon when parade participants gathered before dawn on Tuesday. “Bone-chilling,” Army Spc. Angela Harper of the District of Columbia National Guard’s 276th Military Police Company called it, shivering.

Would she rather be anywhere else? “This is a wonderful moment in time, and I’m privileged to have this opportunity,” Harper said. “I would do it again, and again, and again.”

“I’ve been colder,” Roker said. “I’ve been on remotes where it’s 10 degrees below with a wind chill of 40 below.”

He had been colder, but in a journalism career spanning more than 34 years, Roker said he could remember few more significant assignments. “This

is about as important as it gets,” he said. “It reaffirms that this is the greatest democracy in history, that every four or eight years there is a peaceful, orderly, normal transition. Many places in the world, this is an anomaly. We are the model.”

Leininger said the National Guard made a huge contribution before and during the inauguration but what struck her most was how servicemembers from all components pulled together as a team. “It was just one big group,” she said.

Navy Comdr. Craig Kujawa led part of that group as chief of the Parade Division of the Ceremonies Directorate of the Armed Forces Inaugural Committee.

He called the assembly of more than 200 horses and 300 busloads of marchers a logistical miracle. “Every service is represented,” he said. “It’s a wonderful experience.”


Both the Army and the Air National Guard were represented in the parade, Kujawa said, and both pieces of the Guard contributed to the preparations for and execution of the event.

Army Reservist Sgt. 1st Class Greg Ramsdell supervised Soldiers for escort duties for parade participants that included Guardmembers. “The contribution is enormous,” Ramsdell said of Guardmembers, who have dual roles, both civilians and Soldiers. “They give you an element of both the civilian sector and the military sector,” he said.

“I never thought I would live to see

this day,” Roker said. “It is the fulfillment of the American dream. Every parent has said to their child, ‘You, too, can some day grow up to be president,’ and we saw in this election that you had the possibility of an African-American being president, of a woman being president, or a woman being vice-president. That pretty much says it all.”

The night before the inauguration, Gen. McKinley stopped for a moment on his way to his Pentagon office to continue monitoring the Guard’s contribution. “Our Guardsmen will ... be visible, they will be out in the crowd, and they will be working alongside their civilian counterparts and will be there if needed to respond to any type of emergency,” the chief promised. “I’m looking forward to a very safe, enjoyable and peaceful event.”

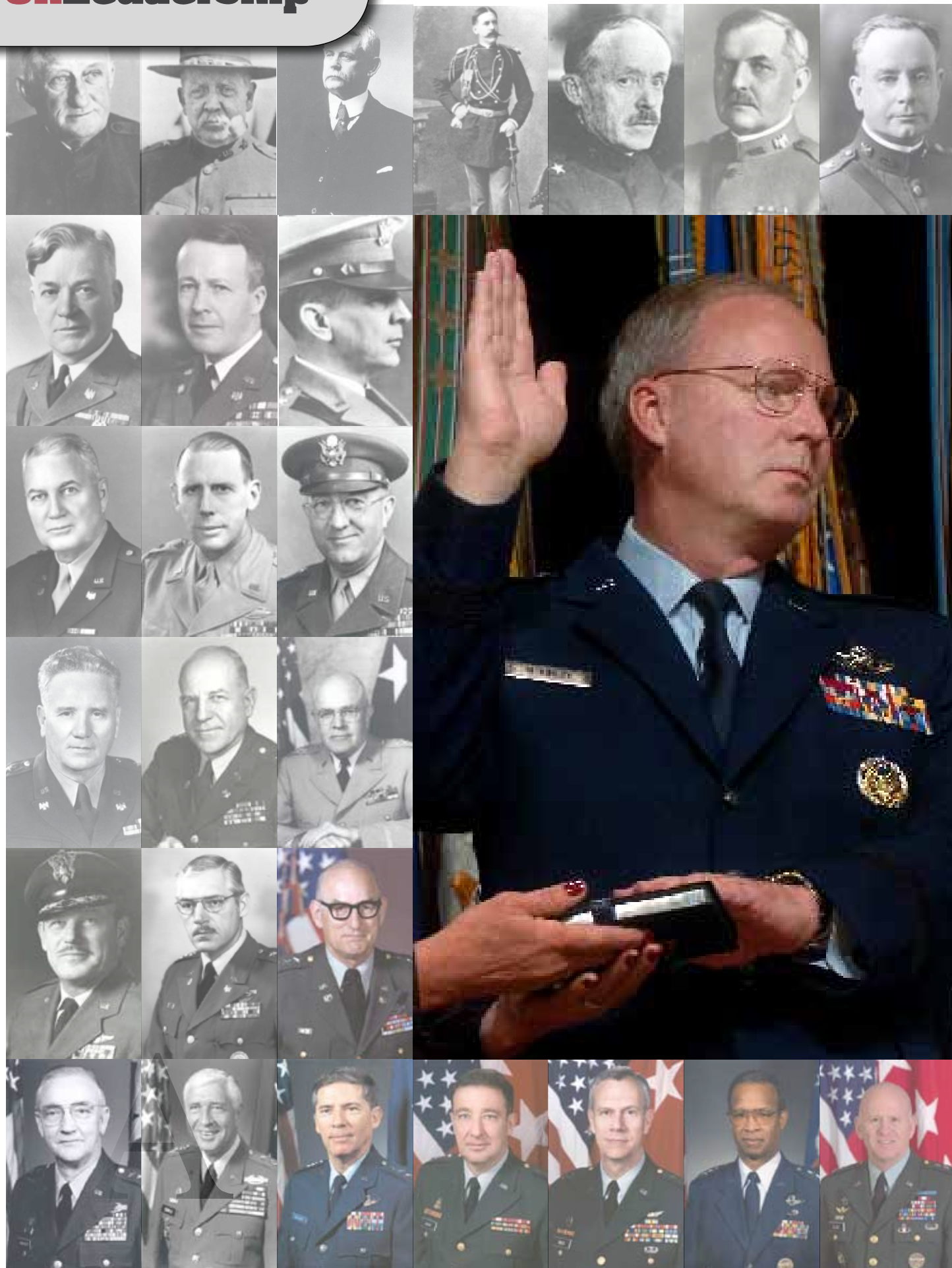
By all accounts, that’s exactly what the nation got. 



Iowa National Guard Soldiers reconnoiter possible checkpoints to be used for security efforts. (Photo by Pfc. Cassandra Monroe)

Click to see  
the photo album





Note: National Guard Bureau chiefs not pictured are Cols. Ernest R. Redmond (Actg), Harold J. Weiler (Actg), John F. Williams (Actg) and Maj. Gen. Earl T. Ricks

# McKinley swears in

## First ★★★★★ chief ready to take Minutemen forward

By Master Sgt. Mike R. Smith

**A**ir Force Gen. Craig R. McKinley officially became chief of the National Guard Bureau and was promoted to the rank of general by Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates Nov. 17 at the Pentagon.

Gates and Navy Adm. Michael G. Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as McKinley's wife, daughter and son helped add the fourth star to McKinley's uniform.

The crowd of more than 300 from all ranks, services and many states' National Guards then watched Gates administer the oath of office to McKinley, who swore in as the first four-star general to lead the National Guard Bureau in its 372-year history.

McKinley succeeds Army LTG H Steven Blum, who served some five and a half years as chief and in January became deputy commander of U.S. Northern Command, the first Guard officer to hold that position.

"It's a rich and high honor to be the 26th chief of the National Guard Bureau," said McKinley. "I will give it every bit of energy, every bit of heart and soul that I can possess to make sure that our National

Guard and our Soldiers and Airmen are well taken care of, and I will work very closely and faithfully with the services."

Of the more than 460,000 Citizen-Soldiers and -Airmen, some 68,000 Army and 5,700 Air Guardmembers were on active duty for Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom today. Furthermore, on any given day an average of 17 governors call out their National Guard for a variety of domestic needs.

McKinley is the fourth Air Guard officer to serve as chief. He most recently served as director for the Air National Guard. There, he was responsible for policies, plans and programs affecting more than 106,000 Airmen.

Gates credited McKinley for successfully leading the Air Guard during a time of severe manpower reductions and other, major challenges from the Global War on Terrorism, Base Realignment and Closure implementation, budget changes and the transformation of the National Guard from a strategic reserve to an operational force.

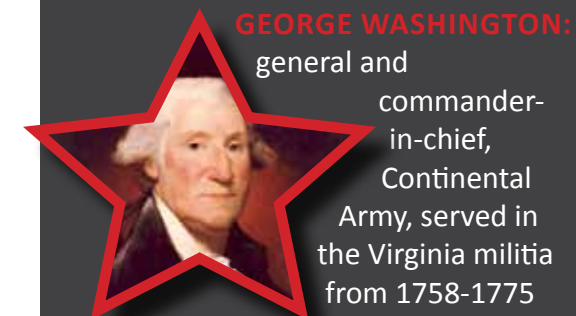
To read the new chief's biography, go to [www.ngb.army.mil](http://www.ngb.army.mil).



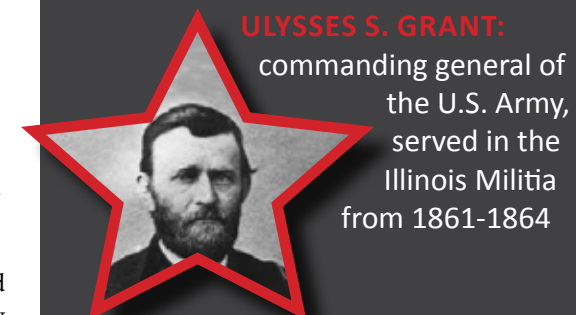
**"... our main reason for being: we protect our homeland, we protect our communities, we work for our governors and our nation needs us."**

## Other famous Guard stars

*The following reached the rank of general*



**GEORGE WASHINGTON:** general and commander-in-chief, Continental Army, served in the Virginia militia from 1758-1775



**ULYSSES S. GRANT:** commanding general of the U.S. Army, served in the Illinois Militia from 1861-1864



**LEWIS HERSHEY:** director, Selective Service System; presidential adviser, Manpower Mobilization, served in the Indiana Guard from 1911-1920



**RICHARD LAWSON:** deputy chief, U.S. European Command, served in the Iowa National Guard from 1947-1952



# One specialist's long, hard road to Iraq

By Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill

*Bombs, violence and death were part of **Titus Abure's** boyhood. He fled the Republic of the Sudan as a 16-year-old refugee. His father died in Sudan's civil war.*

So this Army National Guard specialist says an Iraq deployment isn't much of a hardship.

"I love it," he said at Victory Base Complex, Iraq, in October. "I contributed to the success of the mission."

Abure has fulfilled Freedom of Information Act requests for the XVIII Airborne Division, worked with the Iraqi Security Forces on legal issues surrounding detainees and interpreted and coached Arabic as needed. He is a paralegal specialist with the Nebraska National Guard's 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion here.

It's all a long way from Torit, in the Eastern Equatoria province of southern Sudan in Northern Africa, where Abure was born.

"The majority of our Soldiers – probably 95 percent – come from rural Nebraska," said the 110th MMB's Command Sgt. Maj. Donald Davids. "Spc. Abure has been a benefit by being able to understand how things happen in other places around the world – his background of multiple languages, of coming from the Sudan and moving around Africa and coming to the United States. He's very humble about it."

Ever since Basic Combat Training, Abure has encouraged other Soldiers to keep hardship in perspective. "When people sometimes complain of little things, I ask, 'How many times have you taken a shower? How many times have you eaten MREs? Have you ever thought there are guys here who in a week don't take a shower?' It's good to be able to bring the other side of the story to people, so they are able to look within themselves," he said.

They don't know the half of Abure's story.

## Sudan

Much of Sudan remains an agricultural economy, accounting for a third of its gross domestic product and 80 percent of jobs. "Everybody still depends on agriculture," Abure said. "So my parents were farmers."

They raised cows and grew vegetables.

As an agrarian society, Abure recalled, "They still have the family cohesion – that extended family outlook. You still look at things in terms of, 'What's my relations to my family?' as opposed to, 'What's good for me?'" The 41-year-old still misses Sudan. "A whole lot. The weather. The kind of activities we used to do back home: running, hunting, swimming in the river."

But violence was a daily routine; civil war racked Sudan since its 1956 independence from Britain. "I saw people die," Abure said. "I had friends who were killed."

## Education was a way out

"I warn you ..."

"The commander of the rebels came to my family and asked my father, 'Is Titus still going to school?' Abure recalled.

"Please talk to him," his father said.

Abure remembers the rebel commander's advice: "I warn you to leave if you still want to go to school, because in a month or two, if you are still here, I will tell your father you are not going, because the roads are going to be bad. We will mine the roads. The probability of survival is going to be really reduced. If you want to go, this is the time."

He left the next day. Only the commander and his parents knew; he did not say goodbye to his extended family. He still didn't know if the school was even open.

He left at 5 a.m. on a 200-truck rebel convoy that was ambushed twice – resulting in deaths and destroyed vehicles – during a three-day, 84-mile, trek to safety.

He made his way to Kenya, on Sudan's southern border, where he found the Catholic missionary school open. He studied there for four years.

At one point, Abure's family links to the Sudan People's Liberation Army were a lifesaver. The young man dissuaded rebels from attacking his school, arguing that the missionary institution was not associated with the government.

He later worked in a refugee camp in Kenya as a community leader and high school teacher. He helped distribute United Nations food aid, and he helped refugees apply for asylum in the United States

– knowledge that would eventually take him down the same path.

He made it to the United States at 25.

## Late-in-life enlistee

In California, Abure assembled electronics. In Tennessee, he worked for a publisher of inspirational books and for a tool manufacturer who, finding him a quick study, asked him to teach coworkers about wiring and reconditioning tools.

Now, education was a way up: Abure went back to school, teaching to earn extra money and earning a criminal justice and psychology degree.

He worked in the corrections system as a corrections officer – a civilian-acquired skill that would later enhance his paralegal specialty in the Guard.

He lived in Connecticut and Georgia. He married, and the couple has one five-year-old son. Omaha, Neb., is now home.

"I've benefited" from immigrating to the United States, Abure said. "If I had remained in Sudan, I might not have gone to college, because of being a Southerner – even if you pass [an entrance exam], you rarely find yourself going to college. That's why we had the war."

Abure is one of a group of late-in-life enlistees who have joined the National Guard since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Attracted by the notion of serving his adopted country and by the training, educational benefits and paralegal military occupational specialty, he signed up at 38.

Abure's recruiter told him he might deploy. "Yes, I'll be ready to do that," Abure remembered telling him. "You are there to serve the country should anything happen, and at the same time you still keep your civilian life," he said of why he picked the Guard.

Abure's story is unusual, but Davids, the 110th MMB command sergeant major, said his Soldier is by no means unique in the National Guard.

## Deployment diversity

"Across the board, the National Guard is such a well-rounded organization," Davids said





A Sudanese refugee at 16 and with his father dead in a civil war, Titus Abure came to the United States alone at 25. He enlisted in the Guard at 38 to give something back and, at 41, he is serving as a paralegal with the Nebraska's 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion at Victory Base Complex, Iraq. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill)

"We, as leaders of the National Guard, have learned over time to use those assets to our advantage. We learn who's in the unit that can do what, whether they're a carpenter or whether they can build things or fix things, program, teach, talk – it's phenomenal.

"In our task force alone, we have everything from lawyers to construction workers to computer programmers, to Web developers. We have enlisted Soldiers that are nurses. We have pilots. I'm an electrician back home. One of the first things I did here in theater was to help our brigade wire in new uninterruptible power supplies to keep the phones up and running in the event of power failure."

It's not a one-way street: Abure said he has gained as much as he has given during his first deployment.

"I have gained a wealth of knowledge," he said. "A whole lot of experience." His knowledge of administrative, fiscal and criminal law has grown. "I could not have done that without this deployment."

He did not find the Iraq he expected before he came.

## Perspective

Abure's idea of what Iraq would be like came from what he had seen and read in the media. "Listening to the news, you see bombs

every day," he said. "It's selective. If there's no violence, [there's] no news. You look at it and you think things are really bad, because you are not there. The concept [of deploying] was horrible."

But the Iraq Abure experienced defied his expectations. Violence was declining; reconstruction was increasing; and the Iraqi government, military and police were improving.

"When I came here, I was like, 'What's going on?'" Abure said. "Very different from what I expected. No big deal."

From his perspective as a childhood refugee, Iraq didn't seem like a country at war. "For me, having been in a country with a war, where I've seen all kinds of bombs, it's no surprise," he said.

Since he enlisted, Abure said he's been struck by how Soldiers pull together.

"It is family-oriented," he said of the Guard. Fellow Soldiers have reached out to him, inviting him to share their civilian lives.

That "taking care of Soldiers" has continued with Abure's deployment. His mother still lives in Torit, and Abure was delighted when he discovered he could make morale calls from here to talk with her. "They gave me a lot of phone cards," he said. "Please, you need to talk to your family. You need to talk to your mom.' The service I received was extraordinary."

It's all about attitude:

## Titus Abure

- Survived civil war(s) in Sudan
- Made it to the U.S. at 25
- Lived in Connecticut & Georgia
- Signed up at 38
- Paralegal with Nebraska's 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion
- "Loves" working in Iraq
- Omaha, Neb., is home, but still misses Sudan

*"At times, the life you receive is hard. But that hardship trains you to become a better person."*

Abure exudes gratitude. "It's a beauty," he said of his life. "It's a beauty. At times, the life you receive is hard. But that hardship trains you to become a better person. You tend to appreciate certain things."

Sometimes, though, Abure wonders if his fellow Americans appreciate what we have. "Just the other day we were talking about some states paying students to go to school," he said. "Where do you find in the world where a state or a government pays students so they can go to school, so they can go to learn? When I look at it, it seems people don't even understand the importance of education in the first place."

And why would this not seem strange to a man whose escape from violence hinged on the answer to a rebel commander's question, "Is Titus still going to school?"

For this Citizen-Soldier, education was no luxury: It was the difference between life and death.

— The CIA World Factbook contributed.

## OnHealth

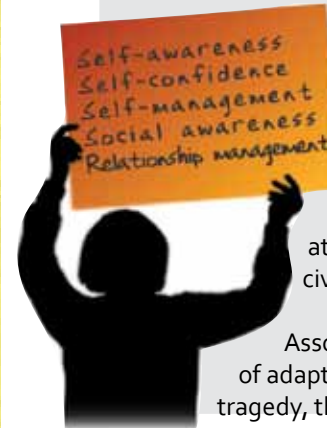
# Rev Up Your Resiliency

By Martin Binks, Ph.D., Binks Behavioral Health, PLLC Consultant

Every Soldier and every family needs to develop a plan to take care of business when their loved ones are away defending their country. The military provides extensive training and support for this mission in Battlemind and other deployment preparedness resources with articles and links located at [www.hoah4health.com/mind/default.htm](http://www.hoah4health.com/mind/default.htm).

A Soldier's "inner strength to face adversity, fear, and hardship during combat with courage and confidence and the will to persevere and win can be developed and enhanced using these tools. Revving up resiliency involves individual training and a well-thought-out plan to ensure that a Soldier's affairs are in order and the family is taken care of so that Soldiers can focus on the task at hand without distraction.

Our Soldiers and families do this extremely well most of the time. However, the importance of this endeavor is heightened when



deployment and redeployment become a part of daily life and loved ones are placed in stressful circumstances. A key aspect of resiliency involves changing what you do in the face of adversity in order to adapt to and respond to difficult circumstances. Soldiers and families do this with skill and determination that is, at times, beyond the comprehension of the civilian onlooker.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), resilience is "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress ... ." Emotions (both the Soldier's and the family's) must be managed so as not to distract from the task at hand. Often, this is interpreted as the need to deny negative emotions or put on a "happy face"—that is not the case. Emotional health requires that we recognize negative emotions like fear, sadness, anxiety and loss while not letting these overwhelm us.

So how do you learn to do this? The same way you prepare for every other aspect of deployment – you train for it in advance. Emotional resilience requires "Mental Health and Readiness," another important aspect of pre-deployment training. See the Battlemind resources at [www.battlemind.org](http://www.battlemind.org) and the APA's "Road to Resil-

ience" at [apahelpcenter.org/featuredtopics/feature.php?id=6](http://apahelpcenter.org/featuredtopics/feature.php?id=6) for information on becoming more resilient. Don't wait until you are in trouble to seek help – use these support resources and be emotionally ready to face every challenge.

Studies examining people's emotional responses to terrorist attacks including those on 9/11 reported that people who were able to experience positive emotions like fellowship, camaraderie, hope, and gratitude for being alive and those people who were able to find positive meanings in these tragedies endured fewer depressive symptoms and displayed healthier adjustment.

Experts have been studying these concepts for decades and most recently have labeled the skills and competencies needed to lead others while taking care of themselves as "emotional intelligence."

**These skills are an important part of being resilient in times of adversity:**

1. **Self-awareness: the ability to read your emotions and the emotions of others.**
2. **Self-confidence: awareness of and trust in your capabilities.**
3. **Self-management: being able to control your emotions and impulses and adapt to change skillfully.**
4. **Social awareness: the ability to sense, understand, and adapt your responses to the emotions of those around you and to be able to judge how your reactions relate to and influence the reactions of others.**
5. **Relationship management: the ability to inspire and influence others.**

Pulling these emotional intelligence skills together in tandem with taking solid action to plan for deployment can help you and your family pursue a good life – even in the face of deployment cycles and uncertain times. So take advantage of the resources that are available to you to rev up your resiliency and learn to be emotionally ready to face challenges.

Editor, Judith S. Harris, CHES, BSN, MA, Consultant, ARNG Decade of Health; Copyright 2008, WinMil, LLC





**WOMEN'S WORK:** ROTC members work together in the "Humvee Pull" during the Ranger Challenge competition held at Camp Atterbury, Ind., in October. The three-day event was a team building- and leadership skills-oriented competition put on by the Indiana National Guard. (Photo by Spc. John Cro)



**PATROL:** An Oregon Army National Guard member (left), trains a member of the Afghan National Army near the Helmand Province, Afghanistan. (Photo by Charles Eckert)



**HUMANITARIAN WORK:** Oregon Staff Sgt. Danae Eskridge (right) helps carry a Nicaraguan woman who was complaining of chest and arm pain in to an examining room. Eskridge worked on the U.S. Kearsarge, which supported the Caribbean phase of Continuing Promise 2008. (Photo by Mass Communication Specialist First Class David G. Crawford)



**POOL TIME:** Members of Colorado's 8th Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction) and Explosive Ordnance Disposal, with the help of two 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Soldiers, conduct water survival training at a pool in Aurora, Colo., in January. (Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Liesl Marelli)





**PILOT FOR A DAY:** Lt. Col. Doug Weskamp, commander of California's 144th Maintenance Squadron, introduces Haley Michelle Collins to the media Feb. 9 at Fresno Air National Guard Base. The 144th hosted Collins, 11, a recent recipient of the Young Hero Award, as a fighter pilot for a day. (Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Chris Drudge)



**CIRCLE OF PRAYER:** Chaplain (Maj.) Joe Hammel of the Washington Army National Guard leads Soldiers of 1st Platoon, E Company, 1-161 Infantry in prayer before they depart Joint Base Balad, Iraq, on a convoy security mission Jan. 18. (Photo by Sgt. David Isaac)



**FIRE!:** California's Army National Guard live fires their Bradleys at Camp Shelby, Miss. (Photo by Sgt. Sheila Holifield)



**THAI'D TOGETHER:** Sgt. 1st Class Brandon Cabanilla and Pfc. Michelle Almeida work on windows for a new classroom facility the Hawaii National Guard, 230th Engineer Company-Vertical is building with the Royal Thai Marine Engineer Battalion during the Cobra Gold Exercise in Thailand. (Photo by Spc. Joanna N. Amberger)



**CONNECTION:** Master Sgt. Jeffrey Madorski, a KC-135 Stratotanker boom operator with the 161st Air Refueling Wing, Arizona Air Guard, refuels an F-16 Fighting Falcon from the 120th Fighter Squadron, Colorado Air Guard. (Photo by Master Sgt. John Nimmo Sr.)



# Task Force Gator

## Keeping the peace in The Big Easy

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Jon Soucy

**W**hen Hurricane Katrina slammed ashore in late August 2005, it left New Orleans virtually underwater and obliterated like many other communities along the Gulf Coast. While many Crescent City residents vacated the city prior to the storm making landfall, thousands of others chose to stay. Others lacked the means to leave.

The storm affected nearly everyone in the area in one way or another. Much of the city was a flooded ghost town with four inches of mud coating almost everything after the water receded. The storm left behind many legacies, one of which was a swath of destruction that put it into the record books.

Katrina saw a tremendous response of support from many, including the military. Among the first to respond were thousands of Army and Air National Guard members with trucks, planes and countless missions.

Today, as the city rebuilds, the Guard is still here in the form of Joint Task Force Gator.

Made up of Louisiana Army and Air National Guard personnel, JTF Gator has been providing law enforcement support to the New Orleans Police Department for over two years. Among the hardest hit of local government services, the NOPD saw many of its officers leave New Orleans after the storm. As a result, many neighborhoods saw a dramatic rise in crime as people started returning.

"The criminal element in New Orleans realized that the police force had maybe shrunk a little bit," said Brig. Gen. Ben Soileau, commander of JTF Gator. "There was a lot of devastation within the city and a lot of places to hide and drugs were a major problem."

### Gator gets going

Because of that, in June 2006 New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin requested law enforcement assistance from then-Gov. Kathleen Blanco, said Soileau.

"And it was provided with approximately 300 Guardsmen and 60 state troopers," said Soileau.

Like many things brought about as a result of Hurricane Katrina, the JTF Gator mission was unique.

"... the Guard has been called in to many, many natural disasters ... However, this I believe is somewhat unique in that it is the first time we are working directly as a law enforcement entity," said Soileau.

For many of the Guard personnel, it was a continuation of what they had been doing in New Orleans since the storm.

"Following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and Rita three weeks later, the Louisiana Guard was doing any number of missions," said Soileau. "Everything from security missions similar to Gator, to handing out supplies and food, and engineer work, or transportation of goods; and obviously, immediately following Katrina and Rita we were in the search and rescue business so we were saving people's lives.

"After things kind of settled down here in the city, we did have a mission, Operation Crescent Guard, and we were patrolling the streets of New Orleans, along with [Guard units from other states] until about February [2006]."

Initially, JTF Gator's ranks came from law enforcement – military police from the Army side and security forces from the Air Force side. As the mission continued, however, new Soldiers and Airmen rotated in. Many of them never carried a badge and handcuffs before. Because of that, a law enforcement training program emerged at nearby Camp Vaire.



Sgts. Willie Clark, left, and Wayne Lewis talk with residents as they patrol in New Orleans.

**New Orleans has the highest crime rate in the country** ► Congressional Quarterly Press, 2008





Left: Senior Airman Daniel Reyes checks on the progress of construction on a home on Hollygrove Avenue in New Orleans damaged during Hurricane Katrina July 31. Middle: Staff Sgt. Lionel Price talks with a man who stopped him saying he had been robbed. Right: Guardsmen and a New Orleans police officer check the doors on a building on the U.S. Department of Agriculture complex in New Orleans after being called to the site because of an alarm going off.

“We take your basic Soldier or Airman and we provide them with some fairly extensive, purely law enforcement training,” said Soileau. “[That includes] everything from weapons qualification, defensive tactics, all the way up through the JAG briefs on the rules of use of force and what we can and can’t do as police officers.”

And in their role as police officers, the Guardmembers have the same legal rights and authority as Louisiana State Troopers, said Soileau. Meaning, they can detain individuals for questioning, initiate traffic stops as well as place individuals under arrest. Though many times the Guardmembers let the NOPD take the lead in those matters, said Staff Sgt. Robert Masters, who has been a part of the task force since June 2007.

Normally, Guardmembers fill in as beat cops patrolling their section of the city. On an average shift, the most common calls include domestic disturbances, traffic accidents, noise complaints, possible prowlers or suspicious activity and burglar alarms going off. And in many cases the alarms were set off inadvertently by the property owners themselves, said task force members.

Though sometimes it can get a little more exciting.

## Busted

“The state troopers were chasing someone who was coming into our district,” said Masters. “We had people staged on the avenues that approach the interstate. We (Masters and his partner) got on Bullard [Ave.] and the guy just happened to be coming right past us. As soon as we pulled out next to him, the state troopers threw down spike strips in front of the street and he hit the spike strips and his car stopped right in front of us. We happened to be right there when everyone

converged on the vehicle. This NOPD guy broke out the window and they snatched him out and he was trying to fight back, he had a bunch of cocaine and stuff in the car. So, the two of us, and one other guy who was with us, got to help take him down to the ground and handcuff him.”

No matter the call, most shifts for many of the Guardmembers are spent simply interacting with those in the communities they patrol.

“We support the local businesses by going there and buying like a plate lunch from them,” said Sgt. 1st Class Wilson Young, assigned to

the 5th District in New Orleans. “And [we] keep going back and just stand there and talk to them and find out how they’re doing and do they need help with anything.”

And many of the business owners are appreciative of the Guardmembers checking up on them.

“I own a business and sometimes I have to head out of here at 2 o’clock in the morning,” said Kim Stewart, owner of We Got It Grocery and the adjacent Stewart’s Diner. “And these guys are sitting out in the parking lot waiting for me to get into my car. We never had that with the New Orleans police.”

And building those relationships has resulted in a few perks for the Guardmembers with many business owners offering free fountain drinks or a discount on purchases. But, for some, their relationship with one owner of a convenience store and restaurant led to a perk of a different kind.

“Sometimes we’re out here eight or 10 hours in the heat, especially if there’s an accident on the twin span (bridge over Lake Pontchartrain),” said Spc. Clint Hotard. “And we’ll come here and she’ll let us sit in the storage freezers to cool down.”

**“This NOPD guy broke out the window and they snatched him out and he was trying to fight back, he had a bunch of cocaine and stuff in the car”** ► Staff Sgt. Robert Masters





Top: Senior Airmen Daniel Venable and Jimmy Venable talk with a New Orleans Police officer at an accident scene. Right: Soldiers take a dinner break at a restaurant in New Orleans' District Three.



## Calm after the storm

It's not only local business owners that the Guardmembers have made a positive impression on, but residents within those communities as well.

"The National Guard has been stationed in our neighborhood here for I think at least a year and crime has really been reduced in the time since [the Guard] has been here patrolling our neighborhood," said Morgan Davis, who lives near the Bywater section of New Orleans.

The Guard was scheduled to stay on duty in support of the NOPD until the end of the 2008, though there are many local residents

who would like to see that time extended.

"We feel safe with them here," said Stewart, the grocery store owner. "We don't have enough police officers here and we really need these guys here."

And that feeling of safety is part of the mission for the Guardmembers.

"I believe we have brought ... a little bit more calm to the city," said Soileau. "People are very comfortable and are very confident that the Guard is going to do good things when we get here, so I don't think it was any different when the task force began in support of the New Orleans Police Department. So, I think in general we have brought a sense of relief to the city. New Orleans had lost a number of police

officers and we supplemented them and I think the citizens really appreciated that."

That sense of calm has resulted in some changes in the city as well.

"There's more people in it now," said Masters. "It's a little more coming back from the hurricane. It's a little more developed, businesses are starting to come back more and more, people are moving back into their homes."

And seeing that, for many Guardmembers, makes the job worthwhile.

"When you go home you kind of look at things a little different," said Hotard. "We see a lot of good things out here, but we see a lot of bad things, too. So, it kind of gives you a little different perspective on your everyday life and you try and make the most of it."

I have a different relationship toward my family than I did before. I kind of took everything for granted. And the satisfaction that you get from [the job] is kind of nice, too, that when you go home knowing that you did something beneficial today."

Click here for  
more photos

**"New Orleans had lost a number of police officers and we supplemented them and I think the citizens really appreciated that"**

► Brig. Gen. Ben Soileau, commander of JTF Gators

## TF Gator ends

By Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

The last 100 Louisiana National Guardmembers supporting Joint Task Force Gator completed operations March 1, according to Army Maj. Michael Kazmierzak, state public affairs officer.

Kazmierzak called the support they provided "precedent setting" and said it sets a new standard for future National Guard support missions. The Guardsmen helped the police make more than 8,000 arrests.

"They performed spectacularly," he said. "They demonstrated exactly what the National Guard is here for."

As the Guardmembers supported Task Force Gator, they continued drilling with their separate units to maintain combat readiness. Many of the Guard volunteers had served previous combat deployments that Kazmierzak said contributed to the New Orleans security mission. "They brought back a wealth of experience doing police-type work," he said. "They had tremendous capabilities."





**“I got off the plane and all I had was my two duffel bags and that was it. I lost everything”** ► Sgt. Edward Moss

passed away in Houston due to a massive heart attack,” Moss said. “So four days after they evacuate to Houston from here, her mom dies. And I come home and not only am I dealing with the stress of just getting back home from Iraq, I got Hurricane Katrina and my fiancée’s mother passes away.”

And that lead to a lot of frustration.

“I was like, what the hell is going on? I worked hard for all this stuff and it’s all gone,” he said. “It felt kind of pointless in a way. A lot of the money I set home, it was just gone, like water flowing through your hands.”

Though Moss was able to find assistance.

## Helping hand

“A lot of churches helped us out,” he said. “Fort Polk helped us out a lot. They had clothes for us, hygiene items. They tried to help us the best they could.”

And help even came before he and his unit got back from Iraq.

“Even the people in Maine when we were coming back from Iraq, they knew what

happened,” Moss said, referring to people in the airport where they stopped to refuel. “I’ll never forget it, they had this couple and I think they were like 76 years old and they waited over 23 hours in the airport for us to get home so we could use their cell phones for us to try and get in touch with our families.”

Amid his frustrations, Moss said kind acts like that kept him going.

“It made me feel good,” he said. “You weren’t totally in the dark. You knew there were people out there willing to help you.”

And that made him want to give something back.

“It’s a great thing,” Moss said of being a part of JTF Gator. “I mean, this is home for me. I’m coming back to the city I grew up in and helping to clean up. I want to help the city I come from.”

## Community

And many in the community that he patrols appreciate Moss and the others of JTF Gator.

“The community loves us here,” Moss

said. “They hope we never leave. They love us. We get stopped everyday, especially by older people because we stop and check on them. It’s not the richest part of town, so a lot of people don’t have A/C, so we stop and check on them and make sure they have water and stuff like that.”

Moss also has a following with the kids in the neighborhood.

“Just like Iraq ... I ride around with a bag of candy here,” said Moss. “If I see kids, I stop and talk with them just to see what’s going on and let them know that there’s people out there that care about them.”

Now living in Baton Rouge, La., he and his wife are making plans to soon return to New Orleans.

“My mom always told me no matter how messed up it is, home is home. You can always go home,” he said.

For now, he’ll be content with being a part of JTF Gator.

“I never thought that seeing guys (and girls) walking around in uniform back in the states patrolling the city would be this way,” he said. “I mean, this is one of the greatest experiences I’ve ever had.”

# No easy homecoming

## Louisiana Guardsman and New Orleans local returns from Iraq to Katrina devastation

By Staff Sgt. Jon Soucy

Joint Task Force Gator has drawn Soldiers and Airmen from across the state of Louisiana. But for some in the task force, New Orleans is home, which is part of the reason they chose to volunteer to be a part of the mission. For them, just like many other New Orleans residents, they too have had to rebuild their lives after Hurricane Katrina.

For Sgt. Edward Moss, who grew up in New Orleans, the hurricane hit just as he was coming home from a 15-month deployment to Iraq.

Assigned to the 256th Infantry Brigade,

he came home to find the city not at all how it was when he left, and he is quick to describe what it felt like coming home.

“It sucked,” he said. “It was like you never get to go home. The whole time you’re (in Iraq) you’re waiting to go home and then you get home and it’s not there anymore. It’s like I (still haven’t) been home yet.”

Normally, a unit returning from deployment is met by family, friends and fanfare. Moss and his fellow Soldiers were met with stiff challenges.

“Most of us who got off the plane had no idea where our family was, had no idea how to contact our families,” he said.

While Moss was home on leave from Iraq, he got engaged. Now married, he and his then fiancée had begun to make plans for the wedding and for their home. That meant new furniture, appliances and furnishings.

“I sent a good bit of money home to get our place together, buy all brand new furniture,” he said. “I mean, all kinds of stuff. I got home and didn’t know where my family was. I had no idea. I got off the plane and all I had was my two duffel bags and that was it. I lost everything.”

Moss was able to track down his family in Houston, but the obstacles didn’t stop.

“My fiancée, now my wife, her mom

Left: Sgt. Edward Moss returned a few days after the storm to find his home destroyed by flood waters. Bottom: Debris sits inside the living room of an antebellum home on Jackson Barracks in New Orleans.





# Runners high

One officer, one enlisted, one incredible week of racing through the Rockies

No amount of training I could have done at sea-level would have prepared me for the altitude. I had been overcome by a very upset stomach. -TECH. SGT. HEATON



Competitors slept in tents that were taken down, moved and reconstructed daily by volunteers.

What are friends for if not to test your limits of endurance?

When Army Capt. Matt Cavanaugh asked his friend and fellow Minnesota National Guardsman Tech Sgt. Tyrell Heaton to team up for the GORE-TEX TransRockies Run, he agreed, but may not have known what he was getting into.

The TransRockies Run is a grueling, six-day stage race where teams of two traverse the Colorado Rockies for over a 100 miles. This year the race took place Aug. 25-30. The course includes a mix of singletrack and forest road with nearly 25,000 feet of elevation gain, reaching altitudes of over 12,500 feet. Even if you are an exceptional endurance athlete – both are members of the Minnesota National Guard marathon team – it's a test of fitness and teamwork.

The Citizen-Soldier and -Airman found sponsors that covered the \$2,700 entry fee and named their team "Minnesota National Guard."

They trained together remotely, as Cavanaugh, a West Point graduate, was living in Minnesota and travelling the West and Canada, and Heaton lived in Washington, D.C. They shared workouts through e-mail: "I tried to match his weekly mileage," said Heaton.

The two joined 67 other teams and started the race in Buena Vista with a steady uphill climb of 1,100 feet. It didn't get any easier as another stage had them racing 23.4 miles with 4,407 feet of climbing at elevations of around 10,000 feet.

These exceptional Guard athletes raced for almost 20 hours though six stages. In the men's class, their best finish was fourth (stage five) and their overall finish was 13th out of 20 men's teams that started.

The pair brought pride and recognition to not only themselves, but the Minnesota National Guard. Read Heaton's race diary for a stage-by-stage account.

-Compiled by Master Sgt. Greg Rudl



Tech Sgt. Tyrell Heaton (left) and Capt. Matt Cavanaugh represented the Minnesota National Guard at the arduous GORE-TEX TransRockies Run. (Photos by Dan Hudson photo, courtesy of TransRockies Run)

## Race Diary

By Tech. Sgt. Tyrell Heaton

Stage 1: Buena Vista to Vicksburg  
12.94 miles/1103 feet climbing

Despite yesterday's clouds and rain, sunshine and clear skies greeted us for stage one, it was a beautiful 65-degree day. Our eagerness to get started heightened at 9:40 a.m. when we heard the announcement for runners to enter the chute. We were about to begin our arduous journey through the Rocky Mountains.

Sixty-seven other eager teams took off with us down a winding gravel road towards the tree-covered mountains. As we departed Buena Vista we passed through tunnels while running adjacent to a crystal clear bustling river. A steady uphill climb of 1,100 ft. provided a gentle introduction to the elevation of 8,000 ft.

We finished our run on a rocky gravel path where my lungs were burning as if I had just run an 800-meter dash. Affects of the altitude on my lungs had already set in.

Another participant was a doctor and she had seen me struggling with nausea and she gave me some pills to relieve my high-altitude sickness.

Stage 2: Vicksburg to Twin Lakes  
10.02 miles/3,098 feet climbing

Wanting to make up time we pressed the

pace down the rocky and uneven terrain. There were a few times each of us slipped but we handled it well and kept up the radical pace.

We caught up to a pack of three teams. We clearly had to slow up for them so at our first chance we maneuvered around them on the single track trail. It was actually harder to run behind them as it made it difficult to read the upcoming terrain.

Once the mountain began leveling off I must have let my guard down as I tripped and sprawled my body across the jagged bowling-ball-sized rocks.

It felt like I got hit in the face with a water balloon. I was carrying my hand-held water bottle and that was probably what saved me from breaking my wrist or arm. It split down the side and gave me a good blast of water to the face.

Matt was quickly upon me and as I was still looking for broken bones when he said, "C'mon, it'll only sting for a bit."

I was a bit apprehensive to get up as I chipped my knee pretty good on the landing, but Matt was correct, it only stung for a few minutes.

We never fully got our momentum back after my fall and at the bottom of the descent we still had two miles to traverse which covered a numerous, ankle-deep puddles, a few knee-deep river crossings, and one hip deep plunge across a short section to the eroded river bank. The cold water felt wonderful on my bruised legs and the seemingly fresh, mountain water did a wonderful cleaning the blood and dirt off my legs.

Running with heavy-wet shoes we pushed through the final mile over boggy terrain before we reached the finish.

## Running for a reason

In the two tours Capt. Matt Cavanaugh served in Iraq, he saw several of his fellow Soldiers suffer devastating wounds, and he has personally watched the resulting impact on their lives and the lives of their families as they struggle to recover. He is now running to raise money because our nation's most severely wounded Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and their families desperately need our help. Over the course of the next year, he's dedicating himself to raising money for the Wounded Warrior Project, which is a non-profit organization whose core mission is to honor and empower [severely] wounded Warriors. ([www.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org))





# Cold Commitment

## Protecting a missile defense facility in Alaska

Story and photos by Master Sgt. Mike R. Smith

Before the subzero temperatures, before their feet began to numb with cold, before their breath cast an icy fog inside their up-armored Humvee, they were warm.

Back in a garage on the missile defense complex here. That's where Spc. Gabriel Ives and Spc. Ian Beers from the Alaska Army National Guard's 49th Missile Defense Battalion, Military Police Company had prepared for their shift Dec. 6. They checked their weapons and clothing – two almost equal necessities when you're

securing a missile base near the Arctic Circle.

Both Soldiers had grown up in Alaska's harsh winters. Despite the constant darkness, freezing winds and snow storms, they and many others choose to protect the Guard's missile mission here, deep in the state's isolated interior.

While Ives drove the Humvee through snow drifts, Beers checked a perimeter fence surrounding the complex's 850-acres of missile silos and high-security buildings.

Missile defense may be known for its hot technology, they said, but the military police (MPs) Soldiers out in the cold here are just as vital to national security.

"There's no place like this," said Ives, navigating a turn. He slowed to make out the road through the blowing and drifting snow. An arctic gust pushed freezing air through the Humvee's door seals. The blast countered the warming effect of an overburdened heater

and made the cab feel like a rolling meat locker.

Another security patrol wheeled past them and then disappeared with a wave and a snowy whiteout.

### Around the perimeter

The military police at Fort Greely face one of the National Guard's most extreme working environments.

Two-thirds of the battalion's missile defense forces here, about 130 Soldiers, provide site security for an ever-expanding missile defense complex.

The complex has about 24 ground-based interceptor (GBI) missiles in underground silos, but Defense officials say a total of 44 GBIs, the majority of them at Greeley, will be in place by 2013.

As a tactical unit, Fort Greely manages the only fire direction

**WOULD YOU WORK HERE?** Spc. Gabriel Ives, left, and Spc. Ian Beers do. They're from the Alaska Army National Guard's 49th Missile Defense Battalion, Military Police Company and they routinely patrol the perimeter of the 850-acre Ground-based Interceptor Missile Defense Complex at Fort Greely, Alaska.

center with ground-based interceptor missiles on site. It is also one of only two sites in the nation that launch and direct GBI missiles.

A live test of the GBI system Dec. 5 resulted in the successful interception of a ballistic missile in space, off the coast of California.

The MPs said they face multiple challenges protecting the complex, which range from the extreme weather and the remote location to providing high-level security amid the constant construction, and the comings and goings of contractors and distinguished visitors.

They apply a detect, defend and delay site-security concept, which includes monitoring, Humvee patrols, random foot patrols and building, vehicle and personnel searches.

Their state-of-the-art security system also integrates software, equipment and technology that until recently was heard of only in science fiction. The Soldiers can also operate hand-held unmanned aerial vehicles and have the ability to track the slightest movements around the complex. But even with the latest technology, they said



nothing can fully counter the effects of the extreme winters. Freezing temperatures arrive here in mid-September. By the new year, sunlight drops to five hours, and wind chills plummet to minus 60 degrees. “Having the proper cold weather gear and knowing how to use it is critical,” said Ives. “When your feet get cold, you are going to have a miserable day.”

## Arctic desert

Ives parked the cold-soaked Humvee, and both Soldiers looked out the windshield, past the perimeter fence and toward a mammoth, snow-covered mountain range. “I’ve been to a lot of places, but, in my opinion, there’s no place that compares to Alaska,” said Beers. Fort Greely’s remote location is just north of the Alaskan Mountain Range and nearly 350 miles northeast of Anchorage. To its southwest, North America’s highest peak, Mt. McKinley, ascends to an aspiring 20,320 feet. Although the views can be priceless, the battalion’s Soldiers and equipment pay a toll.

Vehicles undergo constant maintenance and are run around-the-clock to keep them from freezing. Weapons have to be covered and specially oiled. Slips, frostbite and hypothermia are constant dangers. Soldiers stationed here receive a \$150 monthly stipend for their duty in extreme conditions. Their isolation and real-world national defense mission also justify forward deployed status, so none are deployable overseas. “There’s an extreme adjustment that the Soldiers have to go through,” said 1st Lt. Ryan Skaw, the company’s executive officer. “It’s an arctic desert.” Skaw said that everything takes longer preparation. “There’s a lot of snow buildup ... the wind is atrocious here,” he said. “Trying to be able to focus and stay focused on what you need to do for the mission becomes more difficult.” When you get down to minus 60 degrees and minus 70 degrees, things start to break, he said. “Even engineers who design it and say it won’t break, it’ll break.” Skaw said nutritional needs go up, along with the need to consume water and calories. “They are wearing a lot of extra garment layers, so it’s physi-

cally more demanding along with the elements the environment dishes out,” said Skaw. The MPs wear a seven-layer, cold weather system called Generation III issued by the Army Cold Regions Test Center. The center works with the battalion to get feedback on their latest cold weather gear. The most recent Generation III system includes a light silk layer, a waffle textured shirt as well as fleece and other high-tech fabric, which Soldiers adjust to their level of comfort. On the coldest days, there’s little of a Soldier seen but a set of eyes inside a bundle of fabric and body armor. “Today we went from minus 15 degrees to 15 degrees,” said Skaw. “We can adjust our garment system to match that 30 degree change in temperature and [to match] our operation tempo.”

## The great outdoors

Off-hours find the Soldiers watching movies, cooking or enjoying the outdoors. “For Soldiers who like the outdoors, this is good place to go,”

said Ives. Beers said he sees moose and fox regularly. Soldiers also spot wolf, elk and bears. Off post, there are countless outdoor activities including kayaking, hunting, hiking, camping and fishing. Route 4, the only road out of Fort Greely and the nearby town of Delta Junction, crosses sections of the Alaskan pipeline, past historic gold rush camps and trails. Skaw, who grew up on Alaska’s offshore island of Kodiak, said the MP mission is open to Soldiers outside of Alaska who are “looking for a challenge.” The battalion recruits nationwide, online and through the state’s National Guard headquarters in Anchorage. Many MPs that arrive here from tropical climates like Guam, the Virgin Islands and Florida have acclimated to the weather and the mission, said Skaw. New arrivals are trained on cold weather operations. Morale, welfare and recreation offices as well as a base chaplain and a support group are here for Soldiers and their families. There’s daycare, counseling, activities and other services. “We have a lot of extensions here because Soldiers tend to like what Alaska has to offer them,” said Skaw. “Most fall in love with Alaska, the great outdoors it offers and love working this mission.”

When you get down to minus 60 degrees and minus 70 degrees, things start to break, Skaw said. “Even engineers who design it and say it won’t break, it’ll break.”



# Huey

## It's just simple

Story and photos by

Staff Sgt. Jon Soucy

**“Speed isn’t everything, sometimes it’s style. And the Huey has style.”**

**T**he distinctive low-pitched whump, whump, whump of the rotor blades of UH-1 Iroquois, better known as the Huey, has been heard in Army aviation circles since the late 1950s when the aircraft was first put into service.

As it approaches more than 50 years of service, the job of making sure it stays in flying status falls largely to the maintainers and crew chiefs of the National Guard units that still fly the venerable bird.

Though the UH-60 Blackhawk, which began to replace the Huey in the late '70s, may be faster, for many crew chiefs the Huey is the aircraft of choice.

“I have to say, I prefer these,” said Staff Sgt. Mark Smith, a crew chief, who works on the Hueys of the 121st Medical Company (Air Ambulance) at the Delaware Army National Guard’s Army Aviation Support Facility in New Castle. “They’re just fun to work on. There’s nothing overly complicated about it. And the Army makes it simple. You can’t really screw these up. They’re about as idiot-proof as the Army can make something. It’s just simple.”

And that simplicity is one of the reasons the aircraft has remained flying for so long.

“I’ve heard stories of how they were only supposed to last through Vietnam, but they’re here now and they’re still working. So, it’s a good design,” said Sgt. Justin Wample, a 121st mechanic.

Many of the Hueys that the unit flies are from the early 1970s, which some in the unit see as an upgrade.

“When I first got to the unit, we had ’64, ’65 and ’66 model (year) Hueys. The ’67, ’68 and ’69s were the new ones. Now we have ones from 1972, ’73 and ’74,” said Smith.

But despite the oftentimes 40-plus year age of the aircraft, keeping them flying is a relatively simple process.

“They don’t really require too much work really, just periodic inspections,” said Wample.

“Usually you have a daily (inspection) to do after it flies; basically just go over the aircraft and make sure everything is still working properly, make sure there is no corrosion and things like that. We really don’t have too many problems.”

For the mechanics, most of the problems they have come down to one thing—parts.

“Most of the parts we’re getting now are used because they’ve been cannibalized (from other aircraft),” said Smith.

The difficulties with parts stems from a 2004 Army decision to phase out support for the aircraft as those still flying it transition to the Blackhawk or the newly introduced UH-72A Lakota.

Still, for many of the mechanics, keeping the Huey flying is a labor of love.

“My dad was an auto mechanic, so I grew up working on old cars and restoring them,” said Smith. “I kind of look at (working on the Huey) the same way. I’m restoring it, not just working on it.”

The Huey is scheduled to be phased out of the Army inventory by the end of 2009.

Many are taking the news with a grain of salt, but also with a twinge of sadness.

“I’ve heard this is the last year for the Huey for the last 15 years or so,” said Smith. “I like them. I’ll miss them when they’re gone. It’s got to go away at some point – that’s just the nature of the beast.”

But what Smith and many others who fly or work on the aircraft would like to see is the Army following along in the footsteps of the Navy and Marine Corps, who have retooled the aircraft with a dual engine and updated electronics.

“It would give you increased power, increased torque, increased lift and (Huey mechanics) already know how to work on them,” said Smith. “And, the parts are already in the system so a cost-effective distribution system is already there.”

Though many who work on and fly the iconic aircraft look to it with affection, they admit that many of the young mechanics and pilots coming into the field have eyes for the Blackhawk.

“Many of the young guys like the cool, fast, high-tech thing,” said Smith, referring to the Blackhawk.

But for Smith, speed is only part of it.

“You know, there’s people who like to ride in the Ferrari in the parade, and there’s people who like to ride in the Model A. I think I prefer the Model A,” he said. “Speed isn’t everything, sometimes it’s style. And the Huey has style.”

Sgt. Dave Clarence, left, a crew chief with the 121st Medical Company (Air Ambulance), looks on as his UH-1 Iroquois helicopter is refueled prior to a training mission over Delaware in February. The UH-1, more commonly known as the Huey, is scheduled to be officially retired from the Army inventory during 2009 ending a service life of 50 years. The 121st Med. Co. is one of the few remaining units that stills flies the venerable aircraft.





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photos of the  
Huey in Vietnam

# A FINAL LZ

Capt. John Ghere and his Huey helped locate what would become known as LZ X-Ray, the first major battle of the Vietnam War and depicted in the motion picture, "We Were Soldiers." (Photo courtesy of retired Col. (Ret.) John Ghere)

## As the Guard phases out the Huey, one veteran pilot remembers the iconic helicopter at a famous battle

By Capt. Thomas W. Mehl

**A**mid the tangle of scrub brush, ravines and sun-baked termite hills near the Chu Pong Massif in Vietnam's Ia Drang Valley, the then Capt. John Ghere maneuvered his UH-1 Helicopter close to the deck in search of a landing zone.

On that hot November day in 1965, Ghere, a Huey Helicopter pilot with B Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, was conducting a reconnaissance mission in search of a clearing to land troops. The clearing he located would become known as LZ X-Ray, the first major battle of the Vietnam War and depicted in the 2002 motion picture, "We Were Soldiers."

"[LZ X-Ray] is where you can land troops close to the Chu Pong Mountains,"

said Ghere, 74, who retired as a colonel in the Michigan Army National Guard following 36 years of service, including eight (1959-67) in the active Army.

The battle at LZ X-Ray is significant because it involved the air transport of more than 14 miles of the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry by UH-1 Huey Helicopters.

The Huey proved its metal in Vietnam,

not just as a troop transporter, but also as a gun platform, for command and control and medical evacuation.

Today, nearly 50 years after it was first fielded by the U.S. Army, the last Hueys are scheduled to be completely phased out of the Army National Guard by Sept. 30.

According to Del Hardiman, UH-1 Systems Manager, Aviation and Safety Division,

### Why 'Huey' ?

Huey was actually a nickname for the UH-1H Iroquois. When the helicopter was first introduced, its designation was HU-1. The HU stood for helicopter - utility. Over a short period of time, many who were around the aircraft simply pronounced the designation, and it came out Huey. Later, the Army changed the way it designated helicopters, and the letters were reversed to UH-1, (UH-60, UH-72A, etc.).

## "VETERAN UH-1 PILOTS FOR YEARS HAVE MADE THE STATEMENT THAT WHEN THE LAST UH-60 IS FLOWN TO THE BONEYARD, A UH-1 WILL BE THERE TO BRING THE CREW HOME"

Army National Guard, there are currently 64 Hueys still serving in the Army Guard that are scheduled to be replaced by the more modern UH-60 Black Hawk and UH-72A Lakota by the end of FY-09.

"The UH-1 is quite possibly the best known helicopter in the world today," Hardiman said. "Images of Vietnam air assaults, supply runs and medical evacuations register indelibly in the minds of Americans. The Huey endured years beyond its projected mission life because it was so doggone dependable.

"Veteran UH-1 pilots for years have made the statement that when the last UH-60 is flown to the boneyard, a UH-1 will be there to bring the crew home," Hardiman added.

"In my opinion the Huey was an engineering marvel; it was such a durable helicopter," said Ghere, who was shot down three times in Vietnam and received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service there. "Most of the hits we took were in the tail boom, which wasn't nearly as hazardous as taking a hit in the engine compartment. The safest way to fly in Vietnam was at treetop level because unless you flew right over the top of the enemy, they couldn't see you 50 meters to your left or right," he said. Hardiman said the first Hueys to see service in the Army National Guard were delivered to the Texas Guard in October 1970 for use by the 71st Airborne Brigade and 72nd Infantry Brigade (Mech.).

In a ceremony marking the occasion, Maj. Gen. Winston P. Wilson, then chief of the National Guard Bureau, said that he welcomed the challenge to produce combat-ready aviation units and guaranteed that the Army Guard would, if properly supported, produce units equally as ready as their active Army counterparts.

Following his discharge from the active Army in 1967, like so many veteran Huey

pilots who served in Vietnam, Ghere joined the Army National Guard. He returned to his native Michigan where he joined the Michigan Army Guard in 1968 following a one-year break in service. He served 28 years in the Michigan Guard where he was once again reunited with an old friend, the Huey.

"When I was in the Michigan Guard we flew Hueys constantly," said Ghere, who now lives in Onondaga, Mich. "I like to refer to it as the rotary wing version of the DC-3 because it was so durable."

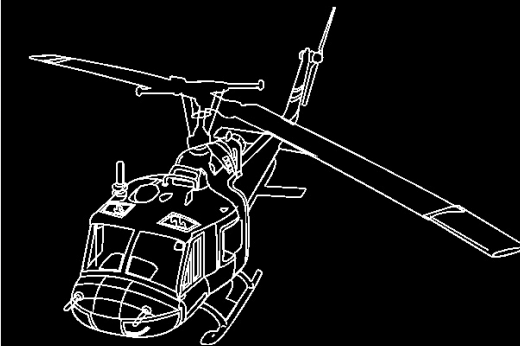
The last days of the Huey are on the horizon as Army Guard aviation continues its drive toward modernization.

"Army National Guard aviation has advanced in recent years to become an almost equal partner with its active Army counterpart," Hardiman said. "No longer does Army Guard aviation take a back seat. It performs and it does so in the war fight and homeland security at the highest levels."

Hardiman said Army Guard units are now fielding the new UH-72A Lakota, which replaces the OH-58 Kiowa; the CH-47F, the newest version of the Chinook Heavy Lift aircraft is now coming on line, joining its CH-47D older brother. The Black Hawk, now the mainstay of Army Guard aviation, is represented by multiple versions, including assault, Medevac, command and control and the Fire Hawks, designed specifically to fight forest fires.

In a sense though, Army Guard aviation owes much of its history to the Huey, a U.S. Army aviation icon.

"When one can no longer hear that familiar sound, and that familiar image crossing the horizon, when those images are no more and all that's left are the stories of this magnificent piece of aviation history, then that will be a sad day," Hardiman said. "That day will be soon."



## UH-1 IROQUOIS (Huey)

### Accommodation

Pilot and copilot; room for 11 combat-equipped troops; provisions for up to six Medevac patients

### Power plant

One 1,400 shp Avco Lycoming T53-L-13 turbo shaft

### Performance

Maximum Speed - 127 mph; hovering ceiling in ground effect - 13,600 ft.; service ceiling - 12,600 ft.; range with maximum fuel @ SL - 318 miles

### Weights

Empty Equipped: 5,210 lbs  
Mission Take-Off: 9,039 lbs  
Maximum Take-Off: 9,500 lbs

### Dimensions

Main Rotor Diameter: 48 ft.  
Tail Rotor Diameter: 8 ft., 6 in.  
Length: Rotors Turning - 57 ft., 9.75 in.  
Height: Tail Rotor Turning - 14 ft., 5.5 in.  
Main Rotor Disc Area: 1,809 sq. ft.

The UH-1 was the Army's first operational turbo shaft-powered helicopter. Built by Bell and fondly called the "Huey," it was one of the most successful rotorcraft in history, with over 16,000 built. It remains in limited use throughout many of the world's military forces.

The UH-1H began to roll off the manufacturing line in September 1967 and remained in production for 20 years, with many UH-1D's also upgraded to UH-1H standard. The Army obtained a total of 3,573 UH-1H's, and many remain in service with Army Reserve and National Guard units. They have been kept current with new avionics, improved composite rotor blades, countermeasures equipment such as chaff-flare dispensers, cable cutters, warning receivers, infrared jammers and other updated gear.

National Guard UH-1s consist of a combination of UH-1H models, commonly referred to as "slicks" in some circles and the UH-1V models, which is the Medevac configuration.



# JTF COMMANDER

## MAKING A

### Joint Task Force course highlights National Guard, NORTHCOM nexus

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill

About 60 senior officers from the National Guard and other services recently spent a week at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., learning how to lead a joint task force.

Offered three times a year at U.S. Northern Command, the Joint Task Force Commander Course prepares officers – usually colonels or higher – to command JTFs.

The bottom line: Faced with major preplanned events like an inauguration or responding to unplanned challenges like a hurricane, everyone is in the fight together and must work as one team.

The National Guard typically stands up a JTF for major missions such as Operation Jump Start, when Guardmembers helped Border Patrol agents secure the nation's southern border; for preplanned events such as national political conventions, sporting matches or presidential inaugurations; and in response to natural or manmade disasters, including wildfires, earthquakes and terrorist attacks.

"If we fail, it's broke for a long time, and we can't let that happen to our citizens," Army Maj. Gen. Charles Rodriguez, the adjutant general of the Texas National Guard, told attendees.

Air Force Col. Brent Feick, the National Guard Bureau's deputy director for domestic operations, said it's important to understand what a JTF commander is expected to do.

"There's a fair amount of education that needs to go in before you become a JTF commander so that you don't overstep your bounds or underestimate your problem," he said.

The course is a unique opportunity for potential JTF commanders from Guard communities nationwide and leaders from other agencies to network with each other, training officials said.

After presentations from doctors, state attorneys, chaplains and organizations, such as the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, commanders leave with a better understanding of how JTFs work and what resources are available.

They are encouraged to "think up" by anticipating the needs of their superiors and partner agencies and "think down" by understanding the jobs of those they lead.

Trainers said thinking up also means asking questions such as: How will NGB support my JTF? How can the Joint Chiefs of Staff support me? What can NORTHCOM provide?

Other agencies can contribute resources, situational awareness and perspectives that the Guard may lack, Rodriguez said.



Officers attending a Joint Task Force Commander Training Course learn about the National Guard's Joint Incident Site Communications Capability, a communications bridge between first responders and other local, state and federal agencies that can provide global communications within one hour of arrival on scene.

"The Guard, as good as it is, cannot do everything," said Army Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, the former chief of the NGB, who on Jan. 16 became NORTHCOM deputy commander and also vice commander, U.S. Element, North American Aerospace Defense Command.

"It doesn't have all the capabilities that reside in the Department of Defense. When the Army and Air Guards exceed their capabilities, there are capabilities and capacity that resides in the Department of Defense, and Northern Command is the combatant command that would coordinate, facilitate and direct those forces when needed."

Rodriguez added that the Guard is always the first military force on the ground. "The Guard provides the communications links, the

persistent relationships with civil authorities," he said. "You always want to err in the favor of leaving the civil authorities absolutely in charge."

Air Force Col. Vic Dallin of NORTHCOM's standing joint force headquarters, said it is important to build these relationships ahead of an event. "You all want to do the right thing and get the mission done," he said. "A JTF is able to focus the mission and make sure that we're working together."

### JTF 101

Course attendees included assistant adjutant generals, a state comptroller, directors of joint staffs, chiefs of staffs and counterdrug

leaders from the Army and Air National Guard. Marine and Navy officers audited. Lecturers and mentors included former adjutant generals and JTF commanders.

Topics included state and federal chains of command, unity of effort and unity of command; the National Incident Management System; the Posse Comitatus Act that allows military support to civil authorities, but not for direct law enforcement operations; subtle organizational and legal differences between each of the 54 states and territories; Emergency Management Assistance Compacts between states; and issues unique to the National Guard such as parallel command versus dual hat command.

Attendees got top-level guidance on interagency planning, JTF funding and public affairs. They also received intelligence briefings, saw National Guard equipment that makes it easier for multiple agencies to communicate during a crisis and conducted table-top exercises.

JTFs have been used for national special security events, such as the Olympics, Group of Eight summits of world leaders and U.N. General Assembly opening ceremonies.

Sometimes, more than one JTF stands up for a single event, with each responsible for a different function or geographic area.

Successes mean the JTF organizational approach will likely remain a fixture, senior leaders say.

"We are getting some templates in place for predictable events," Blum said. "This is a very special course put together for a special [area of responsibility] for a combatant command that is absolutely unique amongst all the combatant commands."

Created in 2002 after the 9/11 attacks, NORTHCOM is the nation's second-newest combatant command; U.S. Africa Command, established last year, is the newest. The nation's oldest military force, the National Guard is a resource for NORTHCOM, which has few permanently assigned forces.

NORTHCOM's mission includes command and control of Department of Defense homeland defense efforts and coordination of defense support of civil authorities.

The Guard is particularly important for air sovereignty, ground-based missile defense and other missions, Blum said.

"This command absolutely to be successful has a very close and collaborative relationship with the National Guard," he said. "The Guard really underpins our success for many of our mission sets. On



the domestic front, the Guard being located in every community across the country provides us with basically our forward-deployed forces.

“We rely on them to an extraordinary degree. When you talk about NORTHCOM, NORAD and the Guard, it’s very difficult to separate one from the other.”

NORTHCOM anticipates and conducts homeland defense and civil support operations in support of local, state or federal agencies. The command typically uses JTFs to provide civil support – not a new concept to the National Guard, which has used temporary JTFs within single states for decades.

But the JTF model has been refined, and the “J” has come to mean more than military services, but also other agencies, such as FEMA or DHS.

The phrase, “unity of effort” has been around for a long time, Feick said. “For 372 years, the National Guard has worked with their civilian counterparts, but the concept of having the Navy, Coast Guard, Army, Marines and National Guard and militias that in many states have funding and force structure – if you don’t have a JTF commander, then it can become somewhat of a cacophony of forces.”

Marine Col. Ken Hopper, planner and policy developer for the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s antiterrorism and homeland defense directorate, said one central organization that should control all the assets that will come to a fight.

“Being Americans, we see an area in distress, your natural reaction is, ‘How can I help?’” he said. “There’s a lot of tools out there in the tool bag, and these guys are going to have to make some very quick decisions.”

Hundreds of agencies were involved, but JTFs helped the Jan. 20 inauguration of President Obama.

## The inauguration

“It was a magnificent performance by the Department of Defense in support of the inauguration,” Blum said. “It wasn’t only the ceremony, which was superb. It was the security, which was amazingly superb and very complex. It dealt with the Army, Coast Guard, Navy, Air Force, the Marine Corps and the Army and the Air National Guards; it dealt with the Secret Service and about 240 other agencies. It was about as complex a bowl of spaghetti as you can imagine, yet when you watched it, it was flawless.”

Army Col. Cecilia Flores, the D.C. National Guard’s vice chief of staff, served as JTF-District of Columbia’s chief of staff.

“JTF-DC showed the spirit of states helping other states,” Flores said. “We had a mission that was bigger than we could support. We were successful because 28 states and territories supported us.”

Even with her inaugural experience, Flores said the JTF Com-

mander Course was beneficial. “Even if I’m not a JTF commander, I could do a better job to advise a JTF commander,” she said.

Taking the course alongside commanders with previous JTF experience was valuable, she said. “I’m learning vicariously through their mistakes or things that they did well.”

The coordination that JTFs offer was a key to inaugural success, Feick said. “The key was everybody understanding their roles,” he said.

## Jointness

The JTF concept has existed in the Guard for decades, and it has been embraced nationally in the last decade. “It was less coordinated,” Feick said. “Y2K didn’t do it, 9/11 didn’t do it, Katrina was the turning point – and we’re much better off for it.”

“Today, there is absolutely no comparison to pre-9/11,” said U.S. Coast Guard Capt. Wayne Brown, chief for air, land and maritime homeland defense, who audited the course. “Now, we wouldn’t even begin to think about conducting an operation without thinking about other components, other services, other agencies, international services. If you’re not thinking across the spectrum of all the players – including the private sector and non-governmental organizations – then you’re missing something.”

Eighty-five percent of the nation’s critical infrastructure is in the private sector, attendees heard.

During Hurricane Ike last year, the Coast Guard in coordination with Northern Command was bolstered by National Guard helicopters for rescues after its own were fully tasked.

“Before, we may not have thought about other organizations to provide additional capabilities and capacity,” Brown said. “Now we realize that when we work together we bring more expertise into the team, we bring more assets into a particular fight, and we bring reserve into the fight as well – and we gain more information, more leverage and greater authorities to get the mission done.”

“Things have changed tremendously,” said Hopper, the JCS representative.

## Refinements

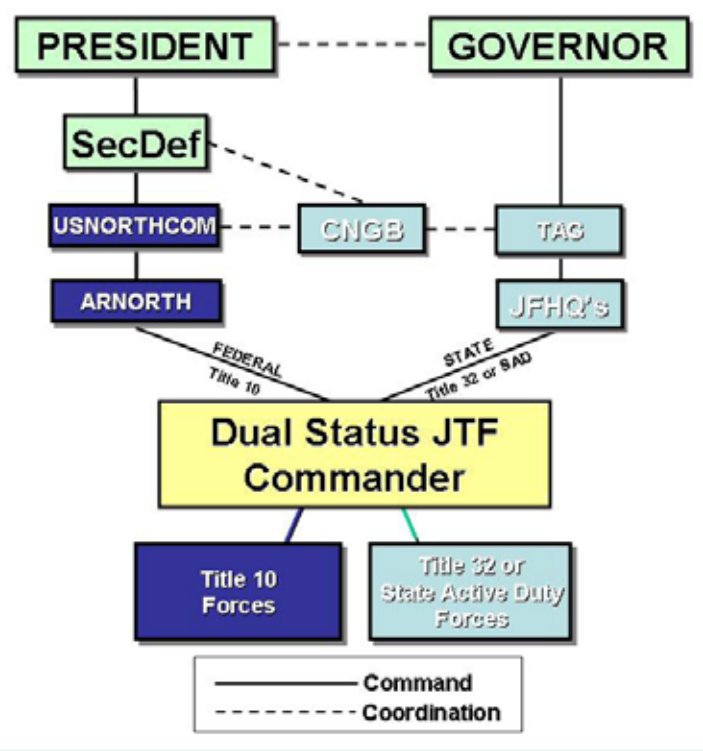
JTFs are still evolving and being refined in response to lessons learned, and course attendees had ideas for further improvements.

“Can we have pre-designated JTF commanders – colonel and above – for a hurricane, a flood or a fire, with a biography that’s already approved by the secretary of defense?” Feick suggested. “Is that possible?”

Another refinement is raising the threshold for federal response, which saves money and time and keeps responses local.

**“The Guard, as good as it is, cannot do everything ... when the Army and Air Guards exceed their capabilities, there are capabilities and capacity that resides in the DoD, and Northern Command is the combatant command that would coordinate, facilitate and direct those forces when needed.”**

**- Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum**



“Every incident is local until asked for support,” Hopper said. “Once their resources – equipment or money – have tapped out, that’s when they will go and ask for federal assistance.”

Support must arrive neither a second too soon nor a minute too late, leaders say, and federal agencies’ goal is to withdraw as soon as local agencies’ ability to cope is restored.

“The federal government responds only in support of the state,” said Robert Powers, FEMA’s acting assistant administrator for disaster operations. “We don’t go in first. Everything we do is in support of the state.”

The course included potential domestic JTF commanders, who already have experience leading JTFs overseas.

“Running a JTF overseas is absolutely different than what we do here,” Blum said. That’s because complex constitutional and other issues affect domestic operations.

A domestic JTF provides military support to local, state and tribal civil authorities, where an overseas task force might be running a military operation.

“The concept is the same, however the rules are different,” Hopper said.

“We have to cooperate very, very closely with the federal government, the state government, the local governments, all the way down to your county sheriffs, your local police chiefs, your mayors, your county executives, all the way up to the White House,” Blum said.

Uniquely, National Guardsmen are county sheriffs, local police chiefs, mayors and county executives, and the Guard has a unique ability to connect local with national, observed Navy Capt. Dave Welch of U.S. Pacific Command.

“It’s an incredible group of professionals, and they bring an important capability to the United States defense community,” he said. “They provide an important tie to the state and local communities through their private sector involvements as well as the relationships and connections that they have at state and local levels of government.”

The Guard is a logical choice to lead JTFs, attendees said. “It’s their brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and

uncles and aunts that they are protecting,” Hopper said.

With wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, riots and terrorist attacks among the potential risks it faces, the California National Guard, for example, could find itself running multiple JTFs for multiple incidents simultaneously.

## California

“In California, we’re faced with about any potential calamity that any state in the country could have, and we feel that we need to have a little redundancy on officers who could, if needed, be a JTF commander,” said Army Brig. Gen. Scott Johnson, deputy commanding general of the 40th Infantry Division.

“The most useful thing to me is becoming thoroughly familiar with the resources,” Johnson said.

It was Johnson’s first visit to NORTHCOM. “I am amazed at the number of National Guard personnel, who are integrated into NORTHCOM,” he said.

“It’s a key relationship,” Dallin said. “You can’t really tell who a Guardsman is and who an active-duty person is when it comes down to doing the mission.”

NORTHCOM also is integrated into other agencies. “The number of liaisons that NORTHCOM has embedded throughout the federal government, especially in Washington, D.C., and the thinking that the NORTHCOM commander has done about ensuring that we’re working seamlessly across all organizational boundaries is phenomenal,” said Brown, the Coast Guard captain.

“It is a magnificent team of teams,” Blum said – a team that includes the National Guard. “This is one combatant command that cannot do its job from day-to-day without the Guard.”

## NORTHCOM and the Guard

Blum’s appointment as the first National Guard general to be deputy commander of a combatant command illustrates the intimacy of NORTHCOM’s relationship with the Guard.

NORTHCOM depends on the Guard, Blum said. “If we’re depending on you, you’ve got to have the equipment that we’re depending on you to have.”

This year, NORTHCOM endorsed 342 separate line items of equipment that the command deems critical and essential for the National Guard to have, Blum said.

“That’s historic,” he said. “That has never happened before.” Examples include equipment required for air and ground transportation and communications that can be used both here and overseas.

“The standard is that the Guard and Reserves receive the same equipment as the active force,” Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said in written remarks to the Senate Armed Services Committee Jan. 27.

Some \$6.9 billion is budgeted to repair and replace National Guard equipment in the 2009 fiscal year, Gates said.

Equipment is vital to success, JTF Commander Course attendees heard – and Guardmembers are at the core of success.

“Our successes are tied to our Soldiers and Airmen,” said Army Col. Ken Sanchez, one of the Colorado National Guard’s JTF leaders in support of last year’s Democratic National Convention. “When it’s time to go do the job, they find a way. They work through whatever issues they have. They come from all over. They come with a rucksack, ready to do whatever they have to do. God bless them.”





## Montana National Guard

Think under pressure

12-mile road march

First Guardsman ever

THE NATIONAL GUARD HAS THE  
**BEST WARRIOR**

Land navigation

Marksmanship

Best of 360,000  
Army Guard Soldiers

## Congratulations Staff Sgt. Michael Noyce Merino Army's NCO of the Year

Noyce Merino is the first Guardsman to achieve the title and is representing the Army and the Army Guard at pre-eminent Soldier events throughout the year, including meeting the president over Veterans Day and participating in the promotional activities leading up to the All American Bowl.

"I'm equally proud of winning [both competitions]," Noyce Merino said, referring to the Army Guard's "Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) of the Year" he won in mid-August at Fort Benning, Ga. "They were both difficult in their own way."

"Sergeant Merino exemplifies the professionalism, skill and knowledge that are the hallmarks of National Guard NCOs, and we are immensely proud of this great American," Gen. Craig R. McKinley, chief of the National Guard Bureau, said.

"We couldn't be prouder," said Lt. Gen. Clyde Vaughn, the director of the Army Guard. "What a

huge event and something that our force will look at with so much pride, and across the components there's an enormous spirit of competition. That's what it's all about."

Noyce Merino explained that the Guard's competition was more physical with its 12-mile road march and land navigation events, while the Best Warrior competition challenged his marksmanship and ability to think under pressure.

The title involves appearances, so he has left his cattle ranch duties to his sister while he serves as a spokesman for the Army and Army Guard.

"I could not do any of this without my wife's support and my sister's support and the belief, faith and prayers from my family," Noyce Merino said.

Noyce Merino's family runs a 21,000-acre cattle ranch. He also works as a shipping supervisor for United Parcel Service.





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