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GUARD DETAIL

A CHRONICLE OF THE MISSISSIPPI ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD



SPECIAL FOCUS:
Caring for the Whole
Guard Family

GUARD DETAIL

JANUARY-APRIL 2008 • VOLUME VX, NUMBER I, A CHRONICLE OF THE MISSISSIPPI ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

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The Guard Detail magazine is an authorized unofficial publication produced three times a year by the Joint Force Headquarters, Mississippi National Guard, Public Affairs Office, under the provision of AR 360-81. The opinions expressed in the Guard Detail are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Joint Force Headquarters, Mississippi National Guard or the National Guard Bureau unless so indicated.

The Adjutant General of Mississippi
Brig. Gen. Bill Freeman Jr.

State Public Affairs Officer
Lt. Col. (Ret) Tim Powell

PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF
Capt. Christian Patterson *
1st Lt. Andy Thaggard
Staff Sgt. Billy Valentine*
Sgt. Charles Brice*
MSgt. (Ret) Sandy Ates

* These are members of the 102nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment who are now deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

If you have questions or submissions write or call:

JFH-MS-CM-PA
Mississippi National Guard
P. O. Box 5027
Jackson, MS 39296-5027
COMM: (601) 313-6148/6271
DSN: 293-6148/6271
FAX: (601) 313-6176

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ESGR Award Nominations Nearly Double

Members of the National Guard and Reserve, along with their families, have nominated 2,199 employers for the 2008 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award.

The award is the highest recognition given to outstanding employers. It was started in 1996 under the auspices of the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) to recognize exceptional employers.

ESGR is a Defense Department agency started in 1972 that makes employers aware of the laws and resolves disputes through informal mediation.

In the past, winners have provided such support as continuing full salary and benefits and taking care of the lawns for employees fulfilling their military obligation.

Large companies such as General Motors, Home Depot and Sears have been honored, but so have small businesses, such as the family-owned Augustine & Sons farm in Rose Hill, Iowa. State and local governments, including the state of Tennessee, have received the award.

The number of nominations this year is a 97 percent increase over last year's total of 1,119.

The 2008 recipients will be announced in the spring and honored in Washington, D.C. at the 13th annual ceremony on Sept. 18. Last year's winners met with President Bush and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates.

Military Will Continue to Rely on the Guard

The U.S. military will continue to rely heavily on the Army National Guard for "another generation," a senior Army officer said Wednesday.

Gen. Charles Campbell, who commands U.S. Army Forces Command, told reporters that a larger Army may provide more time at home for Soldiers between deployments, but the Army National Guard and Army Reserve will still be called upon regularly.

He said the additional 65,000 troops expected to join the Army in the next few years is not enough to handle what is expected to be an era of persistent conflict.

"To meet that demand," Campbell said, "we are going to have to continue to be reliant on our reserve component. That's a reality. It's been a reality that's been true now for seven years and it's likely to be true for another generation."

Five National Guard brigades recently deployed to Iraq and seven more will deploy for overseas missions in the next rotation, said Campbell, whose command is responsible for training, equipping and deploying units mobilized for combat operations.

He said the Army would have to grow to 800,000, which is 253,000 above the current goal, to meet demands without relying on the reserve component.

"I'm not suggesting that a larger Army is not desirable," he said. "But I think there is a reality associated with whether or not you can recruit and sustain that large of an Army given today's demographics."

Another option is the draft, which is unpopular inside the Army and with the public, he said.

Dental Funding Increase

The Army National Guard and the Department of the Army signed a memorandum of agreement on February 11th which is likely to result in \$107 million for dental treatment for all Soldiers who are non-deployable due to dental issues. Currently, only Soldiers whose units have been alerted for mobilization are funded for dental treatment.

55 percent of all Army Guard members fall into non-deployable readiness status due to dental issues, either because they have not been examined recently or need corrective dental measures.

The funding for the dental work is expected to arrive in fiscal year 2009 but added treatments could begin sooner. The memorandum signed in February will allow for treatment for all Guard members regardless of their alert status.

The \$107 million earmarked for dental treatment would represent an increase of about \$50 million from the current \$50-60 million spent annually on dental exams and treatment during alerts. The vast majority of the corrective dental procedures would be contracted out to civilian dentists and clinics.

The Army National Guard currently has only 156 dentists in its ranks out of a total of about 350,000 Soldiers. (Excerpted from an article by SFC Erick Studenicka)

DoD Announces New Reserve Component Deployment Support and Reintegration Office

Undersecretary of Defense David S. C. Chu announced the formation of the Deployment Support and Reintegration Office within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs.

The office, mandated in this year's defense authorization act, is an integral piece of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. DoD's Yellow Ribbon Initiative is designed to provide support and outreach services to Reserve component service members, their families and communities throughout the deployment cycle.

This program places particular emphasis on preparing service members and their families for the stresses associated with separation and deployment, educating members and families about resources available to assist them, and connecting members to service providers before and during deployments. The focus shifts to reconnecting service members with families and communities for successful reintegration following deployment.

Reintegration program capabilities are already underway with services provided through the Joint Family Support Assistance Program and are currently being pilot tested in 15 states. DoD plans to expand this program beyond the pilot phase to all 54 states and territories.

The toll free number for the DOD Deployment Support and Reintegration Office is 1-866-504-7092.

More Education Benefits for Those Who Serve Multiple Tours

Some members of the National Guard and Reserves who serve on active duty will see a significant increase in their educational benefits, thanks to improvements announced by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Reservists and National Guardsmen who serve multiple

tours on active duty may get an increase in their educational benefits, in keeping with the value of their service to our nation," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake.

Under new provisions, members who accumulate three years on active duty, regardless of breaks in service, may be eligible for the maximum payment under the Reserve Education Assistance Program (REAP). Previously, reservists and guardsmen had to serve two continuous years on active duty to receive the highest payment.

The new eligibility rules are retroactive to October 1, 2007. The top payment under REAP is currently \$880.80 per month.

The new law, part of the National Defense Authorization Act, also expands the period of eligibility for certain Guard and Reserve members who complete their service obligation before separation from the selected reserve.

Members meeting these criteria may be eligible to use REAP benefits for a period of ten years following discharge. Benefits typically end upon separation for members who do not complete their full, obligated service.

Additionally, some REAP-eligible National Guard and Reserve members may now make an extra contribution to the Department of Defense to increase their monthly benefit rates.

Service members receive an additional \$5 per month for each \$20 contributed. With the maximum \$600 contribution, this option can add up to \$5,400 to a member's total 36-month education benefit package.

Beginning on October 1, 2008, participants in REAP and the Montgomery GI Bill program for the Selected Reserve who pursue non-degree programs lasting less than two years may also be eligible to receive accelerated payments.

During FY 2007, more than 60,000 National Guardsmen and reservists were paid under REAP, more than 41,000 were paid under the Montgomery GI Bill program for the Selected Reserves, and approximately 344,000 participants were paid under the Montgomery GI Bill for active-duty members.

For more information on changes to VA's GI Bill benefits, go to www.GIBILL.va.gov or contact VA directly at 1-888-GI-BILL1 (or 1-888-442-4551).

Guard is Short Equipment but Rich in Combat Experience

Five years of war in Iraq has given the National Guard and Reserve combat experience, but has left them with a serious equipment problem, experts say.

The Pentagon began relying heavily on the Guard and Reserve early in the war to give the active-duty Army time to reorganize, said Christine Wormuth, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"The view at the time was that the Army could not both transform itself and become modular and provide the 15 to 20 brigade combat teams in Iraq at the same time," Wormuth said. After five years, the Guard and Reserve are "arguably the most effective that they've ever been," she said. "That is due to the fact that far more members of the Guard and Reserve have combat experience than they've had in the past."

But a recent independent commission report found that the Guard and Reserve were woefully unprepared to deal with a catastrophic terrorist attack on the United States.

LTG Steven Blum, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, has conceded that only about 61 percent of National Guard

units have the equipment they need, but he said officials hope to raise that number to 77 percent by 2013.

Wormuth said the Guard and Reserve's equipment problem is offset by the combat experience they have gained, but she also said the overall health of the Reserve component is mixed.

"We need the Guard and Reserve to be marathon runners, and in that perspective, they're not healthy enough to be marathon runners because you can't run a marathon when you don't have the equipment you need," she said.

Retired Army GEN Barry McCaffrey went much further, saying the Guard's lack of resources and manpower have "put the country in peril." A Vietnam and Desert Storm veteran who also was head of U.S. Southern Command, McCaffrey argued that the Guard's primary mission must be to respond to domestic crises.

"For God's sake, we want a huge national force capable of sustaining state governors and the president in an emergency," McCaffrey said.

Local police and national law enforcement agencies simply don't have the muscle that the Guard can bring to bear on a crisis, he said. McCaffrey said the Guard should have 100,000 troops dedicated solely to responding to a chemical or radiological attack.

VA Puts Mobile Pharmacies on the Road

To support veterans and their families during major emergencies, especially natural disasters, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun to deploy mobile pharmacies that will provide vital medicine when patients are unable to fill their prescriptions.

VA will also open up the facilities to help communities during major disasters and other emergencies.

"The mobile pharmacies give VA the ability to provide critical medications to veterans when disaster strikes," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "VA is committed to ensuring our veterans receive their care and prescriptions as soon as possible during an emergency."

Each VA mobile pharmacy is housed in a 40-foot-long solid steel trailer built to withstand winds in a Category 3 storm. The units include a satellite connection with VA's Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy system, a computerized, automated state-of-the-art mailout pharmacy that can process more than 1,000 prescriptions hourly.

Pharmacists can use the satellite system to obtain a veteran's prescription data to dispense the drugs on site. In addition, VA can send replacement medications during an emergency by mail or another carrier to a veteran's home or temporary address.

VA recognized the need for mobile pharmacies in 2005 after hurricanes Katrina and Rita severely damaged VA medical centers along the Gulf Coast. The Department deployed several mobile medical clinics as part of its response to the disasters.

The first mobile pharmacy was unveiled on Sept. 11, 2007 in front of VA's Washington, D.C., headquarters. The unit was displayed recently at a meeting of the American Society of Health System Pharmacists in Las Vegas.

Airborne ambulances evac wounded warriors

■ Story and photos by Senior Airman Carolyn Viss, 379th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

SOUTHWEST ASIA – Miles high, aircraft of all kinds hover 24/7, flying missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, and the Horn of Africa.

Some are fighters. Some are bombers. Some are cargo aircraft. And some carry medics who are trained to provide aeromedical evacuation for patients in harm's way.

The 379th Expeditionary Aero-medical Evacuation Squadron in Southwest Asia is a unit trained especially for that purpose. The medics and nurses fly on cargo and tanker aircraft at any altitude, pick up sick and injured patients, and take them to safety while providing them with top-quality medical attention.

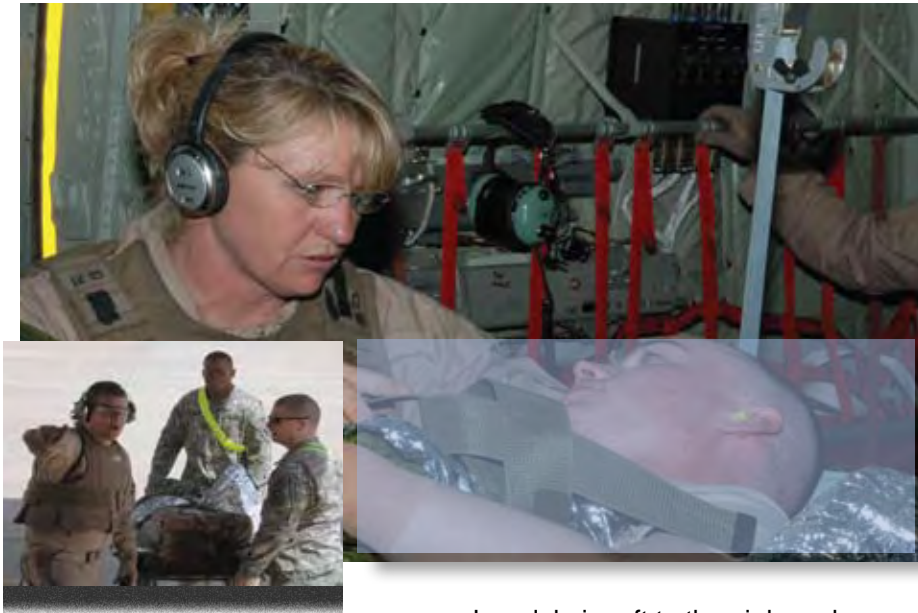
"We provide peace of mind to the area of operations, knowing that the movement of the injured can occur quickly using the best of care," said Col. Peter Mercier, 379th EAES commander. "This allows the best chance of recovery from injuries sustained in combat and in daily operations as well as any health emergency that may arise."

The team of 34 is a combination of Air National Guard members from Tennessee, Minnesota and Mississippi, as well as active duty Airmen from five other bases, said Capt. Julia Wiley, the director of operations. The mixture is quite complimentary.

"The active-duty component manages our crews so expertly that their processes are a benchmark, said the Guard member from Jackson, Miss. "They bring the day-to-day operational knowledge of aeromedical evacuation. Their ability to assess an uncommon occurrence and provide a resolution at rapid speed, [combined with] their willingness to share their knowledge and experience, is an invaluable skill set. Our Guard personnel work in the civilian world as healthcare professionals and provide another level of experience that cannot be matched."

As trauma professionals, critical care professionals, ICU professionals, and cardiac professionals, "their skills run the gamut, and they are greatly needed in the AOR," she said.

One of the flight nurses, Capt. Lisa Causey, also deployed from the Jackson, Miss., ANG AE unit, said



one of the biggest differences between being a nurse on the ground and a nurse in the aeromedical evacuation squadron is the possibility of being in a danger zone.

"Patient care is patient care," the mother of three said, "but not knowing when you leave if you're going to be shot at or not ... is more stressful."

Flying with critically injured passengers who are sometimes barely stable also takes its toll on the medical crews, who have to be ready for almost anything, said Tech. Sgt. Christopher Palmer, an active-duty member of the squadron deployed here from Scott.

"You're basically working in a \$30 million ambulance every day," the seasoned veteran said. He has flown missions in seven cargo and tanker aircraft, deployed seven times, and even been in a reverse role as a litter patient on board a cargo plane when he blew out a disc in his back in 2005 and had to be brought back home. "The most challenging part is being able to separate and shield yourself from the emotions that surround the more critical injuries and illnesses. If you dwell on it for too long, you can picture yourself in their place – and that can make it hard to continue."

In spite of some of the difficulties of being airborne medics, one thing that makes the overall mission easier is the recapitalization of the Air Force cargo fleet, Sergeant Palmer said. The recent addition of the C-130

J model aircraft to the air base here has added advanced capabilities to the already accomplished squadron.

"Sometimes, you walk into one of the new J models and it has that 'new car' smell," said Sergeant Palmer, who used to teach at the AE schoolhouse and has seen almost every situation anyone could think of. "There obviously aren't as many maintenance issues on new aircraft; the rollers can be flipped over instead of stacked and strapped; and we can hold more patients because of its wider configuration."

As a whole, the unit's unique mission is something they handle with "pride and grace," according to their commander, who has been in the career field for 25 years.

"We have extremely brave Airmen, ready to do whatever it takes to ensure our wounded are taken care of," Colonel Mercier said. "My crews have the potential to go into some tough areas. It takes a special person to do the job they do every day. [They] stand trained and ready to do whatever it takes to give our wounded the best chance possible for recovery. They see the impact of war on a daily basis. They look into hundreds of wounded people's eyes and tell them, 'We are here for you. Let us help to get you home!' The Airmen of today are on top of their game, and I am proud to have the opportunity to work with them."



COMMISSION: Invest in the National Guard and Reserve

By Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill, National Guard Bureau

An independent commission has recommended changes for the National Guard and the five other reserve components to reflect their transformation from a strategic reserve to an operational force.

After two-and-a-half years of work, the commission delivered its final report to Congress, the Pentagon and other agencies Jan. 31, calling it the most comprehensive independent review in 60 years.

LTG H. Steven Blum, the chief of the National Guard Bureau, said many elements of the CNGR report are valuable.

The report has six broad conclusions and 95 recommendations based on 163 findings. The six broad conclusions:

CONCLUSION ONE: "The nation requires an operational reserve force. However, DoD and Congress have had no serious public discussion or debate on the matter, and have not formally adopted the operational reserve. Steps taken by DoD and Congress have been more reactive than proactive, more timid than bold, and more incremental than systemic. They thus far have not focused on an overarching set of alterations necessary to make the reserve components a ready, rotational force. Congress and DoD have not reformed the laws and policies governing the reserve components in ways that will sustain an operational force."

CONCLUSION TWO: "The Department of Defense must be fully prepared to protect American lives and property in the homeland. DoD must improve its capabilities and readiness to play a primary role in the response to major catastrophes that incapacitate civilian government over a wide geographic area. This is a responsibility that is equal in priority to its combat responsibilities. As part of DoD, the National Guard and reserves should play the lead role in supporting the Department of Homeland Security, other federal agencies, and states in addressing these threats of equal or higher priority."

CONCLUSION THREE: "Current law and policy still reflect a Cold War-era vision of the employment of valuable military manpower assets and do not adequately support an operational 21st-century force. A new integrated personnel management structure is needed to provide trained and ready forces to meet mission requirements and to foster a continuum of service for the individual service member."

CONCLUSION FOUR: "The reserve components have responded to the call for service. Despite shortages in equipment, training, and personnel, they have once again proven their essential contribution to meeting national security requirements in a time of need. To sustain their service for the duration of the Global War on Terror will require maintaining the force at a new standard of readiness. Current policies cannot accomplish this task. A ready, capable, and accessible operational reserve will require an enduring commitment to invest in the readiness of the reserve com-

ponents. This commitment will necessitate service integration, additional resources, and new constructs for employing the reserve components and for assessing readiness."

CONCLUSION FIVE: "To maintain an operational reserve force over the long term, DoD must appropriately support not only the service members themselves but also the two major influences of members' decisions to remain in the military - their families and employers. Significant improvements in current programs in all three areas are essential to sustain an operational reserve force both today and in the future."

CONCLUSION SIX: "The current reserve component structure does not meet the needs of an operational reserve force. Major changes in DoD organization, reserve component categories, and culture are needed to ensure that management of reserve and active component capabilities are integrated to maximize the effectiveness of the total force for both operational and strategic purposes."

Blum said that equipment shortages mentioned in Conclusion Four are improving because of "an unprecedented historic commitment" by the President, Congress and the Secretaries of Defense, the Army and the Air Force.

In 2006, equipment readiness was at 40 percent, Blum said. In 2007, it was 49 percent. Today, it is 61 percent. A \$45 Billion taxpayer investment will increase it to 69 percent by the end of 2009 and 77 percent in the year 2013.

The National Guard's structural transformation to a mirror image of the active component combined with improved training, experience, commitment and recruiting success make it the most effective force it has ever been, Blum said.



"The National Guard structural transformation to a mirror image of the active component combined with improved training, experience, commitment and recruiting success make it the most effective force it has ever been."

LTG H. Steven Blum



▲ Governor Barbour holds a press conference to announce a replacement for the Mississippi National Guard's retiring adjutant general, Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross (right). The governor's selection was Brig. Gen. (Ret.) William "Bill" Freeman of Newton, Miss. (far left). Members of both of the generals' families were present. (Photo by 1st Lt. Andy Thaggard).

Freeman replaces Cross as state's new adjutant general

■ By Sandy Ates, Staff Writer

Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross, the adjutant general of Mississippi, was at the U.S. North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) in Colorado, when Gov. Haley Barbour announced Cross' resignation.

After winning a second term as governor, Barbour asked Cross to stay with him as the adjutant general, but Cross declined, telling Barbour he would like to retire from the military and have more time with his family.

Cross said he was unaware that the governor was making the announcement on that particular day, but was prepared for the announcement at any time.

"For the past several months I have requested acceptance of my retirement from military service," said the 61-year old Cross. "It has been an extreme honor to work with such magnificent Soldiers and Airmen of the Mississippi National Guard during some of the most important times in the history of the state and nation."

"I commend Governor Barbour for his strong and effective leadership, and I look forward to the opportunity to spend more time with my family," added Cross.

Cross was selected as the adjutant general in 2004, during a period of war in which the Mississippi Army and Air National Guard was already involved.

He was nationally recognized for his command of the Mississippi military forces during Hurricane Katrina.

Indeed it was a long, hard and

very busy four years for Cross.

During a press conference March 22 announcing Cross' replacement, Governor Barbour said he told Cross that after he was confirmed "the toughest thing was going to be recruiting and retention because of the war and because it (the National Guard) has been used so much."

Presently, both the Army and Air National Guard are near 100% strength.

Barbour asked Brig. Gen. William "Bill" Freeman, Jr., of Newton, Miss., to take on the job as the state's adjutant general, noting it would also be a big challenge for Freeman as the National Guard faces possible redeployments for several thousand guardsmen into Iraq in 2009.

When Barbour nominated Cross to be adjutant general in 2004, he said Freeman was one of four finalists in line for the job.

"The last four years have not been an easy task and we all know that. You have performed your job beyond the call of duty," Freeman, 63, told Cross at the news conference just after the announcement was made of Cross' replacement.

Freeman, although retired from the Mississippi Army National Guard in 1999, is a familiar face to most guardsmen.

He has served in leadership roles at all major subordinate commands of the Joint Force Headquarters, Mississippi National Guard since completing officer candidate school in 1969 (he enlisted in the National Guard in 1966).

When asked what Freeman's focus would be during his tenure as adjutant general he mentioned several things.

Signing on new people and keeping good Soldiers will continue to be a priority, Freeman said.

"This is a very patriotic state," Freeman said. "We have a lot of hands going up saying, 'Here I am, send me,' because they realize this is a country at war."

Freeman will be responsible for 2,670 members of the Air National Guard and 9,715 Soldiers of the Mississippi Army National Guard.

With the probability of deployment for the 155th Brigade Combat Team in 2009, Freeman said the focus would be on training as well as support for the families of deployed troops.



▲ Brig. Gen. William "Bill" Freeman (left), Karen Freeman, Carolyn Cross and Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross gather together following the announcement of the selection of the new adjutant general. Cross is retiring after four years of service with Gov. Barbour, and Freeman will become the new state adjutant general beginning May 1, 2008. (Photo by 1st Lt. Andy Thaggard).

Freeman said he will also continue to prepare troops in case of natural disaster.

While the job will still be challenging, Barbour assured the public Freeman will carry on the duties in the same dedicated and professional manner as his predecessor.

"We will have the resources, the equipment and the number of people that are necessary to deal with any kind of natural disaster, terrorism attack or anything else," he said.

Freeman's leadership ability is unquestionable according to Sen. Terry Burton of Newton.

"There is nothing in his background that would bring the state any dishonor. He's a super man," said Burton, who has known Freeman most of his life.

Freeman served two terms as mayor of Newton from 1979-87. Currently he is Senior Vice President and member of the Board of Directors of the Newton County Bank and the Newton County Bancorporation. He also serves as the Secretary of Bancorporation, which is the parent company.

He is a 1967 graduate of the University of Mississippi with a degree in Business Administration; he got

his banking certificate in 1971 from Louisiana State University and National Installments Certification from the University of Oklahoma in 1972.

Upon his retirement in June 1999, Freeman served as the commander of the 66th Troop Command's 2,457 Citizen-Soldiers.

His greatest appreciation however, was for the field artillery. He served with Battery C, 4th Battalion, 114th Field Artillery as the assistant executive officer and later went to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 631st Field Artillery as an air observer. Ultimately he became the battalion commander of the 4th/114th and further along in his career brigade commander of the 631st Field Artillery Group.

"I believe General Freeman will do a very good job of taking care of the Soldiers and Airmen of the Mississippi National Guard," said Cross. "They are in good hands."

Freeman will begin duties as the new adjutant general beginning May 1st.



2008 Soldier of the Year Challenge

Let Nothing Hold You Back

■ Photos and Story by Sandy Ates

It isn't only the postman that carries on through wind, sleet, rain and wintry storms.

The 10 competitors in this year's state Soldier of the Year competition went through all that and more!

A tornado had just touched down at Camp Shelby the day prior to the competition, and more storms and bad weather were predicted for the next three days of the competition (March 6-8, 2008).

Thursday, March 6, when they arrived at Camp Shelby, they were given quarters, stowed their gear, and shortly after lunch headed to the field for warrior task training.

All tasks were graded and points given for the warrior skills category, making up about 10 percent of their overall score.

Later in the evening, an icebreaker was held at the All-Ranks Club for competitors and their major support command sergeants major. State Command Sergeant Major Don Cooley welcomed the competitors and representatives from the various commands and gave instructions for the next day's events.

"Every one present here is already a winner because you were selected to represent your major commands in the state wide competition, and three of you will go on to represent the Mississippi Army National Guard in the Regional Competition," Cooley said.

This year's AGR Soldier of the Year competitors included: Sgt. Jerry O. Johnson of Lena, Sgt. 1st Class Aaron N. Gatherright, III of Hattiesburg, and Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan R. Luke of Philadelphia. There were four competing for NCO of the Year: Sgt. Michael W. Willis of Moss Point, Staff Sgt. Johnathan W. Rawls of Gulfport, Sgt. Olinger B. Cob of Sherman, and Sgt. Contarus D. Carter of Louisville. Four also competed for Soldier of the Year: Spc. Earnest C. Lowery Jr., of Brandon, Spc. Jeffrey A. Walker, Jr., and Spc. Aaron C. Proctor of Crystal Springs, and Spc. Matthew L. Wilson of Madison.

Friday morning events began at



0530 hours when they assembled at the running track at Camp Shelby. Braving brisk cool temperatures and darkness, they started with push-ups and sit-ups — many wished they had worn more than running shorts and tee-shirts because the ground was wet (even through mats) and the air cold.

The two-mile run was a way to warm up but didn't bode well with one or two of the competitors.

Wilson, became nauseated during his run and somehow ended up twisting his ankle in the process; while he lost time, he ended up finishing the two mile run, limping noticeably, but steadily smiling (throughout the competition he never lost his smile).

After breakfast, the competitors were tested on marksmanship skills at the inside, computerized range at Camp Shelby. The Soldiers enjoyed this challenge and all did very well.



▲ A nice brisk walk helps the weary runners build energy levels following a two-mile run.

Up to this point, all competitors appeared to be on level footing.

The next part of the competition was a written exam, and took Soldiers a bit more head-scratching time. One of the Soldiers commented that the test was "tough!"

With the event schedule changed due to an approaching winter storm,

instructors opted to give the mystery event first so the last two events of the day could be done consecutively and completed before the storm arrived.

With clouds approaching, Soldiers quickly completed the mystery event, an essay, and loaded up for the next event, the navigation course.



Spc. Earnest Lowery has his own method of finding his next point on the land nav course.

The navigation event was muddy, mucky and messy, but Soldiers tromped through the thickets and downed pines to find their way to the points in the field as indicated by instructions given to them on sheets of paper. Feeling intensity of pain, Spc. Wilson prepared for the next event by wrapping his sprained ankle tightly. As the other Soldiers helped get the boot on his swollen, wrapped foot, a big smile appeared on Wilson's face, and he said he was ready to get the 6-mile, 35-pound ruck forced march over.

As the wind started whipping up a good lash at Camp Shelby, the Soldiers headed to their start place for the forced march.

When they arrived, seemingly out in the middle of nowhere, they unloaded and were debriefed on the trail they needed to take and other information they would need to complete the 6-mile course.

The clock was started and the ten Soldiers were off straggling in groups of twos and threes in the beginning.

Halfway through the course, the winter storm arrived hurling sleet and

cold rain at the runners. All the runners were still on the right track, but it looked as if the weather was going to out-do them.

Way down the road a small figure emerged, head down, he looked determined to show mother-nature a thing or two. As the instructors stared at the runner, one of them could be heard saying, "Well, doesn't that just beat everything? It's Wilson with the bad foot coming in first!"

Yes, it was Wilson, he came across the finish line and kept running; even though he was the smallest of all competitors, it took three instructors to catch him to slow him down and then hold



Spc. Matthew Wilson gets his sprained foot wrapped up before he takes his six-mile march.

him up as Wilson caught his breath and then gave them that awesome smile.

Sleet had already begun pummeling the Soldiers long before they all had crossed the finish line, and the temperature dropped to just above 30 degrees. After a long day, the Soldiers relished warm showers, warm clothes and warm food.

Saturday morning arrived as did the final event of the competition.

Meeting a board of three command sergeants major was not something any of the Soldiers were relaxed about; they took turns looking over each other to ensure their uniforms were squared away before approaching the board of interviewers. Some thought this was the hardest part of the competition.

The 10 Soldiers appeared to have formed a certain bond between them; they wanted to win, but they also watched out for their fellow Soldiers throughout the competition.

Last year's AGR Soldier of the Year winner, and also NCO of the Year Regional winner who went on to National Level competition, Sgt. (now Chief Warrant Officer) Jesse Lindsey from the 1st Battalion 198th Armor, spent his time

with the competitors this year giving them support and answering any questions they might have.

"I am very proud to be here, I know how much the Mississippi National Guard has done for me and what winning last year has done for me as a Soldier, I just felt I should give back and do something for these Soldiers," said Lindsey during the awards banquet held Saturday night prior to revealing the winners of the 2008 Soldier of the Year Awards competition.

Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross, the adjutant General of Mississippi, and Maj. Gen. Ike Pylant, assistant adjutant general for the Army National Guard were on hand to present the many awards presented.

Runner up awards were presented to seven of the competitors, and winners of the competition's three categories were: 2008 Soldier of the Year - Spc. Matthew Wilson; 2008 NCO of the Year - Sgt. Michael Willis; and 2008



2008 Soldier of the Year Competitors--top row (l-r) Sfc. Jonathan R. Luke, Philadelphia; Spc. Aaron Proctor, Crystal Springs; and Spc. Earnest C. Lowery Jr., Brandon. (Middle Row) Spc. Jeffrey A. Walker Jr., Crystal Springs; SSgt. Johnathan Rawls of Gulfport; Sgt. Michael W. Willis of Moss Point; and Sfc. Aaron N. Gatherright III, of Hattiesburg. (Bottom row) Sgt. Jerry O. Johnson, Lena; Sgt. Contarus D. Carter, Louisville, Spc. Matthew L. Wilson, Madison and Sgt. Olinger B. Cob of Sherman.

AGR Soldier of the Year - Sfc. Aaron Gatherright.

A very loud applause broke out when Wilson was announced winner of the 2008 Soldier of the Year award. His fellow competitors cheered and were first to shake his hand and congratulate Wilson. He gave them a million dollar smile that could only mean -- thanks a million!

The three Soldiers recently were recognized during the Mississippi National Guard NCO Association Conference held in Jackson, Miss., April 18-20. They received gift certificates of money, military clothing and many other gifts during the conference.

All three Soldiers said they look forward to the regional challenge and to bring back a win for Mississippi.



▲ **2008 Soldier of the Year Winners**--Shown here with Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross, the adjutant general of Mississippi, are the three winners of the three Soldier of the Year categories for 2008. They are (from left) Sgt. Michael Willis, NCO of the Year; Spc. Matthew Wilson, Soldier of the Year; General Cross; and Sfc. Aaron N. Gatherright, AGR Soldier of the Year. All three will go on to compete at the regional level which will be held in May 2008.



Members of the 185th Aviation prepare cables to airlift a KFOR vehicle from the ground in Kosovo.

Changes 'In The Air' for Aviation

■ From MSNG Annual Review; all photos by SSgt. Maury Schuh

Transformation is "in the air" for the Aviation Community in the Mississippi Army National Guard.

FY06 saw the 1/185th Aviation Battalion transform from a General Support Aviation Battalion into an Air Assault Battalion. G Company, 185th Aviation was re-designated as B Company, 1/111th Aviation with six CH-47D aircraft assigned. The 185th Aviation Group became the 185th Theater Aviation Brigade on Sept. 1, 2006.

In the attack community, Mississippi's eight AH-64 Apaches now belong to the 151st Aviation as C Company, which is currently redeployed from Iraq. Mississippi will soon acquire 10 OH-58Ds that will organize under C troop 1/230th Air Cavalry Squadron. The Mississippi Reconnaissance and Air Interdiction (RAID) has transformed to C Company 1/114th Security and Services Battalion. Mississippi's Air Traffic Services unit, K Company 185th Aviation has now consolidated its assets in Southaven, Miss., and has been redesignated as an Airfield Operations Detachment.

Mississippi also acquired two UH-1 aircraft, and mobilized nine crewmembers and medics. The new unit will handle MEDEVAC emergencies and forest fires at Camp Shelby.

Select members of the Aviation Brigade prepare to redeploy for a tour in Kosovo soon. They include 140 members of Headquarters, 1st Battalion, 185th Aviation Air Assault, and Companies A and D. Mississippi also will be deploying members of Company I, 185th Avn (C-23 Serpa unit) for a tour in Iraq.

Training and equipping Mississippi's aviation units has evolved to further increase the readiness of aviation during times of emergency. The 1/18th Avn Bn has been working closely with military police units in conducting real-world exercises involving a Quick Reaction Force to deal with immediate emergency threats within the state. The lessons that were learned from Hurricane Katrina were evident in the Annual Training of aviation this past year at Camp McCain. The units war-gamed possible hurricane scenarios and courses of action. New equipment such as hoists, water buckets, communications, and tracking systems are being fielded that will further improve aviation's capability should another crisis occur.

The Mississippi Guard is slated to receive the UH-72 Lakota which will be used by the Security and Support Battalion for Homeland Security missions. Scheduled rollout date is June 7 in Tupelo.



Flying across the snow covered mountains in Kosovo.

DEPLOYMENT ARRIVALS/DEPARTURES

Arrivals:

These are units who have redeployed during the months of January-April 2008:

- 1687th Truck Company, Southaven,

Departures:

These units deployed or have been deployed during the months of January-April 2008:

- 102nd Mobile PA Det, Jackson, 03/06/08 (11 pax)
- 890th Engr Bn, Gulfport, 03/30/08 (159 pax)
- 288th Sapper Co, Houston, 06/07/07 (92)
- 1387th QM Water Co, Philadelphia, 06/10/07 (153 pax)
- 113th MP Co, Brandon, 06/14/07 (143 pax)
- 230th Concrete Det, Gulfport/Purvis, 07/19/07 (12 pax)
- 231st Sur&DsgnTM, Gulfport, 07/19/07 (12 pax)
- 1108th AVCRAD, Gulfport 29 July 2007 (93 pax)
- 1/185th Avn Bn, Tupelo/Jackson, 07/15/07 (125 pax)

At the end of April 2008, there 2343 a total of 1,739 Soldiers deployed in support of operations for OEF, OIF or GWOT. Many were single volunteers and many were assigned to Camp Shelby for duty.

For the 186th Air Refueling Wing, Meridian's Air National Guard base, there was a total of 156 members on deployment orders, most in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. There were 120 deployed OCONUS, 6 deployed CONUS, 29 home station (not on medical hold), and one on medical hold, through 30 April 2008.

Several units have also been alerted for mobilization call-up in the near future. Co I, 185th Aviation Bn, with headquarters in Jackson; 1st Bn, 204th Air Defense Artillery, with headquarters in Newton; 155th Brigade Combat Team with headquarters in Tupelo; 168th Engineering Brigade with headquarters in Vicksburg and Det. 1, 230th ACS, with its headquarters in Tupelo.



890th Engineer Battalion IS OFF TO IRAQ



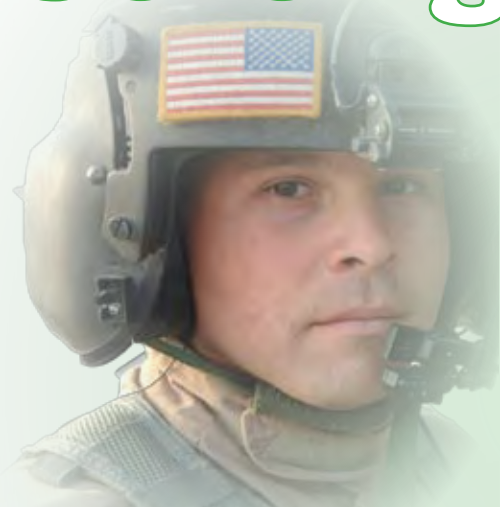
1687th Truck Company IS HOME!



102nd Mobile Public Affairs Det IS OFF TO AFGHANISTAN

MARRIAGE PREP

Strong Bonds



I miss my family terribly, but we are flying non-stop here in Iraq and I don't have much time to communicate with them.



I feel alone in handling all these problems by myself and being both mother and father to a 7-year old child.



■ By Sandy Ates, Staff Writer

Army's Plans for Soldiers' Well-Being

When a Soldier deploys and returns for a reunion with his family, no doubt changes will be noticed around home. More than likely, the Soldier himself/herself has done some changing as well.

Separation can be hard on a marriage, and if there were problems in the marriage before the Soldier deployed, it is highly likely that it will not survive a year-long deployment, says State Chaplain (Col) Tommy W. Fuller, Joint Force Headquarters, Mississippi Army National Guard.

"The Army witnessed an unusually high number of divorces among deployed troops," said Fuller. "There was also an increase in suicides, injuries and mental/emotional problems, and many of the problems

could be attributed to family issues."

Army well-being is directly linked to the relevance and readiness of the Army (several other branches of the armed forces also noted the jump in crisis statistics among its members), and are now focusing on meeting the needs of Soldiers before, during and after deployments.

The Army Well-Being program is the "bridge" that connects Army needs with individual needs and at the core of all Well-Being initiatives are four strategic goals. These goals address the primary and basic needs of each member of the Total Army Family -To Serve, To Live, To Connect and To Grow.

Marriage PREP® or Prevention and Relationship Enhancement

Program, is one of the best courses provided by the Army today for Well-Being of the Soldier and his/her relationship with a spouse.

PREP® offers a fresh approach to solving problem areas in marriages. The workshop and material teach couples the skills they need to nurture a lasting love. Couples spend most of their time in special discussions or practicing skills.

It is not group therapy, but an educational and practical application opportunity to learn what works in marriage and what makes marriage work. The program begins with teaching effective communication skills, addresses problem resolution strategies that work, reveals how to discover the hidden issues in every



▲ "With the military going through such high operations today, this seminar should be a part of mandatory training for all married couples. The tools learned in this seminar are useful for all married couples, regardless of how that marriage is going. Using these tools should provide a foundation for the couples to discuss and work through issues that all marriages face. I came wanting my wife to know how much I love her and with these tools learned through this seminar, I feel I will be better able to show her how strong my love is for her." **Howard E. (Gene) Touchstone.** "I think it opens doors for discussion of topics that help with marriage. It gave specific ways of dealing with problems that I had never heard before. I believe that the book and "take home" material could be very helpful." **Cappie Touchstone.**



▲ "Coming into this seminar, I thought I knew everything that makes a marriage work. This seminar taught me how to communicate effectively with my wife. I will take the skills I learned and use them to make my marriage better," **Marcus Washington.** "This seminar was an eye-opener. It allowed me to find ways to make our marriage better. It gave us the opportunity to tune into our feelings about our relationship. I learned that with good communication a marriage can actually last a lifetime," **Wylinda Washington**



▲ "The PREP course gave us a tool to use that would allow us to take the floor with one another when discussing issues. In the past, we both would be too busy yelling at one another and not listening to what was said." **Nick Tran.** "We had a lot of 'realizations' that I truly believe will help our marriage go forward. It also reminded me to allow for some things I don't always understand about him, due to him having been through two deployments. It was enlightening, entertaining and even humorous at times." **Heather Tran.**



▲ "The PREP® Marriage course is a great course to attend. We are parents of two children and grandparents of five. This has taught us to take time for us. The 'date night' Saturday night with no children or grandchildren - we needed this time to be us. We sometimes forget we need to do things for ourselves and not our children. I really liked the Speaker and Listener. We were bad about solving problems fast and not looking at things long term. We will now take more time to solve these. I like the idea of a Time Out and taking about it before you talk it out. I think all couples could benefit from this course if they will just try. It really gives you the tools to change your life and marriage." **Dianne Varnes.** "Lots of people tried to get us to come to the meetings; last year and this year also. I finally took the time to come to one and I really did enjoy myself and my wife also; I have always had all the things we talked about, and have tried to put them in play, but something has always come up to not do them. Now I feel that I can try to do lots better at this. I've learned sometimes I need to ask my wife about her feelings instead of thinking I knew them. As a whole, take time with one another and enjoy and have fun in a marriage instead of getting caught up in life, financial, or feelings. I think this was a great thing the Army has done. I really hope they continue this for the Soldiers. Even if you think everything is okay in your marriage, you can always improve; everyone can. I thank everyone that was involved in presenting this," **Richard D. Varnes.**

Marriage PREP® - Strong Bonds program is for every marriage no matter how long you've been married.

relationship, and then moves into caring, fun and friendship. Key topics include expectations, commitment, forgiveness, feeling understood, and sensuality.

February 15-17, 2008, the Mississippi National Guard had about 30 couples attend a Marriage PREP® - Strong Bonds retreat at the Eola Hotel in Natchez, Miss.

Not only did couples attending have a very relaxing weekend at a romantically charming hotel, but they also had a 'date night' together on the old historic Mississippi River town.

Fuller said the Marriage PREP® course is available free to Soldiers of all ranks.

"People normally would pay \$150-300 for the workshop and material, but the Army and now, Air National Guard, get the course for free, and hotel rooms are free as well," said Fuller, noting this particular course was the fourth given since the inception of the course in Mississippi.

Most of the couples attending the February retreat had already experienced deployment. The program however, is set up

to be given prior to deployment says Fuller.

"It has benefited even those who have returned from deployment, however, we may have prevented some of the statistics in divorce had we had the PREP course in place prior to the first deployments."

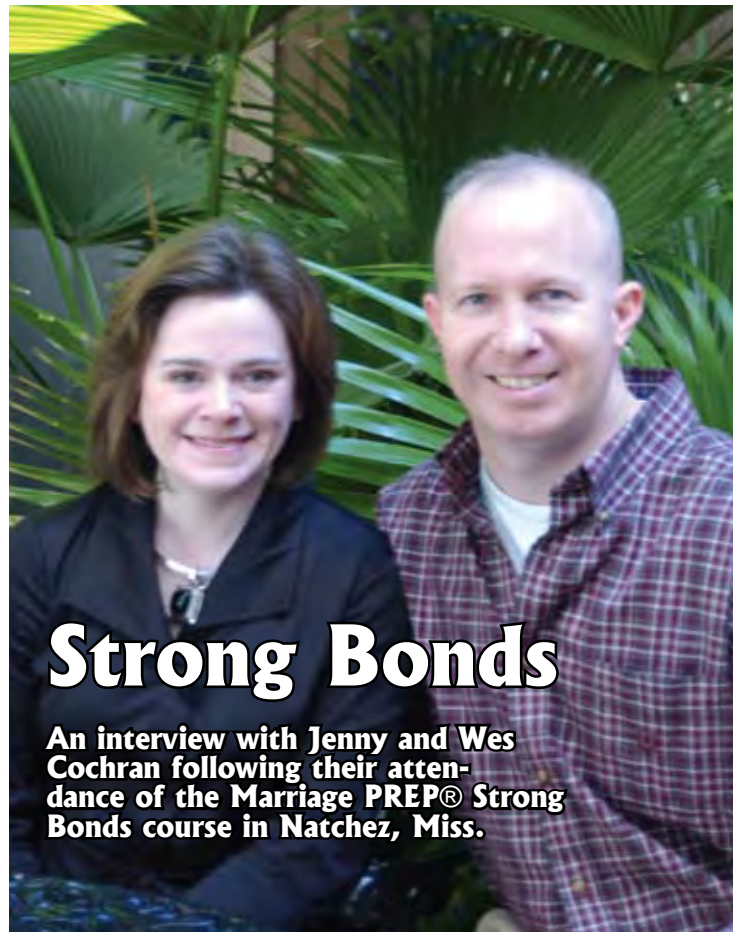
Most in attendance said they would like to have other similar programs available for the Soldiers and family through the Army.

"There are many new programs coming down through the Army Well-Being initiatives for Soldiers," said Fuller. "In a recent conference we discussed a program for single Soldiers on how to select a proper potential marriage partner; there is also a program being developed for parents and children and you will see those being incorporated into the Mississippi National Guard in the near future."

One officer and his wife gave a detailed account of what they experienced during a first deployment and facing a second deployment when attending the course in February.

CONTINUES ON
NEXT PAGE





Jenny and Wes Cochran, Brandon, Miss.

WES: I thought the conference was excellent; it was very well planned, put together and much needed. It is probably one of the best things the Guard has done for me and my family. I think it should be mandatory for all married Soldiers to attend. Deployments put a lot of stress on the family.

JENNY: His first deployment was hard. At the time we had a 15-month old and a three-year old, and I'm a diabetic, but it made me stronger. Which is interesting because I don't like change and have always depended on him helping me. I thought the title of the course was great, Strong Bonds – Marriage PREP®.

WES: We have been to other marriage conferences before and have learned about the listening skills, but the problem-solving skills probably are the biggest things we've brought out of this - just the technique. Of course, I've learned military problem solving and I can tell you, military problem solving is different than marriage problem-solving. So to have the problem solving technique-- because we've run into that. We have discussed a problem and a couple months later we discuss the same problem again without a resolution. So, it is good to have a technique to come to a resolution.

JENNY: The military can put a strain on any marriage. So, that's a problem in itself. Not having your husband-- it seems when an important event comes up in your life he has National Guard drill or something like that. That has always made friction. But through the techniques I told him how much I liked the multiple speakers, many being chaplains and Christ-centered because that is what we base our

marriage on, Christ.

WES: This conference was beneficial. We were in civilian clothes. We weren't military. We didn't identify with military but with marriage.

WES: The National Guard is a huge part of the Army. They need to invest time, money and resources in the Guard and Reserves, because they invested in the full-time forces. Big Time and they need to invest it in the Guard. Because we are a vital part of the nation's armed forces. And by doing that I really think it will pay dividends. By investing in the family like whether it be single, married, they need to because the National Guard has put forth a big effort the National Guard as a whole and on our families.

WES: Like Jenny said, it changes the family.

JENNY: It was hard letting him step back in when he came back from Iraq. I was mom, dad, bottle washer, nurse, cook, everybody's everything, all by myself.

WES: She made all the decisions about everything. We didn't have huge issues, but just over the time getting back into the lives we had—we both had changed.

JENNY: We went through a lot of changes. We actually moved. We moved from Madison to Brandon and sent our children to school at a Christian academy in Pelahatchie. So we went from him being gone, to coming back, to us moving. We went through lots of changes, but we had prepared ourselves for some of that.

JENNY: It changed me. Before I couldn't handle things and now I say I can handle that. It has given me strength. Now, I welcome change; I desire change more because its something different. That's the positive thing.

WES: I have 16 years of military service. I found many changes after I got back. I saw so many things when I deployed, and that's where the real challenges came in. I was the commander, so I constantly battled personal problems. I never thought I would. That's all I did. It took up 99% of my time. Now if I see one of my troops, even though they had an issue when deployed, I just love to see them. We have a bond now that you can't take away; we endured so many hardships together. Now even though there are challenges we endured, it is all good now.

JENNY: He was committed to his troops, and to our family. He's always been strong and committed while I struggle when things get rough. I think that's what the deployment did to our family, it made us realize we are committed to being a couple and a family. Even when the going gets tough.

WES: While deployed you (as a commander) couldn't have problems, you couldn't have friends. But, I enjoyed being a commander. The problems I encountered were always about the Soldiers' family. We need to spend more time with family before deployment. We already know how to train. Good families make good Soldiers. That's what allows you to go and do your job as a Soldier. This is what the Marriage PREP® Strong Bonds focused on. I would have to recommend it to every married Soldier in the National Guard.

JENNY: Everyone needs to make a commitment to their spouse. Some people just throw up their hands in a marriage when things go wrong. They don't commit themselves to the marriage. I am grateful for the seminar and the tools it provided for improving the relationship between husband and wife. It shows that you have to fight for your marriage as a commitment, just as you fight and train for the military commitment you made.



2008 Family of the Year - ARNG



2008 Readiness Group of the Year



FRG Volunteer of the Year - ANG



FRG Coordinator of the Year - ANG

Family Readiness Awards

The Family Readiness Group Workshop was held in Gulfport, Miss., March 9-10, 2008. During the early part of the ceremonies several awards were presented for 2008 Family awards for both the Army and Air National Guard FRG programs.

2008 FAMILY OF THE YEAR - ARNG

Mississippi Army National Guard
William and April Bullard and Family

2008 FAMILY OF THE YEAR - ANG

Mississippi Air National Guard
MSGT Edward and Cindy Hansen and Family

FAMILY READINESS GROUP OF THE YEAR

Mississippi Army National Guard
1687th Trans Co, Southaven, Miss.

FAMILY READINESS GROUP OF THE YEAR

Mississippi Air National Guard
172nd Airlift Wing, Jackson, Miss.

FRG VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Mississippi Army National Guard
Mrs. Marie Sullivan, 1687th Trans Co., Southaven

FRG VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Mississippi Air National Guard
Mrs. Paulette Lafferty, 186th Air Refueling Wing

FRG COORDINATOR OF THE YEAR

Mississippi Army National Guard
SGT Thomas Jones, Det 1, 858th Horizontal

FRG COORDINATOR OF THE YEAR

Mississippi Air National Guard
Lt. Col. Betty Miles-Newman, 183rd AES, Jackson

BEST YOUTH PROJECT

"Flight to the North Pole"
172nd Airlift Wing, Jackson

COMMUNITY OF THE YEAR

Flowood, Mississippi
172nd Airlift Wing, Jackson



2008 Family of the Year - ANG



FRG Volunteer of the Year - ARNG



FRG Coordinator of the Year - ARNG



2008 Community of the Year

■ Photos by Sandy Ates



Vet Center Offers National Guard Members Help

■ By Sandy Ates, Staff Writer

When Soldiers deploy/redeploy and they have problems they just can't seem to sort out themselves, they can find real help at their nearest Vet Center.

The Vet Center was established in 1979 by Congress. This was to help the returning Vietnam Vets. They had an extremely hard time adjusting when they returned, according to Don Malin, Global War on Terror (GWOT) Outreach Specialist at the Jackson Vet Center.

"This was done by veterans who for the most part understood those vets who were having a hard time," Malin said. "This is (Vet Center) kind of an oasis amidst the chaos of their life."

The Vet Center helps the returning war vets – be they National Guard or Reserve members – get back into 'normal' life. They do this by providing readjustment counseling.

"We offer individual, group, marriage and sexual trauma counseling," said Malin describing services offered at the Vet Centers across the country. "We do bereavement counseling for families that have lost loved ones in a combat zone. We make referrals to veterans wanting help with benefits. We provide community education and help the public know about the issues and that the Vet Center can be an additional tool for others to use."

Often veterans don't know where to go for help, or possibly can't afford to go to civilian counselors for the help they need or help for the family. The Vet Center is an option open to the veteran.

The Vet Center has improved the veteran's way of life by providing supportive counseling based on their needs therefore improving individual and family functioning. We have implemented an OEF/OIF group. We also have family support meetings that began in March 2008 to provide support for those family members and loved ones who are living with or caring for a veteran that served in a combat zone and are experiencing symptoms of stress and fatigue often called secondary trauma or compassion fatigue."

There are currently six employees that make up the Vet Center in Jackson. They include Robert W. Cheeks M.A. team leader and counselor (readjustment counseling therapist); Tamiko T. McCollum, Sammie Bateman, Micah Taylor all social workers; Annie Grantham, Office Manager and Malin who serves as the GWOT outreach specialist.

Most employees are either current or former members of the military said Malin bringing experience and familiarity with the mindset of the military.

The Vet Centers have flexible hours said Malin. Normally the Jackson Vet Center operates from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm through the week, and also has a group that meets on Tuesday evening at 5:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Veterans can walk in or schedule an appointment as needed with little or no waiting time. There is no cost for services at the centers, however, veterans must be eligible for services verified by providing the center with a copy of their DD 214, or the Vet Center can assist them acquiring their DD 214 if needed.

"The Jackson Vet Center serves 50 counties consisting of 35, 000 square miles and 141, 000 veterans,"



The Jackson Vet Center - serves 50 counties consisting of over 35,000 square miles and 141,000 vets. It is located at 1755 Lelia Drive, Jackson, Miss., off Lakeland Drive.



▲ Employees of the Jackson Vet Center are (back row left-right), Micah Taylor, Tamiko McCollum and Sammie Bateman, liscensed master social workers, and Don Malin, Outreach Specialist. Front row: Robert Cheeks, team leader and counselor, and Annie Grantham, of-ice manager.

said Malin. "We average 4,100 vet visits a year. The Biloxi Vet Center serves seven counties on the coast and the Memphis Vet Center covers 25 northern counties."

Malin said the Vet Centers make numerous referrals to various agencies depending on the veteran's individual needs. These referrals most often include the VA hospital for additional mental health or medical care, as well as the VA Regional Office to assist the veterans with claims; they also refer vets to local community centers like the WIN Job Centers.

"My role at the Vet Center is to get in front of the OEF/OIF veterans during drill or one –on–one and tell them about **the best kept secret in the veteran community**, the Vet Center," said Malin. "I would like to speak to all the men and women of the Army and Air National Guard and Reservists. I would like to talk to the VFW or other community services about the Vet Center so they can let the veterans know we are here for them."

If you would like Don Malin to come to your unit to speak give him a call at (601) 965-5727. We will also be bringing you additional information about the Vet Center in future issues of the Guard Detail.

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Army suicides, attempts rise despite efforts

WASHINGTON (AP) - U.S. Soldiers are committing suicide at record levels, young officers are abandoning their military careers, and the heavy use of forces in Iraq has made it harder for the military to fight conflicts that could arise elsewhere.

Unprecedented strains on the nation's all-volunteer military are threatening the health and readiness of the troops.

While the spotlight Wednesday was on congressional hearings with the U.S. ambassador and commanding general for Iraq, Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Richard Cody was in a hearing room explaining how troops and their families are being taxed by long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the prospect of future years of conflict in the global war on terror.

"That marathon has become an enduring relay and our Soldiers continue to run — and at the double time," Cody said. "Does this exhaust the body and mind of those in the race, and those who are ever present on the sidelines, cheering their every step? Yes. Has it broken the will of the Soldier? No."

And it's not just the people that are facing strains.

Equipment is wearing out

Military depots have been working in high gear to repair or rebuild hundreds of thousands of pieces of equipment — from radios to vehicles to weapons — that are being overused and worn out in harsh battlefield conditions. The Defense Department has asked for \$46.5 billion in this year's war budget to repair and replace equipment damaged or destroyed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Army and the Marine Corps have been forced to take equipment from non-deployed units and from pre-positioned stocks to meet needs of those in combat — meaning troops at home can't train on the equipment.

National Guard units have only an average of 61 percent of the equipment needed to be ready for disasters or attacks on the U.S., Missouri Democrat Ike Skelton lamented at a hearing of the House Armed Services Committee.

Cody and his Marine counterpart, Gen. Robert Magnus, told the committee they're not sure their forces could handle a new conflict if one came along.

An annual Pentagon report this year found there was a significant risk that the U.S. military could not quickly and fully respond to another outbreak elsewhere in the world. The classified risk assessment concluded that long battlefield tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with persistent terrorist activity and other threats, are to blame.

The review grades the armed services' ability to meet the demands of the nation's military strategy — which would include fighting the current wars as well as any potential outbreaks in places such as North Korea, Iran, Lebanon or China.

Similarly, a 400-page January report by the independent Commission on the National Guard and Reserves found the force isn't ready for a catastrophic chemical, biological or nuclear attack on this country, and National Guard forces don't have the equipment or training they need for the job.

Strain on individuals has been repeatedly documented.

Recruiting is more difficult It contributes to the difficulty in getting other Americans to join the volunteer military. The Army struggles to find enough recruits each year and to keep career Soldiers.

Thousands more troops each year struggle with mental health problems because of the combat they've seen. The lengthening of duty tours to 15 months from 12 a year ago also has been blamed for problems as has the fact that Soldiers are being sent back for two, three or more times.

President Bush will announce on Thursday that the length of tours will go back to 12 months for Army units heading to war after Aug. 1, defense officials said Wednesday.

Some 27 percent of Soldiers on their third or fourth combat tours suffered anxiety, depression, post-combat stress and other problems, according to an Army survey released last month. That compared with 12

percent among those on their first tour.

In Afghanistan a range of mental health problems increased, and 11.4 percent of those surveyed reported suffering from depression.

Medical professionals themselves are burning out and said in the survey that they need more help to treat the troops. The report also recommended longer home time between deployments and more focused suicide-prevention training. It said civilian psychologists and other behavioral health professionals should be sent to the warfront to augment the uniformed corps.

Though separate data reported on divorce rates appeared to be holding steady last year, Soldiers say they are having more problems with their marriages due to the long and repeated separations.

As many as 121 troops committed suicide in 2007, an increase of some 20 percent over 2006, according to preliminary figures released in January.

If all are confirmed, that would be more than double the 52 reported in 2001, before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks prompted the Bush administration to launch the war in Afghanistan.

A **Ask your buddy**

- Have the courage to ask the question but stay calm.
- Ask the question directly, e.g. Are you thinking of killing yourself?

Care for your buddy

- Remove any means that could be used for self-injury
- Calmly control the situation; do not use force.

Escort for your buddy

- Never leave your buddy alone.
- Escort to the chain of command, a Chaplain, a behavioral health professional, or a primary care provider.

A



Army Family Covenant

CW3 Melissa Tanksley, Family Readiness Officer, displays the Army's new Family Covenant signed by the Army's top leaders and presented during a March Workshop. Within the Covenant is written, **We Recognize:** The commitment and increased sacrifices that our families are making every day; the strength of our Soldiers comes from the strength of our families. **We Are Committed To:** Providing Soldiers and Families a Quality of Life that is commensurate with their service; provide our family a strong, supportive environment where they can thrive, building a partnership with Army families that enhances their strength and resilience. **We Are Committed to Improving Family Readiness By:** Standardizing and funding existing family programs and services; increasing access and quality of health care, improving Soldier and Family housing, ensure excellence in schools, youth services and child care, expanding education and employment opportunities for family members.

The covenant was also signed by Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross, the adjutant general of Mississippi, Maj. Gen. James E. "Ike" Pylant, assistant adjutant general-Army and presented for their signature by Mr. J. Dwight Dyess, civilian aide to the secretary of the Army for the State of Mississippi.

Soldiers From Mississippi's 230th Concrete Team Patches Roads After IED Blasts

■ By Sgt. Henry Bauer
769th Engineering Battalion, 35th Engineering Brigade

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Craters from improvised-explosive devices can be found throughout the thousands of miles of roadway that cover Baghdad and the surrounding areas. They are the direct result of IED blasts that were detonated by cowardly criminals against the people of Iraq, its Iraqi security forces and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers.

When the attacks occur, it is time for the Soldiers of the 230th Concrete Team to “pour” into action.

The team is based out of from Purvis, Miss., and is attached to the 769th Engineer Battalion, 35th Engineer Brigade, MND-B.

The 230th Concrete Team consists of Soldiers who specialize as concrete mobile operators and concrete masonry troops in performing what is known as rapid crater repair.

“Through precise planning from the 769th Eng. Bn. from Baton Rouge, La., these missions are flawlessly executed with the assistance of the 851st Vertical Engineer Company from Little Falls, Minn.,” said Lt. Col. Keith Waddell, a native from New Roads, La., who serves as the commander for the 769th Eng. Bn.

“Since arriving to Baghdad in October, this small group has repaired over 105 craters using 828.5 cubic yards of concrete to better assist the local Iraqi people by making their roads safer to drive on and to prevent anti-Iraqi forces from using the same crater to cause further harm,” said Capt. Jason Mahfouz, a native of Lake Charles, La., who serves as the operations officer for the 769th Eng. Bn. “These repairs also benefit the Soldiers of the Multi National Division – Baghdad to carry out their mission here in Iraq.”

A local Iraqi who serves as an Iraqi citizen security officer said “the repairs made to the road are good. The smoother road makes for better driving.”

Whether the sun is beginning to rise or set, the Soldiers from the 230th Concrete Team, with assistance from the 851st Vertical Eng. Co., prepare to head out to perform the rapid crater repair missions. The Soldiers and their equipment head out to various sites, day after day and night after night, to repair the roads that wait ahead of them.

“Once on site, and all security measures have been emplaced, the crater is dug out and shaped so that the reinforcing rebar can be properly placed,” said Sgt. James

Bridges from Gulfport, Miss., who serves as a concrete mobile operator with the 230th Concrete Team.

Because of the hardness of the rock below the roadway, sometimes a pneumatic jackhammer is used to shape the crater that is being repaired. It is a physically demanding task due to the fact that the Soldiers wear sixty pounds or more of protective gear. Once the road is shaped, the Soldiers of the 230th Concrete Team begin to pour concrete from their concrete mobile vehicles.

The task can be challenging at times to get the concrete at the proper texture and consistency. At times, sand needs to be shoveled manually into the mixer. Once the proper mixture is established, the tiring task of spreading the concrete evenly is performed with metal concrete rakes and shovels, said Bridges.

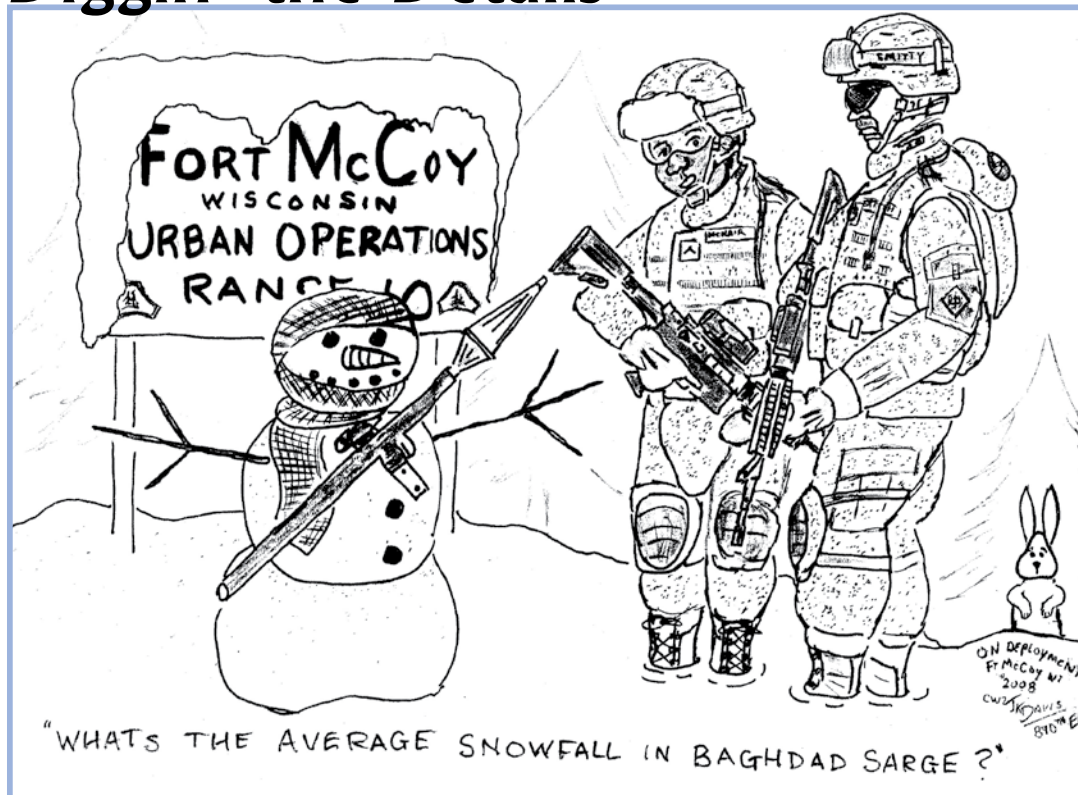


Spc. Robert Fancher, from Grenada, Miss., uses a hand trowel to smooth out concrete for rapid roadway repair in northwestern Baghdad. He is a member of the 230th Concrete Team, Mississippi Army National Guard.

Diggin' the Details

- CW2 Keith Davis, 890th Engineer Bn, cartoonist

Mr. Davis is currently at Fort McCoy with other members of the 890th Engineers conducting training prior to deployment to Iraq. This is a second tour for most of the 890th members. They have been stuck in snow while training in Wisconsin and by the end of May, they will be on their way to the desert heat. That's what ya call Diggin' In—God Speed Soldiers of the 890th EN BN.



Once the concrete is evenly spread out, it is smoothed over with a large float to ensure that it is evenly packed on top. While the process is performed, another Soldier uses a hand trowel to assure that the edges of the newly repaired crater are smoothed over the adjoining edges of the roadway.

Once the crater is repaired, these Soldiers, who have nicknamed themselves the “Goons,” sign the newly repaired roadway with their nickname, date and time. Before leaving the newly repaired area, the Soldiers mark the site in the hopes that passing vehicles in the night will not damage the setting concrete. Once properly marked, the entourage of vehicles move further down the road towards the next crater awaiting much needed repair, said Bridges.

It is with the tireless and physically demanding effort from the Soldiers of the 230th Concrete Team and the 851st Vertical Eng. Co. ensure the roadways throughout the Baghdad area are safe once again for the citizens of Iraq and their brothers and sisters in arms.



TRICARE Reserve Select Plan Available to National Guard Members

The vast majority of active National Guard and Reserve members now have access to a robust TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) health care plan authorized by the 2007 National Defense Authorization Act.

The restructured TRS is affordable and streamlined, featuring continuously open enrollment and monthly premiums of \$81 for the service member only and \$253 for the service member and family. Coverage is comparable to TRICARE Standard and Extra. Members of the National Guard can find out more about TRS and how to purchase coverage through the "My Benefit" portal at www.tricare.mil, or contact their local unit representative.

Gone are the complicated tiers and qualifications, service agreements and varying premiums of previous TRS versions. But, there is an important new exclusion. Excluded from purchasing coverage under the restructured TRS are Selected Reserve members who are eligible for Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB), or currently covered under FEHB (either under their own eligibility or through a family member). By law, TRICARE cannot extend TRS coverage to those Guard and Reserve members who are eligible for FEHB programs as defined in Chapter 89 of Title 5 U.S.C.

Members of the National Guard and Reserves who wish to purchase TRS coverage under the restructured program must go to the National Guard and Reserve Web portal at <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/trs/> and follow the instructions to access the new TRS Request Form. You can then print out the form; attest that you are not eligible for, or covered by, an FEHB plan, and then send the form with one month's premium to the TRICARE South Region Contractor, Humana Military Healthcare Services, Inc., PO Box 105389, Atlanta, GA. 30348-5389 or call 1-800-444-5445, www.humana-military.com.

After purchasing TRICARE Reserve Select, you will receive a welcome letter with TRICARE Reserve Select wallet cards for each member of your family who will be covered. This card contains key information to assist you with your health care coverage. Health care providers will want to see this card before you receive care.

There are annual deductibles for outpatient services: member whose rank is E-4 and below; \$50/individual or \$100/family per fiscal year (October 1 – September 30); member whose rank is E-5 and above; \$150/individual or \$300/family per fiscal year.

After the annual deductible has been met, you pay 15 percent for care received from a TRICARE network provider or 20 percent from care received from a non-network TRICARE-authorized provider. Please contact your physicians to determine if they are TRICARE network providers.

TRICARE Reserve Select coverage includes, but is not limited to:

- Urgent and emergency care, including ambulance services
- Family health care
- Obstetrics, gynecology, and maternity services
- Clinical preventive services, including health screening and immunizations
- Behavioral health care, including partial hospitalization and residential treatment
- Annual eye examinations
- Durable medical equipment and supplies
- Ancillary services such as laboratory and radiology
- Prescription drug coverage

For Soldiers who do not have individual or family health care plans, they now have an affordable and viable alternative to expensive private health insurance.



If you're a member of the Mississippi Army or Air National Guard and are unemployed, or just simply looking for a better job, consider working for the Mississippi National Guard on a full-time or temporary basis. The Guard has many jobs available for you to consider in various locations throughout the state.

You can review current vacancy announcements for Technician-Army, Technician-Air, AGR-Army, AGR-Air and State Employment Opportunities at the Human Resources Office website www.ngms.state.ms.us/hroinfo/hrohomepage.htm.

If you are looking for a GREAT JOB and want to work for the BEST employer in Mississippi, go to the Human Resources website and apply today.



Third Annual Dixie Thunder Run

The Dixie Thunder Run is a benefit ride to raise money for injured Soldiers & the families of Soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The motto "SoldierS HELPING SoldierS" is testimony to the ride's beginnings when a few Soldiers of the 155th Brigade Combat Team of Mississippi chose to get together to help out fellow unit members. As it spread by word of mouth, Soldiers and citizens from numerous units and states wanted to show their support for America's Finest by participating in the Dixie Thunder Run.

Come join us for the best ride ever
28 thru 30 June, 2008

This year's ride will leave
Bancorpsouth Arena Tupelo MS
at 8:00a.m, 28th June

We will be escorted once again
by Mississippi's finest,
MISSISSIPPI HIGHWAY
SAFETY PATROL
To Chunky River
Harley Davidson, Meridian, MS
Where a full day of events are planned.

Next morning "29th" depart
CRHD at 8:00a.m. And on to
Mississippi Coast Harley-
Davidson Biloxi, Ms.

FOR MORE UPDATES: GO TO:
www.dixiethunderrun.net

Moody selected for special job

■ by Ms. Sandy Ates, Staff Writer

The Army is working quickly to field and fully staff new warrior transition units, which provide critical support to wounded Soldiers and their families, the general in charge of the Army Medical Action Plan said.

The Army has created 35 warrior transition units, which consist of 58 companies of about 200 Soldiers each. These units are designed to fill a gap in support personnel for wounded troops that the Army identified after media reports revealed problems with care at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Sergeant First Class Alfreda Moody of Jackson, and a family readiness assistant at the Joint Forces Headquarters, recently was selected to become a member of one of the warrior transition units.

The cadre, or training staff, being recruited to join these warrior transition units consists of civilians and active-duty, reserve and National Guard Soldiers. The units have physicians, nurses, squad leaders, platoon sergeants, and mental health professionals. These leaders are responsible for making sure wounded troops' needs are met, their care is coordinated, and their families are taken care of.

In crafting these units, Army leaders have made sure that the ratio of support personnel to Soldiers stays low. Each squad leader has 12 Soldiers to take care of, whereas in the past he could have as many as 50. The platoon sergeants each have about 36 Soldiers under them, and the commanders have 200. The units also include case managers at a ratio of 1 to 18, which is a vast improvement over the past, when they could have as many as 80 Soldiers they were responsible for, he said.

"Based on my family program experience for the past 15 years, and 16 years of military personnel services prior to those family program years, I have volunteered excitedly for one year of active duty with the

Warrior Transition Units at Ft. Gordon, Georgia," said Moody. "My son John and I have decided that the time has come before I retire, to volunteer to support the wounded Soldiers and Airmen, and their families by providing the same kind of critical support and services that I have worked honorably and assisted on for the Mississippi National Guard, for over 31 years."

These personnel are hand-selected by the unit commanders, who are looking for strong leaders who understand what wounded troops go through and can be sensitive to their needs.

In conjunction with the warrior transition units, the Army also set up Soldier family assistance centers, which provide administrative and social work services for family members staying with wounded troops. These will especially help families that aren't familiar with the military become oriented with installations and find lodging and other services.

While Moody will be assisting in family support operations, her participation in the program will provide a great resource due to her own experiences.

"John is presently on active duty and has recently returned from Iraq with the U.S. Army," explained Moody. "We know the hardships of deployment separations; and we know the blessings that a dedicated Family Readiness Program can provide. In other words, my family and I have experienced and survived a lot; and now, 'I want to help the wounded warriors and their families.'"

The overall approach by the Army medical system is to promote not only physical healing in wounded warriors, but also encourage their ambitions and goals, whether they be to stay in the military or transition into the civilian world. The entire family gets involved in the process of healing the Soldier.

"Please know that I thank the Guard for giving me the opportunity to serve God and my country. And, I appreciate my co-workers, friends and family for allowing me to work and dedicate my life lovingly to helping others," said Moody.



Thomas earns rare, unique award

■ By Sandy Ates, Staff Writer

A recent order signed by the Secretary of the Army and Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross, the adjutant General of Mississippi, recognized one of the Mississippi Army National Guard's top officers, Colonel Robert F. Thomas of Crystal Springs. The award order, rarely presented, was for his outstanding volunteer service to Mississippi's Hinds County.

The Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal is to honor a member of the armed forces who performs outstanding volunteer community service of sustained, direct, and consequential nature.

A letter from Hinds County Sheriff Malcolm E. McMillin prompted the award be presented to the Bay Springs native for his many years of dedicated service to the Hinds County Reserve Deputy Sheriff unit.

"For over 17 years Hinds County has benefited greatly from the services of a unit of reserve deputy sheriffs. All reserve deputies serve without compensation and have to provide their own uniform and weapon(s)," explained McMillin. "Each deputy undergoes law enforcement training and works on details such as providing law enforcement protection at community events, and works on details such as providing law enforcement protection at community events, patrolling highways and streets of the county, supervising work details, radio room duties, serving warrants, and conducting road safety checks as such."

McMillin said he was proud to have Thomas lead his team of deputies.

"Col. Robert Thomas has contributed as a volunteer, the highest levels of dedication and participation, including the very demanding position of commander of the reserve deputy sheriffs. His service began in August 1997 and his tour as unit commander concluded August 8, 2007...Colonel Thomas has made invaluable contributions over



▲ Maj. Gen. Ike Pylant, assistant adjutant general-Army, pins the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal on Col. Robert F. Thomas for his service to Hinds County. (Photo by Sandy Ates)

the many years to the safety of Hinds County residents," noted McMillin in his letter to Maj. Gen. Ike Pylant, assistant adjutant general and commander of the Mississippi Army National Guard.

"You won't find a more dedicated leader than Colonel Thomas," said Pylant. "It is indeed an honor to present the award to him personally."

Following the scandal of Abu Ghraib, much of the success of turning the trashed and utterly de-

stroyed detention center into one of the finest Forward Operating Bases in Iraq was a result of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 114th Army Liaison Team, and the leadership of Colonel Thomas. Ultimately, his leadership under the command of Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, Multi-National Forces in Iraq, led to restore America's honor and Thomas and his team to command, organize, and construct a second U.S. detention facility in Iraq.

Seeing Our History Beneath the Soil

■ By Ms. Rita Fields, Environmental Office

Camp Shelby has a long and rich cultural history. Beginning with Native American Indians, the land on which Camp Shelby is constructed has served a multitude of purposes leaving behind a rich archaeological record of south Mississippi history.

During early statehood, the area where Camp Shelby is located served as early settler homestead locations until the coming of the timber industry, when vast acres of land and timber were purchased from local landowners for forestry activities.

Following the timber industry, land for Camp Shelby would be forever changed with the coming of World War I and World War II. It is during these periods that Camp Shelby took the form it is today and like Native American and early historic settlers, the United States military left its archaeological mark on the land.

Today, cultural resources at Camp Shelby include Native American camp sites, historic homestead sites and cemeteries, World War I and II archaeological sites, and historic structures association with World Wars I and II. The vast majority fall within the range of archaeological sites.

These sites are identified through cultural resource management practices by professional archaeologists and are an ongoing part of the environmental program for the Mississippi National Guard.

As part of the ongoing cultural resources work conducted at Camp Shelby, new techniques in detecting archaeological features such as cooking pits, storage pits, and hearths have been employed with great success. One of these, the use of remote sensing, has recently been used to determine the presence of subsurface features related to prehistoric Native American occupations that date to roughly 2000 years ago.

The Mississippi National Guard, in conjunction with archaeologists with the University of Southern Mississippi and University of Mississippi, have been excavating on two prehistoric archaeological sites at



Camp Shelby this past fall. The excavations are part of the "ground truthing" phase of remote sensing where the remote sensing is used to 'x-ray' the ground prior to digging.

This application of remote sensing can expedite cultural resource projects in the event that a potentially significant archaeological site is in danger of being destroyed or damaged.

There are a number of instruments that are used for such work, some with cinematic names like "fluxgate" and magnetic gradiometer." In fact, the fluxgate instrument is considered the workhorse in archaeological geophysical surveying in Britain and the United States. So what exactly does a fluxgate do?



A fluxgate is a magnetometer, a group of instruments used to measure magnetic field strength on the surface of the Earth. Whenever there is a deviation in the instrument's readings, then the surveyors have found a sub-

surface target. The reason artifacts create anomalies in the magnetic field is a consequence of the stone materials used in making the artifacts plus the heating of the artifacts. Therefore, artifacts that are typically found via this method include fireplaces, furnaces,



burnt clay floors, heaths, kilns, daub, bricks and walls composed of magnetically anomalous rocks like basalt. Also, objects made of iron materials may be targeted, such as historic nails, in order to map areas of interest.

After surveying the area, the data is downloaded into a computer program where it maps anomalies, revealing potential artifacts. Then, excavations are performed on these areas to identify the anomalies. Such technology is boundless and the Mississippi Army National Guard is just beginning to employ its use for cultural resources.

Expect to hear of more discoveries in the future. For any questions, please contact Ms. Rita Fields (601) 558-2596.



◀ Kiss the Cow--Col. Alan Brewer contemplates before locking lips with a Scottish Highlander bull during a family readiness group (FRG) fundraiser for the 113th Military Police Company. Brewer, the human resources officer for the Mississippi National Guard, agreed to pucker up if the goal of \$2,500 was raised by the FRG. The 113th is currently deployed to Iraq. The bull is reported to have asked for a tetanus shot. (Photo by 1st Lt. Andy Thaggard)



▲ CHANGES--Col. Johnny Sellers receives the colors of the 168th Engineer Brigade from Brig. Gen. Ben Gaston during a change of command ceremony. The 168th Engineer Brigade is currently preparing for deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. (Photo by SSG Joel Wagner)



▲ WELCOME HOME--Members of Detachment 16, Operational Support Airlift, are welcomed home by Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross, the adjutant general of Mississippi, during Freedom Salute and homecoming activities at the Army Aviation Support Facility, in Jackson. Pictured, from left, are Chief Warrant 4 Joseph Sharp, Sgt. 1st Class Curtis Boddy, Jr., and Sgt. Charles Baxter. (Photo by SSG Joel Wagner)



◀ G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery Patriot Awards -Two members of the Mississippi National Guard were presented the G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery Patriot Award during the 40th Annual NCO Association conference held in Jackson April 18-20. The G. V. Montgomery Foundation selects one Army Guardsman and one Airman each year through nomination from all state units in the state rated by a selection board for their leadership skills, character, community involvement and military accomplishments. This years selections were (from left) Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Revette of Petal (he is a member of the 154th Regional Training Institute at Camp Shelby), MSgt. Deborah D. Fielder of Meridian, from the 238th Air Support Operations Squadron, Key Field, and presenting the awards was MSgt. (Ret.) Bo Maske, a member of Congressman Montgomery's staff and former member of the Mississippi Air National Guard. (Photo by Sandy Ates, PA Staff)

Professional Skills = Tasty Meals

■ By 1st Lt. Andy Thaggard; All photos by permission of Chris Jenkins, Mississippi University for Women

The Mississippi University for Women's Culinary Arts Institute has partnered with the Mississippi Army National Guard to help Soldiers sharpen their food service skills.

The partnership was officially announced in a March 8 ceremony on the university campus, in Columbus, where Guardsmen also participated in the inaugural culinary arts workshop.

The agreement, nearly two years in the making, is intended to not only help Guard food service professionals refresh and refine basic food preparation techniques and safety practices, but also to promote unit participation in the annual Philip A. Connelly Awards Program.

Objectives of the Connelly Awards Program are: to improve the professionalism of food service personnel, thus providing the best quality food service to supported Soldier; provide recognition for excellence in the preparation and serving of food during field kitchen operations; and provide added incentive to competitive programs by adding a higher level of competition and appropriate recognition.

The Mississippi has twice won the national title in the field feeding division, Army National Guard, first with the HHB, 1-114 Field Artillery, in 1999, and again with the 367th Maintenance Company, in 2007.

Mississippi University for Women has the only bachelor-degree culinary arts program in the state, and regularly competes (and wins) against the nation's oldest and most prestigious culinary programs.

The 10-year agreement provides a unit team of up to eight Soldiers with a no-cost two-day annual workshop at the Culinary Arts Institute's test kitchen. All supplies, housing and meals are included.

The course of instruction can be tailored annually to meet particular team's needs, as well as to provide a chance to prepare the regional Connelly menu under the supervision of a bona-fida master chef.

"They will have confidence in themselves and learn presentation techniques that will give them the competitive edge" said Brigadier General Ben Gaston, who represented the Guard during the signing ceremony.

Ultimately, he added, it's the Soldiers who benefit from a good cooked meal through the team's enhanced cooking skills.



▲ Staff Sgt. Clarence Sipp, left, Company F, 106th Support Battalion, and Staff Sgt. Donald Files, Company D, 106th Support Battalion, begin preparing ingredients in the Culinary Arts Institute's test kitchen.



▲ Chef Josh Oubre, lead workshop instructor, gives seasoning tips to Spc. Dagard Hughes, 367th Maintenance Company.



▲ Dr. Claudia Limbert, president of the Mississippi University for Women, and Brig. Gen. Ben Gaston complete the ceremony formally announcing the partnership.





▲ Airman of the Year 2008: Staff Sgt. Erica D. Harper (right), receives her silver eagle award from Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross, the adjutant general of Mississippi.



▲ NCO of the Year 2008: Staff Sgt. Jennifer D. Powell (right) is presented her silver eagle award by Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross, the adjutant general of Mississippi.



▲ Senior NCO of the Year 2008: Master Sgt. Kevin L. Johnson (right) accepts his eagle award from State Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross.



▲ The Charles L. Sullivan Leadership Award recipient for 2008 was Master Sgt. Robert S. Ellis, Jr. (left).

Airmen of the Year named during annual NCO Association meeting

■ Photos & Story by Sandy Ates, Staff Writer

Every quarter Mississippi Air National Guard bases select its top performing Airman, NCO, and Senior NCO for the quarter. Then, at the end of the year, all quarterly winners are judged and three will become the year's cream of the crop for the year, Airman of the Year, NCO of the Year and Sr. NCO of the Year, and presentations made during the annual conference of the Mississippi National Guard Non-commissioned Officers Association Conference held in April. The Air National Guard also selects one individual Airman to receive the Charles L. Sullivan Leadership Award for their

outstanding leadership abilities as enlisted personnel.

Presenting awards to this year's winners was Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross, the adjutant General of Mississippi, himself an officer of the U.S. Air Force and Mississippi Air National Guard for over 40 years.

Winners were Staff Sgt. Erica D. Harper, Airman of the Year 2008; Staff Sgt. Jennifer D. Powell, NCO of the Year 2008; Master Sgt. Kevin L. Johnson, Senior NCO of the Year 2008; and Master Sgt. Robert S. Ellis, Jr., earned the Charles L. Sullivan Leadership Award for 2008, with his name added to the traveling plaque and kept at his base until a new winner is announced next year.

SPECIAL TROOPS BATTALION, 155TH ARMORED BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

The 150th Combat Engineers get new designation, new name, new unit insignia and coat of arms, but still part of 155th Brigade Combat Team.



Distinctive Unit Insignia. Description: A Silver color metal and enamel device 1 3/16 inches (3.02 cm) in width overall blazoned as follows: Azure, a pale bretessed and double-parted Argent surmounted by a gauntlet closed, palm inward Argent (Silver Gray), charged on the sleeve with two mullets in pale Gules; on a chief of the like, ajourné of the third, a bowie knife fesswise, point to dexter of the last. Attached below a Red scroll inscribed "HONOR IS OUR STRENGTH" in Silver.

Symbolism: Red, white, and blue are the nation's colors and the colors of the Mississippi flag. The pale parted suggests railroad tracks, denoting the City of Meridian, which was founded at the junction of several railroad lines and the home state of the Brigade. The gauntlet represents strength and symbolizes the call sign used by the Headquarters, "Knight." The stars signify the Battalion's combat deployment during World War II and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The chief with the separations illustrates the battlements of a castle and suggests the unit's lineage to the 150th Engineer Battalion. The four merlons commemorate the four Soldiers of the 150th Engineer who lost their lives during Operation Iraqi Freedom: MSG Sean Cooley, SGT Robert McNail, SSG Larry Arnold and SGT Terrence Lee. The bowie knife indicates the Battalion's association to the 155th Armored Brigade Combat Team.

Background: The distinctive unit insignia was approved on 18 April 2008.

Coat of Arms.

Blazon:

Shield: Azure, a pale bretessed and double-parted Argent surmounted by a gauntlet closed, palm inward Argent (Silver Gray), edged of the first, charged on the sleeve with two mullets in pale Gules; on a chief of the last, ajourné Argent, a bowie knife fesswise, point to dexter Argent (Silver Gray).

Crest: That for the regiments and separate battalions of the Mississippi Army National Guard: From a wreath Argent and Azure, a slip of magnolia full flower with leaves Proper behind a trident Sable.

Motto: HONOR IS OUR STRENGTH.



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Jackson, MS 39046

Contact: Micah Taylor at the
Jackson Vet Center
for more information.
(601) 965-5727

IN MEMORIAM

Sergeant Lerando Brown
288th Sapper Company
Killed in Iraq
March 14, 2008



▲ Maj. Gen. Harold A. Cross, the adjutant general of Mississippi presents a folded flag to the widow of Sergeant Lerando Brown, Candice, of Poplarville during funeral services for the Mississippi Army National Guardsman who was killed in Balad, Iraq, March 14. Brown was among 99 members of the 288th Sapper Co, who were mobilized last June and sent to Iraq in September. The Soldiers were conducting engineer support operations. (Photo by 1st Lt. Andy Thaggard.)



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