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Virginia GuardPost

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Virginia Guard supports Hurricane Irene recovery operations

JULY -SEPTEMBER 2011



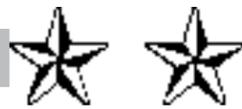
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FROM THE TOP



Virginia National Guard is making a difference right here in the Commonwealth of Virginia

By Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr.
The Adjutant General of Virginia

I continue to feel a great sense of pride in the courage and sacrifice of our Soldiers and Airmen who serve on federal active duty in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn. The Virginia National Guard is also making a significant impact in the lives of citizens right here in Virginia.

In July, Virginia National Guard combat engineers put their military and civilian skills to work with two community service projects in Richmond and Stafford County providing significant improvements to both areas.

In late August, Virginia Guard Soldiers, Airmen and members of the Virginia Defense Force helped state and local authorities respond to damage caused by Hurricane Irene. We also deployed Soldiers to support with clean up efforts in Vermont.

Soldiers from the Petersburg-based 276th Engineer Battalion, 91st Troop Command executed the two community service projects in Stafford County and Richmond during their two-week annual training period from July 16 to 30. The work was part of the Innovative Readiness Training program that allows engineers to put their military skills to work on community service projects approved by National Guard Bureau.

The Soldiers' efforts included clearing and grading a pedestrian and biking trail along Cannon Creek which runs parallel to the Richmond Henrico Turnpike as a part of the Greenway project. In Stafford, the Soldiers prepared an access road for the planned Stafford County Civil War Park.

Not only are these projects beneficial to those communities, but it gives our Soldiers a chance to improve their skills in real world situations and it also clearly demonstrates to those communities and the rest of Virginia the high level of training and mission capabilities of the Guard.



Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr.

We put our engineers to work again in late August when we brought more than 350 personnel on state active duty to assist in the Commonwealth's response to Hurricane Irene from Aug. 27 to 31, 2011.

The Guard began staging forces Aug. 26 at readiness centers in Bowling Green, Emporia and Sandston. We also co-located forces with Virginia State Police personnel in the Eastern Shore Region of Virginia near Onancock.

From these locations Soldiers worked with the VSP to clear nearly 350 fallen trees during the hurricane as well as in the immediate response after the storm had passed. Virginia Guard personnel also rescued 10 stranded motorists near Richmond.

Hurricane Irene caused even more damage to our north, and we sent approximately 20 Soldiers and six 20-ton dump trucks to Vermont where they began running missions on Sept. 8 to assist with clean up efforts after the storm.

The Fort Pickett-based 157th Engineer Platoon provided the personnel and dump trucks, and the Blackstone-based 3647th Maintenance Company provided a

maintenance team and support vehicle.

According to the Vermont Agency of Transportation, 450 miles of Vermont's 2,700 miles of state highway were closed after Hurricane Irene hit. State road crews, contractors and National Guard personnel from six different states worked nearly 16-hour days for eleven days and opened all but 57 miles of state highway. The Soldiers completed their last haul mission Sept. 27 and returned to Fort Pickett Sept. 30.

The examples clearly show that our hard work to train and prepare for rapid response is paying off. Local leaders were amazed by the speed of our Soldiers' work on the community service projects as well as with the quality of work, and our effective response effort for Hurricane Irene here in Virginia as well as in Vermont was recognized by the Secretary of Public Safety and Governor of Virginia.

I also want to acknowledge the continued exceptional performance of the Virginia Defense Force during Hurricane Irene.

The VDF trains and prepares as an all-volunteer force and only receive compensation during state active duty call ups like this. These dedicated professionals selflessly give their time and energy to provide additional capabilities to the Guard, and they are vital to our success.

It is extremely critical that we remember the important roles our families and employers have in our readiness and mission success.

Our families make great sacrifices during our training as well as when we are on duty, and their support is incredibly vital.

Likewise, we give special thanks to the employers of our traditional Soldiers and Airmen who share their employees with the Commonwealth during times of need.

I am proud of the progress we are making in our communities in Virginia, and I thank everyone for their dedicated service to both commonwealth and country.

News Briefs

Fort Pickett selected for further study as a candidate for Foreign Affairs Security Training Center

Governor Bob McDonnell announced July 26 that the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. General Services Administration are conducting further studies at the Virginia Army National Guard's Maneuver Training Center at Fort Pickett and in Nottoway County's Pickett Park to assess the potential for locating a planned Foreign Affairs Security Training Center at the installation.

After a year-long comprehensive search process that included the review of over 40 publicly-held sites in the vicinity of Washington, D.C., Fort Pickett and Pickett Park were selected as a potential candidate. The site will now undergo an environmental impact statement under the National Environmental Policy Act. The EIS will be prepared to address potential impacts to the natural, social

and cultural environment. The study may take up to two years to complete, and will include a robust and transparent public engagement process to answer questions from citizens and address any possible concerns about the project. Following the completion of the EIS, a final decision will be made by the DOS and GSA whether to move forward with the site and develop construction documents.

Once completed, the center will be used to provide security training for DOS and other U.S. government staff posted at American embassies overseas. A small number of foreign security personnel will also receive training at the center. Training is currently conducted at 19 separate locations. The training will include weapons training similar to what is conducted at Fort Pickett and also will include a driving course and classroom instruction. The DOS plans to transfer and/or consolidate a number of staff positions to the site.

The project could potentially bring construction

jobs and other employment to the local community. According to DOS estimates, approximately 300 to 500 jobs could be created as part of the first phase of construction and the preliminary estimate for longer term permanent part- or full-time job ranges from 850 to 1,000.

Data Processing Unit changes command

Lt. Col. Randall Cudworth assumed command of the Virginia National Guard's Fairfax-based Data Processing Unit from Lt. Col. Adam Volant in a change of command ceremony held Aug. 21 at Fort Belvoir. Col. Edward Morgan, commander of the Information Operations Support Center, presided over the guidon exchange that signified the change of command.

A native of Moosic, Pa., Cudworth is a graduate of the University of Scranton with a bachelor's degree in computer science. He holds a master's degree in information assurance from Capitol College.

"The DPU is the force multiplier of the future. It's similar to what the tank or the machine gun were to WWI, and I am privileged to be entrusted with such a profound responsibility," said Cudworth.

The DPU is a unique unit comprised of approximately 160 Soldiers. It provides direct and indirect support to Virginia and to a variety of Department of Defense organizations to include United States Army Cyber Command, the U.S. Army 1st Information Operations Command, Strategic Command, United States Army Network Enterprise Technology Command, and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, and continued support to the National Guard Bureau.

Soldiers from the DPU have been actively conducting real-world missions for the duration of the unit's history in the U.S. and overseas most recently in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Currently, 40 percent of the DPU is deployed on active missions in support of various organizations.

For more on these stories, visit <http://vko.va.ngb.army.mil/VirginiaGuard/news/newsindex.html>

Virginia National Guard Federal Deployments

# *	Unit	Where Deployed	Home Town
175	116th Brigade Combat Team Headquarters	Afghanistan	Staunton
435	2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry Regiment	Iraq	Portsmouth, Norfolk, Suffolk, Virginia Beach
260	Co. A, 116th Brigade STB/ Co. D, 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment	Iraq	Fredericksburg
130	Co. C, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment	Iraq	Christiansburg
150	29th Infantry Division	Afghanistan	Fort Belvoir
40	Provincial Reconstruction Team Security Force	Afghanistan	Various Locations
75	Various Virginia Army Guard Units	Homeland Defense/OND/OEF	Various Locations
10	Various Virginia Air Guard Units	Homeland Defense/OND/OEF	Various Locations

* All listings for numbers of Soldiers/Airmen are approximate as of Oct. 1, 2011

192nd FW Youth of the Year honored as ANG winner

By Staff Sgt. Meaghan E. Selki
192nd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Breanna Bowman, the 192nd Fighter Wing Youth of the Year, was honored as the Air National Guard Youth of the Year at the Pentagon Wednesday, Aug. 3. The Air Force award ceremony was hosted by Surgeon General of the Air Force Lt. Gen. Charles B. Green.

Breanna Bowman was selected as the Air National Guard Youth of the Year after competing against other youths from across the country.

"The Air National Guard Youth of the Year Award means a lot to me. I am very honored and proud that I was chosen to

represent my MAJCOM. It's a big deal," said Bowman.

She is the daughter of two 192nd Fighter Wing members at Joint Base Langley-Eustis: Capt. Pamela Garner, budget officer, and Chief Master Sgt. Angus Garner, quality assurance chief.

"When we were notified that Breanna was selected as the ANG Youth of the Year, I felt a great sense of reward for all the hard work and dedication she puts forward daily. Without wearing the uniform, she truly exemplifies the Air Force Core values," said Chief Garner.

Bowman currently attends Gloucester High School and maintains a 4.5 GPA. Bowman plans to attend Stanford



Breanna Bowman was honored at the Pentagon Aug. 3 during the 2011 Air Force Youth of the Year Award Ceremony hosted by Lt. Gen. Charles B. Green, Surgeon General of the Air Force.

University and study political science and law.

"The way I see it is, if I uphold the qualities now to such a high-caliber position then that only leads me to greater success in my future," said Bowman.

6th annual Youth Summer Camp held at the beach

By Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

For the sixth year in a row, children of Virginia Guard Soldiers and Airmen spent the first week of August at Camp Pendleton, State Military Reservation in Virginia Beach engaging in fun and informative classes and activities during the Virginia National Guard Youth Summer Camp.

"This year at camp, we are doing a whole lot of fun stuff. We have our classes being taught by several great organizations like the Children's Museum and the Air and Space Museum," said Dana Ivory, state youth coordinator. "The Virginia Aquarium came out too, and we have representatives from the 4-H that have come out to do our campfires and teach some classes as well."

Each morning the 60 eight-12 year old kids started the day with a flag ceremony and exercise before beginning the day's activities. The Guard kids participated in a wide variety of activities, including arts & crafts, model rockets, fishing and classes on the dangers of substance abuse, and healthy eating practices. The camp also went on several day trips to Busch Gardens, Ocean Breeze Water Park and a day at the beach.

"This is where all members of the Air Force and Army in the Virginia National Guard's children can come together and we have a youth camp for them," said Command Sgt. Maj. Henry Motley, Jr., 91st Troop Command CSM and a volunteer adult counselor. "It's all about developing and team building for the kids."

In addition to the classes and the fun activities planned for the kids, the counselors also noted that the time the kids spend together is important for building relationships with other Guard families. Often times, when the parent of a Guard child deploys there are not many support services in place to help the children cope with the absence of a parent due to the unique nature of the



Photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Children of Virginia Guardsmen attending the sixth annual Virginia National Guard Youth Summer Camp launch a rocket during a 4-H sponsored class Aug. 3 at Camp Pendleton in Virginia Beach.

National Guard and their geographic disbursement.

"It's important because it keeps them connected and it helps them go through whatever issues they may be going through," said Ivory. "I know we have a lot of kids here that represent the cavalry that is deployed; we have some kids here from the aviation unit that is currently deployed, so it helps them make these connections with other kids, and they keep these connections year after year and they look forward to coming every year."

The Summer Youth Camp brings the kids together once a year to show them that they are not alone.

"A lot of Soldiers and Airmen are deployed and some of the children are away from daddy; they're away from their momma and this is one way they can get a chance to partner with the child of another Soldier and both of them can talk about their shared experiences," said Motley.



On the Cover



Virginia National Guard Soldiers from the West Point-based 237th Engineer Company use chain saws to clear a fallen tree near Onancock Aug. 28. The 237th Engineer Company was staged in the Eastern Shore Region of Virginia beginning Aug. 26 in response to Hurricane Irene. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Virginia Guard Public Affairs)

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New Virginia Guard senior enlisted leader shares vision for future

By Sgt. 1st Class A.J. Coyne
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis A. Green assumed the position of Virginia National Guard Senior Enlisted Leader July 11 and will serve as the senior enlisted advisor to Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, the Adjutant General of Virginia. In his new position Green, who most recently served as command sergeant major of the 29th Infantry Division, will provide leadership to the Airmen and Soldiers of the Virginia National Guard and support the AG's mission, goals and objectives.

"I am pleased to announce that Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis A. Green has agreed to accept my offer to serve as the Virginia National Guard State Senior Enlisted Advisor," Long said. "I look forward with great anticipation to working with Command Sgt. Maj. Green as we continue to strive to make the Virginia National Guard the best in the nation and a source of pride to the citizens of the commonwealth."

One of Green's first actions was to establish a council of senior command sergeants major and chief master sergeants from the Army and Air Guard and Virginia Defense Force to provide enlisted members with a direct voice to the AG.

Another goal is to visit each armory in the state to visit with training and readiness noncommissioned officers to make sure they understand the AG's vision, roles, responsibilities, mission goals and objectives.

"Some of those come from the Army, some from National Guard Bureau and some from the governor of Virginia," Green said. "So there are a lot of requirements on our Soldiers and Airmen and they need to be familiar with all of them."

Green, who has served in the Virginia Army National Guard for more than 26 years, has seen both the Army and the Virginia National Guard change over the years and is familiar with the stress some of those changes have caused to both members, employers and their families.

"I've seen the force go from a strategic course to an operational one," Green said. "When you do that, you have to change the way you do business."

As a result, there are many more requirements of today's Soldiers and Airmen but limited time to get everything done.

"The average Guardsman no longer just serves the traditional two weeks a year, one weekend a month," he said. "In the last eight years, as a traditional Soldier, I averaged eight to 10 days a month for the Guard."

The requirements have made it more difficult for Guard members to balance their military duties with their civilian jobs and families. But the military has come to realize this and puts greater emphasis on the overall wellness of its members, according to Green.

"It used to be if you were MOS (military occupational specialty) qualified, you were physically fit," he explained. "But



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis A. Green (center) assumed the position of Virginia National Guard Senior Enlisted Leader July 11 and will serve as the senior enlisted advisor to Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, the Adjutant General of Virginia. In his new position Green, who most recently served as command sergeant major of the 29th Infantry Division, will provide leadership to the Airmen and Soldiers of the Virginia National Guard and support the AG's mission, goals and objectives.

now the Army has gone to total Soldier fitness- family, physical, social, spiritual, emotional."

During his civilian career Green has served as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, principal and in education administration. He feels these experiences have helped him as a Soldier and leader enabling him in his new position to lead, direct and guide.

"As a Soldier we talk about mentoring and counseling," he said. "It's no different from what you do as a teacher and a mentor and a coach."

Both fields are about growing, learning and guiding people on how to meet expectations, Green explained.

"In education we call it licensure. You have to be licensed to be an educator," he said. "In the Army it's MOSQ (military occupational specialty qualified) and in the Air Force it's AFSC (Air Force specialty code)."

Green feels that the key to leading and mentoring servicemembers is to be able to identify with the person with whom you're communicating.

"It's a matter of getting to know folks, finding out who they are and what they're about," Green said. "Then you try to communicate with them and encourage them to be proactive to take care of themselves in both their civilian life and military life."

Despite all the changes to the Virginia Guard he's seen in his more than two decades in uniform, Green said both the performance and capabilities of the organization have never been better, whether at home or abroad.

"When we've been given a mission in the Guard, we've proven that we can execute that mission and do a pretty good job if given the time to prepare for it," he said. "Look at the floods, fires, hurricanes and snow support we've responded to in support of the governor. Our Soldiers and Airmen have helped save life and limb providing assistance to people in many Virginia communities."

A look back at the 2nd "Day of Infamy," Sept. 11, 2001

By John Listman, Virginia Guard Historian and Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Just like the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, the first "Day of Infamy," the terrorist assaults on Sept. 11, 2001, came as a complete surprise to all Americans. The nation was at first in shock but that soon turned into resolve not to let future threats greatly disrupt our freedoms.

The Virginia Guard's participation in the nation's response started almost immediately on Sept. 11 with the F-16s of the 192nd Fighter Wing, Virginia Air National Guard, taking an active role in flying combat air patrols, or CAP, missions over the nation's capital, Camp David, and New York City to prevent future aerial attacks. These missions continued on a continuous basis for almost one year.

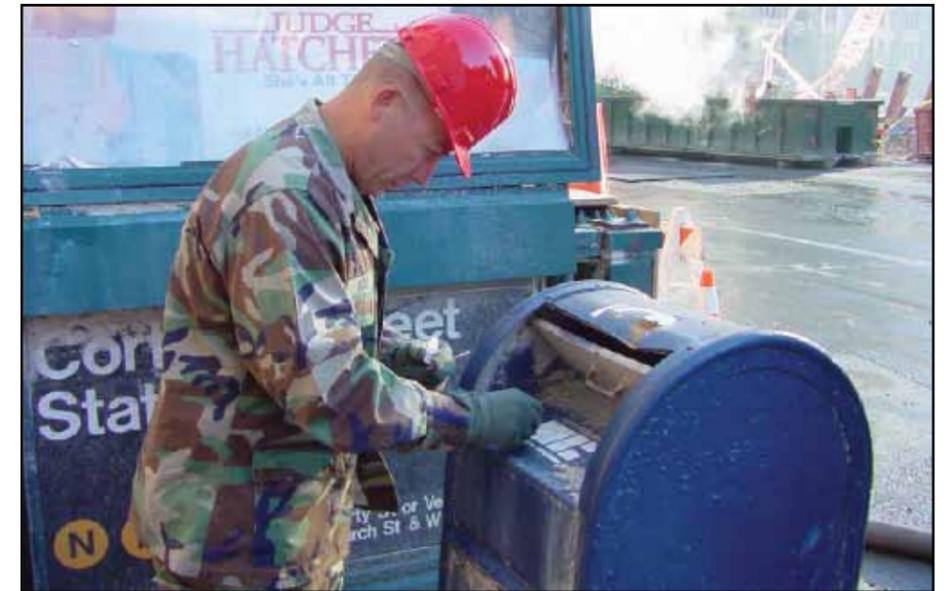
"We were flying 24/7 for 10 months out of our unit in the Virginia Air National Guard, and we were also pulling alert 24/7," said Air Force Col. Mark McCauley, Virginia Air Guard director of staff, who flew the missions in the days following the attack. "We always had six aircraft that were loaded up with live weapons ready to go. Two of which were dedicated to the combat air patrols we had to fly."

The Virginia Army Guard played no immediate role on September 11, but in the days that followed, that would change. In that first week, Sgt. 1st Class Ricky Kiser, then a survey leader for the 34th Civil Support Team, took a truckload of Meals Ready to Eat and body armor to D.C. National Guard personnel working around the Pentagon in the days after the attack.

When Kiser first learned of the attacks, he was at Fort Pickett training along with Army Lt. Col. William Patton, then a captain, on CST operations.

"When I first heard the news, I was in a state of shock and disbelief, then a sense of anger with an overwhelming need to protect our country and families," said Kiser, now the command sergeant major of 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment.

In late September through early October 2001 eight members of the CST, working in two, four-person, teams deployed to the site of "Ground Zero" in New York City



Courtesy Photo

Sgt. 1st Class Ricky Kiser checks a mail box at the entrance to the Cortland Street Subway Station in New York City for possible biological agents just a few weeks after 9/11. Members of the 34th Civil Support Team worked around Ground Zero, the site of the World Trade Center in Manhattan. The 34th's mission was to augment civilian first responders at HAZMAT events.

where the remains of the World Trade Center were still smoldering to examine the grounds for any trace of biological contamination.

"I was assigned to the same unit I am assigned to now," said Patton, who now commands the CST. "We responded to Ground Zero a few weeks after 9/11 to conduct reconnaissance and air sampling with my survey team."

Meanwhile other Virginia Army Guard personnel received a different set of tasks. For three days following the attacks, all American airports closed. When they began to reopen on September 14, part of the visible security was the presence of armed Virginia Guard members serving under the designation Operation Noble Eagle.

Also serving as part of Noble Eagle were hundreds of Guard members mobilized by the Department of Defense under Title 10, on active duty for up to 24 months. They secured vital facilities and infrastructure such as nuclear power plants, bridges, military bases (including Fort Pickett and the Virginia Air Guard Base at Sandston), military sites in the Washington, D.C. area, including the Army National Guard

Readiness Center and the Army's Ordnance Center at Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland.

"We went from a ready reserve force to a conventional force multiplier for DOD that was capable of conducting forward support operations," said Kiser. "The volunteers that joined our ranks to fight our current conflicts had a sense of duty and honor for our country, different from other conflicts the Guard was involved in."

Most of the security missions remained in place until 2003, in part by rotating the Soldiers after a one-year tour with fresh troops as to not overburden any one group by being on active duty for more than a year. Of course many of these Soldiers, having served up to a year already were soon to be recalled to active duty for preparation for the conflict in Iraq in the spring of 2003.

"Our posture and readiness has increased tremendously," said Patton. "We are fully trained and ready to respond to another terrorist incident or natural disaster. The readiness of the National Guard is there because we have made sure our training is first and foremost, and we are ready to respond."

1-116th BCT makes Humvee fly during AT

By Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Though they only graduated the courses a few weeks ago, Soldiers from the Lynchburg-based 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 116th Brigade Combat Team were already putting the skills they learned during the U.S. Army Air Assault course and the U.S. Army Pathfinder school to use Sept. 19 at Fort Pickett during their annual training period.

The Soldiers graduated the courses in August at Fort Pickett and, with the aid of a CH-47 Chinook helicopter, used their newly acquired skills to move a Humvee from one side of the training post to the other by sling loading it underneath the aircraft. The 1st Battalion warriors, who were on AT from Sept. 10-24, properly strapped the vehicle underneath the hovering helicopter before the aircraft took off to the sling load landing zone.

“We got here about an hour beforehand; we went through sling load operations with our new graduates from the Air Assault course,” said 1st Lt. Benjamin Melin, executive officer of Headquarters Company, 1-116th and a recent graduate of the Pathfinder course. “I inspected it as the pathfinder on the ground to certify the load. Once it was certified, we brought the bird in. They hooked it up to the CH-47 and right now, they’re heading south where Staff Sgt. McCormick, a pathfinder who graduated with me, is on the ground ready to receive it.”

During the two-week course, the Pathfinder students learned how to set up drop zones, sling load operations, and a whole variety of different things using an aircraft and drop zones on the ground.

“The main thing I took away was the ability to take a vehicle, sling load it, actually certify it, and have it go to a location the pilots have never seen before, so on the ground as pathfinder, we can certify a site that it is able to be used, and using our radio we can bring them into an unknown area and land equipment or personnel,” said Melin.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 116th Brigade Combat Team conduct sling load operations at Fort Pickett Sept. 19 during annual training. Many of the Soldiers involved in the operations were graduates of the Air Assault and Pathfinder Courses taught at Fort Pickett in August by the Warrior Training Center.

The exercise also incorporated the graduates of the Air Assault course and gave them an opportunity to sharpen their skills by giving them an up close, practical application of their knowledge by preparing the Humvee for transport.

“We had some students who just graduated Air Assault school last month and we wanted to use this opportunity to get them some hands-on training,” said Sgt. Jerry Leonhardt. “We were fortunate that we had the aircraft here because during

Air Assault they didn’t have the aircraft. So they actually got to see the aircraft up close and personal, and actually got to sling load a vehicle today.”

“Today’s mission went really well. It tied in both the Air Assault graduates and pathfinders. The Air Assault guys did an excellent job,” Melin said. “For the sling load operations, I went and inspected it and everything was perfect, the crew chief came out and took a look at it and everything was perfect on the sling load.”

116th BCT headquarters assumes responsibility for Afghan mission

By Maj. Nevin Blankenship
116th BCT Public Affairs

ZABUL PROVINCE, Afghanistan — The Virginia Guard’s Staunton-based 116th Brigade Combat Team Headquarters officially began its mission in Afghanistan and took over responsibility from the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division in a transfer of authority ceremony held Aug. 7 at Forward Operating Base Eagle. The 116th began federal active duty May 15 and will serve as the higher headquarters in Zabul province for coalition troops.

Provincial Governor Alhaj Mohammad Ashraf Naseri told of the accomplishments of the 1st SBCT and the confidence in the 116th BCT to continue the mission.

“The incoming unit has great potential and energy,” said Naseri. “They will be supported by the Afghan forces and they will help us be successful in our missions of security, stability and prosperity.”

Maj. Gen. James L. Terry, Regional Command South commander, told of the accomplishments of the outgoing unit and the expectations of the incoming unit.

“The relationships that Col. Wood’s unit made will be everlasting and unforgettable,” said Terry. “Their legacy will always be remembered.”

“The Stonewall Brigade is ready to continue the fight,” said Terry. “I am confident that you are equal to the task and I am proud to have you as part of the Regional Command South team.”

“It is not what you do, it is what you leave behind,” said Terry to both the incoming and outgoing units.

The 2nd Brigade, 205th Corps Afghan National Army Executive Officer, Col. Wazir, told of the bright future for Col. Wood and his Soldiers and the ANA’s eagerness to work with the 116th BCT in continuing to fight the insurgency in the province.

The outgoing commander, Col. Todd R. Wood, told of the accomplishments of his unit and his coalition partners.

“Governor Naseri, thank you for the great support of my unit,” said Wood. “You care about your citizens and they are fortunate to have you as their leader. Everybody has worked hard to make this province better and the 116th will continue



Photo by Sgt. Frank O'Brien, 116th BCT Public Affairs

Col. Blake C. Ortner and Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas H. Yancey uncash the 116th Brigade Combat Team colors at a transfer of authority ceremony at Forward Operating Base Eagle August 7. The 116th BCT is deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

what we have started,” said Wood.

Col. Blake C. Ortner, the commander of the 116th BCT, said his Soldiers were up to the challenge of taking over the mission.

“The Afghan people are a great people and they have the ability to do anything,” said Ortner. “We will work together to build a better future for Afghanistan, especially the children.”

“I look forward to working with our partners in making Afghanistan a better place,” he said.

116th BCT Soldiers pin combat patches

By Frank O'Brien
116th BCT Public Affairs

ZABUL PROVINCE, Afghanistan — “There are less than 2,000 Soldiers who wear the 29th Infantry Division symbol as a combat patch,” said Col. Blake C. Ortner, commander, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Aug. 6 at Forward Operating Base Lagman, Afghanistan, to the 100 Soldiers of the 116th BCT, as part of an award ceremony recognizing their deployment to a combat zone.

Soldiers of the 116th BCT now take their place in history, adding their accomplishments to a legacy that stretches back as far as the Revolutionary War, Civil War and the shores of Omaha Beach during World War II.

Soldiers are authorized to wear a shoulder sleeve insignia for wartime service on their right arm to symbolize their deployment in a combat zone. The patch is based on the unit in which they served. Although the 116th BCT reports to the 10th Mountain Division in Afghanistan, the 116th IBCT is on an International Security Assistance Force mission and as such is still considered a part of the Virginia Army National Guard’s 29th Infantry Division.

The 29th patch, awarded Aug. 6, is a modified yin-yang symbol in muted green and black for the new theater-specific MultiCam uniforms. During the ceremony, each Soldier was congratulated by a member of the brigade leadership, had the 29th Infantry Division patch applied to their right arm, shook hands and then exchanged salutes.

For Spc. Brehann Hudgins, 23, of Newport News, Va., in her fourth year with the Virginia Army National Guard, it is her first deployment and first combat patch ceremony.

“At first I didn’t think it was going to be a big deal, but once they put it on, I felt different; important,” said Hudgins. “What the colonel was saying about history...understand that now.”

Sgt. Tamekia Studivant, 28 of Petersburg, Va., echoed the sentiment.

“I understand what she’s feeling,” said Studivant. “You feel like you’ve accomplished something. It’s an overwhelming feeling to be part of something big, something larger than yourself.”

“Before, I was studying history,” said Spc. Stephen V. Smith, 19, an American History major from Norfolk State University. “Now I’m a part of it; a part of what you think of when you think of D-Day or World War II.”

Virginia's Task Force 183 assumes command in Iraq

Courtesy of 4th Sustainment Brigade

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE ADDER, Iraq — Virginia National Guard Soldiers with Task Force 183, 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry Regiment, 4th Sustainment Brigade, 310th Expeditionary Sustainment Command from Portsmouth, Va., assumed command of the convoy escort mission in southern Iraq from Task Force Griz, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 163rd Infantry Regiment, 4th Sust. Bde., from Belgrade, Mont., during a transfer of authority ceremony Aug. 28 at Contingency Operating Base Adder, Iraq.

According to Lt. Col. T.J. Hull, a Helena, Mont., native and the commander of Task Force Griz, his Soldiers escorted millions of gallons of fuel and tens of thousands of tons of various commodities safely throughout Iraq. This was done while driving more than one million miles in MRAPs of all types,

"The Soldiers of Task Force Griz have set a high standard, and we will have to work hard to meet that standard," said Lt. Col. William Korsen, a Virginia Beach, Va., native and the commander of Task Force 183.

The Soldiers of Task Force 183 come from all over Virginia. These citizen Soldiers are from various occupations to include police officers, lawyers, firemen, students, security guards and dock workers, just to name a few.

"Operation New Dawn has presented us with a myriad



Photo by Spc. Sean McGuire, 4th Sustainment Brigade

Lt. Col. William Korsen, commander of Task Force 183, 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry Regiment, 4th Sustainment Brigade, 310th Expeditionary Sustainment Command, and Command Sgt. Maj. Terry Gibbs, senior enlisted leader for Task Force 183, uncased the unit's colors during a transfer of authority ceremony at Aug. 28.

of both challenges and opportunity," said Staff Sgt. Matthew Hughes, a Washington, D.C., native and the assistant convoy commander with 2nd Sqdn., 183rd Cav. Regt. "The professionalism and attention to detail extended from the [noncommissioned officers] of the 163rd has set us up for success. I look forward to overcoming new challenges and taking advantage of every possible opportunity for growth."

Aircraft fuel handlers keep helicopters flying in Iraq

By Sgt. Deanna M. Shelton
77th Theater Aviation Brigade

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE ADDER, Iraq -- Soldiers from Company E, 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 77th Theater Aviation Brigade are doing their part to keep helicopters flying in Iraq by operating the Forward Arming and Refueling Point at Contingency Operating Base Adder.

"We are what people know as 92F or petroleum supply specialist," said Spc. Darnell Conner, Company E, 2-224th. "Our main job here is to refuel any military aircraft that stops at this FARP."

According to Army Training and Support Center, the responsibilities of a petroleum supply specialist, known on an airfield as aircraft fuel handlers, is to make sure that the fuel pumped into an aircraft is free of water or sediments. They must retrieve samples and perform tests on petroleum products used in aircraft and keep accountability of fuel used and stored.

The Virginia Guard's 2nd Battalion, also known as "Task Force Punisher," mobilized more than 390 Soldiers to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn Feb. 25, 2011, with the mission of conducting assault and combat support aviation operations in order to facilitate combat, peacekeeping and sustainment efforts to build a secure and stable environment in conjunction with the Iraqi National Government.

The task force consists of more than 500 assigned Soldiers, 30 UH-60L Black Hawk helicopters and 12 UH-60M medical evacuation helicopters.

"Since prior to our mobilization, the Punisher fuelers have accomplished some amazing things," said Lt. Col. Neal Edmonds, commander of Task Force Punisher. "Upon our arrival at our mobilization station at North Fort Hood, they identified some significant safety issues in the established FARP, took it over and had it up to standards in less than a day. Including our time at Hood and here in Iraq, they have pumped more 700,000

gallons of fuel.

"Without their dedicated effort, Task Force Punisher could not have possibly flown the 10,000 combat flight hours it has."

This FARP usually fuels all helicopters. On average, one 12 hour shift can fuel 20 aircraft.

"There is a lot behind our job that people don't understand and it isn't something to be taken lightly," said Spc. Shervell Stevenson, a petroleum supply specialist from Company E.

"On a daily basis, my guys would usually pump 10 to 15 thousand gallons of fuel ... these guys work very, very hard. They know their job and they know it well," said Sgt. 1st Class John P. Childress, a platoon sergeant in Company E.

"I would put my team of refuelers up against any team of refuelers in the United States Army," stated Childress, with the utmost confidence and pride. "They are the best ... they work hard, they know the job and they know the standard."

Engineer projects aide Richmond, Stafford communities

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Soldiers from the Virginia Army National Guard's Petersburg-based 276th Engineer Battalion, 91st Troop Command put their engineer skills to practical use for two community service projects in Stafford County and Richmond during their two-week annual training period from July 16 to 30.

The work was part of the Innovative Readiness Training program that allows engineers to put their military skills to work on community service projects approved by National Guard Bureau.

"The use of heavy and light engineer equipment on these sites prepares Soldiers for the Defense Support to Civilian Authorities mission," said Capt. Dave Baber, commander of the Powhatan-based 180th Horizontal Construction Company, 276th Engineer Battalion and project officer for the Virginia Guard. "We need to be prepared to react to hurricanes, floods, tornado's and heavy snow removal. These projects will help give us real world training making us better prepared to support the commonwealth."

Approximately 75 engineers from the 180th worked to clear and grade a pedestrian and biking trail along Cannon Creek which runs parallel to the Richmond Henrico Turnpike as a part of the Greenway project.

In Stafford, approximately 75 engineers from the Cedar Bluff-based 1033rd Engineer Support Company along with Soldiers from the 180th and a section from the Bowling Green-based 189th Multi-Role Bridge Company worked to prepare an access road for the planned Stafford County Civil War Park.

The Petersburg-based Forward Support Company of the 276th Engineer Battalion provided all logistical support for the units on both sites, keeping them fed and fueled.

"This is a great opportunity for these men and women to use the skills they have as Soldiers to help the community," said Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia after touring the site in Richmond.

During the two weeks on the Cannon Creek site, Virginia Guard engineers cleared and grubbed 3,100 linear feet of trail,



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Virginia Guard engineers from the Powhatan-based 180th Horizontal Construction Company, 276th Engineer Battalion work to clear and grade a pedestrian and biking trail along Cannon Creek which runs parallel to the Richmond Henrico Turnpike as a part of the Greenway project.

removed 350 tons of debris, placed and compacted 1,450 tons of gravel, conducted 1,634 hours of equipment training and 287 hours of chain saw training, Baber said.

The work in Richmond is part of the Phase I of the Cannon Creek Greenway that will bring the road to final grade in order to prepare the road for paving immediately following the engineer's construction.

The 276th is scheduled to continue that work of Phase II for their annual training period in 2012. This pedestrian and bike path will run from Valley Road north to Dove Street along the eastern portion of the Richmond Henrico Turnpike.

The work being performed is valued at \$300,000 and is being provided at no charge to the city.

"I am amazed," said Ellen F. Robertson, Councilwoman for Richmond City Council's Gateway 6th District after touring the site. "I can't believe the Guard has done so much work in such a short time."

At the end of two weeks in Stafford, the engineers had cleared and grubbed an access road that is 50 feet wide and 3,500 feet long, hauled gravel more than 3,700 miles and clocked more than 1,400 hours on heavy equipment and chain saws, Baber said.

"The Guard has meant success to the project," said Glenn Trimmer, a retired Air Force colonel and executive director of the Friends of the Stafford Civil War Sites.

"There wouldn't be a project without the Guard."

Having the Guard providing the construction work in concert with the donation of supplies and support from Stafford County to move the project along after the county agreed to set aside the land, he said.

"I have been staggered by how efficient they are," Trimmer said. He said he was expecting the engineers to clear 100 feet of road in the first day, and the Guard engineers cleared 500. "They all seem genuinely glad to be here," he said.

The planned Stafford Civil War Park includes three large Union battery fortifications, winter quarters encampment remains, a corduroy road and a pre-Civil War sandstone bridge ruin on property recently preserved by Stafford County and the City of Fredericksburg at the request of the Friends of the Stafford Civil War Sites.

Future phases of this project will be to take the road to final grade in order to prepare the road for paving, and engineers from the 276th are scheduled to continue that work during their annual training period in 2012.

This road will have multiple parking lots allowing visitors to get out and walk the historic grounds in Stafford County, allowing for greater awareness of this site while still preserving the original forts and encampment.

3-116th conducts simulation, light infantry courses at annual training

By Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

During their two-week annual training Sept. 10-24 at Fort Pickett, Soldiers of the Winchester-based 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 116th Brigade Combat Team focused on several activities, including Army Warrior Tasks and individual weapons qualification, but the two focal points for the battalion were the Staff Exercise for the Headquarters Company, and Light Leaders and Light Fighters courses for the line companies.

"The exercise has taken our infantry battalion staff through simulated training based on a stability operations environment, such as Iraq or Afghanistan in today's mission," said Lt. Col. Paul Gilman, battalion commander. "It's an awesome opportunity for the Guard to train on exercises that they would encounter if they deployed overseas."

While participating in the exercise Soldiers in a building adjacent to the operations center spent day and night entering scenarios into computer systems while the primary staff reacted to the situations in real-time. The system, known as the Joint Conflict Simulation

and Training System, kept the staff on their toes by simulating anything from an improvised explosive device attack to a vehicle stopping due to a flat tire.

"Anything that can happen in the real world, we can simulate on our system," said Donald Williams, database administrator for the JCATS. "We are running 24-hour operations and the system has not failed us yet. These Soldiers are part of one of the best groups of operators we have seen here in a long time."

"We don't get to pull this equipment out very much, we have a tough time pulling it out because it is a lot of equipment and a lot to learn about," said Gilman. "This is an awesome opportunity for our Soldiers to learn how to operate these new systems, as well as for our staff primary officers to learn how to do their jobs in a real world [overseas] environment."

While the primary staff was focusing on the exercise, Soldiers from the line companies participated in Light Leaders and Light Fighters courses. Sergeants and above trained in the Light Leaders, while privates and specialists focused on Light Fighters. The two courses, which ran concurrently, taught light infantry tactics at the squad level and focused on the individual Soldier's role in battle.



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Soldiers in the Light Leaders and Light Fighters Courses taught by the 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute assault the Fort Pickett Cherry Village training complex Sept. 19. Many of the Soldiers in the course are from the 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 116th Brigade Combat Team and are conducting two weeks of annual training.

"Because we have over 200 Soldiers deployed overseas for four missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, we are left with about 250 Soldiers here for our annual training, so we have a Light Leader course and a Light Fighter course that we have coordinated and integrated with the 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute here at Fort Pickett," Gilman said. "It is

outstanding training. The course is open to anyone across the country, but the entire class is 3rd Battalion Soldiers, with the exception of four Soldiers from South Carolina."

"This annual training period we have really focused on our Soldier skills and squad level training," said Command Sgt. Maj. Alan Ferris, 3rd Battalion command sergeant major. "The Light Leaders program trains our staff sergeants, sergeants first class and our young lieutenants on leadership through troop leading procedures, operations orders and how to train and lead Soldiers in combat operations."

"With the (Light Lighters) course, we also have the Light Fighters program, which supplements the light leaders by having our privates and specialists go through all their basic Soldier skills and Army Warrior Tasks, and shows them how they fit into the squad and how they maneuver as a squad."

The courses culminated with a Field Training Exercise, where the fighters worked side-by-side in a Military Operations in Urban Terrain scenario on Fort Pickett. The two classes combined to maneuver in squad-sized elements.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Va. Guard PAO

Soldiers of the 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 116th Brigade Combat Team man the operations center Sept. 19 during a simulated exercise during the unit's annual training period.

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Air Guardsman helps families of fallen

By Master Sgt. Carlos J. Claudio
192nd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

When Senior Master Sgt. Mark A. Lounello volunteered for a temporary duty assignment at the Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations at Dover Air Force Base, Del., he seemed to have all his bases covered.

Orders? Check. Transportation? Check. Billeting? Check.

What he did not count on was how this deployment would change his life.

"For me, to see someone who has made the ultimate sacrifice return home and having the privilege to be there and render honor, has been life-changing to me," said Lounello, a chaplain's assistant with the Virginia Air National Guard's 192nd Fighter Wing at Joint Base Langley-Eustis.

The Mortuary Affairs Division is comprised of three branches: Entitlements, Past Conflicts and Contingency Response and the Families of the Fallen Support.

The division is supported by 18 personnel from both the civilian and military workforce.

Additionally, the Mortuary Affairs Division provides support to family members of all services who travel to Dover AFB for the dignified transfer of their loved one.

This support occurs on the Campus for Families of the Fallen which encompasses the Fisher House for Families of the Fallen, the Meditation Pavilion and surrounding gardens, and Center for Families of the Fallen.

During Lounello's 179-day tour, which lasted from Dec. 26, 2010 to July 1, 2011, he performed more than 200 dignified transfers of human remains.

He also spent countless hours at the Campus for the Family of the Fallen, meeting and comforting families of U.S. service members who died in theater and were returned to American soil.

"I had an opportunity to experience and see grief in a way that I've never had before," Lounello said. "To pay tribute to someone who's made the ultimate sacrifice is not done by watching it on TV or by hearing about it. It's done when you live that experience."

As a result of Lounello's experience



Courtesy Photo

Senior Master Sgt. Mark A. Lounello, 192nd Fighter Wing chaplain's assistant, participates in a dignified transfer of a fallen U.S. military member's remains from aircraft to a waiting vehicle June 21, 2001, at the Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations at Dover Air Force Base, Del.

at AFMAO, two songs are now more noteworthy.

"Today, when I hear 'Taps' or the 'Star Spangled Banner,' I always associate my experience at AFMOA in rendering the honors, where I didn't so much before," he said. "When you witness, visibly, the price that's being paid, it not just something that's cognizant and important; it takes on a greater meaning."

Chaplain assistants typically witness positive and spiritual events like worship services, baptisms and weddings. However, Lounello's duties at Dover contrasted heavily to normal church duties.

The Air Guardsman assisted families struggling with some of the most difficult emotions possible; loss of a spouse, son, daughter, father or mother. It was a challenging process.

When cargo planes land and taxi near the Campus for the Family of the Fallen, families are escorted to the flight line.

They witness their loved ones' transfer case being moved from the plane by a "carry team" to a large white van. This is called a "dignified transfer." It is at this point that Lounello saw families needing his support, the type of support he had to gain knowledge in.

"Finding the right words and the appropriate way of reaching out to

someone in that grieving process is what I had to learn," he said. "In some cases, it doesn't require saying anything, except being there, being available, be appropriate and just listening to them. That's all we needed to do."

Lounello enlisted in the Air Force in 1976. In 1988, he joined the Air National Guard. He cared for wounded warriors in Landstuhl, Germany Regional Medical Facilities in 2005 and 2007. In 2008, he volunteered as a chaplain assistant to a B-52 crash at Andersen AFB, Guam. A year later, he served in Balad's Air Force Base Hospital in Iraq.

Lounello feels his six months at AFMAO taught him a great deal and changed him. Although his capacity as a chaplain assistant is the same, his ability to listen and understand today's "Warrior Airman" is much greater.

"After witnessing so many of our military members returning home in a transfer case, my sensitivity to the concerns and challenges of our young Airmen has taken on a greater meaning," he said. "I take every opportunity to influence, encourage and mentor much more seriously than I did previously, and I engage them with a greater purpose to provide the guidance and support necessary for them to succeed."

Va. Guard troops complete mission in Vermont

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

The Virginia National Guard Soldiers supporting recovery operations in Vermont completed their last haul mission Sept. 27 and returned home to Virginia on Sept. 30.

Approximately 20 Soldiers and six 20-ton dump trucks began running missions Sept. 8 to assist with clean up efforts in the wake of Hurricane Irene. The Fort Pickett-based 157th Engineer Platoon provided the personnel and dump trucks, and the Blackstone-based 3647th Maintenance Company provided a maintenance team and support vehicle.

While in Vermont, the Soldiers transported 781 loads in the dump trucks for a total of 8,860 cubic yards of rock and fill dirt. They drove more than 25,600 miles and logged in nearly 2,900 hours of training time on their equipment. They augmented the 133rd Engineer Battalion from the Maine Army National Guard and worked directly for the Vermont Agency of Transportation in coordination with a civilian contractor.

According to the Vermont Agency of Transportation, 450 miles of Vermont's 2,700 miles of state highway were closed



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Virginia National Guard Soldiers conduct maintenance checks on 20-ton dump trucks Sept. 5 at Fort Pickett in preparation for moving the vehicles to Vermont. The Soldiers arrived at Fort Pickett Sept. 5 to prepare for the mission and departed for Vermont on Sept. 6.



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill

Virginia Guard Soldiers from the Fort Pickett-based 157th Engineer Platoon work to repair Hurricane Irene's damage to U.S. Highway 4 in Vermont on Sept. 12, 2011.

the day after Hurricane Irene hit. State road crews, contractors and National Guard personnel from six different states worked nearly 16-hour days for eleven days and opened all but 57 miles of state highway.

Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin praised the work of everyone involved and called opening the road network "an extraordinary achievement."

The experience in Vermont was a positive one for the Soldiers from Virginia.

"From the first day and the first plate of brownies, the local community has been so supportive, thankful and generous that we were all in awe," wrote Sgt. Steven L. Moore in a post on the Vermont Rutland Herald Facebook Page. "We are accustomed to 'Southern hospitality,' but the people of Vermont have taken it to a new level. Thank you, Vermont, for showing how people can pull together in times

of need. I can only hope that if this ever happens in Virginia, or anywhere else in this great country, the people would act the same way."

The post prompted dozens of positive responses.

"I know that Vermont appreciates all that the National Guard members do for us," wrote Kathi Sheehan Stern. "We thank them for being here in our time of need."

Vermont made the request in early September through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact to the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, and Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, approved the request to provide the personnel and equipment.

"This is exactly how the Emergency Management Assistance Compact system is supposed to work," Long said. "When a state needs additional capability to assist in a time of need, they can reach out to other states to provide that capability. We are glad to be able to assist the citizens of Vermont with their clean up effort. I am sure they would do the same thing for us."

The 157th Engineer Platoon's primary mission is to provide crushed stone for the Virginia Guard's Maneuver Training Center at Fort Pickett, but the Soldiers have a wide variety of engineer skills. Many of the Soldiers in the platoon have deployed to Iraq.

Blue-Gray warriors come face to face with WWII vets

By Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

With estimates at around a thousand American World War II veterans passing away each day, the opportunity for current Soldiers to meet with these heroes of the greatest generation and share their experiences with one another becomes a thing of the past. Fortunately for the Soldiers of the 29th Infantry Division, they got to do just that.

Members of the 29th Division Association, including several veterans of the Second World War from Virginia and Maryland, visited the 29th ID during their annual training at Fort A.P. Hill July 18. The veterans saw modern Soldiers training and witnessed first-hand the changes the military has seen in the past 65 years.

"We invited our 29th Infantry Division Association here to visit with us during this annual training period," said Maj. Gen. Frank Batts, division commander. "We took an opportunity to bring out some of the members of the association to look at the training and to interact with our Soldiers."

Throughout the day, the Soldiers of the 29th showed the veterans static displays of their current weapons systems, vehicles and personal protective equipment while listening to tales of days gone by. The modern Warriors spent several hours trading stories and marveling at the similarities, as well as the differences between the two fighting generations.



Members of the 29th Division Association, present awards to current Soldiers of the 29th Infantry Division during their visit July 18 at Fort A.P. Hill.



Photos by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Members of the 29th Division Association, including veterans of WWII, visit Soldiers of the Fort Belvoir-based 29th Infantry Division on annual training at Fort A.P. Hill July 18. The Soldiers showed the vets, all prior members of the 29th ID, current weapon systems, vehicles, uniforms and body armor. During the visit, the vets ate lunch in the mess hall and witnessed 29th Soldiers navigating the Leader Reaction Course.

the Army's newest grenade launcher, the M320.

"I look at these guys and I think that they are a fine bunch of men, and they're well trained with stuff that we never had," said John Kessler, a retired lieutenant and WWII veteran. "You've got modern equipment like that grenade launcher...we had to throw that thing, we threw it just as far as we could and that was it. The weapons they have now are fabulous."

At the end of the day, the current Soldiers of the 29th and the legacy Soldiers left with a sense of connection through their shared sacrifices, and the modern day warriors continued their training with new perspectives on how far the military has advanced in some respects yet remained the same in others, according to Spc. Sean Spurr, 29th ID, Special Troops Battalion.

"Obviously a lot of things have changed since World War II, they were definitely interested, there were a lot of hands on," Spurr said. "They were very interactive; they were very open about their experiences and sharing with the Soldiers."

"I gained a huge sense of pride from these men coming in here and talking to us. I think it's a great thing what they do, and what they did and I think it's a great credit to the Army and a great credit to the 29th Infantry when they can come in and talk to the Soldiers and relate on that kind of level."

During their annual training, the Soldiers also focused on Army Warrior Tasks, individual weapons qualification, crew-served weapons qualification and participated in a command post exercise.

The Soldiers of the 29th Division also tested their inter-state communication abilities in preparation for real-world civil support missions.

"If you look at the division coin, it says 'The Spirit of Omaha Beach.' Many of these Soldiers were actually on Omaha Beach, so there's no better way to convey that spirit from the last greatest generation to this new generation than to have them interact," said Batts.

Many of the WWII vets awed at how far the technology had progressed over the years and jumped at the chance to get their hands on the new weapons systems, including

Engineers wrap up AT with combat streamer ceremony

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

The Petersburg-based 276th Engineer Battalion, 91st Troop Command wrapped up its two-week annual training period with a streamer ceremony held July 29 at the Fort Pickett Parade Field. During the ceremony, several units in the battalion were presented with streamers for combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Think about these streamers and the recognition you just received," said Col. Walt Mercer, commander of 91st Troop Command. "Those streamers represent you as Soldiers. Most of you were in one or more of those deployments where those were earned, and you know what it means. You know the cost, and you know the significance.

"Keep that close to your heart," he said. "It is a big deal."

The battalion received the Combat Action Streamer and Valorous Unit Award for duty in Afghanistan from February to November 2009 where they provided command and control for six engineer companies with 15 route clearance platoons. The battalion's forward support company was also recognized with a Valorous Unit Award.

"The 276th Engineer Battalion and its subordinate units displayed extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy in support of Operation Enduring Freedom throughout Regional Command East and South," the award citation read. "Through a coordinated effort the unit accomplished its route clearance mission in support of Combined Joint Task Force 101st and 82nd. In doing so, the unit provided freedom of maneuver to at least 5 brigade combat teams, numerous battalions, coalition task forces, the Afghan National Army and the Afghan people. Additionally the unit's command and staff team successfully planned more than 1,090 missions to reduce explosive hazards and neutralize enemy forces within their area of operation."

The Powhatan-based 180th Horizontal Construction Company received the Meritorious Unit Commendation for service in Iraq from May 2008 to July 2009 where they were responsible for road repair, route sanitation and various other engineer projects under the command of the 54th Engineer Battalion.

"The unit served as the sole engineer asset for Multi-National Division-Center, and in doing so, completed essential horizontal engineer missions including the start to finish horizontal construction of 17 bases, 150 route clearance missions, and critical bridge repair and inspection," the award citation read. "The unit also supported Coalition and Iraqi Forces by providing force protection and by increasing route traffic ability."

The West Point-based 237th Sapper Company received the Valorous Unit Award and Meritorious Unit Commendation for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy in Iraq from 2007 to 2008 where they conducted route clearance operations as part of the Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. Three Soldiers from the company were killed in action during the tour on active duty.

"The battalion's stalwart efforts and untiring support to the people of Iraq ensured an outstanding record of accomplishment,"



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Lt. Col. James Zollar and Command Sgt. Maj. Daryl Plude attach the Combat Action Streamer for the 276th Engineer Battalion to the unit colors during a ceremony held July 29 at the Fort Pickett Parade Field. Several units in the battalion were presented with streamers for combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan during the ceremony.

the award citation read. "Additionally, the unit's adept execution of operations, under perilous conditions, was instrumental in the domination of the counter insurgency fight, while at the same time, improving the quality of life for the citizens of Iraq."

In addition to recognizing the significance of the streamer ceremony, Mercer also commended the engineers on a very successful annual training period.

"You earned my trust and respect as a battalion this AT," Mercer said.

Lt. Col. Chris Atkinson, commander of the 276th, called the AT "the safest and best executed" in the battalion's history. In particular, he credited the noncommissioned officer's of the battalion for the care of Soldiers during the extreme heat and the fact that the battalion had no significant heat casualties because of their efforts.

The training for the battalion included two Innovative Readiness Training Projects in Richmond and Stafford County, as well as Fort Pickett, which gave Soldiers significant hands on training to better their engineer skills.

For many of the engineers, the AT was a chance to focus on the most basic engineer skills. Soldiers from the 237th were able to conduct urban breaching training at Fort Pickett to hone their skills on using explosives to open doors for entry into a building.

Atkinson said Soldiers in the battalion fired a quarter million rounds of ammunition, conducted 10,000 miles of vehicle operation and issued 165 new equipment operator licenses. The Forward Support Company delivered 8,000 gallons of fuel, 2,000 hot meals and traveled 5,100 miles. The 189th MRBC constructed a 70-meter float bridge, a first for the unit since it transformed more than seven years ago.

The 1033rd Engineer Support Company led the Stafford County Civil War Park IRT Project where they cleared 2,000 linear feet for an access road and hauled 2,000 tons of gravel and debris. In the Richmond Cannon Creek IRT project, the 180th Horizontal Construction Company cleared 1,500 feet for the new bike and pedestrian path and hauled 2,000 tons of gravel and debris.

Female Engagement Team blazes trails in Afghanistan

By Staff Sgt. Rebecca Petrie
116th BCT Public Affairs

ZABUL PROVINCE, Afghanistan — A Stryker pulls up. The ramp lowers, and four Soldiers dismount, weapons at the ready, assault packs slung over their shoulders. The Afghan sun mercilessly beats down on their solid frames, swollen beads of perspiration growing heavy on each forehead. The leader lifts a hand and wipes the trickle of sweat from her eyes.

This is the Female Engagement Team of Zabul province, part of a new military program aimed at reaching out to the women of Afghanistan while still respecting cultural boundaries.

"FET is providing a voice and opportunities to women and children for a better tomorrow," said Maj. Maria Rodriguez, the outgoing officer in charge of the Combined Team Zabul FET. "It is a huge honor to be part of something that will make an impact not only for this generation of Afghan women, but future generations as well."

Currently, the CTZ FET is working with the provincial chief of police to organize projects for the local women in hopes of recruiting them to the Afghan Uniformed Police.

Many insurgents sneak through checkpoints dressed in women's clothing because there are not enough female police officers to search the women at each checkpoint. Female police also play important roles in prisons and recruiting stations.

But cultural blinders are making it hard to recruit women. One major problem for the recruiting program is the constant danger the female AUPs live in every day. The Afghan culture frowns on women working outside the home.

"The biggest obstacle facing the FET is the cultural differences and 'rules' regarding the women of Afghanistan," said Capt. Iajaira Perez, CTZ FET OIC, and a native of Laredo, Texas.

"Although it is something we acknowledge and try to accept, I find it to be extremely difficult to understand just because I have never experienced the hardship that these women have been through."



Photo by Staff Sgt. Rebecca Petrie, 116th BCT Public Affairs

Capt. Iajaira Perez, Combined Team Zabul Female Engagement Team officer in charge, engages with an Afghan female during the FET's visit to a local village in Zabul province, Afghanistan. The CTZ FET is deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The FET program is still in its infancy, and the U.S. military has a long way to go before all the kinks are worked out, but Perez and her team are working hard to create the necessary changes.

"FET training should not just be limited to the females (who) will be part of the team, but for the whole patrol that will be out engaging with them," said Perez. "We need to include the males (who) will be patrolling with us and the teams need to have a dedicated force (patrol) to be consistent and to fully support the FET mission."

The transitory nature of deployed military units also creates a difficult problem for the FETs and their mission.

"Relationships are very important to the Afghan people," said Rodriguez. "My concern is we move in, build rapport and a relationship, and then the mission changes and we pull out. It would leave anyone leery of others coming in to assist."

The language barrier is another issue at the top of the list.

"We really need a female interpreter," said Staff Sgt. Christina Gedney, a member of the CTZ FET who hails from Woodbridge, Va.

"Our current interpreter has a great

relationship with the AUP females, but I feel a lot gets lost in translation. We hope to begin getting out into the villages to engage the local females, and with our current interpreter situation, I can foresee many issues."

Despite the obstacles, FETs can be a very effective weapon in the counterinsurgency fight.

"The FET is getting in places that our male counterparts can't go, and that's talking to the women of Afghanistan," said Sgt. 1st Class Elizabeth Jackson, a member of the CTZ FET and a resident of Lynchburg, Va. "It shows them that their voice counts and we are interested in their concerns; that we are listening and working with them to accomplish their goals and projects."

Though the progress is slow, and the results are still almost negligible, female service members can be proud of their contribution.

"I think just our presence makes a difference in their lives," said Perez. "These women have suffered so much and they are the true warriors, and seeing us patrolling among our male Soldiers will hopefully give them the hope that they too can break the boundaries of their culture."

29th ID troops depart for Afghan mission

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

The Virginia National Guard's Fort Belvoir-based 29th Infantry Division held a departure ceremony Sept. 12 for the Soldiers taking part in the unit's federal mobilization for the Security Partnering mission in Afghanistan. The Soldiers officially began federal active duty Sept. 11.

The Security Partnering Team consists of approximately 30 Virginia National Guard Soldiers combined with approximately 35 Soldiers from the Maryland National Guard. The Soldiers will replace a group of Maryland and Virginia National Guard Soldiers currently serving in Afghanistan who began their federal active duty Nov. 1, 2010.

The Virginia contingent is comprised of Soldiers assigned to the 29th Infantry Division augmented by Soldiers from Joint Forces Headquarters and other units across Virginia. The Soldiers will spend several weeks conducting pre-mobilization training at Camp Shelby, Miss., before deploying to Afghanistan, and the



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Soldiers from the Virginia National Guard's Fort Belvoir-based 29th Infantry Division take part in a departure ceremony Sept. 12 on Fort Belvoir's Long Parade Field.

mobilization is expected to last one year.

"I had a chance to talk with family members, and it is really neat to see the pride in their eyes as they talk to you about the men and woman in front of us," Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, told the audience. Long said the group of 29th ID Soldiers currently serving in Afghanistan is doing great work, and he knew this group would continue on the same path.

"For the Soldiers performing this mission, I can't tell you how proud I am," said Brig. Gen. Charles Whittington, director of the Security Partnering Team. "I have not been associated with a finer group of officers since I have been privileged enough to wear this uniform. I am absolutely excited and humbled to be working with you on this most important mission." He also thanked the families for the support they give to the Soldiers during the mission.

The Security Partnering Team will fall under the command and control of the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command in Afghanistan. Their mission will be to resource, facilitate and assess training for the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. Soldiers from the 29th Infantry Division will provide subject matter expertise in support of the mission.

The 29th Infantry Division is comprised of Soldiers from the Virginia Army National Guard and the Maryland Army National Guard.

Of the Virginia Soldiers mobilizing, approximately six are from the Richmond and Petersburg area, about five are from the Northern Virginia area, approximately four are from the Fredericksburg area, about three are from the Hampton Roads area and the remaining are from various locations across the state.



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Family members and friends were on hand to say goodbye to the approximately 65 Soldiers of the 29th Infantry Division who left Sept. 12.

3rd annual Diversity Day celebrated in Henrico

By Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

As part of its ongoing effort to celebrate diversity among the ranks, the Equal Opportunity Office of the Virginia National Guard celebrated its third annual Diversity Day Program celebrating the differences and the cultures from all backgrounds Aug. 25 at the Henrico Theater in Highland Springs, Va.

"The Diversity Day program is important because it illustrates the diverse composition of the Virginia Guard, and how

our diverse composition only enhances the greatness of the organization," said Capt. Kervin Sider, state Equal Opportunity officer.

The program highlighted a Philadelphia-based dance troupe specializing in American Indian heritage and culture.

The troupe, Native Nations Productions, performed a mini-American Indian Pow-Wow and invited Soldiers and Airmen in attendance to join them on stage for several dances.

Following the performance by the dancers, the attendees were ushered

upstairs to enjoy cuisine from different backgrounds from around the world and view displays of different heritages to increase their awareness of other cultures.

"We want the Virginia National Guard to be a place where we are proud to serve and work and one of the ways to do that is to be open with communication. If you know of a way to make us better, speak up. We all owe it to the organization to make this a better place where we can all serve and work," said Brig. Gen. Janice Igou, Director of Interagency Operations and guest speaker at the event.

Change of command ceremony held for 183rd RTI

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Col. Doug Messner assumed command of the Blackstone-based 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute from Col. Marie Mahoney in a traditional change of command ceremony held July 23 at Fort Pickett.

As part of the ceremony, Regimental Command Sgt. Maj. Howard E. "Skip" Halfacre presented the regimental colors to Mahoney, who then in turned passed the colors to Brig. Gen. William R. Phillips, II, Virginia National Guard land component commander, to signify her relinquishing command. Phillips then presented the regimental colors to Messner in recognition of his assumption of command, then Messner returned the colors to Halfacre.

"Thank you for your leadership and thank you for your sacrifice," Phillips told Mahoney.

Phillips recognized the significant accomplishments of the 183rd RTI during Mahoney's command including completing the 2010 Organization Inspection Program with compliance in 66 out of 67 areas, which Phillips said was a first in Virginia. During her time in command, the RTI also earned full TRADOC accreditation for all assigned units and earned back-to-back "Institute of Excellence" honors and was the runner up for the 2010 Army Award for Maintenance Excellence.

"I am humble today to stand before you and thank you for two wonderful years as your commander," Mahoney said. She said the list of accomplishments during her time in command were the achievements of the Soldiers of the Regiment more than her achievements.

Another significant milestone during Mahoney's time in command was the completion of the new headquarters and training facility for the 183rd RTI. "We all point to how wonderful this facility is, but it really is nothing more than the type of facility that is deserving of the caliber and quality of the Soldiers and leaders of this unit and the Virginia National Guard," she said.

Mahoney serves as the deputy United States Fiscal Property Officer at Fort Pickett in her full time job. She was scheduled



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Col. Doug Messner passes the colors for the 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute to Regimental Command Sgt. Maj. Howard E. "Skip" Halfacre in recognition of his assumption of command in a ceremony held July 23 at Fort Pickett.

to deploy to Afghanistan in September with the 29th Infantry Division for the Security Partnering mission. She received a Meritorious Service Medal in recognition for her service as the commander.

"I can assure you today that the responsibility of leadership is passing on to another great Soldier, leader and American," Phillips said. "Col. Messner is the right Soldier for this job, and we are fortunate to have him as the new commander of the 183rd Regiment."

Messner has spent almost all of his career in the Virginia National Guard. He deployed to Afghanistan in 2004 as a member of the combined joint staff. He commanded the Gate City-based 1030th Transportation Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group, and the battalion was recognized as the most ready battalion in the National Guard with the Reckord Trophy and Kerwin Award during his time in command. Phillips promoted Messner to colonel before the change of command ceremony.

116th BSTB gets back to basics during annual training at Pickett

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Soldiers assigned to the Fredericksburg-based 116th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 116th Brigade Combat Team focused on individual Soldier skills and Army Warrior Tasks during their annual training from Sept. 10-24 at Fort Pickett, culminating in the "Warrior Stakes" event where they were evaluated on those skills.

Soldiers in three-person teams navigated through 10 different stations where they were tested on tasks such as putting a tactical radio into operation, reacting to enemy contact and emplacing an anti-personnel mine. Before starting the evaluation, they had to navigate several of the obstacles on the Fort Pickett Air Assault Obstacle Course.

"We trained on these skills throughout annual training, and this builds to an evaluation of skills, not just as individuals, but as a team," said Maj. Chris Doss, commander of the 116th STB. "These are all skills that each Soldier is expected to be proficient in."

Soldiers from across the battalion, including the headquarters company, signal company and engineer company, took part in the event.

Doss said the battalion had three goals for the annual training period: improve tactical proficiency, improve individual Soldiers skills and improve their readiness to perform state missions for Defense Support to Civil Authorities operations.

"We have been able to do all three," he said.

The battalion conducted consolidated training due in part to the number of Soldiers mobilized or attending schools. Out of the approximately 450 Soldiers assigned to the battalion, about 135 were present for annual training, Doss said.

The battalion's engineer company is currently deployed with Task Force 183 in Iraq, the unmanned aerial vehicle platoon from the military intelligence company is deployed with the 116th Brigade Combat Team Headquarters in

Afghanistan, and many Soldiers from the battalion were reassigned to positions in the 116th BCT HQs staff as well.

Doss said that the nature of the battalion's mission to support the rest of the brigade often makes it difficult to focus on individual Soldier skills, so this annual training period has been a great opportunity to focus on the basics.

"The feedback from Soldiers has been great," Doss said. "They have enjoyed getting back to their roots of being Soldiers and focus on being able to shoot, move and communicate on the battlefield."

A total of 75 Soldiers qualified on the personal weapons, 24 earned the Combat Lifesaver certification, 10 were licensed on chain saw operations and the battalion doubled the number of licensed drivers on Humvees and medium trucks.

"We came in to AT with realistic expectations and ambitious goals, and we wanted to leave here a better battalion," Doss said. "We are doing that."



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Soldiers from the 116th Brigade Special Troops Battalion take part in the "Warrior Stakes" training event Sept. 20 at Fort Pickett. The training event kicked off with Soldiers organized into three-person teams navigating obstacles on the Fort Pickett Air Assault Obstacle Course, followed by stations where they were evaluated on a number of different Army Warrior Tasks. The stations included putting a radio into operation, chemical and biological agent protection, M249 machine gun assembly and disassembly, basic map skills and reacting to enemy contact.



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Va. Dept. of Military Affairs

Soldiers from the Fredericksburg-based 116th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 116th Brigade Combat Team react to enemy contact at one of the stations of the "Warrior Stakes" training event Sept. 20 during the unit's two-week annual training period.

MP companies focus on core military skills during AT

By Cotton Puryear, Virginia Dept. of Military Affairs and
Sgt. 1st Class A.J. Coyne, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

The Virginia National Guard's two military police companies focused on their core military tasks at several training locations across Virginia during their annual training in July. Soldiers from the Manassas-based 266th Military Police Company, 1030th Transportation Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group trained at Fort Pickett and Soldiers from the Virginia Beach-based 229th MP Company trained at the State Military Reservation, Fort Story and the Virginia Beach Law Enforcement Training Center.

"We came out of reset last year, so this year our focus was on the core military police missions like convoy escort, route regulation enforcement and getting certified on law and order tasks," said Capt. John Roche, commander of the 266th MP Company. "It is really going back to the core of what we do as MPs and build on that from year to year."

At the request of Fort Pickett Range Operations, Soldiers from the 266th established traffic control points where they conducted spot checks for drivers' licenses, proper vehicle dispatch procedures, seat belt use and general vehicle safety checks.

Soldiers also trained route regulation enforcement procedures where military police personnel conducted mounted vehicle convoys using Humvees and armored security vehicles where they evaluate routes, ensure proper markings are in place, provide security against route infiltration and facilitate efficient movement along the route.

A military police support company like the 266th or 229th has an assigned strength of about 170 Soldiers and is organized into three line platoons and a headquarters platoon with sections for operations, maintenance, supply and food service. "We are set up to be self-sufficient," Roche said.

Soldiers from the 266th also received training and certification



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class A.J. Coyne, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers from the Virginia National Guard's 229th Military Police Company conduct a police investigation at the Virginia Beach Law Enforcement Training Center July 28, 2011. The Soldiers spent three days at the center training in various law enforcement scenarios during their summer annual training.



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Soldiers from the Manassas-based 266th Military Police Company, 1030th Transportation Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group focus on their core military skills July 25 and 26 during their two-week annual training at Fort Pickett. At the request of Fort Pickett Range Operations, Soldiers established traffic control points where they conducted spot checks for drivers' licenses, proper vehicle dispatch procedures, seat belt use and general vehicle safety checks.

on less-than-lethal use of force by instructors from the Blackstone-based 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute. Part of the certification included getting a face full of pepper spray and navigating a course where Soldiers had to exercise specific baton and personnel take down procedures.

"This AT gave us a solid two weeks to come together and really hone those critical MP skills," Roche said. "Our Soldiers have really enjoyed the training."

For the Soldiers of the 229th MP Company, this was their first annual training since they redeployed from Iraq in July 2010.

"We realized there were some great resources in the area so we decided to stay close to home and take advantage of those resources," said Capt. John Hinton, commander of the 229th MP Company.

The 229th conducted both land navigation and combatives training at Fort Story, traveled to Fort Pickett for individual weapons qualification, and had the opportunity to hone their police skills at the State Military Reservation and at the Virginia Beach Police Department's Law Enforcement Training Center. There, the unit focused on skills that would be useful in a police advisory role, such as presence patrols, police investigation and securing a crime scene.

"The training scenarios were geared toward collecting information and talking to non-hostile civilians the Soldiers may encounter," Hinton said.

The scenarios included finding a suspicious package outside a convenience store, encountering a dead body in an apartment and responding to a crime scene to conduct an investigation.

"The Soldiers really seemed to enjoy this AT," Hinton said. "They could stay home and use great facilities, facilities they aren't familiar with."

529th CSSB Freedom Salute honors service in Afghanistan

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Virginia National Guard Soldiers from the Virginia Beach-based 529th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group, gathered August 14 to conduct a Freedom Salute in honor of their service in Afghanistan. Approximately 80 Soldiers from the battalion returned to the United States March 18, 2011, after serving in Afghanistan since May 2010. The Freedom Salute recognized the Soldiers, their families, employers and organizations that contributed significantly to supporting the unit during its deployment.

"I can say without a doubt that many of these Soldiers had experiences they will never forget in their lifetime," said Lt. Col. Michelle Rose, commander of the 529th. "Many worked with local Afghan nationals on projects aimed at improving their lives. These were the simple things that paid big dividends in fighting the insurgency in Afghanistan, like cleaning out the natural underground waterways, improving the schools, and lending a hand to a farmer whose truck is overturned on the highway with a year's worth of crops in the back of it. It is the little gestures and infrastructure improvements that these Soldiers will remember for years to come, and they all contributed to us leaving Afghanistan much better off than we found it a year ago."

The 529th deployed to Afghanistan from Fort Hood in May 2010 and operated from the remote forward operating base at Shindand Air Base, Regional Command – West in Afghanistan where it pioneered logistical support operations as the first U.S. combat support battalion to locate in the area and conduct operations. The battalion was responsible for building an expeditionary life support complex and infrastructure for the airbase while providing seamless sustainment operations for supported units as well as helping improve quality of life and promoting economic development in local communities.

Working directly with Italian, Spanish, Slovenian and Afghan forces, the unit's mission was to provide supply, maintenance

and transportation support to U.S. and coalition warfighters throughout the region that covers the four large western provinces of Herat, Farah, Badghis and Ghor.

"None of these accomplishments would have been possible without the support of many friends, families, organizations and communities that surround us in this room today," Rose said. "This Freedom Salute is for you in recognition of your support to us for our year-long deployment. All of our families and communities here in Virginia and points beyond have been truly supportive of not only us but of the many missions we spearheaded in rural Afghanistan."

The Freedom Salute campaign is designed to publicly acknowledge Army Guard Soldiers and those who supported them during the President's call to duty for Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

As part of the Freedom Salute ceremony, the Soldiers received the Virginia Governor's National Service Medal from Virginia Secretary of Public Safety Marla Graff Decker on behalf of Gov. Bob McDonnell.

Decker said the 529th had special meaning to her because it was the first unit since the McDonnell Administration began where she had been able to attend both the deployment and return ceremonies.

"We are so proud of our National Guard," she said. "Many of you have gone over not once, not twice but three or four times. That is a tremendous personal sacrifice to you as well as to members of your family. We understand that, we appreciate that and can't thank you enough. The National Guard has been a tremendous component against the war on terror, and we couldn't do that without the support of the people in the room today."

Decker also recognized the sacrifice made by the employers and acknowledged how important their support is for the success of the Guard's mission.

"You do it for your country and you do it for your commonwealth, and we thank you for that," she said.

Most of the Soldiers in the unit are from the Hampton Roads area, but about



Photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Va. Guard PAO
Virginia Secretary of Public Safety Marla Graff Decker presents the Virginia Governor's National Service Medal to a National Guard Soldier from the 529th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, Aug. 14 in Norfolk.

15 Soldiers are from the Richmond area, approximately 10 are from the Southwest Virginia area, and five are from the Northern Virginia area.

The battalion provided command and control for more than 500 Soldiers from three active duty units to accomplish their mission.

The battalion had no Virginia Soldiers killed in action or wounded in action by hostile enemy action.

Capt. Jaden W. Stapleton of Sterling was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for Valor for combat actions while serving in Afghanistan, and 1st Lt. Philip Lacey of Staunton and Staff Sgt. David Maw of Virginia Beach were awarded the Combat Action Badge.

The battalion held an end-of-tour awards ceremony March 11 and presented the Bronze Star Medal for Service to Lacey and Maw as well as Capt. Lindsey Hodgkins, Sgt. 1st Class Jerry Witcher and Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Perdieu for exceptionally meritorious service during the deployment. More than 60 Army Commendation Medals were also awarded and all Soldiers received the NATO International Security Assistance Force Medal for service in Afghanistan.

29th Division Band completes cross-border AT

By Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

The 29th Division Band crossed several state lines June 19 to July 4 and accomplished more than just playing concerts in Virginia as it has in annual trainings past. The band travelled to Fort Campbell, Ky., where it performed musical support missions and conducted Army Warrior Tasks, before heading back to Virginia where it played more concerts and changed armories.

According to 1st Sgt. Fred Lewis, the band's senior noncommissioned officer, the 29th Band performed during eight change-of-command ceremonies for brigades and battalions of the 101st Airborne Division, as well as two public concerts in Kentucky and Tennessee. In between rehearsals and performances, the band found time to conduct vehicle rollover training, individual weapons qualification, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and equal opportunity briefings.

"The change-of-command ceremony for the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade was impressive, with over 1,300 troops all marching in unison to the cadences and martial music provided by the 29th ID Band," Lewis said. "The band was complimented by all the commands supported for its professional manner; they completed the mission of an active duty band with little to no

Virginia DMA conducts state-wide commo exercise

By Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

The Virginia Department of Military Affairs tested its tactical communications abilities during a state-wide communication exercise, or COMEX, Aug. 20 at armories across the commonwealth of Virginia. Members of the Virginia Defense Force teamed with Soldiers of the Virginia Army National Guard to test their ability to communicate with and support the Virginia National Guard with communication support in the event of an emergency.

From Gate City to Norfolk and from Winchester to Danville, Soldiers and VDF Incident Management Assistance Team members tested the capabilities of nine TAC-PAKs in eight armories during the exercise. The IMAT focused on making sure the TAC-PAKs were fully functional and able to exercise the six modes of communication the TAC-PAKs are capable of providing.

"We're here to exercise our communication assets and show that we can be an integral part of the Virginia National Guard team," said VDF Warrant Officer Fred Calvert, communications technician.

"It's an opportunity for us to continue to make sure our equipment is ready to support the Virginia Guard.

"This is a team-building exercise for us. The more opportunities we have to come together as a team, the better we will be as a team. We learn to rely on one another; this gives us that unit cohesion and we get to build upon that," he said.

According to Army Chief Warrant Officer Christopher Johnson, the communications exercise tested and validated equipment capabilities and personnel training. He also noted that the exercise tested the two Joint Incident Site Communications Capability platforms, a Virginia National Guard communication asset.

"Overall, it was a success," Johnson said. "As expected, we had a few challenges, but generally the exercise has been effective. We have done this a few times ... this is

train up."

After completing their missions out of state, the band returned to Virginia where it performed concerts in Charlottesville, Front Royal and Staunton. The local communities and leaders of the 29th Infantry Division welcomed the band at several concerts.

According to Lewis, Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis Green, who was 29th ID command sergeant major at the time, attended shows in Kentucky and Tennessee, and Maj. Gen. Frank Batts, 29th Infantry Division commander, was in attendance at the Front Royal performance.

The 29th was the featured band in the Charlottesville Community Band Festival, where more than 800 members of the audience gave it a standing ovation.

In addition to the over 3,000 accident-free miles travelled by the Soldiers to perform their shows, the band also managed to squeeze in time to move its base of operations from the armory in Petersburg to its new headquarters in Clifton Forge.

"This AT was a success because of the ability of the unit members to perform all their missions and they always maintained the highest standards in the public eye," said Sgt. 1st Class Richard Carr, 29th Division Band Readiness NCO. "The band completed a hard, long AT period of musical and Army training that showcased all the talent in the personnel of the 29th Division Band."



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class A.J. Coyne, Virginia Guard Public Affairs
Members of the Virginia Defense Force in Hampton test their communication abilities as part of a state-wide communications exercise Aug. 20.

the first time we had all our TAC-PAKs issued out around the state and had the VDF IMAT teams recording the data and report it back."

The VDF performed its role of setting up the equipment and making sure Virginia Guard units were able to communicate with one another from their various locations across the state and insuring the units on the ground could communicate successfully with one another.

CERFP University teaches troops WMD basics

By Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

The Virginia National Guard's Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package, or CERFP (pronounced "surf-p"), trained its newest Soldiers and Airmen on the basics of being a member of the incident response team during their annual training at Fort Pickett July 17-23 during what is being called CERFP University.

The nearly 60 Soldiers and Airmen in the joint incident response unit spent their week learning the basics of what it takes to be a member of the CERFP by gaining various Occupational Safety & Health Administration and Virginia Department of Emergency Management certifications, learning how to operate hazardous material detection equipment and how to properly wear hazardous material protection suits.

"The point of the CERFP University is to bring in new members of the CERFP who need to be trained to the basic level," Air Force Master Sgt. William Morey, search and extraction instructor. "The big thing we do here is the hazardous operations class. That's four days of the week they are here. Then they get the hands on and familiarization training for all the equipment that we use."

The program, which is the only CERFP-U in the nation, takes the individual members of the CERFP and trains them to integrate seamlessly in to the teams. The program is designed to take a service member with no prior CERFP training and integrate them seamlessly into the unit while providing them with all the necessary certifications required.

"The CERFP University process for Virginia set us apart from a lot of the other states and that's because we have our one stop shop," said Air Force Master Sgt. Leon Joyal, training program manager. "We have CERFP 101; we have CERFP basic training. We can take anybody off of the street whether they're a Soldier, an Airmen, a Coast Guard, a Marine or Sailor and we can bring them in for five or six days and we can actually train them to be



Photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen. Virginia Guard Public Affairs

A Soldier tests an Airman for radiation during the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package University, or CERFP-U, at Fort Pickett July 20. As members of the CERFP, the Soldiers and Airmen will be required to be proficient on several radiation detection devices.

a viable CERFP team member, a responder able to respond to any weapons of mass destruction incident."

Soldiers and Airmen of the CERFP enrolled in the CERFP-U are given the best training the commonwealth has to offer in their chosen career fields and are being taught by instructors with years of experience under their belts who have been validated through years of training and exercises at the state and national levels.

"We have three years of experience at doing this and we better our process each time. Our process is tried and true," said Joyal. "We haven't had anyone fail any of the required tests and we haven't had anybody fail any of our internal tests, so I know the instructor staff is top-notch."

"We're well trained and we're ready to go. The Guardsmen and the Airmen of the CERFP are ready to roll."

The CERFP can conduct tasks associated with incident management, search and rescue, mass decontamination, medical triage and treatment and fatality search and recovery. The force is made up of Soldiers and Airmen from units based in Petersburg, West Point, Rocky Mount and Langley Air Force Base as well as the D.C. National Guard.

Virginia's CERFP is made up of approximately 250 Virginia Guard Soldiers and Airmen. The units making up Virginia's

CERFP include:

The command and control and incident management team from the Petersburg-based 276th Engineer Battalion.

The mass casualty decontamination element from the Rocky Mount-based 229th Chemical Company

The search and extraction element from West Point-based 237th Engineer Company.

The mass casualty medical triage and treatment element from the 192d Medical Group, Virginia Air National Guard stationed at Langley Air Force Base.

The fatality search and remains recovery element from the 113th Service Squadron from the DC National Guard.

The concept is that when an incident occurs, Guard personnel of the CERFP are alerted through the Joint Force Headquarters - Virginia and mobilized on state active duty. If the incident is located within Virginia they would proceed to the incident when directed by the Joint Force Headquarters. If the incident is located outside of Virginia, the Joint Force Headquarters - Virginia would coordinate with the receiving state under the terms agreed to in the Emergency Mutual Aid Compact. After arriving at the incident site, the incident management team and element commanders coordinate with and support the local incident commander.

Virginia Air Guard salutes its Hometown Heroes

By Master Sgt. Carlos J. Claudio
192nd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

The Virginia Air National Guard's 192nd Fighter Wing honored 130 Airmen and their families at the Hometown Heroes Salute Award Ceremony at Langley Air Force Base Sept. 11, 2011.

More than 300 guests attended the ceremony, which recognized Guardsmen who deployed in support of Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, Noble Eagle and other peacekeeping operations across the globe from Sept. 11, 2001 to April 15, 2010, who have not previously been recognized.

Col. Bryan K. Turner, 192nd Fighter Wing commander, told the audience, "We are here to honor these men and women before us, who some of us know as colleagues, some of us call them friends, and for some of you, you just call them mom and dad, but they all have one thing in common which is they have all been labeled heroes."

"As wing commander, I go to many events, whether hosting or attending for the 192nd Fighter Wing and I can tell you this



The ceremony recognized Guardsmen who deployed in support of Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, Noble Eagle and other peacekeeping operations across the globe from Sept. 11, 2001 to April 15, 2010.



Photo by James R. Orbin, 192nd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

The Virginia Air National Guard's 192nd Fighter Wing honored 130 Airmen and their families at the Hometown Heroes Salute Award Ceremony at Langley Air Force Base, Va., Sept. 11, 2011.

one, in my heart, is the most significant," he told the audience. "That can be attested by the presence of our special guests and the fact that this award is not being presented on behalf of the wing, Major General Long or the state, but on behalf of the Air National Guard."

Brig. Gen. Wayne A. Wright, Virginia Air Guard Chief of Staff, applauded the Guardsmen for their sense of volunteerism.

"All of us in this room who are in uniform raised our right hand and took an oath and we swore to defend and protect the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic," Wright said. "The 130 folks that we're honoring today did that. They all stood up. They all volunteered and they all took that oath when it came time to do that."

"It's the citizen Airman or Soldier that's willing to serve and willing to give that time," Wright continued. "We're asking citizen Airmen or Soldiers for their willingness to walk away from their civilian jobs and their families, and often times, it's going to be abnormal service. So I wanted to thank those in the field for that."

In August 2008, Gen. Craig R. McKinley, chief of the National Guard Bureau, sanctioned the ANG Hometown

Heroes Salute recognition program to celebrate and honor Airmen, families, communities and those special supporters who have significantly contributed to supporting Airmen and the ANG's mission.

In order to properly recognize the sacrifices of eligible Guardsmen, awards are presented in a three-phase campaign.

Phase I includes all eligible ANG members deployed for 30-179 consecutive days.

Phase II includes members deployed for more than 180 consecutive days.

Phase III includes members deployed 366 days or more.

All recognized Airmen receive a framed letter of appreciation signed by the ANG director and command chief master sergeant and a Hometown Heroes Salute coin. Members recognized in phase II, depending on their deployment length, also receive a framed American flag or Hometown Heroes eagle statue.

The honored Airman's spouse or significant other receives an engraved pen and pencil set, while their children receive unique Hometown Heroes Salute dog tags. Lastly, each honored Airman receives a medallion to recognize their center of influence for outstanding support during their deployment.



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Virginia National Guard Soldiers from the Bowling Green-based 189th Engineer Company and the West Point-based 237th Engineer Company use chain saws to open a path for 10 motorists trapped after fallen trees left them trapped for more than seven hours on Route 5 Aug. 28 near the Richmond National Battlefield Park.

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

The Virginia National Guard brought more than 350 personnel on state active duty to assist in the Commonwealth's response to Hurricane Irene from Aug. 27 to 31, 2011. The Guard began staging forces Aug. 26 at readiness centers in Bowling Green, Emporia and Sandston as well as co-locating with Virginia State Police personnel in the Eastern Shore Region of Virginia near Onancock, and from there Soldiers worked with the VSP to clear nearly 350 fallen trees during the hurricane as well as in the immediate response after the storm had passed.

Virginia Guard engineers from the Bowling Green-based 189th Engineer Company, the West Point-based 237th Engineer Company and the Powhatan-based 180th Engineer Company cleared debris fields along the I-64, I-81 and I-95 corridors and in the Eastern Shore area, and transporters from the 1173rd Transportation Company performed commodity distribution and were on standby for possible high-water transport. Soldiers from the 189th and 237th used chain saws to clear trees that had trapped

10 motorists for more than seven hours on Route 5 near the Richmond National Battlefield Park, and Soldiers from 1173rd delivered sandbags in Franklin and moved commodity items in Suffolk.

"We were mobilized, staged and ready to do what we were asked to do," said Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia. "The hurricane impact was less than what we expected, and the local governments did a great job with their response, so it made our job much easier."

Long credited months of training and preparation with the Guard's interagency partners like the Virginia State Police and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management with the rapid and well-coordinated response.

"Our Guardsmen certainly were happy to do the job, and I think Virginia should be proud of how well they did," Long said.

The Virginia Guard continued the practice of staging forces at readiness centers in advance of the severe weather, but there were some new strategies implemented for this response that helped improve the organization's performance, explained Col. Gerald T. Catrett, Joint Operations Officer for the Virginia Guard.

Virginia National Guard personnel support Hurricane Irene recovery operations

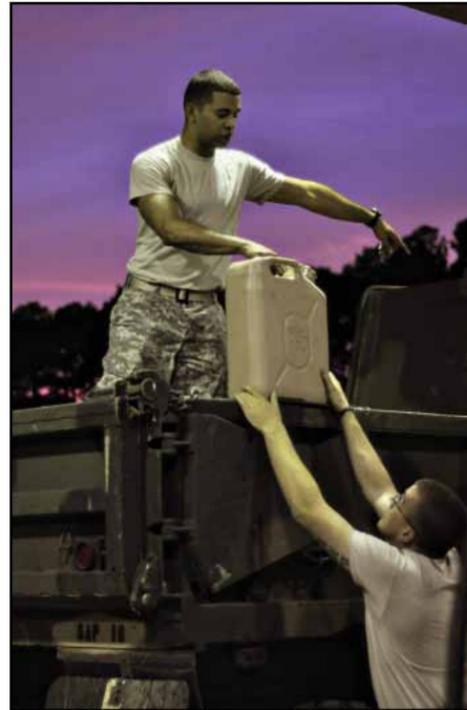


Photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Virginia Guard PAO
Soldiers from the West Point-based 237th Engineer Company stage vehicles, equipment and fuel in Onancock Aug. 26.

"We positioned forces rapidly in advance of the storm so we were prepared to respond," Catrett said. "I think the Soldiers did remarkably well late Saturday night and early Sunday responding in the midst of storm surge winds. They went out at moderate risk to themselves to assist the citizens of the Commonwealth and did what they were asked to do. The next day when the storm had passed, they were out again working with our agency partners to clear debris fields."

Linking up Virginia Guard chain saw teams with the Virginia State Police proved to be a very effective strategy, he said. "The troopers would guide our Soldiers to where the trees had fallen, and then provided support to make sure that they were protected from oncoming motorists while they worked. This enhanced the ability of our Soldiers to reduce the debris fields quickly and open up roadways."

Catrett said that the VSP provided a liaison officer to work in the Virginia



Photo by Master Sgt. Carlos J. Claudio, Virginia Air Guard Public Affairs

Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Adjutant General of the Virginia National Guard, talks to soldiers about professionalism Aug. 27. in Bowling Green as Soldiers from the 189th Engineer Company in Bowling Green and the 180th Engineer Company in Powhatan prepare for duty in response to Hurricane Irene.

Guard's Joint Operations Center, and that was a tremendous help in making effective coordination between the two agencies.

The Virginia Defense Force provided Incident Management Assistance Teams using special communication packages that helped provide critical communication capability during the response.

"We used the Virginia Defense Force in a different role," Catrett said. "The IMATs allowed us to maintain contact with units that were deployed forward. Without the support from the VDF, interoperable communications would have been a huge challenge for us. With them, it was seamless. We never lost communication with our forces in the Eastern Shore area, and that enabled us to stay in contact with the unit commander to maintain situational awareness and provide them with mission taskings."

Personnel were also on duty at the Virginia Guard Joint Operations Center in Sandston, at the Virginia Emergency Operations Center in Midlothian and at Fort Pickett providing command and control and logistical support. The Virginia Guard was authorized to bring as many as 500 personnel on state active duty to support Hurricane Irene operations and additional forces had been alerted for possible duty but were not needed.

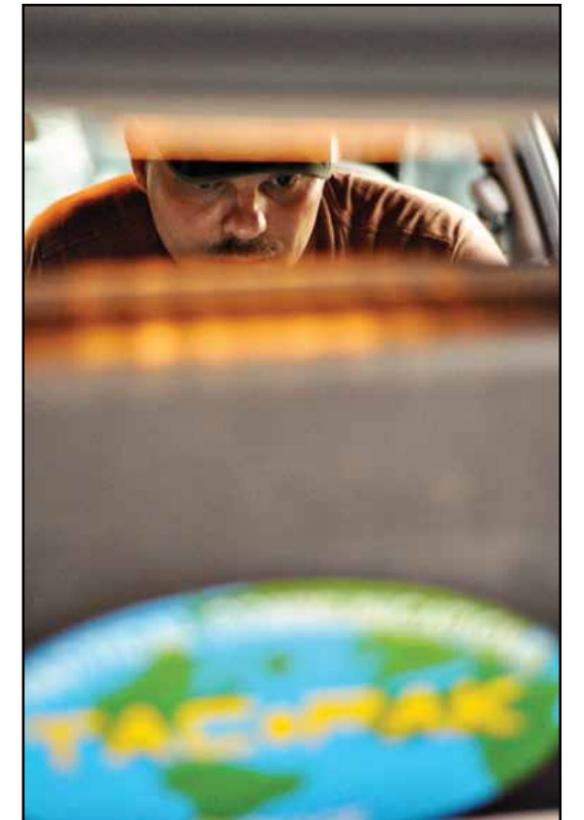


Photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Members of the Virginia Defense Force Incident Management Assistance Team in Onancock set up a TAC-PAC Aug. 26 to provide communication between Virginia National Guard Soldiers on duty across the commonwealth.



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Soldiers from the 189th Engineer Company and 237th Engineer Company use chain saws to help Virginia State Police clear fallen trees along I-85 near Petersburg Aug. 27 after having been staged in Sandston since Aug. 26