



Photo by Staff Sgt. Paul Rivera, 116th IBCT

Maj. Gen. Robert B. Newman, Jr., takes aim and fires a round June 14 at the 9mm range at Fort Pickett, Va. Newman was at Fort Pickett to visit with and talk to Soldiers from throughout the state who were conducting annual training at the installation.

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116th IBCT troops test their Soldier skills at AT

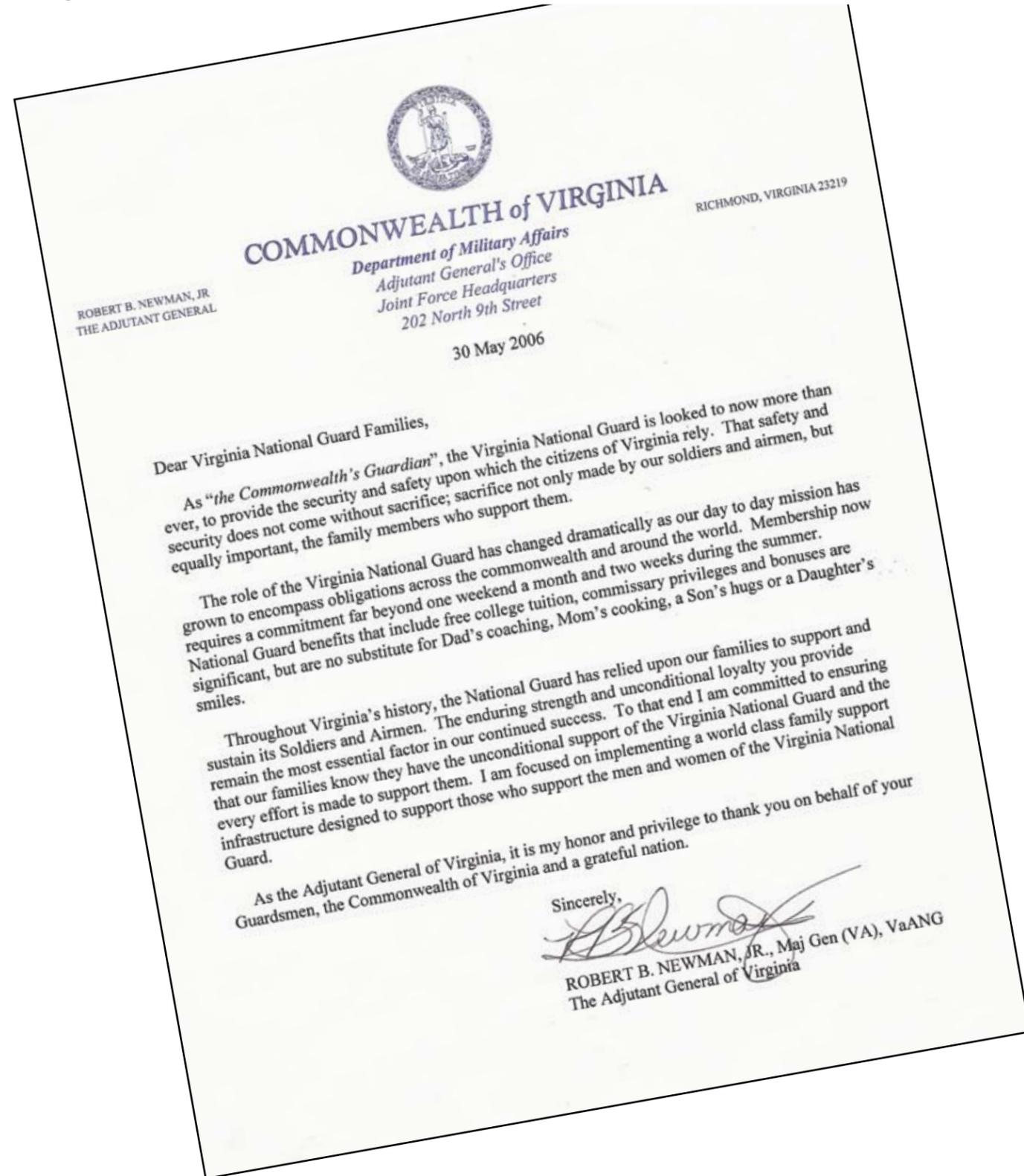
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FROM THE TOP



Adjutant General addresses National Guard families



276th Engineers welcome aboard new commander

By Capt. Lesley Kipling
 91st Troop Command



Col. David Archer, commander of 91st Troop Command, passes the 276th Eng. Bn. guidon to Maj. James A. Zollar.

Maj. James A. Zollar took command of 276th Combat Engineer Battalion at a ceremony at Fort Pickett on June 16.

He replaced Lt. Col. Michael J. Higgins who completed his second battalion command and is preparing to retire.

"There is no better way that I could have ended my career in the National Guard, in the military than serving as your commander," Higgins said in a speech at the ceremony.

"When I took command, I thought this would be an ideal situation for me, with most of the unit re-deployed

from Iraq," he added. "With so much experience, I figured my job as commander would be very easy and you proved me right."

"Actually, you exceeded what my expectations were for this battalion," he continued.

"I expected a bunch of combat veterans. I didn't expect in peace time that you'd carry the same determination, loyalty and honor that you carried in battle."

Zollar, who has served with the 276th in several assignments throughout his career, most recently deployed with the unit to Iraq as the battalion executive officer.

"I'm proud to come back and serve with them again," he said.

Governor Kaine signs Military Relief Family Act

By Tricia Riggs,
 Sandston Family Assistance Center

Virginia Gov. Timothy Kaine signed the Virginia Military Family Relief Act June 19 in Richmond. The act will create the Virginia Military Family Relief Fund, which will provide financial assistance to the families of Guard and Reserve members who are deployed.

One of Virginia's Family Readiness Group liaisons and her family were there to witness this historic event. They were invited and welcomed by Kaine, who remembered all of the sacrifices families go through when a Soldier deploys.

The Virginia Military Family Relief Fund will provide another avenue for Soldiers and their families to get through the financial issues that sometimes come with a deployment.

At present, 22 other states have established similar funds to

provide financial assistance to the families of Guard and Reserve members.

These bills were the result of recommendations by the Virginia Citizen-Soldier Support Council.

In addition, Senate Bill 617 establishes the "Support Our Troops" license plate. Support Our Troops, Inc. expects to have these license plates available in at least 30 states by the end of this summer. The bill will be funded by everyday citizens checking off that block on their taxes this coming tax season.

Support Our Troops, Inc. is a national non-profit organization which raises funds to provide financial assistance to Soldiers' survivors and families to meet medical or household expenses.

These two bills are a great way for the community to not only show support for Soldiers but to benefit the families of those injured or killed while on duty.

More information can be found at www.governor.virginia.gov

Virginia National Guard Federal Deployments

# *	Unit	Where Deployed	Home Town
157	Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 111th Field Artillery	Iraq	Richmond
60	192nd Fighter Wing, 200th Weather Flight and 203rd REDHORSE	Various locations	Sandston and Virginia Beach
55	Various units	Army Guard Readiness Center	
275	2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation	Iraq	Sandston

* All listings for numbers of Soldiers are approximate.

News Briefs

TAG announces senior enlisted appointments

Maj. Gen. Robert B. Newman, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, announced that, effective May 1, 2006, Command Sgt. Maj. Robert W. Huffman has been selected to serve as the Senior Enlisted Advisor at the Virginia National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters in Richmond.

In addition to serving as the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Adjutant Advisor, his duties include providing guidance concerning enlisted issues for both the Air and Army National Guard.

Command Sgt. Maj. Clifton C. White has been selected as the command sergeant major for the Virginia Army National Guard at Fort Pickett. He will be responsible for providing input and advisement concerning enlisted matters for the Army National Guard.

Command Chief Master Sgt. John Iorio will continue to serve as the command chief master sergeant for the Virginia Air National Guard. He is responsible for providing guidance concerning all enlisted matters concerning the Air National Guard.

"These senior NCO's have a tremendous amount of experience and knowledge," Newman said. "They will be instrumental to the transformation of the Virginia National Guard."

Red Cross, Sandston FAC team up for classes

The Sandston Family Assistance Center and the Greater Richmond Chapter of the American Red Cross teamed up for the first time on June 3 to offer a number of valuable classes for Virginia National Guard members and their families.

Thirty Soldiers and three family members took part in First Aid Preparedness and CPR training at the Sandston armory.

In addition, 20 Soldiers took a two-hour class that taught basic first aid and how to prepare their family for a disaster.

Meanwhile, eight Soldiers and three civilians took a four-hour CPR class and are now certified in performing CPR.

The events were a success and the

Ribbon cutting officially opens new quarters at SMR



Photo courtesy Virginia Air Guard Public Affairs Office

The 203d Red Horse Squadron (RHS) conducted a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony on April 1, officially opening a new Troop Training Quarters facility located at the State Military Reservation (SMR) in Virginia Beach. Cutting the ribbon at the main entrance to the new Troop Training Quarters is (left to right) TESORO Corporation President Dennis Gilbert; Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera Oberndorf; Lt. Col. Paul Julian, 203d RHS Commander, and Col. Jeff Allen, the Virginia National Guard's U.S. Property and Fiscal Officer. The new facility will be used to conduct training; and it will be used by out-of-town HORSEMEN for billeting purposes.

Richmond Red Cross would like to offer more programs for servicemembers and their families in the future. Camille Gaffney, the chapter's military liaison can be reached at 804-780-2270.

Army streamlines service uniforms to one blue Army Service Uniform

The Army announced on June 5 that Army service uniforms will be streamlined to one blue Army Service Uniform.

"World-class Soldiers deserve a simplified, quality uniform. The blue Army Service Uniform is a traditional uniform that is consistent with the Army's most honored traditions," said Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston.

Many Soldiers already own an Army lue uniform and may continue to wear it.

Improvements will be made to the fabric and fit. The uniform will include a gold braid on the trousers for E-5's and above.

Additionally, the service cap will be authorized for wear by NCOs as well as officers. The new uniform will also be wrinkle-free.

Reduction of the number of uniforms will reduce the burden on Soldiers for purchases and alteration cost, officials add.

Introduction in the Army Military Clothing Sales Stores should begin in fourth quarter of fiscal year 2007. Introduction in the Clothing Bag should begin first quarter 2009.

The Mandatory Possession Date is expected to be fourth quarter fiscal year 2011.

A wear-out date for the Army Green Class A and White dress uniforms will be determined at a later date.



On the Cover



A Soldier in the 116th Infantry Brigade carries a fellow Soldier to safety during an exercise at annual training at Fort Pickett. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Raul Rivera 116th IBCT)

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In this issue:



Page 7



Page 11

- From The Top.....2
- Virginia hosts annual AGAUS conference4
- Virginia National Guard Soldiers deploy to border5
- Exercise at mall tests 34th CST's capabilities6
- New Virginia National Guard capability authorized.....6
- Cavalry Soldiers quell 'riot' at Fort Pickett7
- 116th IBCT AT in photos 8 - 9
- Stonewall battalions search for HVT's at AT10
- Former VMI cadets serve in Va. Guard aviation units in Iraq 11
- Annual training & a check up for IBCT troops12
- Portsmouth unit competes in Connelly competition.....12
- 116th IBCT Soldiers blow down doors at AT12
- Virginia Guard Soldiers ordered to duty for KFOR mission13
- News Briefs.....14
- 276th Engineers welcome new commander15
- Virginia National Guard Federal Deployments15

Virginia hosts AGAUS conference

By Maj. Ed Moran
Virginia Air National Guard

As significant events shape our lived history so too did the beautiful setting of Colonial Williamsburg provide the perfect context for the Adjutants General Association of the United States conference June 19-23.

The Colonial Fife and Drum Corps, "President George Washington" and "Thomas Jefferson" were all on hand to greet the 52 state adjutants general, Lt. Gen. H. Stephen Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, corporate sponsors and guests for a week of federal and state business meetings.

A visit by Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, followed that evening by dinner with Gov. Tim Kaine were, for many, the highpoints of the conference.

A fashion show, tour of a nearby winery, an afternoon of golf at Kingsmill and a visit to historic Jamestown entertained spouses and TAGs alike for the "non-business" parts of the week.

Maj. Gen. Robert B. Newman, Jr., Adjutant General of Virginia, said the conference was critical to the mission of the National Guard.

"In terms of funding, force structure and mission, we are here to forge a united front," he said. "The beauty and history of Virginia, and Williamsburg in particular, provides a perfect setting to bring us together to face the challenges of passing The National Guard Retirement Act and hold the line on funding diminishment that threatens so much of our performance in our critical federal war fighting mission as well as our state capabilities like homeland security, disaster relief, drug interdiction and border security."

Newman noted that the real success of the conference was in what was done for the spouses.

"By getting them out to do some fun things in a really great environment, they will remember Virginia and the hospitality



Photo by Maj. Cotton Puryear, Virginia National Guard Public Affairs

Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, addresses Maj. Gen. Robert B. Newman, Jr. and his fellow adjutants general during the AGAUS conference.



Photo by Maj. Cotton Puryear, Virginia Guard PAO

Gov. Tim Kaine hosted the Governor's Reception and spoke to those attending the conference.

we offered here this week," he said. "They will remember how truly great the experience with the Virginia Guard truly is."

Col. Mike Coleman, chief of staff of the Virginia Army Guard, supervised 162 Soldiers and Airmen in support of the operation. He noted that the conference was two years in planning and that he built it as a joint military operation complete



Photo by Maj. Cotton Puryear, Virginia Guard PAO

Lt. Gen. H. Stephen Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, appeared June 20 at the AGAUS conference.

with operations orders, command teams, and mission accountability.

One of the most difficult parts of the operation, he said, was keeping the state and federal components separate.

Coleman said he was proud of the work his "red shirts" did on both the Army and Air Guard sides to make things run well and provide the kind of excellent service conference attendees reported to him.

Exercise at mall tests 34th CST's capabilities

By Staff Sgt. A.J. Coyne
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

In order to gauge its ability to respond to potential biological, chemical, nuclear, radiological and explosive incidents at a moment's notice, the Virginia National Guard's 34th Civil Support Team conducted an evaluation exercise June 8 at Cloverleaf Mall in Richmond.

The 34th CST, which is based at Fort Pickett, responds and provides support to civil authorities at potential biological, chemical, nuclear, radiological and explosive incidents.

It can identify these agents and substances, assess current and projected consequences, advise on response measures and assist with requests for additional state support.

"The point of this exercise is to learn from our mistakes and see where we are," explained Lt. Col. Jeffrey Hice, commander of the 34th CST.

"It's less a report card and more of an

evaluation to see where we are."

The day-long event tested the entire 22-person team, which was evaluated on 15 different tasks by personnel from Fifth Army headquarters in Atlanta.

"That's why it's important to bring the team from Fifth Army in," Hice said. "They can offer another perspective, another point of view on our performance. But this is a well-trained, solid team and they're performing very well."

The 34th CST is one of 32 such units in the country and is equipped with a wide range of the latest military and commercial equipment. The team's primary response area includes a 250-mile radius from its home station at Fort Pickett.

It is made up of full-time Army and Air National Guard personnel who bring a wide range of career experience from the civilian sector.

The team trains constantly in preparation for a real-world scenario. In fact, the exercise in Richmond was the 34th CST's 16th major exercise in the past year,



Photo by Staff Sgt. A.J. Coyne, Va. Guard PAO

34th CST Soldiers wheel a "wounded" teammate to safety during an evaluation exercise June 8 in Richmond.

according to Hice.

"The main thing is to identify anything present at the site, whether it's chemical, biological or nuclear" he said. "Then we help determine how it will affect the local population."

New Virginia National Guard capability authorized

By Lt. Col. Chester C. Carter, III
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Maj. Gen. Robert B. Newman, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, announced a new capability has been authorized for the Virginia National Guard.

The Virginia National Guard has been authorized a National Guard Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High-Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package (NG CERFP). He said this package will add significant capability to support homeland security operations within the Commonwealth.

The NG CERFP is made up of traditional National Guard Soldiers from existing National Guard units who are trained and equipped to perform the functions of casualty decontamination, medical triage and treatment, and casualty search and extraction at a catastrophic incident scene.

Currently a CERFP capability exists in the National Guard of 12 states. Virginia was one of the five states authorized the additional CERFP by the 2006 National Defense Authorization Act.

The Virginia National Guard Joint Force Headquarters will provide command and control for the CERFP.

The 237th Engineer Company located in West Point and the 203d Civil Engineer Squadron (Red Horse) in Virginia Beach will provide the capability to extract victims from damaged structures;

the 229th Chemical Company, Virginia Army National Guard, in Roanoke will provide mass decontamination capability; and the 192d Medical Squadron, Virginia Air National Guard in Sandston provides medical triage capability to the CERFP.

The 34th Civil Support Team located in Blackstone will provide the weapons of mass destruction capability for the CERFP.

The focus of the CERFP mission will be for the Virginia National Guard to build an enhanced homeland defense capability within Virginia.

However, each of the units that make up the Virginia National Guard CERFP will also continue to support their traditional state and federal missions in addition to supporting their new mission as part of the CERFP.

The proximity to the National Capital Region, numerous important major military facilities and Virginia's population of over seven million people are among the reasons to add this to the Virginia National Guard's current mission set.

The Virginia National Guard has the requisite force structure, equipment storage facilities, airfield access, and training areas required to support the CERFP mission.

This mission, added to the state's Immediate Response Force capability, military police, aviation and ground transportation capabilities, creates a significant disaster response and recovery capacity for Virginia and the United States.

Annual Training & a check up for IBCT troops

By Sgt. John Slosser
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

More than 300 Soldiers from the 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team became the first troops from Virginia to receive the Department of Defense Post Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA).

The PDHRA is part of the force health protection program designed to extend the range of care for Soldiers' deployment-related health concerns.

It provides education, screening, assessment and access to care for a wide variety of health and readjustment questions and concerns that may not emerge until Soldiers have been home for three- to six-months.

"We are doing what we have been directed to do and so much more," said 1st Lt. Russell Britt, Virginia's PDHRA program manager. "A key component of the program is the one-on-one time soldiers get with health care providers."

The screening and education process covers everything from post traumatic stress and family problems to financial and educational benefits.

The Soldiers had the opportunity to discuss any health concerns or questions with a health-care provider in a private face-to-face session.

If a Soldier required further evaluation or treatment, a follow up appointment could be scheduled with an appropriate health-care or community service provider.

"When a Soldier returns from a deployment all they really want is to go home," said Col. Kim Dillon, deputy chief of staff for personnel.

"After a few months, some might recognize deployment-related issues or problems with their health, families or jobs," said Dillon.

"I think it's very important for them to understand that they

should have no fear for reprisal in asking for help in getting proper assistance with personal or professional issues."

The event not only included teams of doctors, nurses, and counselors, but also representatives from a range of veteran organizations from around the state.

"We want every one of them to have a chance to meet with us," said Debra Butler, Veterans Affairs liaison for returning Soldiers. "Every Soldier should understand all the help and benefits available to them. Then, if they want or need assistance, they will know where to go."

Many cite the program as a move forward in understanding the physical, environmental and emotional challenges today's Soldiers face during deployment.

"When I got out of the Navy I had no idea about the benefits that were available to me. You had to go out and find it. Now we take the information right to troops," said Rick Tatum, a physicians assistant with the PDHRA. "We've gotten a lot of very positive feedback. It gives us a chance to give back a little for what (the Soldiers) have done for us."

While the program organizers plan to meet with other recently re-deployed units throughout the year, other states are looking to Virginia as an example of how to conduct their own reassessments.

Although this is the state's first, the overall message is that the PDHRA program is a standard to be followed by all re-deploying units from now on.

"We all cope with things in different ways," said Britt. "(The Soldiers) all seem to agree that this is a positive and worthwhile service."

More information about the Post Deployment Health Reassessment can be found on the internet at www.pdhealth.mil or www.deploymentlink.osd.mil.

Soldiers and their families can also call the Deployment Health Help Line at 1-800-497-6261

Portsmouth unit competes in food service competition

By Capt. Tim Brooke
116th Infantry Brigade Public Affairs

D Company, 429th Brigade Support Battalion, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Virginia Army National Guard from Portsmouth, Va., competed in the regional Connelly Competition for excellence in Army National Guard Food Service on June 17.

As state champions, D Company is competing against other Army National Guard Food Service Teams from Mississippi, Nevada, South Dakota, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Kansas, and the Virgin Islands for a chance to compete in the national finals.

The Connelly Award is named after Philip A. Connelly, recognized for his

contributions to the career field of food service.

D Company's Food Service Team is led by 1st Lt. Ronald Gilbar and Sgt. 1st. Class Ernest Smith, Jr.

The competition is evaluated based on training, administration, accounting, storage, command support, servings, site layout, equipment, food preparation, diner satisfaction, safety, sanitation, pride, and professionalism.

Benefits of the competition for the Virginia Army National Guard include better training for food service personnel, improved morale, readiness, and retention for all soldiers.

Food service is the type of job in the Army that if you do your job, nobody takes much notice, if you don't do your job, then

everybody notices.

When asked what the competition meant to him and his soldiers, Gilbar said "They realize food is a morale booster. Soldiers work really hard to provide top quality food for the Soldier."

When asked the same question, Smith stated that in 26 years of service this was one of the few times he had the opportunity to compete at this level.

The competition is evaluated by Bowhead Eagle. Bowhead Eagle employs retired food service personnel as evaluators.

This year all competing units will prepare the same menu of beef stroganoff, tomato rice soup, noodles, carrots, spring salad, pineapple up-side down cake, assorted breads, available beverages, and appropriate condiments.

TAG sends special thanks for hard work during AGAUS

To the Men and Women of the Virginia National Guard that supported the Adjutants General Association of the United States Spring 2006 Conference,

I want to publicly applaud your tremendous efforts in support of the conference. I have received dozens of laudatory comments from senior officers, family members and corporate sponsors who complimented your professionalism, energy, optimism and abilities.

Like any military operation, success was predicated upon hours of planning and rehearsals, much of it on personal time.

I want to thank you for the sacrifices you made and the energy you devoted to making the conference an unqualified success.

The importance of this gathering is highlighted by the attendance of 51 Adjutants General, the visit of Gen. Pace, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the many days spent there by Lt. Gen. Blum. Your efforts ensured that the operation of the conference facilitated the strategic discussion and important national dialogues that occurred within the historic setting of Williamsburg.

I am immensely proud of your efforts. You represented the Virginia National Guard with distinction and set a high standard for other events to follow. As we look to the 400th Anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, we have a trained and ready cadre of people who will be able to execute any operation that may arise.

Thank you!

Maj. Gen. Bob Newman
The Adjutant General



Photo by Maj. Cotton Puryear, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Gov. Kaine with some of the "red shirts" who helped make the conference happen.

Virginia National Guard members deploy to border

From Staff Reports

Maj. Gen. Robert B. Newman, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, announced that Soldiers and Airmen of the Virginia National Guard have volunteered to serve on the Southwest Border in support of Operation Jump Start.

Newman said approximately 350 Soldiers and Airmen from the Commonwealth volunteered to serve on a Virginia National Guard task force that will be supporting the United States Customs and Border Protection in Arizona. Newman went on to say that the volunteers will begin entering duty around June 30, 2006.

According to Newman the mission for the Joint Force Headquarters – Virginia is to alert, marshal, train, deploy, and support a Joint Task Force, or JTF, made up of volunteer Soldiers and Airmen of the Virginia National Guard. Once that JTF arrives in Arizona, it will support

Operation Jump Start and operate under the control of the Governor of Arizona.

Initially the plan was to have Virginia National Guard Soldiers deploy in support of Operation Jump Start after the hurricane season, which ends Nov. 1, but this opportunity for volunteers came up.

Newman said that the call went out across the Commonwealth seeking Soldiers and Airmen to support this requirement. In the strongest tradition of the Virginia National Guard; Soldiers and Airmen came forward willing take this mission on.

According to Newman, the Virginia National Guard will remain capable of meeting the potential challenges of the upcoming hurricane season even with these Soldiers deployed on the Southwest Border. Newman noted that these volunteers could be recalled to Virginia in the event an emergency strikes the Commonwealth while they are serving in Arizona.

Col. Robert Simpson, Director of the

Joint Staff of the Virginia National Guard, said the Soldiers and Airmen will come from units throughout Virginia.

"About one third of the volunteers will begin entering duty at their home stations on June 30 where they will complete preliminary processing requirements and then travel to Fort Pickett," Simpson said. "There they will complete various administrative and training tasks in preparation for this mission."

Simpson went on to say when the volunteer Soldiers and Airmen arrive in Arizona they will receive an orientation and specific mission training from the Customs and Border Protection Service.

Lt. Col. Thomas Morgan, the Virginia National Guard Director of Military Support, said current planning provides for the volunteers to report for duty on June 30, July 15, and July 25 and "a phased deployment by group ending with all forces in Arizona by July 30."

116th Special Troops Battalion Soldiers blow the doors off AT

By Staff Sgt. A.J. Coyne
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Some Virginia Army National Guard troops knocked down doors and blew through walls during a day of annual training at Fort Pickett, Va.

The Soldiers, from A Company, Special Troops Battalion, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, spent June 15 learning about urban breaching charges and the most effective way to use them. They designed, built and detonated three different types of breaching charges- water impulse charges, flex linear charges and C-shaped charges.

Although their two weeks of annual training also included weapons qualification, military operations in urban terrain training, and a convoy live fire, their combat mission means the demolition training carried extra importance.

"In an urban environment, these skills are vital," said Capt. Ryan Thompson, company commander. "And we're a combat engineer company so mobility is important."

Although only about 50 percent of the unit had worked with these devices before, the other half of the group included many combat experienced Soldiers.

"These Soldiers are outstanding," Thompson said. "Some are nervous. Some are experienced. But they're all meshing. You couldn't ask for a better group."

One member of that group was Pfc. Lyndsay Mollohan, who is



Photo by Staff Sgt. A.J. Coyne, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers attach a water impulse charge to a door before detonating the device June 15 at Fort Pickett, Va. A. Co., Special Troops Battalion Soldiers learned about three different types of urban breaching charges during demolitions training.

assigned to Headquarters Company maintenance section.

She had the opportunity to spend the day with A Co. and experience training she might not otherwise see in her own unit.

"This is very exciting," she said. "This is my first time doing this and I was intimidated at first. But I thought it was awesome."

"This is definitely cool," Mollohan added. "It's definitely something different."

Virginia Guard Soldiers ordered to duty for KFOR mission

From Staff Reports

Maj. Gen. Robert B. Newman, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, announced that approximately 488 Soldiers of the Virginia Army National Guard will enter active federal service at their home armories beginning on July 17.

These Virginia Army National Guard Soldiers are being ordered to active federal service for 18 months in support of the NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR) mission.

The Soldiers are currently scheduled to travel to their mobilization station at Camp Atterbury, Ind., after a short period of duty at their home armories.

The 29th Infantry Division will deploy to provide command and control for one of the four brigade-sized task forces conducting peace-enforcement operations in Kosovo.

National Guard units from 16 states and Puerto Rico, as well as units from the active Army and the Army Reserve, will deploy to Kosovo under the 29th Inf. Div.

flag in late November and assume control of the Multi-National Task Force (East) (MNTF(E)).

Task Force Falcon is made up of approximately 1,500 personnel.

The National Guard of Virginia, Maryland and Massachusetts will provide more than half of those Soldiers, while other National Guards from 16 different states and Puerto Rico will provide the additional personnel.

The Kosovo Force (KFOR) is a NATO-led international force responsible for establishing and maintaining security in Kosovo.

This peace-enforcement force entered Kosovo on 12 June 1999 under a United Nations mandate, two days after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

The objectives of KFOR are to establish and maintain a secure environment in Kosovo, including public safety and order; to monitor, verify and when necessary, enforce compliance with the agreements that ended the conflict; and to provide

assistance to the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

KFOR contingents are grouped into four Multi-National Task Forces.

Although Multi-National Task Forces are responsible for a specific area of operations, they all fall under a single chain of command under the authority of Commander KFOR.

Virginia National Guard units affected by this mobilization are:

- HHC 29th Infantry Division (Fort Belvoir)- 170 Soldiers
- HHC 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry (Lynchburg) - 38 Soldiers
- B Co., 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry (Lexington & Clifton Forge) - 95 Soldiers
- C Co., 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry (Christiansburg & Radford) - 95 Soldiers
- Co. D., 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry (Pulaski) - 66 Soldiers
- Co. E, 429th CS Battalion (Roanoke) - 24 Soldiers

Former VMI cadets serve in Va. Guard aviation units in Iraq

By Cpl. Jonathan K. Teslevich
3rd Marine Aircraft Wing

AL ASAD, Iraq -- One hundred and sixty-seven years ago, an educational institution was founded in the rolling hills of Virginia. Through the years, many brave Americans have walked its halls, taking the first steps of journeys marked by personal sacrifices of which some even offered their lives in defense of their fellow citizens and country.

The Virginia Military Institute's mission is to produce educated, honorable men and women prepared for the varied work of civil life, imbued with love of learning, confident in the functions and attitudes of leadership, possessing a high sense of public service, advocates of the American Democracy and free enterprise system, and ready as citizen-soldiers to defend their country in time of national peril.

Nearly two dozen graduates of this prestigious institution are now serving in Army and Marine aviation units deployed to a remote desert airbase in Al Asad, Iraq, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The soldier and Marine graduates of the institute explained how the VMI experience prepared them for the challenges of a combat environment.

"VMI gave me the foundation for being able to deal with a multitude of competing priorities," said a graduate with the Virginia Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, Marine Aircraft Group 16 (Reinforced), 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing.

"Life at the institute is a constant risk-assessment where you have to balance your studies, extra duties and military training. Often you have to decide which thing, that day, is going to be least important and which thing has the greatest risk of coming back to haunt you."

Other graduates with the Virginia battalion explained similar benefits of attending a military institute.

"VMI prepared me in many ways, but simply put, VMI prepared me to accept each situation as it comes and realize that is just how things have to be sometimes," said 1st Lt. Gordon S. Larkin III, a pilot and maintenance platoon leader, 2-224 AVN.

As a place of learning, VMI provided its



Photo by Cpl. Jonathan K. Teslevich, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing

Virginia Military Institute graduates serving in Marine and Army aviation units pose for a picture at Al Asad, Iraq.

graduates with an undergraduate education of the highest quality conducted in, and facilitated by, the unique VMI system of military discipline.

"It would take too long to describe exactly how VMI challenged me mentally, but suffice to say that it did," said Larkin, a 2001 graduate and Providence Forge, Va., native. "By making it through VMI and its many challenges, it gave me extreme confidence that, when needed, I can rise to new challenges and difficulties."

The graduates' jobs range from pilots to intelligence officers in the Army and Marine Corps units here. Service in the U.S. forces is not a requirement of the institute's graduates, though it is encouraged.

"I wanted to serve," said Larkin. "There are many reasons why, but the most important reason is that I could not imagine not serving. I started realizing that if I did not go into the military, then I would go through life feeling that I hadn't done my part.

"However, I also love civilian life, which is why I joined the National Guard," he added. "We get the best of both worlds, and the worst sometimes. That decision (to join the military) was not easy, but very rewarding."

As members of the Virginia ANG, many of the VMI graduates at Al Asad worked in the civilian sector full time until they were called to active duty.

"After leaving VMI, I worked as a consultant," said 1st Lt. Todd M. Anthony, logistics officer, 2-224 AVN and St. Louis, native.

"I felt that VMI had more than prepared me for the job. The job I am doing here is much different from my civilian work, but VMI has allowed me to excel in this environment as well.

"The multi-tasking skills that I learned in school and the ability to think through problems and prioritize have allowed me to be successful in the military logistics arena."

Stonewall battalions search for HVT's at AT

By Capt. Timothy Brooke
116th Infantry Brigade Public Affairs

Months of planning for annual training's culminating event were realized June 21 as soldiers from the 1st and 3rd battalions, 116th Infantry Regiment conducted a cordon and search of Cherry Village with the mission of finding and detaining a high value target (HVT).

The operation initially involved placing battalion scouts in position to observe the village and identify the HVT. Once the scouts acquired the location of the target, they provided real time reports to the battalion tactical operations center on the location and activities of the HVT.

With the assistance of aviation assets from the Pennsylvania Army National Guard's B/104th Aviation, platoons were lifted by Chinook helicopters into positions to the north and south of the village to set the inner cordon. This assured the target would be unable to escape the village.

Once the inner cordon was set, the platoon leader radioed the company commander that they were ready for the search/assault platoon to be inserted.

Within minutes, a rifle platoon touched down at Landing Zone Omaha to begin the search.

Many members of 3-116th Infantry are veterans of just this kind of mission in the mountains of Afghanistan. This was evident when, upon arrival, the platoon leader immediately sought out the village elder to gain his assistance and cooperation in finding and detaining the target.

The outcome of this training mission is often very different as platoons cordon and search the village. Some platoons gain the assistance of the village elder and others do not. The latter situation usually results in far more dangerous engagement with the villagers.

According to Lt. Col. John M. Epperly, commander of the Winchester-based 3-116th, "This sort of training places the Soldiers and their leadership in a situation where they are forced to think on their feet no matter how in depth the mission planning as been. We try to make it as real as possible. I want these soldiers to know when to use force and how much to use."

The use of civilians on the battlefield added to the realism of the training. Villagers approached Soldiers asking for cigarettes, food and water. They also asked the soldiers why they came.

The platoon and company leadership must balance their need



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michael Hampton, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers from the 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team prepare to enter a building during cordon and search training June 21 at Fort Pickett. The operation involved observing the village and identifying high value targets.

for speed and security with cultural sensitivity.

"Simply assaulting the village is too elementary," Epperly continued. "I have no doubts about their ability to take the village. Platoon leaders, squad leaders and team leaders have to know instinctively how to engage the populace to build trust and gain their assistance. This will result in precise direct action based on better intelligence."

Most of the time, the HVT is not taken without some level of firefight. Once the HVT is detained, he along with the rest of the search/assault platoon is extracted by CH-47.

The cordon element is extracted in follow-on CH-47 lifts.

During the operation a reporter from *The Virginian-Pilot* questioned Epperly on the purpose of the training and role of the National Guard. After explaining the purpose of this training, Epperly pointed out that this is the type of training that Soldiers join the Guard to participate in.

When asked by the reporter about his opinion on the Guard only being used for domestic purposes like hurricane relief Epperly pointed out, "The Army National Guard trains and is prepared to conduct what we call full spectrum operations. We can fight in Iraq or Afghanistan and we can provide relief following a natural disaster in Virginia or Mississippi which is a domestic support operation.

"We've shown we can do that by deploying to Afghanistan and with both Hurricanes Isabelle and Katrina. The two missions are not mutually exclusive. The Guard is uniquely positioned to execute both."

According to Epperly, planning for relief operations is very similar to planning and coordinating stability and support operations in that the military is only one component of the effort.

Cavalry Soldiers quell 'riot' at Fort Pickett

By Staff Sgt. A.J. Coyne
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers from the 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry Regiment were pelted with pinecones, water balloons and insults as they took to the streets of Fort Pickett May 7 to quell a civilian disturbance.

Decked out in full riot gear and wielding batons and shields, the troops cleared the streets of rioters and peacefully defused the situation with only a few arrests.

The "riot" was actually the culmination of two days of training on military assistance for civilian disturbances (MACDIS). And although the event was staged and the "rioters" were fellow Soldiers, troops from 2-183rd learned a valuable lesson on how to handle civil disturbances in the future.

May 6 was spent both in the classroom and outside, learning how to form impenetrable lines, how to move together and how to apprehend and immobilize people.

All of this training was put to the test the next day when each troop had the opportunity to go through two iterations of the scenario while spending one rotation as the opposing force.

A Fort Pickett street was closed off to traffic and the role-playing Soldiers began causing trouble for their fellow troops. Even though it wasn't real, there was still plenty of tension and anxiety on both sides.

"It's great to have the realism of this training," said Sgt. Raymond Bunch, a section leader with A Troop. "You're trying to stay focused on what's in front of you and not look around. It definitely adds a great feeling of realism you can't get in a classroom."

While the Soldiers had to lock arms, keep their shields up and push the "rioters" back, the role-playing Soldiers tried to bust through the line. Bunch described it as being a defensive lineman in football.

Behind him and the first line of troops were the "linebackers," Soldiers who helped the line stay locked together and keep people from breaking through.



Photo by Staff Sgt. A.J. Coyne, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers maintain their position as a "rioter" (in red) tries to break through their line during the MACDIS training.



Photo by Staff Sgt. A.J. Coyne, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

A Soldier with 2nd Sq., 183rd Cav. Regt., stands his ground as fellow Soldiers, role-playing as rioters, gather in front of him during military assistance for civilian disturbances training May 7 at Fort Pickett.

The unit's mission was to secure "city hall." They did this by slowly moving their way down the street, pushing the civilians further back until the building could be secured. Concertina wire was employed along the sides to keep the rioters from coming around the flank and to direct them where the Soldiers wanted them to go.

"The overall picture is beyond us when we're on the line," Bunch explained. "We just have to focus on what's in front of us. You can't get distracted."

Rioters who broke through the line or who were judged to be the most troublesome and let through, were handcuffed and taken to the rear of the operations area for processing. There, Soldiers had to fill out paperwork on the arrested citizens and try to keep them from escaping. Although the training was fun, it was physically and mentally demanding.

"It's tiring but it's also rewarding because you've learned your training, applied it and now you're able to find out what your mistakes are and improve for the future," Bunch said.

But just as important, the training exercise offered the opportunity to bring the Soldiers in one of the Virginia Army National Guard's newest units together as a team.

"A lot of this training is teamwork and operating as one," said Lt. Col. Walt Mercer, the squadron commander. "These Soldiers have only been together for less than a year and they are already showing good teamwork."

From spur rides to live fires, a look at 116th Infantry Brigade's annual training



Photo by Staff Sgt. Raul Rivera, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team



Photo by Maj. Dwayne Brauner, 29th Infantry Division

Soldiers from 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry Regiment emerge from the woodline June 21 after completing the obstacle course en route to earning their spurs as part of the squadron's first-ever spur ride (left). Members of the 429th Brigade Support Battalion practice multiple echelons of care for casualties during a mass casualty exercise (top). A 116th IBCT Soldier evacuates a wounded Soldier during a cordon and search operation June 21 (top right). Troops from A Company (Engineers), Special Troops Battalion receive a range safety briefing prior to conducting a convoy live fire range June 13 (bottom right). 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Soldiers make their way toward Cherry Village to set the inner cordon prior to the search of the village for insurgents during consolidated training for the 1-116th and 3-116th Infantry Battalions.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Raul Rivera, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team



Photo by Maj. Dwayne Brauner, 29th Infantry Division



Photo by Staff Sgt. Raul Rivera, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team