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Courtesy Photo

Command Sgt. Maj. Carl Holcomb, the Virginia Army National Guard land component command sergeant major, places a holiday wreath at Arlington National Cemetery Dec. 10 to honor the service of fallen U. S. service members laid to rest there. Holcomb joined thousands of volunteers including family members, veterans, scouting organizations and others in placing wreaths on the headstones. Holcomb placed wreaths on the graves of two Virginia National Guard Soldiers buried at the cemetery.



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FROM THE TOP



Adjutant General reflects on Virginia National Guard accomplishments in 2011

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

I am honored and humbled to continue my service as the Adjutant General, and I feel a great sense of pride when I reflect back on the great things we accomplished this year. Once again we continued to successfully balance the demands of our federal mission while maintaining a high state of readiness to respond to emergencies here in Virginia.

The General Assembly approved Gov. McDonnell's budget addition of \$6.7 million to repair critical facility deficiencies, and we very much appreciate their support. With federal matching funds, we turned that original Commonwealth investment into more than \$24 million for much needed facilities repairs.

We completed the consolidation of the Joint Staff to Mullins Armory early this year. Not only do we benefit from having the staff together in one place, but we saved the Commonwealth \$140,000 when we left the Washington Building.

We had two very solemn reminders of the serious nature of our service in the National Guard. The Air Guard's 203rd RED HORSE Squadron conducted a memorial service March 3 to honor 18 unit members who perished in a military transport crash 10 years ago. In April, the names of five Virginia Guard Soldiers lost during combat operations since Sept. 11 were among more than 330 names on the Memorial Wall for Fallen Engineers at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

Fort Pickett continues to be a premier training destination on the East Coast, and there is a strong chance even more training will be conducted there in the future. The U.S. Department of State and the U.S. General Services Administration are conducting further studies to assess locating a planned Foreign Affairs Security Training Center at Fort Pickett. We anticipate the results of the study in less



Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr.

than two years.

Soldiers and Airmen of the Virginia Guard's 34th Civil Support Team and Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package trained side by side with local, state and federal emergency response organizations in May. The event brought together different agencies to improve their interoperability in the event of a catastrophic event within the commonwealth, whether from a terrorist attack, a natural disaster or any other emergency.

The Virginia Guard brought more than 350 personnel on duty to assist in the response to Hurricane Irene. Together with State Police we cleared nearly 350 fallen trees during the hurricane as well as in the immediate response after the storm. We also sent 20 Soldiers and six 20-ton dump trucks to Vermont to help rebuild roads destroyed by the severe weather.

Several special programs are making significant impact in the lives of citizens of the Commonwealth. The Military Funeral Honors Program performed more than 2,400 funerals attended by almost 44,000 people throughout the state. The Counterdrug Program provided support to state and federal law enforcement resulting

in the confiscation of more than 37,000 marijuana plants, more than 441 arrests and the seizure of more than \$136 million of narcotics, currency and weapons. The Commonwealth ChalleNGe Program intervenes in the lives of at-risk youth to produce responsible and productive citizens. Since 1994, 34 classes totaling more than 3,640 cadets have graduated from the program.

The Virginia Guard was one of 15 states to achieve all the readiness training and certification goals set by NGB for Guard Reaction Forces. The Governor and the citizens of the Commonwealth expect us to rapidly respond and provide support during a crisis. Meeting the goals for our reaction force is an important part of our effort to train and maintain a ready, relevant and rapidly responding force to meet the expectations of our citizens and the nation.

We end the year with the return of more than 1,100 Soldiers from Iraq during the month of December. Since Sept. 11, 2001, we have mobilized more than 14,000 Soldiers and Airmen. We should all feel a great sense of accomplishment for the great work the Guard has done in defending the cause of freedom around the world. We end the year with more than 260 Soldiers and Airmen on duty in Afghanistan and other locations across the world.

I could not be more proud of the efforts of our Soldiers, Airmen, members of the VDF and civilian workforce and their dedicated service to commonwealth and country. My thanks to your families, employers and communities for the support they provide so we may all continue our service in the Virginia National Guard. Without their support, we could not do all the things we do. We will all work together to make sure the Virginia Guard is a synchronized and unified force that is ready, relevant and rapid responding; that is disciplined, professionally-led and prepared to meet the expectations of our federal and state partners and the needs of our citizens.

News Briefs

Virginia Guard receives funding for STARBASE youth education program in Winchester

The Virginia National Guard has received federal funding to establish a STARBASE youth education program that will be hosted at the Cherry-Beasley Readiness Center in Winchester.

National Guard Bureau allocated \$350,000 for the Virginia Guard program from Oct. 1, 2011 to Sept. 30, 2012, said Brig. Gen. Wayne A. Wright, Virginia Air National Guard chief of staff and the officer responsible for setting up and monitoring the operation. The bulk of the funding goes to the full time staff, but funds will also go to requirements for the initial set up of equipment and supplies.

STARBASE is a Department of Defense and National Guard Bureau initiative for youth ages six through 18 aimed at

improving math and science skills. It starts at the elementary school level in order to attract and prepare students at an early age for careers in engineering and other science-related fields of study, and it serves students and teachers by providing exciting hands-on learning experiences combining personal development, team building and hands-on enrichment in science, math and technology.

Federally reimbursed state employees will staff STARBASE. Wright said there will be a program director, deputy director, instructor and an office manager who will also provide information technology technical support.

The initial advertisements for the director and instructor should go out in November and the additional positions in December, Wright said. Once the staff has been hired, they will begin work on curriculum development, facilities set up and receive required

STARBASE training. Classes normally run concurrently with the academic school year, Wright said. He said the goal is to have a pilot ready to begin in June 2012 and the full schedule ready for the academic year in fall 2012.

Wright said the Virginia National Guard will work in close coordination with Winchester Public Schools as they set up and launch the new educational opportunity.

The STARBASE in Winchester will be the first in Virginia run by the National Guard. There is one hosted at the Norfolk Naval Base, and the closest to Winchester is in Martinsburg, W. Va. The Virginia National Guard also runs Commonwealth ChalleNGe, a 22-week residential program for at-risk teenagers that is structured in a military style environment to promote academics, attention to detail, time management and leadership, while promoting self esteem, confidence and

pride. STARBASE principally exposes at-risk children and their teachers to real world applications of math and science through experiential learning, simulations and experiments in aviation and space-related fields. It also addresses drug use prevention, health, self-esteem and life skills within a math- and science-based curriculum.

According to the 2010 DoD STARBASE Annual Report, there are 60 locations in 34 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Since 1993, more than 609,000 students have participated in the program and more than 64,000 took part in 2010. The annual cost is almost \$18 million.

Participating States: Alaska, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming.

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
30	29th Infantry Division	Afghanistan	Fort Belvoir
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
120	203rd RED HORSE Squadron	Southeast Asia	Virginia Beach
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 Dec. 1, 2011

Virginia Defense Force selects 2011 NCO of the Year

By Capt. David Cahan
VDF Blackhorse Brigade

The Virginia Defense Force has selected Staff Sgt. Milton Chen of Charlottesville as the 2011 Noncommissioned Officer of the Year. In a ceremony held Dec. 17, 2011, Maj. Gen. John Taylor, commander of the VDF, honored Chen and presented him with the award that recognizes outstanding duty performance, knowledge of mission, civic involvement, volunteer hours and completion of various skill-based schools.

Competitors from all over the commonwealth must be nominated by their unit command and compete at the battalion and brigade level before appearing at a Division NCO Board in Richmond.

Chen serves as first sergeant for Charlottesville-based Company C, 33rd Battalion. He is qualified in several of the nine response packages offered by the VDF including Incident Management Assistance Teams and Shelter Assistance Liaison Teams. He is also Military Emergency Management Specialist qualified.

Chen credits his experience in the VDF with honing his leadership and training skills which he puts to use as a Line-X franchise owner. "My experience in dealing with people as a business owner has helped me greatly in my leadership role in the State Guard and the converse is true as well," Chen said. "I'm a much better teacher, listener and leader in my business and in the community because of my VDF experience."

Chen has served in the Defense Force since 2008.

The VDF is an all-volunteer force authorized by the Code of Virginia and organized under the Virginia Department of Military Affairs reporting to the Adjutant General of Virginia. In 2010, the VDF provided approximately 58,850 man hours in service to the commonwealth. Using the Virginia average of \$21.45 per hour of volunteer work, this equates to \$1,262,332 in support.

The Blackhorse Brigade, which controls all VDF units in the northern third of the state, deployed four IMAT



Courtesy Photo

Staff Sgt. Milton Chen of Charlottesville is the Virginia Defense Force 2011 Noncommissioned Officer of the Year.

teams during Hurricane Irene. In addition to SALT and IMAT, the VDF offers other response packages to the Virginia Department of Military Affairs including mobile communications platform, civil disturbance force and fixed wing aviation.

Va. reaction force one of 15 to achieve readiness goals

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

The Virginia National Guard is one of 15 states to achieve all the readiness training and certification goals set by National Guard Bureau for National Guard Reaction Forces.

"The Governor and the citizens of the Commonwealth expect the Virginia Guard to rapidly respond and provide support to state and local authorities during a crisis," said Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia. "Meeting the training and certification goals for our reaction force is an important step in our effort to train and maintain a ready, relevant and rapidly responding force to meet the expectations of our citizens and the nation."

The Lynchburg-based 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 116th Brigade Combat Team has the assigned mission as Virginia's NGRF and is referred to as the Incident Response Force.

"Your state NGRF has shown itself fully capable of performing the five mission essential tasks required to obtain your Adjutant General's certification," wrote Maj. Gen. David L. Harris, director of domestic operations and force development for NGB in a letter dated Nov. 14. "As of November 10, 2011, your State NGRF is one of only fifteen currently rated as green, which is a laudable accomplishment."

According to the NGB Implementation Plan for NGRF, the original concept for the force was to focus on response to terrorists threats but is now training and preparing to be an all-hazard response force that can fulfill a number of different roles in a state response situation.

A state NGRF must perform five mission essential tasks: assemble forces, deploy, communicate, provide security and support civil authorities.

The NGRF must respond quickly to a no-notice event.

"We have to be able to be out the door with a quick reaction force within eight hours of notification," explained Lt. Col. Allan Carter, commander of 1st Battalion and the IRF. The main body of the response force has to respond in 24 hours.

The response force must be able to conduct movement in order to deploy to the incident area and communicate with the higher headquarters in the Guard as well as with state and local agencies as necessary.

The security mission for the NGRF potential comes in a number of different forms.

"In the event of a natural disaster type event, we could provide security to a community that has lost power or to a critical site or infrastructure location," Carter said. "We might also establish pedestrian or vehicle entry control points if a particular area needed to be secured."



On the Cover



A Soldier from the Virginia National Guard's Troop A, 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry returns to friends and family members in Norfolk Dec. 18, 2011 after serving in Iraq since August 2011. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class A.J. Coyne, Virginia Guard Public Affairs)

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Virginia GuardPost

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TF 183 troops return from duty in Iraq

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

After serving in Iraq since August 2011, more than 800 Soldiers from the Virginia National Guard's Task Force 183 returned to the United States in December. The Soldiers officially began federal active duty June 1.

About 825 Soldiers from across the commonwealth mobilized for duty in Iraq as Task Force 183 under the command of the Portsmouth-based 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry Regiment with units in Norfolk, Suffolk and Virginia Beach in addition to units from Christiansburg and Fredericksburg.

Approximately 120 Soldiers from the Fredericksburg-based Company A, 116th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, about 110 Soldiers from the Norfolk-based Troop A, 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry and approximately 90 Soldiers from the Portsmouth-based Headquarters Troop, 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry returned to the United States Dec. 11 and 12.

About 105 Soldiers from the Christiansburg-based Company C, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, approximately 75 Soldiers from the Virginia Beach-based Troop C, 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry and about 130 Soldiers from the Fredericksburg-based Company D, 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment returned to Virginia Dec. 12.

Approximately 120 Soldiers from the Suffolk-based Troop B, 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry Regiment, 116th Brigade Combat Team are scheduled to return to Virginia Dec. 8 after serving in Iraq since August 2011.

Other Soldiers have returned to Virginia in smaller groups based on transportation availability and their individual outprocessing schedule.

The Soldiers of the task force were stationed at Contingency Operation Base Adder and Contingency Operation Station Kalsu and conducted convoy security escort with the Headquarters Troop providing command and control and logistical and sustainment support and Troop A, Troop B, Company A and Company C organized into composite security companies.

The task force conducted a total of 181 convoy escort missions. Troop A conducted 33 missions, Troop B conducted 40, Company A conducted 52 and Company C conducted 56 missions.

Units in the task force drove more than 50,000 miles escorting convoys throughout their area of operations and all commodities were delivered safely with no military vehicle accidents and no incidents with local population. They escorted more than 14



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

Approximately 75 Soldiers from the Virginia National Guard's Troop C, 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry returned to friends and family members in Virginia Beach Dec. 12, 2011 after serving in Iraq since August 2011. The Soldiers are part of a group of about 825 Soldiers from across the commonwealth who mobilized June 1 for duty in Iraq as Task Force 183.

million gallons of fuel and more the 5,000 trucks hauling all military classes of supply like food and water, major end items, ammunition and repair parts. The supported sustainment convoys hauled commodities for all bases in Iraq, whether by direct support or handoff to other units at re-supply hubs that relayed supplies to their final destinations.

Convoy escort teams reacted to 22 enemy attacks from small arms fire, indirect fire and IED detonations. The task force had no Soldiers killed in action.

Troop C and Company D conducted specialized security and force protection missions. Troop C conducted more than 150 personnel, convoy and fixed site security missions within Baghdad, Iraq with no incidents of hostile enemy contact. Company D conducted security and force protection operations from 14 different missions sites for Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Arabian Peninsula and later Special Operations Task Force - Iraq as they prosecuted insurgent groups until closure of both missions in Iraq.

Soldiers from the task force earned 44 Bronze Star Medals. Seven of those were in the Headquarters Troop, 10 were in Troop A, three in Troop B, 11 in Company A, 116th Brigade Special Troops Battalion and 12 in Company C, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment.

Soldiers from the task force earned 18 Combat Action Badges with three in Headquarters Troop, 12 in Troop A, two in Troop B, one in Company C, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment. Five Soldiers in Company C earned the Combat Infantry Badge.

With approximately 825 Soldiers, Task Force 183 was the largest single unit mobilization in the Virginia Army National Guard since World War II.

3647th Maintenance Company heads to Germany for AT

From Staff Reports

Soldiers of the 3647th Maintenance Company completed two overseas annual training rotations in Hohenfels, Germany in support of the Joint Multinational Readiness Center from Oct. 11 to Nov. 26. The company was broken down into two rotations comprised of Soldiers from many different Military Occupational Specialties, or MOS, including armament repairers, wheeled vehicle mechanics, automated logistical specialists and food operations specialists. Both rotations had an advance party which laid the foundation for each rotation's arrival and mission.

"It allowed the unit to get a better picture as to how the Army operates. Most of the junior Soldiers have never deployed and don't fully realize how their particular MOS affects the overall picture/mission," said Capt. Carlos Maldonado, 3647th commander. "As support Soldiers, they now understand their place, and how important their mission is towards helping their combat arms brothers remain mission capable."

The Soldiers were divided into three different work areas depending upon their MOS: the Repairs Assistance Maintenance Shop, the Consolidated Maintenance Activity and the Warrior Sports Cafe.

The RAMS utilized their mechanics to make expedient repairs on wheeled vehicles belonging to active component units from the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment and the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, which routinely conduct training exercises on Hohenfels. The Soldiers enjoyed the experience and opportunity of assisting a live mission during their annual training.

"In a forward environment, whether Iraq or Afghanistan, interaction between the Reserve and active component as well as foreign NATO forces is imperative towards accomplishing the overall mission," said Maldonado. "In Germany, our Soldiers were able to support a RA joint exercise with allied troops by servicing their equipment and keeping them mission-capable until the end of the exercise. They understood the urgency of getting tasks done to standard in order to return equipment to the fight and the importance their MOS has on the warfighter on the



Photo courtesy of 3647th Maintenance Company

Sgt. Carl Booker of the 3647th Maintenance Company works to remove a tire from a tractor during the company's annual training in Germany.

ground. I believe this realism also fosters job satisfaction and esprit de corps."

The CMA is where Soldiers worked on time-intensive repairs, to include welding and fabricating, alongside German local national contractors. The automated logistical specialists were also employed at this area as they conducted supply and production control functions. JMRC also benefited from the high level of technical expertise possessed by 3647th Soldiers. Thanks to almost 60 dual-status Federal technicians in their ranks, they were able to undertake more complex maintenance assignments as opposed to what a standard maintenance company, composed of a majority of traditional Soldiers, would be able to accomplish. Sgt. Paul Birmingham, a dual-status technician at MATES on Fort Pickett, was able to utilize his skills to mount brackets for Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System gear on an M113 Armored Personnel Carrier.

The armament shop repaired and serviced many types of small arms weapons. Sgt. Justin Alexander was highly impressed at the great organization of the JMRC arms room stating, "The layout was highly efficient, easy to maintain and taught us a few things that we should implement in our own arms room," he said.

The cooks helped serve meals to their fellow Soldiers of the 3647th, the

active Army, and multi-national forces from countries such as Italy, Canada, Lithuania and Germany at the Warrior Cafe. According to Staff Sgt. Felix Rucker, 3647th food operations sergeant, "Interacting with Soldiers from many different nations and also active duty Soldiers was a great experience and allowed my section to really experience a new and exciting atmosphere."

As a show of gratitude, the Soldiers found a creative way to thank their JMRC by creating a traditional German beer mug, called a "stein," from scrap metal.

"The creation of the stein required the use of multiple military job fields and really helped us work together better to accomplish a mission," said Sgt. Charles Smith, a welder assigned to the repair section. "Working with our German hosts was a bit difficult at times due to language barriers but was fun and a great learning experience nonetheless."

"The unit was able to perform three consecutive weeks of daily, realistic MOS training," Maldonado added. "Proficiency in their field allows them to become better Soldiers as well as making them combat multipliers- their efficiency allows them to operate in smaller teams, which in turn allows for more Maintenance Support Teams to be available and able to support federal and state missions."

VDF participates in State Managed Shelter Exercise

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

Members of the Virginia Defense Force, a branch of the Virginia Department of Military Affairs, assisted Virginia State Police in their new role as Shelter Augmentation Liaison Teams during the 2011 State Managed Shelter Exercise Oct. 11 on the campus of Richard Bland College near Petersburg. The three-man team, known as a SALT, will act as subject matter experts for the DMA at each shelter before turning the mission over to the National Guard in the event of an emergency.

"The SALTs from the VDF, having attended this exercise, are going to know what the traffic control plans are going to be and what the security plan is going to be," said Command Sgt. Maj. Alan Grandis, command sergeant major of the VDF Military Police Battalion. "They are going to know where you are supposed to eat, where you are supposed to sleep, where the latrines are, so when the shelters are set up, the SALTs are going to dispatch quickly to the shelter and link up with the State Police to receive the mission plan."

After the SALT has received the mission, the VDF will then brief the Virginia National Guard officer-in-charge on the traffic and security mission the Guard Soldiers or Airmen will be executing upon their arrival to assist the State Troopers.

"Department of Military Affairs' mission in this whole scheme



The VDF had three observers on hand to watch and analyze the SALT during the exercise, and one member to serve as the VDF coordinator assisting the VSP incident commander in the emergency operations center on site.



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

Members of the Virginia Defense Force, Shelter Augmentation Liaison Team provide assistance to the Virginia State Police during the 2011 State Managed Shelter Exercise Oct. 11 on the campus of Richard Bland College near Petersburg.

of things is to support the VSP in traffic control and unarmed shelter security," said Grandis.

The VDF sent three MPs to the exercise to perform their role as the SALT in addition to three members to act as the National Guard personnel to turn the mission over to. The VDF also had three observers on hand to watch and analyze the SALT during the exercise, and one member to serve as the VDF coordinator assisting the VSP incident commander in the emergency operations center on site.

"Hopefully, we can learn how the agencies will interoperate and build a partnership with the State Police and the Department of Social Services so we can be called when needed," said Staff Sgt. Edwood Corker, SALT noncommissioned officer-in-charge. "This gives us a chance to show that we are capable of doing what the commonwealth needs us to; we are here to support the commonwealth and its needs."

In the event of the activation of State Managed Shelters, the VDF teams will provide support to four shelters in the region. They will provide a SALT at the shelter at Richard Bland College, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia State University, and in Doswell at Meadow Event Park.

The SMSP is the commonwealth's response to catastrophic events such as Hurricane Katrina developed to be an all-hazard capability, and is a commonwealth effort lead by Virginia Department of Social Services in coordination with the VSP, Virginia Department of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Health, Virginia State Colleges and Universities, and many other organizations.

The exercise at Richard Bland College was a homeland Security Exercise Evaluation Program and therefore met all Department of Homeland Security exercise requirements.

Task Force Punisher Soldiers return from Iraq mission

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

Approximately 210 Virginia Army National Guard Soldiers from the Sandston-based 2nd Assault Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 91st Troop Command returned to Virginia Dec. 10 after serving in Iraq since April 2011. The Soldiers arrived in two separate flights and were welcomed home by senior leaders of the Virginia National Guard and reunited with their families and friends at the Virginia National Guard Aviation Support Facility in Sandston.

"Welcome home heroes! We are delighted to have you back," exclaimed Governor Bob McDonnell. "I was looking at what you men and women of the 2nd of the 224th have accomplished. Over 16,000 flight hours, 1800 missions, 30,000 passengers transported all over the theater and with that, no fatalities and no serious injuries and missions always accomplished.

"What a tremendous job you have done over these last 10 months in service to the United States of America. Thank you."

During the two back-to-back ceremonies held at the air facility in Sandston, the governor consistently thanked the families of the Soldiers for their dedication and support.

"I want to say to all of you families; you are owed an amazing debt of gratitude. The fact that you have sent off your husbands, your wives, your brothers, your sisters, aunts, uncles, sons and daughters, and now you are here today to welcome them back just 15 days before Christmas is really amazing," said McDonnell.

"The only way these men and women have done such a fantastic job is because you have done such a great job here at home."

The Soldiers were the main body of about 325 total Soldiers from the unit returning to Virginia. They returned to the United States Dec. 3 and 4 and conducted a number of different administrative and reintegration demobilization activities at Fort Hood, Texas to transition from active duty back to traditional National Guard status prior to returning to Virginia. The Soldiers officially began federal active duty Feb. 25.

"Punishers, you stepped into a non-standard environment, nothing about this deployment was standard, and we succeeded above all expectations and closed the door to Iraq," said Maj. Carl Engstrom, executive officer of the 224th. "I appreciate all your efforts."

The battalion, also known as "Task Force Punisher," mobilized more than 400 Virginia and Maryland Army National Guard Soldiers for duty in Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn Feb. 25, 2011, with the mission of conducting air 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 the headquarters company, three assault helicopter companies, the aviation maintenance company, the forward support company and one attached aero-medical helicopter company totaling more than 520 Soldiers, 30 UH-60 Black Hawk assault helicopters and 12 HH-60M medical evacuation helicopters.

The Punishers were one of the last three U.S. military aviation assets to depart Iraq. They flew more than 16,500 combat flight hours during more than 1,800 combat missions while performing split-based operations from seven different locations. The battalion executed an average of 15 missions per day and flew more than 30,000 passengers, and they planned and executed multiple direct action air assault missions that were instrumental in reducing the number of attacks on U.S. forces.

The battalion had no Soldiers killed in action or seriously wounded in action.

They conducted effective and responsive air assault and air movement aviation operations in order to provide freedom of movement for ground commanders throughout Iraq, interdict weapons smuggling operations and facilitate security operations and sustainment efforts for United States forces.

The battalion's forward support company provided Forward Arming and Refueling Point support to the battalion's aircraft, as well as multiple other aircraft from a myriad of units. Typically fueling more than forty aircraft per day, they issued more than a million gallons of aircraft fuel



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Va. Dept. Military Affairs

Sgt. Angel Perez of Virginia Beach receives a warm welcome home from young members of his family Dec. 10 in Sandston. Perez was one of more than 200 Soldiers from the Sandston-based 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 91st Troop Command to return to Virginia after serving in Iraq since April 2011.

during the combat deployment.

While headquartered in Sandston, the battalion is comprised of Soldiers from all over the state. Approximately 110 Soldiers are from the Richmond and Petersburg area, about 50 are from the Hampton Roads area, approximately 15 are from the Charlottesville and Central Virginia area, about 25 are from the Northern Virginia area, approximately 15 are from the Fredericksburg and Stafford County area and the other Soldiers are from various locations across the state. Approximately 75 are from the Maryland National Guard. Their medical evacuation company was from the Florida and Georgia Army National Guard.

The battalion last mobilized for federal active duty in Iraq from January 2006 to February 2007.

Additional reporting by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

29th ID Soldiers return from Afghanistan duty

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Approximately 72 Virginia and Maryland National Guard Soldiers from the Fort Belvoir-based 29th Infantry Division returned home to family and friends Oct. 27 after serving in Afghanistan since early December 2010. The Soldiers returned to airports close to their home of record throughout the day.

The Soldiers were assigned to NATO's International Security Assistance Force Joint Command Security Partnering Team with the mission of assisting with the growth and development of the Afghan National Security Forces, where they served as advisors and mentors to senior Afghan leaders. They were part of a NATO coalition of 49 troop-contributing nations that Security Partnering personnel interacted with daily across Afghanistan.

"It was a great mission," said Col. Jeffrey Hice, one of the senior officers who served as a mentor and advisor on the Security Partnering Team. According to Hice, Soldiers from the 29th were "front and center" on the mission of transferring security responsibility to the Afghans. The 72 Soldiers were embedded on the staff and worked as advisors with the Afghans trying to get them to a point where they can take responsibility for their own security, he said.

Hice explained that the Soldiers were broken up into small sections across the ISAF Command Joint Staff and were out advising and mentoring with the Afghans in multiple locations. "We were able to network very well to get things done and keep growth and development of the Afghan forces moving," he said.

Hice explained that the Security Partnering Team was working to support the growth and development of the existing security forces of the Afghan National Army and Afghan Police as well as developing the command structure for a new organization that will have responsibility for Afghan security in the future.

His team of 20 military personnel and civilian contractors, including 10 from the 29th ID, helped develop an implementation plan for the new Afghan National Army Ground Forces Command. Led by an Afghan three-star general officer, the GFC will provide command and control for all ANA forces at the corps level and below by transition in 2014. The Security Partnering Team helped design the organizational structure for the GFC as well as the strategy for acquiring equipment and facilities for the new organization. The command grew from 70 officers to more than 300 during the mobilization.

During their time in Afghanistan, the Soldiers of the Security Partnering Team provided advice and assistance to help the Afghan National Police grow from 98,000 to 136,000 and Afghan National Army from 119,000 to 171,000. As those forces grew, the Soldiers of the 29th helped manage every aspect from requisitioning weapons and equipment, developing training and evaluation plans and constructing facilities to house and train the new personnel.

They facilitated the construction of more than \$2 billion of infrastructure and facilities for the ANSF including multiple



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

Family, friends and fellow members of the Virginia National Guard greet Soldiers from the Fort Belvoir-based 29th Infantry Division at Richmond International Airport Oct. 27 as the Soldiers return home after serving in Afghanistan since early December 2010.

brigade- and battalion-size operating bases, combat outposts, police headquarters and ministerial buildings.

They also played an integral role in researching the significant causes to rising rates of attrition in the ANSF and helped senior leaders develop measures to counter the causes in order to continue the growth and development of the security forces.

Members of the Security Partnering Team also authored responses to multiple strategic and national policy documents including the Quarterly Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction report, numerous Department of Defense Inspector General reports and Central Intelligence Agency reports.

The Security Partnering Team was comprised of Soldiers from the Virginia Army National Guard and the Maryland Army National Guard. Of the Soldiers who took part in the mission, approximately 44 are from the Virginia National Guard Soldiers and 20 are from the Northern Virginia area, 15 are from the Central Virginia area, seven are from Southwest Virginia, three are from the Hampton Roads area and the remaining are from various locations across the state.

A new group of Maryland and Virginia Soldiers from the 29th Infantry Division took over the mission, and a Transfer of Authority Ceremony was held Oct. 12 in Kabul.

Gov. McDonnell recognizes Guard's 375th birthday

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Governor Bob McDonnell recognized the 375th birthday of the National Guard Dec. 13 with the presentation of a Certificate of Recognition to Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, at the Patrick Henry Building.

He also thanked senior leaders of the Virginia Guard attending the presentation for the outstanding service of Virginia Guard Soldiers and Airmen in the commonwealth as well as overseas.

McDonnell said that he and Secretary of Public Safety Marla Graff Decker are "absolutely thrilled" with what the Guard has been able to accomplish.

"It is a group of consummate professionals, and what we have asked from you over the last decade has really been

tremendous with supporting a two-front war and multiple missions around the world. It has been a phenomenal amount of teamwork."

He commended the Guard for its work during the winter storms that came soon after his inauguration where the Guard was "tirelessly working to do what needed to be done" to help emergency service organizations respond to the record storms.

"It was an incredible number of missions we asked you to do, and without question and without fail, you accomplished ever mission we gave you and then some," McDonnell said. "I am very grateful for what you have accomplished."

As Virginia's governor, McDonnell serves as the commander in chief for more than 10,000 members of the Virginia Army National Guard, Virginia Air National Guard and Virginia Defense Force.

"While the National Guard recognizes its official birthday in 1636 in Massachusetts, we trace the heritage and traditions of the selfless service of citizen soldiers back to the founding of Jamestown in 1607," McDonnell said. "Those traditions live on today throughout the Commonwealth, through all of the branches of the armed forces serving here, as well as the thousands of veterans who call Virginia home. Without the sacrifices made by these great Americans, we would not enjoy the freedoms we have today. As George Washington once said, 'The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.' This is our time to give thanks to these brave men and women for their service."

Virginia Defense Force HQ moves to Waller Depot

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

The Virginia National Guard United States Property and Fiscal Office handed over responsibility for Waller Depot to the Virginia Defense Force Nov. 30 at Waller Depot, in Richmond. Waller Depot will now serve as the headquarters of the VDF, the Virginia Department of Military Affairs all-volunteer reserve force for the National Guard.

Col. Donald Sutherland, the United States Property and Fiscal Officer of Virginia, handed the final gate pass to Col. (Va.) Michael Lawson of the VDF to signify the transfer of responsibility during an informal ceremony.

The USPFO logistics section vacated the Waller Depot location and moved to the Defense Supply Center, Richmond.

"This is the first time the VDF has been entrusted with actual command of a state asset, so it is a big step for us," said Lawson. "We have units at over 30 other locations across the state. This is going to be our primary headquarters."

Waller Depot will now house the Virginia Counterdrug Program, the Virginia Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package and the Virginia Defense Force.

With the addition of the VDF headquarters to the area, Waller Depot is considered a hub for Defense Support to Civil Authorities in Virginia. Following the closing of the Air National Guard Base in Sandston, the Waller Depot location was an obvious choice to locate the three state units.

"Waller Depot is state property, so it was thought that would be a good place for the VDF to have a home," said Sutherland. "With the Adjutant General of Virginia's focus on DSCA operations,



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

Col. Donald Sutherland, United States Property & Fiscal Officer for the Virginia Guard, hands over an access card to Col. (Va.) Michael Lawson, Virginia Defense Force, Nov. 30 during an informal transfer of responsibility for one of the buildings at Waller Depot.

this seemed like a good compound, a secure area to bring the CERFP and Counterdrug elements in to better prepare for DSCA operations."

Waller Depot is a state owned property, occupied by the Virginia Guard since 1949, according to James "Eddie" Ayers, a National Guard technician who has worked at Waller Depot since 1969. The departure of USPFO personnel signals the end of an era, one which has seen many changes in logistics business processes and operations. While some expressed sadness at leaving, they are also excited about the opportunity that exists at DSCR.

Former state CSM concludes 56 years of service to Virginia

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

In a small conference room in the Fort Pickett headquarters, a group of Soldiers and civilians gathered Dec. 15 to wish retired Command Sgt. Maj. James Flanary well upon his retirement from civilian service to the Virginia National Guard and Fort Pickett. The following day marked the end of a career that spanned more than 56 years in combined service as an enlisted Soldier and a civilian employee.

Flanary uncorked his career as a private in the engineers in March 1955 and has served the commonwealth continuously ever since. Blazing through the ranks, he pinned on command sergeant major at just 35 years old, the pinnacle of an enlisted Soldier's career.

In 1973, he became the first enlisted commandant of the Virginia Army National Guard Noncommissioned Officer Academy. Nine years later, he was appointed as the first full-time state command sergeant major, a position that would escalate him to the top noncommissioned officer in the state. He was the senior enlisted advisor to three Adjutants General of Virginia.

"It's been a good ride all the way through," said Flanary. "I never expected to become a command sergeant major, but I did and that was another highlight. I did the U.S. Army Sergeant Major Academy and I graduated from that and it's been a real good tour."

Flanary served the Virginia National Guard in almost every status one can serve the commonwealth. Beginning as a traditional Guardsman serving one weekend a month and two weeks a year, he later joined the Active Guard Reserve Program, and ran the gamut of statuses between the two and beyond.

"I have been in every status that you can be in," said Flanary. "As an M-Day traditional Guardsman, and then I've been on orders for state duty; I've been a military technician; I've been on what they now call ADOS [Active Duty for Operational Support] for 90 days to six months, and then on AGR. After I left AGR I became a state employee, so that's about every status you can serve."

Following a short break from Mar. 31 to May 16, 1997, he decided that his 42 years of service as an NCO to the commonwealth were not yet over and transitioned to a state employee.

While under the employ of the commonwealth, Flanary spent the next 14 years working at Fort Pickett. There he worked on staff assistance in the post headquarters.

"I took care of the support man days and took care of the budget for that," he said. "Putting Soldiers on orders to support the Maneuver Training Center was one of the things I did."

During the retirement ceremony the current Adjutant General,



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

Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., Adjutant General of Virginia, presents the Virginia Legion of Merit to James Flanary Dec. 15 during a luncheon at Fort Pickett to celebrate Flanary's 56 years of service to the Virginia National Guard. Except for a six-week break in 1997, Flanary served the Guard continuously since 1955.

Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., presented a Virginia Legion of Merit to Flanary for his support to the state in his role as a state employee for the past 14 years. The two joked about how long they have known each other before the presentation of the medal.

"I was trying to remember, and I think I have known you for over 40 years. I was a lieutenant when I first met you," Long said.

Flanary interrupted, noting how far Long had come in his own career over the years, "A brand new second lieutenant."

"And I have grown up while you were here, but this has been just a tremendous career and I have watched you on and off as I have been in and out of the Guard and doing other things," said Long. "What a great inspiration you have been to all of us. I want to thank you so much for all you've done for all of us."

Also in attendance at the ceremony was Flanary's last boss at Fort Pickett, Col. Thomas Wilkinson, the post commander. Wilkinson, a captain when he first met Flanary, noted how Flanary was always willing to teach another Soldier regardless of their rank.

"Jim is one of those NCOs who would put his arm around you and mentor the officers," said Wilkinson. "You don't usually equate NCOs with mentoring officers, but Jim was the kind of sergeant major who would, and my sergeant major now mentors me all the time."

The afternoon concluded with remarks from retired Maj. Gen. Carroll Thackston, former Adjutant General of Virginia from 1994 to 1998, on the outstanding service Flanary provided the state over his decades of service.

"I have a little saying when I welcome troops back from overseas, and this is so true in his case. 'He answered the call, he served the call-up and he fulfilled the calling,'" said Thackston. "I don't know how you could ask anyone to do any more than 56 years devoted to the National Guard, one way or the other."

"I know you all are going to miss him up here. He is a great spokesman for the National Guard and he did a great job for us and he continues to do a great job."

Air Guard civil engineers return from overseas duty

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Family and friends welcomed approximately 120 Airmen from the Virginia Beach-based 203rd RED HORSE Squadron back to Virginia Oct. 8 after serving in Afghanistan and other locations in the Central Command area of operations. The unit began federal active duty Feb. 17, 2011, spent several weeks conducting final preparations in Virginia, then spent three weeks in early March at Fort McCoy, Wisc., for Combat Skills Training before heading overseas.

"It feels great to be home," said Lt. Col. Peter S. Garner, commander of the 203rd. "These guys worked hard, and I am really proud of what they did. Now we are ready to be home and back with our families."

Garner said he was most impressed by the sheer volume of construction work the 203rd conducted at 18 different sites in seven different countries and the integration of active and National Guard units. "It was awesome the way we came together," he said. "It really was one team, one fight."



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Photos by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Family and friends welcome approximately 120 Airmen from the Virginia Beach-based 203rd RED HORSE Squadron back to Virginia Oct. 8 after serving in Afghanistan and other locations in the Central Command area of operations.

RED HORSE stands for Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers, and the unit provides a highly mobile civil engineering response force to support contingency operations worldwide.

While deployed, the Airmen of the 203rd RED HORSE served as part of the 1st Expeditionary RED HORSE Group, an organization made of up more than 400 personnel from the 203rd and other RED HORSE units that was a mix of active duty and Air National Guard.

The 1st ERHG was headquartered in Al Udeid AB, Qatar and was responsible for providing theater engineer support for vertical and horizontal construction missions and projects that enhanced operations, safety and quality of life for Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines in the Central Command Area of Operations including Al Udeid Air Base, Thumrait Air Base, Manas Transit Center, Al Dhafra Air Base, Bagram Air Field, Al Mubarak Air Field, Camp Leatherneck, Camp Dwyer, and Kandahar Air Field.

During the rotation, the 1st ERHG completed 70 projects valued at \$32 million. They utilized the full range of special construction capabilities including

K-Span design and construction, erection of expeditionary shelter systems, wood and steel frame construction, erection of pre-engineered buildings, concrete batch plant operations, quarry operations and asphalt, concrete and gravel pavements.

In addition, the 1st ERHG had a 34-person convoy team complete 16 missions, logging 2,000 miles with 13 gun trucks and tractor trailers, the unit's vehicle mechanics managed and repaired more than 780 vehicles and completed almost 1,000 purchase requests for more than 6,000 repair parts, and their supply technicians tracked, distributed, and controlled 1,200 assets worth \$138 million throughout the Central Command area of operations.

The unit had no Airmen killed or seriously wounded in combat action.

While headquartered in Virginia Beach, the 203rd RED HORSE is made up of Airmen from all over the state. Approximately 65 Airmen are from the Hampton Roads area, about 15 are from the Richmond and Fredericksburg areas, approximately six are from the Northern Virginia area, six from the Southwest part of Virginia, 14 from North Carolina and the remaining are from other parts of Virginia and from different states.

116th Regiment musters in Staunton

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

Dressed in formal attire, Soldiers of the 116th Brigade Combat Team past and present gathered once again at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel in Staunton Nov. 12 to celebrate the 44th Annual Muster of the 116th Infantry Regiment. The Soldiers and veterans muster every year to pay honor to the unit's 270-year long history.

"Our theme this year is to recognize the 270 years of service and still serving," said retired Brig. Gen. Theodore G. Shuey Jr., the honorary colonel of the 116th Infantry Regiment.

This year's muster saw a decline in attendance among service members due to ongoing deployments of the brigade supporting Operations Enduring Freedom and New Dawn, but the turnout of World War II veterans who served in the 116th remained high with a number of veterans making the trip to honor the lineage of the "Stonewall Brigade."

"Last year at this time we were all together, but for this year's Regimental Muster we are separated once again," said Col. John Epperly, commander of the 116th Brigade Combat Team (Rear Detachment).

Approximately 175 Soldiers from the Staunton-based 116th Brigade Combat Team Headquarters are currently serving in Afghanistan. About 825 Soldiers from across the commonwealth are mobilized for duty in Iraq under the command of the Portsmouth-based 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry Regiment with units in Norfolk, Suffolk and Virginia Beach. Also serving as part of the task force are Soldiers from the Fredericksburg-based Company A, 116th Brigade Special Troops Battalion and Company D, 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment and the Christiansburg-based Company C, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment.

"Let us take this year to honor them as we honor all our regimental veterans. We are honored to be called veterans and to be included amongst our World War II veterans, some who have traveled far to be here this weekend," Epperly said.

The evening began with the presentation of the colors and a video teleconference with Col. Blake Ortner from Afghanistan. Though the sun had just set over the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia, the sun was just beginning to rise over the mountains of Afghanistan for the 116th Brigade Combat Team Headquarters commander.

"I wasn't sure this was going to actually work, but it just goes to show you how amazing technology is," said Ortner. "I guess if we can control Predators from back in Nevada, we can do a Skype call back to Virginia."

On behalf of all the Soldiers of the 116th in Afghanistan, Ortner recognized the service of the Soldiers of the regiment who served



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

Soldiers of the 116th Infantry Regiment, past and present, attend the 44th Annual Regimental Muster Nov. 12 at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel in Staunton, Va. The Guest speaker for the 270 year old unit's annual event was U.S. Representative Robert William Goodlatte.

in World War II.

"We are actually just starting our day over here; it's about 5 a.m. and I would really like to welcome our D-Day veterans and our World War II veterans to the muster," Ortner said. "That is probably the greatest part of the legacy of our muster. It is the recognition of those individuals."

"We are reminded probably every week by someone, either from an active duty unit or another National Guard unit that comes through, just how great your service was and how great a legacy we have to live up to in what happened there."

The evening also highlighted by remarks from guest speaker, Rep. Robert William Goodlatte, U.S. Representative for Virginia's Sixth Congressional District.

"It is indeed an honor to be at this wonderful occasion with this distinguished group," said Goodlatte. "To be at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel with the Stonewall Brigade is very exciting. I am proud to be here in honor of each and every one of you."

"I am truly humbled to be speaking to such a large number of American patriots," he said. "You are our nation's veterans and our true public servants. You have sacrificed so much to defend our nation and our freedom at home and abroad and for that I applaud you."

The chaplain held a memorial to honor the fallen warriors affiliated with the regiment lost in the past year. An impromptu roll call, a moment of silence and a bugle playing "Taps" solemnly paid tribute to the departed.

Seeing extensive action in France during WWI, the regiment earned the motto "Ever Forward" for its reputation of never giving up ground in battle, and during the Second World War, the 116th spearheaded the invasion of Normandy at Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944.

Virginia ChalleNGE program graduates 116 cadets

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

The Virginia National Guard ChalleNGe program graduated 116 cadets from Class 35 Dec. 17 on the stage of the Ocean Lakes High School auditorium in Virginia Beach. Ernie Gonzales, Office of the Secretary of Defense Reserve Affairs, Virginia Secretary of Public Safety Marla Graff Decker and Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., Adjutant General of Virginia, were among those on hand to congratulate the graduates. Other National Guard senior leaders in attendance were Brig. Gen. Wayne A. Wright, Chief of Staff of the Virginia Air National Guard, Brig. Gen. Janice Igou, Director of Interagency Operations and Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis Green, Senior Enlisted Advisor.

"I am honored to be here, to help celebrate and acknowledge the accomplishments of these young individuals," said Gonzales. "One hundred sixteen of them have actually completed a program that the studies have shown that in the end they will be productive citizens, that they will continue with their education, get a job, or move on to doing better things because of the time and talents and service that has been invested, not by the money involved, but by the people involved, especially by the staff of the Commonwealth ChalleNGe program."

"I think we can all be very proud of what we see up here on stage today," said Decker. "This is America's future."

"I also want to thank some of the leadership you see up here on stage today and some of the leadership you see in uniform in the audience," said Decker. "These folks work night and day on various programs for kids, and various things to keep our military safe and out of harm's way and we are very, very proud of our leadership in the National Guard because they are the ones that make this all possible."

The cadets of Class 35 contributed more than 14,000 hours of community service to local organizations during their time at Commonwealth ChalleNGe with an estimated market value of over \$103,000. This included helping at local community and fitness centers, assisting with the Commonwealth Attorney's office, volunteering at the NAS Oceana commissary, doing public cleanup and supporting the growth of students at Seatack and Lynnhaven elementary schools. The cadets also assisted with education programs at the Virginia Aquarium, helped to maintain the Virginia Beach Public Schools' bus fleet, and provided help to the SPCA, Virginia Beach Convention Center and the Virginia Beach Parks and Recreation.

Gonzales noted that the ChalleNGe program is one of the few second chance programs available for at-risk youths to be able to change their lives and continue with their service.

"We look to them to show that the lasting improvements that they have made will continue on based on the skills that they have learned from the staff here at Commonwealth ChalleNGe," said Gonzales.

Commonwealth ChalleNGe is the Virginia component of the



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

Virginia Secretary of Public Safety Marla Graff Decker, Maj. Gen Daniel E. Long, the Adjutant General of Virginia, and retired Col. J.J. Chandler, the director of the Commonwealth ChalleNGe, congratulate graduates of Commonwealth ChalleNGe Dec. 17, 2011 at Ocean Lakes High School in Virginia Beach.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, which focuses on preparing at-risk teens and high school dropouts for the General Educational Development test and future employment, military or higher education opportunities.

"When we first got to ChalleNGe, it felt like a different world from what we were used to at home. Coming through the gates was the start of a long road we all decided to walk. No one knew what to expect as we started, but within the first month expectations were set," said Cadet Stephen Crivello during his graduation address. "Cadre, worked with us day by day so we could achieve these milestones. Everything had a purpose; it was all for the better and it made it us stronger, mentally and physically."

"We have all taken a step in the right direction; there is a forward momentum in our lives right now and we all need to keep it going whether it's working a job, starting a military career or obtaining a higher education, follow your ambitions."

Offered free to at-risk teens ages 16 to 18 in Virginia, Commonwealth ChalleNGe is a statewide co-educational program with two components: a 22-week quasi-military residential phase followed by a 12-month post-residential phase.

During the 22-week residential phase, cadet studies center on the eight components of the program - academics, life-coping skills, work skills, citizenship, leadership, health education, physical fitness and community service. Cadets have the opportunity to take the GED test and establish a life plan- continued education, employment or military service- during this phase.

In the 12-month post-residential phase a mentor guides each of the cadets as they follow through with the life plan established during the residential phase.

Over 3,600 Virginia teens have graduated from Commonwealth ChalleNGe since it started in 1994.

Virginia posthumously awards WWI hero

By Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen and Cotton Puryear
Virginia Guard Public Affairs

The Virginia National Guard presented the Virginia Distinguished Service Medal to the family of Chaplain (1st Lt.) Thomas McNeill Bulla in a ceremony Oct. 17 at the First Presbyterian Church in Emporia 93 years after he died from combat wounds in World War I. Brig. Gen. Wayne A. Wright, Air Guard Chief of Staff, presented the award to the Bulla family outside the church and 10 members of the Virginia National Guard Military Funeral Honors Team performed honors by providing a rifle volley, the playing of "Taps" and the folding and presentation of a United States flag to family members.

"Today we are honoring and paying a long overdue tribute to a great American," said Wright. "I want to thank the Bulla family for allowing us in their lives and hearts to make this award and day happen. It is indeed an honor to stand before you today and be a part of a very special event."

Bulla served in 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in France and was helping wounded Soldiers when he was struck by enemy fire Oct. 15, 1918. After evacuation to an Army hospital Bulla died of his wounds Oct. 17. Bulla never received any recognition by the Army for his sacrifice to save others, and he will be the 61st recipient of the VDSM.

The VDSM is exclusively intended for the recognition of the highest standards of dedicated service to the Virginia National Guard or to those in command of members of the Virginia National Guard in war and is rarely presented.

"The VDSM is the highest decoration the commonwealth of Virginia can award and is rarely presented. The sole authorizing agent for this award is the adjutant general of Virginia," Wright said. "So, the privilege of presenting this to a 'native son' makes it all the more special."

The last chapel currently in use at Fort Pickett was dedicated May 24, 2011 to Bulla. Maj. Gen. Frank E. Batts, Sr., commander of the 29th Infantry Division, and Col. Tom Wilkinson, commander of Fort Pickett, unveiled the new sign outside the chapel as part of the dedication. Several of Bulla's relatives also attended the event.

"It has been quite a labor of love to get us here to where we are today," said Wilkinson. "Back in May, we actually dedicated the chapel at Fort Pickett to Chaplain Bulla, and many of you were there at that ceremony. This is the culmination of that event where we are now presenting Chaplain Bulla with the award he so well deserved."

Bulla was born near Fayetteville, N.C., on Jan. 4, 1881. Soon after he graduated from Union Theological Seminary, he moved to Emporia, Va., where he became the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in 1911. He was never married.

Congress declared war against Germany and Austria on April 6, 1917, bringing the United States into World War I. Following a request by the colonel of the 4th Virginia Infantry, an element of the Virginia National Guard, to become its chaplain, Bulla volunteered and was appointed in the rank of first lieutenant. By



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

Brig. Gen. Wayne A. Wright, Virginia Air National Guard Chief of Staff, presents the Virginia Distinguished Service Medal to the family of Chaplain (1st Lt.) Thomas McNeill Bulla in a ceremony Oct. 17 at the First Presbyterian Church in Emporia 93 years after he died from combat wounds in World War I.

late summer the 4th had been transferred to Camp McClellan, Ala. There it was combined with Virginia's other two infantry regiments, the 1st and 2nd, to create the 116th Infantry, an element of the newly organized 29th "Blue and Gray" Division. This much larger regiment, numbering more than 3,000 Soldiers, required three chaplains so Lieutenant Bulla was assigned to the 3rd Battalion.

As the 116th continued to train at McClellan, Bulla attended an Army chaplains school held at Fort Monroe, Va. While returning to his unit he briefly stopped back in Emporia to visit his church. There he performed a baptism, probably his last official act for his parish. He soon returned to his regiment.

The entire 29th Division sailed to France in June 1918. It first entered combat in the Alsace Sector in August but suffered relatively light casualties. That changed when, starting on October 8, the division took part in the massive Allied operation known as the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. It was apparently during the opening days of this attack that Chaplain Bulla repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire by moving across "no man's land" helping wounded Soldiers to safety. This was a duty neither required nor expected of an Army chaplain.

On the morning of October 15, the 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry was the lead element for yet another attack in the area known as the Molleville Farm. It was during this assault that Bulla, again helping wounded Soldiers, was struck by enemy fire and mortally wounded. He was evacuated to an Army hospital at Petite Mejoy where he died of his wounds on October 17.

In the years since his death Bulla has been honored in several venues: by his church with a stained glass window dedicated in his name; American Legion Post 46 in Emporia adopted the name "Bulla Post" in 1924; he is cited among the 23 Army chaplains who died during World War I on a monument at Arlington National Cemetery; and in 1999 the Commonwealth of Virginia erected a roadside historical marker on the grounds of his church in Emporia.

New Virginia warrant officers recognized

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

The Virginia Army National Guard recognized six of its newest warrant officers during a Warrant Officer Recognition Ceremony Oct. 22 at Fort Pickett. The ceremony was held at the 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute's auditorium and Brig. Gen. William R. Phillips, the Virginia National Guard Land Component Commander, was the guest speaker.

Warrant officers are appointed at a Federal Recognition Board, the Warrant Officer Candidate School at Fort Rucker, Ala., or a Regional Training Institute like Camp Atterbury, Ind., or Fort McClellan, Ala., and it's often difficult for family members to travel out of state to their graduation ceremonies, explained Chief Warrant Officer Eddie Whitt, the Virginia National Guard Command Chief Warrant Officer, at the beginning of the ceremony.

"Many families aren't able to participate and recognize their career change," he said. "So this ceremony lets us welcome them into the warrant officer corps, be with their families and celebrate this momentous occasion."

The new warrant officers recognized at the ceremony were Warrant Officer



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

Warrant Officer Mohamed F. Azeez, Warrant Officer Kevin O. Cutchin, Warrant Officer Thomas O. Mooney, Warrant Officer Anna M. Stewart and Warrant Officer Cory C. Wheeler listen to Brig. Gen. William R. Phillips, the Virginia National Guard Land Component Commander, during a Warrant Officer Recognition Ceremony Oct. 22 at Fort Pickett.

Mohamed F. Azeez, Chief Warrant Officer Biruk Abraham, Warrant Officer Kevin O. Cutchin, Warrant Officer Thomas O. Mooney, Warrant Officer Anna M. Stewart and Warrant Officer Cory C. Wheeler.

"So what's expected of you now?" Phillips asked the new warrant officers in his speech. "One is trust. The second one is technical competency. And the third one is for you to excel for excellence."

Phillips reassured them that their prior enlisted experience is going help them in their new positions but also warned them that there is more responsibility coming their way than they may used to.

"There are going to be challenges, such as balancing work and home life," he said. "So communicating and planning are really important."

The final bit of wisdom he left with the Soldiers regarded decision making.

"When commanders are in the decision making process, we want as much input as you can give us," he explained. "So don't be bashful. Fight for what you believe in."

If you don't think it's right, fight, but once the decision is made it becomes your decision and then you must do all you can to make it a successful decision."

Stewart, a Richmond resident, is the property book account officer with the 1030th Transportation Company in Gate City. She was a staff sergeant with Company B, 429th Brigade Support Battalion before attending Warrant Officer Candidate School. But her plans to become a warrant officer date back to when she was just a specialist.

"I met a warrant officer who inspired me to want to become one," Stewart explained. "The hardest part was to get started. It took me six years and I wished I'd done it sooner. Starting the process is the toughest part."

That's a sentiment shared by Cutchin of Ruther Glen, Va. Cutchin, who has 26 years total service in the Army, chose to become a warrant officer because he wanted to do more in the Army and thought he could have a greater impact as a warrant officer.

"If you want to become a warrant officer, make that decision and pursue it right away," said Cutchin, who will soon be assigned to Company F, 429th Brigade Support Battalion in Winchester. "It's a long process and involves a lot of paperwork. So be decisive. Don't think about, be about it and go after it."



Chief Warrant Officer Biruk Abraham takes the oath of office as a new warrant officer at the Warrant Officer Recognition Ceremony Oct. 22 at Fort Pickett.

Blackstone Rotary dedicates monument to Fort Pickett, veterans

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

At the corner of Main Street and Tavern Street, the Blackstone Rotary dedicated a monument Nov. 11 to commemorate the sacrifices of all military personnel and veterans, especially those who have trained at neighboring Fort Pickett.

“May you remember the reasons that this monument has been erected and never forget the sacrifices of our military personnel who made this moment possible,” said Mike Clay, Rotary Club president.

The Community of Blackstone and Fort Pickett share a long history due to their close proximity, and the troops who have come through Fort Pickett over the years have helped shape the community around the base.

“From World War II to today, we estimate that this community has touched more than one million military personnel, said Col. Tom Wilkinson, commander of Fort Pickett. “Today we average about 120,000 troops coming through Fort Pickett every year.”

Many of the personnel who come to train at Fort Pickett are members of the community and serve in a citizen-soldier status. These National Guard men and women come from communities like Blackstone all across the commonwealth.

“Since 9/11 the National Guard had mobilized more than 480,000 Guardsmen,” Wilkinson said. “Of those mobilized, Virginia has contributed more than 14,000 Virginia Army and Air National Guard members. Today we have more than 1,300 members of the Virginia National Guard deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.”



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

The Blackstone Rotary dedicated a monument Nov. 11 to commemorate the sacrifices of all military personnel and veterans, especially those who have trained at neighboring Fort Pickett.

Va. Guard Airmen receive apprenticeship certificates

By Cotton Puryear
Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Sixteen Virginia National Guard Airmen from the Virginia Beach-based 203rd REDHORSE Squadron received apprenticeship certificates Dec. 3 as part of a program that translates military job skills directly into marketable civilian job skills.

The Virginia Department of Military Affairs created an Apprentice Partnership Initiative that works with the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry to allow Virginia Guard Soldiers and Airmen to get credit for the skills they acquire through military schools as well as the duties they perform when they are in uniform.

“This is another professional credential for my civilian job that makes me competitive with my peers,” said Tech Sgt. Brian Rizzo, a ground safety officer in the Air Guard who also works as a safety officer with the city of Suffolk. “This will also make me more competitive for future opportunities as I advance in my career.”

The program is open to both Soldiers and Airmen. Apprenticeship programs traditionally produce well trained and highly skilled workers in specific trade field, and civilian employers like to hire workers who already have the experience and training so they don’t have to spend time and money for training. Guardsmen with these skills are more competitive on the civilian market and can be hired at a higher rate. Over time the earning potential is also higher.

“Most of our Air Guard occupations and many of our Army Guard occupations translate directly to what have been considered

traditional apprenticeships, such as avionics technicians, electricians, and HVAC,” said Virginia Army National Guard 1st Lt. Bryan Hicks, Virginia National Guard’s API coordinator. “Our partnership with the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry is unique in that we have “apprenticed” virtually all of the many different military jobs, to include infantry. Infantry Soldiers have much to offer civilian employers as they possess a variety of skills, from managing troops to human resource experience, which are very marketable in the civilian sector.”

Once Guardsmen who sign up for the program complete the Apprentice Action Form based on their working military occupation, they become a registered apprentice.

While in the apprentice status, the Guardsmen must keep track of their hours on the job through a journal. After completing all DOLI standards and guidance for that trade, the Guardsmen will turn in the required documentation. Once approved, the Guardsmen become certified journeymen.

The journey card allows eligibility to test for state certification. The Virginia Department of Labor and Industry is recognized nationwide as an accredited certification and the certification can then be used across the country.

The program currently has about 325 Soldiers and Airmen registered and encompasses almost all military jobs and fields.

The program also has plans to make registering for the program a requirement for new Soldiers coming into the Guard as part of the recruit sustainment program.

Additional information about the program can be request through email at va.api@ng.army.mil.

Virginia units take part in National Capital exercise

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

Soldiers and Airmen from the Virginia National Guard’s 34th Civil Support Team trained alongside members of the D.C. Guard’s 33rd CST Oct. 19 during the 2011 Exercise Capital Shield 12 in Lorton, Va., hosted by Joint Force Headquarters-National Capital Region and the U.S. Army Military District of Washington.

The exercise was designed to enhance joint operations, techniques, procedures and enhance communication among the services and interagency partners. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen participated in a series of training evolutions alongside interagency partners and local first responders.

“The 34th Civil Support Team’s main role is to assist the local responders, first responders and state authorities to make sure that anything that could be hazardous material is mitigated,” said Lt. Col. William Patton, 34th CST commander. “We make sure that we get proper identification of the samples so we can identify the hazard.”

“This is a fantastic opportunity to work with other joint agencies to make sure we are all on the same page in case we have a terrorist attack.”

The 33rd and 34th CSTs have worked with each other during several exercises and missions throughout the years and have built strong relationships due to their close geographic proximity.

“The D.C. team has the same types of equipment that we do in operation, so we are falling in on their gear,” said 1st Sgt. Brodie Kirkland, 34th CST first sergeant. “If anything needs to be supplemented, or if say, the D.C. team is exhausted with all their resources and personnel, they can now leave the site and we can take over.”

“If an event were to occur in D.C., our partners in Maryland and Virginia would be the first ones that we would call upon, so it’s very important for us to train together, so we have familiarity with each other,” said Maj. Tina Kopilchack, 33rd CST commander. “Even though the CSTs are designed to have all the same equipment, this training together gains a familiarity with personnel, so that we can fall in on each other and our teams



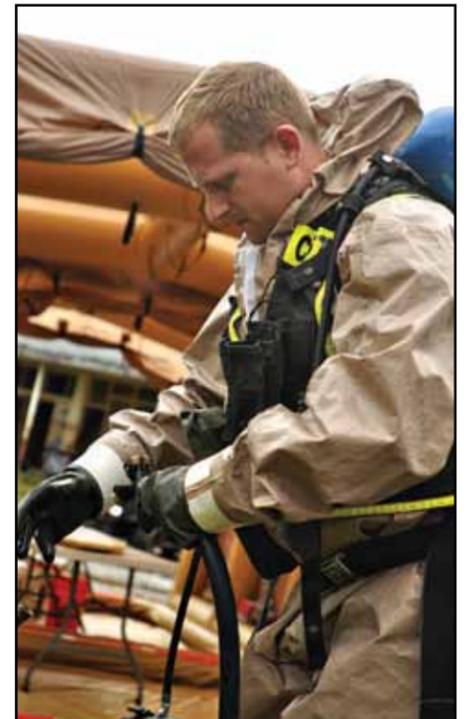
Photos by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Virginia Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers and Airmen from the Virginia National Guard’s 34th Civil Support Team work alongside members of the D.C. Guard’s 33rd CST Oct. 19 during Exercise Capital Shield 12 in Lorton, Va., hosted by Joint Force Headquarters-National Capital Region and The U.S. Army Military District of Washington.

get to know each other. Even though the equipment is the same, people aren’t the same, so we get to know how the other people operate.”

During the exercise, the 22 Soldiers from the 34th CST responded to a possible terrorist attack with potential chemical and biological agents from a makeshift lab. After notification by local authorities, the 34th and 33rd arrived to assess the situation and advise law enforcement. Units assigned to JFHQ-NCR and MDW participated in urban search and rescue tasks and mass casualty evacuations following a simulated Chemical, Biological Radiological Nuclear High Yield Explosive event.

“The biggest benefit that I see from this is, anytime that you get a large-scale multi-agency exercise, you start really finding out where your weaknesses and strengths are,” said Kirkland. “If something like this were to happen in the real world, you would have a lot of resources on the site and you have to figure out how to control the scene, but for our little piece of the pie, now we can actually integrate with, not only another CST, but also the local first responders that we’re going to be working for initially.”



The Soldiers and Airmen from the civil support teams conducted decontamination operations following exposure to potentially contaminated areas during the exercise scenario.

“Forward Guardian” tests VDF capabilities statewide

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

Members of the Virginia Defense Force conducted their annual field training exercise Nov. 5-6 at locations across the commonwealth, and the “Forward Guardian” exercise was built around command and control operations and deploying specially-designed “packages” of VDF members that would provide capabilities to assist the Virginia National Guard.

The VDF conducted 24-hour operations to simulate how they would respond to a major snowstorm event in Virginia, according to Lt. Col. (Va.) Stewart Bentley, mission director for the exercise.

“This is the first time we have done 24-hour operations,” said Col. (Va.) Justin P. Carlitti, operations officer and 28-year Marine Corps veteran. “Normally we will start at 1600, stop at 2000, start again at 0700, so this is the first time we have done 24 hours straight operations through the night, and we threw everything against them.”

“Forward Guardian is a readiness exercise that will help assure that we can mobilize, deploy and perform operations during natural or man-made emergencies in Virginia,” said Col. (Va.) Richard Downey, commander of Manassas-based Black Horse Brigade.

During the exercise, the VDF maintained a command and control element in the Virginia National Guard Joint Operations Center in Sandston, Va., while deploying teams to locations in Manassas, Fort Pickett and the Hampton Roads area to conduct training.

“We deployed, mobilized and sent out on various missions, the entire Virginia Defense Force in geographically diverse locations,” said Bentley. The training included deploying several Incident Management Assistance Teams, who in a real-world situation would work closely with and lend support to Soldiers and Airmen of the Virginia National Guard. The VDF also had the Shelter Assistance Liaison Teams, the Aviation Battalion and the Riverines Detachment involved in the weekend scenario.

“This is the first exercise of its nature that the VDF has done where we have stood everyone up,” said Bentley. “We stood up all of the TAC-PAKs; we had the mobile command posts out and operational; we were running aviation reconnaissance and surveillance missions checking on the status of the major highways and we also had the Riverine unit down on the Chesapeake doing riverine reconnaissance missions.

“We are a force multiplier for the Virginia Department of Military Affairs. We have right at 1,000 troops who are all volunteers, who are trained and ready to go to support the National Guard in the event we are called to active duty by the governor,” Bentley said. “What we are providing is essentially a command and control network that will help the Guard carry out its missions in response to a disaster.”

The VDF FTX was also the first time the VDF ran the FTX concurrently with a tabletop exercise with the Virginia Guard Joint Force Headquarters to give the Guard the opportunity to control



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

Members of the Virginia Defense Force assist stranded motorists in a simulated snowstorm during their field training exercise Nov. 5 at Fort Pickett. The VDF conducted its 2011 Forward Guardian FTX Nov. 5-6 at several locations across the commonwealth. The VDF FTX was built around command and control operations and deploying various response packages in response to scenario-based events.

actual maneuver forces during their exercise.

“The big thing was the integration with the Joint Force Headquarters. Normally in the past, the VDF would execute its own missions,” said Carlitti. “The Guard knew what we were doing, but now that’s why we are here; the integration between the JOC and with our forces. We are now collocated working with the JOC and that’s what we simulated here, the passage of message traffic between the JOC, through our team here, to the maneuver brigades.

“I already met with the (Virginia) Guard Director of Operations and the Deputy Director of Operations and this is going to become the normal course of activity,” he said. “It’s going to be joint exercises, and that is the way it should be.”

“This exercise was a building block for the Virginia National Guard and the VDF,” said Col. (Va.) John Fortune, commander of Lafayette Brigade. “This is a bridge we had to cross before we could move on to the next level of training. This was a chance for us to show the Guard we know what we’re doing and we’re ready for the next step.”

The VDF will continue to train throughout the year during their scheduled one-day monthly training and the two weekends per year in an all-volunteer status.

VDF members dedicate their training time in an unpaid status to be prepared for a time when the governor may call upon them in an emergency. The members receive paid compensation for their time only while in a state active duty as directed by the governor of Virginia.

“We train for it, we practice for it, we have an exercise of it and that is critical to have a joint Army/Air/Virginia Defense Force/civilian first responders operations to respond to a disaster,” said Maj. Gen. (Va.) John D. Taylor, Virginia Defense Force Commander. “We will have a disaster one day, you know, I hope we don’t, but hope is not a strategy. We have to plan for it and if we do have it, we will respond. We’re here to serve.”

New Virginia Army Guard officers sworn in

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

The Virginia Army National Guard welcomed 13 second lieutenants into the Army during a commissioning ceremony Oct. 22 at Fort Pickett. Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, was the guest speaker for the event, which took place at the 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute’s auditorium.

The graduates completed Officer Candidate School conducted by the 3rd Battalion, 183rd RTI at Fort Pickett. Two of the graduates were from the OCS Summer Accelerated Class 54B while the other 11 were from OCS Traditional Class 53.

The OCS candidates who graduated were 2nd Lt. Michael J. Cunningham, 2nd Lt. Donald G. Davis, 2nd Lt. Christopher R. Epperson, 2nd Lt. Gustavo F Ferreira, 2nd Lt. Adam P. Greiber, 2nd Lt. Brandon A. Harding, 2nd Lt. Michael B. Kohn, 2nd Lt. J. Scott Martin, 2nd Lt. Asa G. Miller, 2nd Lt. David J. Narcum, 2nd Lt. Stephen J. Noggle, Jr., 2nd Lt. Stephen D. Ramsey, and 2nd Lt. Nicholas A. Tucker.

“When I talk to the moms and dads and friends of these Soldiers here I can see the pride in their eyes, pride in the way you talk and how proud you are of them,” Long said during the ceremony. “I’ve had a chance to talk with all these future lieutenants, and I’ll tell you I’m impressed with them. I think they’re great Americans and will certainly make great officers.”

But Long warned the new officers’ families they are entering a military about to undergo some changes compared to the last decade.

“Times are going to change,” he explained. “Over the last 10 years we have had an abundance of resources. In the coming



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

Family members pin new rank on 2nd Lt. Michael J. Cunningham during the Virginia National Guard Officer Candidate School commissioning ceremony Oct. 22 at Fort Pickett.

years resources are going to be somewhat limited. So they will be challenged to do the things I’m going to ask them to do because I expect them to get out there and train, qualify with their weapons and make sure their Soldiers have the basic things they need to get out there and learn their skills.”

Following Long’s speech, the graduates received awards for their performance during the course. Epperson was recognized with the Erickson Trophy as the Distinguished Honor Graduate; Ferreira received the AUSA Leadership Award; Greiber was presented with the Commandant’s Award for Academic Achievement; Miller earned the Physical Fitness Award; Tucker was presented the COL James B. Moore Award for most improved in leadership; and Narcum received the CPT Harry Q. Rose Award, which is named after the only Virginia Officer Candidate School graduate to be killed in action in Vietnam and is given to the graduate who most exemplifies Rose’s values.

After the presentation of awards, it was time for the graduates to receive their diplomas and have their new ranks pinned onto their uniform by family members and friends.

Having their family members there for the ceremony meant a lot to the Soldiers, according to Harding, who will be assigned as a platoon leader with Forward Support Company, 276th Engineer Battalion.

“It’s a life changing moment,” he explained. “So you really want your family here to share the moment with you. Without our families, none of us would be here.”

With their diplomas in hand and new ranks on their shoulders, Lt. Col. Bryan J. Coleman, commander of the 3rd Battalion, 183rd RTI, then administered the Oath of Office for the Virginia Guard’s newest crop of lieutenants.



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

2nd Lt. Donald G. Davis is congratulated on his new rank following the Virginia National Guard Officer Candidate School commissioning ceremony Oct. 22 at Fort Pickett.

Virginia Guard supports DEA National Drug Take Back Day

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

Virginia National Guard Soldiers attached to the Counterdrug Program met in Richmond Nov. 3 to load more than 9,400 pounds of unwanted drugs in two medium tactical vehicles for transport to Lorton, Va., for incineration. The Drug Enforcement Administration collected the drugs by collaborating with state and local law enforcement during the annual National Drug Take Back Day Oct. 29, an initiative encouraging citizens to surrender unwanted prescription and over-the-counter medications.

"We are here to support the DEA's Drug Take Back," said Sgt. 1st Class Brian Wright, a member of the Counterdrug Task Force. "We are in support of the DEA to pick up pharmaceuticals to dispose of them properly and we are helping by transporting the drugs up to the incinerator in Fairfax."

This event marked the third National Drug Take Back Day, giving citizens the opportunity to turn in their unwanted, unused and potentially harmful drugs at 160 sites across the commonwealth. Getting the drugs out of the homes of Virginians reduces the risk for drug abuse, misuse or improper disposal. Studies show that the majority of teens who abuse prescription drugs obtain them from family and friends, including from the home medicine cabinet. Many Americans simply do not know how to dispose of their unused or expired medicine properly, often flushing it down the toilet or throwing it away.

"The pharmaceuticals are usually flushed down the toilet; it becomes an environmental impact. Kids are able to get the unused drugs and use them at rave parties called 'fish bowls' and then they pick through different bowls with different drugs, and they don't know what they are getting," said Wright. "This is a safe way for us to take them off the street and dispose of them properly."

The DEA Take Back Day is a significant piece of the Attorney General of Virginia's initiative to clean out medicine cabinets and to educate the public about the dangers

of drugs found in Virginia households.

"The Virginia National Guard is a member of the Office of the Attorney Generals' Prescription Drug Working Group, which is a task we came into as part of the Governor's office for substance abuse prevention. It's part of a coalition to not only transport the drugs and dispose of them, but to help get the word out to the commonwealth through the members of the command and the other agencies that we work with," said Lt. Col. Charlton Dunn, Counterdrug coordinator. "We do this for several reasons; pharmaceuticals are becoming a popular drug of abuse for youth and there's also a lot of accidental issues with drugs that are in medicine cabinets that have been left there for years: kids get into them, older people mix up their prescriptions.

"A lot of it is being dumped down toilets or put into landfills and seeping into the groundwater and its actually coming back through our water supply system. The filters in the filtration plants can't get it all out, so we now have trace amounts of pharmaceuticals showing up in our drinking water."

In addition to getting drugs out of the hands of Virginia teens and out of the water systems, the event also provided a real-world training event for the Virginia Guardsmen, who not only support the CD program, but also are trained military truck drivers.

"All of us here today are actually 88-mikes [truck drivers], so this is a training opportunity for us to be able to get on-the-road mileage going to a commercial facility that we normally would not have, so it also helps us with interagency cooperation and with the war fight," said Wright.

The Guard was an obvious choice for the DEA and the Attorney General to task with the mission of transporting the drugs to the incinerator due to the availability of equipment and the Guard's relationship with the communities the drugs came from.

"We have a synergistic effect with those other agencies because we are linked to the community, we are members of the community and our Soldiers and Airmen



Photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, Va. Guard PAO
Sgt. 1st Class Brian Wright, a member of the Virginia Guard Counterdrug Task Force, loads prescription drugs into trucks Nov. 3 following the National Drug Take Back Initiative, which resulted in 9,450 pounds of unwanted, unused, and potentially harmful drugs collected throughout Virginia. Accompanied by agents from the DEA, Soldiers drove the trucks to Northern Virginia to properly destroy the drugs.

are members of all sorts of civilian organizations and local government organizations," Dunn said.

"It's an easy day when you see that you have an end result that you know that you've done something positive in the community," added Wright.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, enough prescription painkillers were prescribed in 2010 to medicate every American adult around-the-clock for one month. Often, some of these medicines languish in the home and are highly susceptible to diversion, misuse and abuse.

Rates of prescription drug abuse in the U.S. are alarmingly high. More Americans currently abuse prescription drugs than the number of those using cocaine, hallucinogens, heroin, and inhalants combined, according to the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

29th Band conducts holiday concerts

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

The 29th Division Band kicked off its annual Holiday Concert Series at the Memorial Baptist Church in Staunton Dec. 8 and kept the holiday spirit alive as it travelled to two more locations to perform the show over the next two days. The Soldiers of the band, along with guest vocalists, performed the shows to express the Guard's appreciation to the communities and families for their support of the National Guard and their units.

In addition to the Staunton show, the group performed at First United Methodist Church in Martinsville Dec. 9 and at Covington High School Dec. 10 bringing to fruition the several months of preparation. By September, the band began rehearsing with guest solo singers Capt. Clay Blevins and his wife Cindy Blevins, Missy Carter and Chelsey Helms.

"Without them it would be a challenge to put on all our vocal numbers," said Warrant Officer Donald Carlson, 29th Division Band commander. "We do have some vocalists in our band, but they really bring an extra special thing to it and it's nice because it's part of the Guard family."

"It's always just so much fun with them because they are all so talented. They just make us feel like we are part of the band too. So we don't have a rank, but they treat us like we've been here the whole time," said Helms. "I thoroughly enjoy every minute of being here; I enjoy the people, I enjoy the band I enjoy meeting all of these people. It's just fun everywhere we go. It always gets better every year."

In attendance at the Staunton concert was Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, who traveled from Sandston to thank the citizens who came out to support the show.

"I've been to concerts and special events all across Virginia in the last 16 months I have been the adjutant general and this band is amazing, and we hope you enjoy them," Long said. "Thanks to all of you here in the band for everything that you do."

The Holiday Concert Series serves as a way for the Adjutant General and the Virginia National Guard to say thank you



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

The Adjutant General of Virginia, Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long Jr., presents 1st Sgt. Fred Lewis the Virginia Legion of Merit Dec. 8 in Staunton for his outstanding service to the Virginia National Guard throughout his career. Lewis retired from the National Guard at the end of December.

for all the Guardsmen and women that serve and to thank the communities that support them.

"Soldiers doing their job doesn't necessarily always directly impact the citizens, so we have a chance to just go out there and say, 'Hey thank you, here's a little something we can do for you and thank you for all your support,'" Carlson said.

During the concert, Long and Carlson took a moment to recognize 1st Sgt. Fred Lewis on his upcoming retirement and to award him the Virginia Legion of Merit for his outstanding contributions to the Virginia National Guard over 33 years.

"He has been in the military for 36 years. He was active duty and then he came to the National Guard. He is the man I blame for all of the success of this group," said Carlson. "He has taken this group from a very small unit of about 16 members who were not very disciplined and not very skilled musicians. Through the years, through recruiting and working with the band he has made what you hear tonight."

"I joined this band in Nov. 1978. We've gone through a lot of changes. When I joined the band, I think I made number 13," said Lewis. "We were down way under

strength and it's been a long, long climb to get up to full strength. We finally achieved full strength in 2005. Not everybody is qualified to be in the unit; we have to have people who are already qualified before they can be admitted."

"He so deserves that award. He has given his life to the Guard and this band in particular. I have to say I am inspired by him and I hope that I continue and keep that torch going and just go further and further with the band just standing on the shoulders of that giant," Carlson said.

Lewis started his career as a euphonium player and also served as a bus driver and an instrument repairman. As his full-time job, he was a high school band director but he has retired from that position as well.

"It's a bittersweet thing to be leaving. I'm getting to the point where the PT (physical training) test is no fun," Lewis noted jokingly. "I guess it's time to turn over the reins to someone else."

"The only advice I can give [the band] is to do their best every time, make it a professional job every single time. It doesn't matter how many people are in the audience; we've had audiences as small as one person, but that one person deserves the same effort as we would give a packed house."

Virginia Guard engineers work with Tajikistanis

From Staff Reports

A group of Virginia Army National Guard Soldiers traveled to Tajikistan Nov. 10- 17 to conduct a four-day engineer workshop with members of the Tajikistani military.

One officer and three noncommissioned officers made the trek to Dushanbe in an effort to work with Tajikistani military engineers on issues commonly faced assisting the local civil authorities in a natural disaster, according to 1st Lt. Artur Taryan of the 180th Engineer Company.

“We accomplished this by conducting a total of 13 workshop topics that were structured toward the audience and required interaction,” he said. “The workshop was concluded with a practical exercise that utilized all the skills taught.”

In addition to Taryan, the Virginia Guard Soldiers who participated in the mission were Sgt. 1st Class Crayton Houston, 91st Troop Command, Staff Sgt. Danny Adkins, 1033rd Engineer Company, and Sgt. Joseph Buckner, 189th Engineer Company.



Courtesy photo

Tajikistani Soldiers and 1st Lt. Artur Taryan pose for a group photo in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Taryan was one of four Virginia Guard Soldiers who conducted a four-day engineer workshop with members of the Tajikistani military Nov. 10-17.

A total of 13 Tajikistani officers, most of whom were captains and majors, participated in the workshop. The topics covered during the week included- Conduct an Engineer Route Reconnaissance; Prepare an Operation Order; Conduct Troop-leading Procedures; Determine the Radius of a Curve; Determine the Percent of Slope; Determine Stream Velocity; Prepare

a Ford Reconnaissance Report; Prepare an Engineer Reconnaissance Report; Perform a Route Classification; Collect Information During a Route Reconnaissance; Prepare Route Reconnaissance Map Overlay; Plan an Engineer Reconnaissance Operation; and Conduct a Route Reconnaissance Mission.

In the practical exercise, the Tajikistani military officers received an operations order based on a natural disaster scenario. They then planned and executed a mission with the advice of the Virginia National Guard Soldiers.

“The interpreters and the Tajikistani class leadership articulated their extreme pleasure with the course and even presented small gifts to the team,” Taryan said “We were told this was the one of the better workshops, and the reason was due to good prior planning and having a skilled team.”

This workshop not only helped the Tajikistani military officers with engineer skills but solidified the engineer information in the trainers.

“The Virginia Army National Guard has now five more Soldiers with greater experience in route reconnaissance and working with foreign military,” Taryan said. “This is clearly a win-win situation for Tajikistan and the Virginia Army National Guard. We both gain valuable experience which will be shared throughout the units.”



Courtesy Photo

A Tajikistani Soldier prepares to measure the speed of a flowing river using an empty bottle tied to a string of 550 cord while Sgt. Joseph Buckner looks on.

1032nd Transportation Company competes in national Connelly food service competition

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

Soldiers from the Gate City-based 1032nd Transportation Company, 1030th Transportation Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group prepared a lunch meal Oct. 1 at Fort Pickett for the national-level Phillip A. Connelly Awards for Excellence in Army Food Service in the Army National Guard Field Kitchen Category. Virginia is one of seven regional winners competing for the national-level award.

The Soldiers set up several tents around the mobile kitchen trailer where they spent a week preparing for the competition. In addition to preparing and serving food, the Soldiers also had an area where they could wash dishes, focus on field sanitation and an area for dining during the meal.

The Soldiers spent long hours preparing for the actual evaluation. Leading up to the evaluation the Soldiers made sure everything they did was exactly as the regulations specified. According to Master Sgt. Gregory Mason, state food advisor, the Soldiers put in several 18-20 hour shifts in preparation for the competition.

“They are doing well,” said Mason. “It’s mostly field feeding by the regulations. They are following their armed forces recipe card, and making sure the times and temperatures are correct. The field sanitation teams know their diseases and the maintenance folks know how to do the proper preventive maintenance checks



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

Soldiers from the Gate City-based 1032nd Transportation Company, 1030th Transportation Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group serve the lunch meal Oct. 1 at Fort Pickett during the Phillip A. Connelly Awards for Excellence in Army Food Service. The Soldiers spent the week at Fort Pickett preparing for the annual competition.

and services on all the equipment, on the burners, the generators and the sanitation centers.”

The Phillip A. Connelly Award is a Department of the Army food service program. The International Food Service Executives Association and the Department of the Army co-sponsor the program administered by the Army Center of Excellence, Subsistence. The program achieves improvements in the quality of food service by inspiring competition to adhere to regulations and guidelines.

The Connelly competition uses a point system to determine the winner. Each competing unit begins with a set amount of points and that number decreases throughout the grading.

“You start out with a thousand points, and if it’s something you have done wrong, you lose a point,” said Mason. “Whoever ends up with the highest points will win the nationals.”

The food service section competes in a number of areas including food preparation, taste, nutrition, service and sanitation. The Soldiers will learn the results of the competition in December or January. Soldiers from the 1032nd won the award four times including back-to-back titles in 2008 and 2009.

“It’s a very important event,” said Lt. Col. Doyle Gillis, 1030th Transportation Battalion commander. “It puts us in competition with the rest of the nation, not just in the Guard, but against active duty and the Reserves as well. It shows we can hold our own against any active duty unit.

“I feel like these Soldiers have done a magnificent job here. They have worked 20 plus hour days for the past week to prepare for this thing and there is no doubt that we will set the standard.”



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

The food service section competes in a number of areas including food preparation, taste, nutrition, service and sanitation.



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

The family of 1st Lt. Mark Ford of Virginia Beach cheer as he and his fellow Soldiers from Headquarters Troop, 2nd Squadron, 183rd Cavalry return to the Portsmouth National Guard Armory Dec. 19.

Virginia Guard Soldiers, Airmen welcomed home statewide



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

A group of Soldiers from the Sandston-based 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 91st Troop Command return to the Richmond International Airport Dec. 21.

Staff Reports

Between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31, 2011, more than 1,300 Virginia National Guard Soldiers and Airmen returned to the commonwealth from overseas deployments.

By early 2012, there were still approximately 260 Soldiers and Airmen serving on federal active duty in Afghanistan and other locations across the world.

Since September 11, 2001, more than 14,000 Virginia Guard Soldiers and Airmen have served on federal active duty in support of Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn, helping to maintain security in the United States and further the cause of freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as serving in the NATO peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and Kosovo.



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Va. Department of Military Affairs

Family, friends and members of the community welcomed home about 105 Soldiers from the Christiansburg-based Company C, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment Dec. 12.



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

Elizabeth Tsui of Alexandria welcomes home husband, Sgt. Thomas Tsui from the Fredericksburg-based Company A, 116th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 116th Brigade Combat Team Dec. 18 as he returned to Virginia after serving in Iraq since August 2011.



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

Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, and Secretary Marla Graff Decker, the Virginia Secretary of Public Safety, greet approximately 120 Airmen of the Virginia Beach-based 203rd RED HORSE Squadron Oct. 8 at Naval Station Norfolk.



Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs

Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell welcomes home Soldiers from the Sandston-based 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 91st Troop Command as they return to Virginia Dec. 10 after serving in Iraq since April 2011.



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

Capt. David A. Loy of Richmond hugs his daughter Elena Grace, 5, upon his return to Virginia with the Sandston-based 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 91st Troop Command Dec. 10 after serving in Iraq since April 2011.