

HEADQUARTERS, 29TH INFANTRY DIVISION

LET'S GO

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116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team musters in Staunton

Virginia Guard keeps regimental history alive

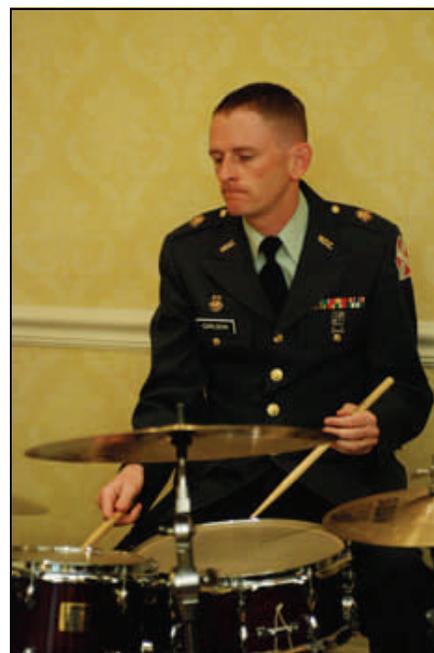
41st Annual Muster celebrates unit's rich history

*By Sgt. Andrew H. Owen
29th Infantry Division Public Affairs*

STAUNTON, Va. — Soldiers and officers of the 116th Brigade Combat Team, also known as “The Stonewall Brigade,” donned their dress green and dress blue uniforms to gather with family and friends at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel and Conference Center in Staunton Nov. 8 to mark the unit’s 41st Annual 116th Regimental Muster. The purpose of the formal dinner was to honor the unit’s service to the commonwealth, the nation, the Soldiers, and the unit’s long and rich history.

This year’s muster was the first time the majority of the individual units of the 116th BCT have been able to assemble together since 2006 because of the deployment of units to Iraq, Kuwait and Kosovo. Between overseas deployments, wildfires, hurricanes, tropical storms, and other homeland defense missions, the 116th has been actively engaged for the past few years. The muster was a great opportunity for Guardsmen to reconnect with their brothers-in-arms.

“I am very proud and thankful to stand before you and report that all the



Warrant Officer Candidate Donald Carlson entertains guests at the 41st 116th Regimental Muster as part of a jazz ensemble provided by the 29th Army Band. (Photo by Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, 29th Infantry Division Public Affairs)



Lt. Col. John Epperly (left) and retired Brig. Gen. Theodore G. Shuey Jr. (right) display a World War II-era helmet that 3rd Battalion, 116th Brigade Combat Team was presented as a gift while they served in Kuwait. The helmet will be donated to the 116th museum. (Photo by Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, 29th Infantry Division Public Affairs)

Stonewall units have returned from their deployment(s) and are in the middle of re-set operations, focusing on reintegration with families, friends, work, and their respective communities,” said Col. William R. Phillips, commander of the 116th BCT.

In attendance at the Muster were Soldiers and officers of the unit both past and present. There were several veterans of the unit from World War

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Guard celebrates National American Heritage Month



Chief Red Hawk performs for Soldiers, Airmen and other Virginia Guard employees at the American Indian Heritage Celebration Nov. 6 at Fort Pickett. (Photo by Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, 29th Infantry Division Public Affairs)

By Sgt. Andrew H. Owen
29th Infantry Division Public Affairs

FORT PICKETT, Va. — November marks the beginning of National American Indian Heritage Month, and the Virginia National Guard is doing its part to help educate and celebrate the influences Native Americans have had on shaping our nation.

The Virginia National Guard Joint Forces Headquarters Equal Opportunity office held a National American Indian Heritage Celebration to kick off the month Nov. 6 at the Camp Pickett Officers club at Fort Pickett.

The celebration, which was open to all Soldiers, Airmen and Department of Military Affairs employees of the Virginia National Guard, began with opening remarks by Lt. Col. Jeffrey Stewart, State Safety Officer and American Indian Special Emphasis Program Manager. During his opening statement Stewart emphasized the great contributions the Native Americans have made to the United States Military.

“American Indians have served with distinction in the military dating back to the War of 1812. During World War II these brave patriots used their native languages to create an unbreakable oral code,” said Stewart. “The valor and dedication of American Indians is further visible in the decorations received in battle. 25 Medals of Honor, 71 Air Medals, 51 Silver Stars, 47 Bronze Stars, and 34 Distinguished Flying Crosses.”

Following the invocation, Chief Red Hawk, an award-winning recording artist and master storyteller, was introduced. Red Hawk kept the crowd entertained with stories of his life growing up as a Cherokee Indian with his family in a modern-world and a demonstration on Native American drums and a flute.

Red Hawk, a former military serviceman himself, understands the importance of teaching cultural diversity to Soldiers. “Every time you learn about someone else’s culture, you benefit your culture,” said Red Hawk.

29th ID Soldiers supporting exercise in Japan and Hawaii

From Staff Reports

More than 100 Virginia Army National Guard Soldiers from the Fort Belvoir-based 29th Infantry Division and the Staunton-based 116th Brigade Combat Team are currently serving in Japan and Hawaii in support of U.S. Pacific Command exercise called “Yama Sakura 55”. Yama Sakura (meaning Mountain Cherry Blossom in Japanese) is a weeklong command post exercise scheduled this year from Dec. 7 to 13 at Camp Asaka, Japan.

“By training with our Japanese allies in Yama Sakura 55, the 29th Infantry Division shows our Soldiers are relevant and ready for global missions in support of our nation’s defense interests,” said Brig. Gen. Peter Hinz, the 29th Infantry Division task force commander for YS 55. Roughly 75 Soldiers from the 29th are participating in simulation exercise at Camp Asaka, Japan, located about two hours

by bus from Tokyo. The 29th is supporting the overall Pacific Command mission of defending Japan from outside attack, as part of our treaty obligations, Hinz said. Of the roughly 75 Soldiers taking part in the exercise, approximately 20 are Maryland National Guard and about 55 are Virginia National Guard

Soldiers of the 116th Brigade Combat Team are stationed in Hawaii and are acting as part of a response cell supporting 29th, said Capt. Nevin Blankenship, public affairs officer for the 116th.

Two liaison officers from the brigade departed with 29th on Dec. 1, and they will work with the Japanese military throughout the exercise where they will coordinate with units in Hawaii and their Japanese military counterparts, Blankenship said. Approximately 36 Soldiers from the brigade’s main body departed on Dec. 2.

Blankenship said the unit hoped to conduct a historical tour of Pearl Harbor during breaks from shift work during the exercise.

The 116th will join other National Guard units from Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Mississippi, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah and Wisconsin taking part in the exercise. Additionally, units from the active Army, Marines and Navy are participating in the exercise, Blankenship said.

According to the U. S. Army web site, Yama Sakura is the most important bilateral exercise the U.S. Army conducts with our closest ally in the Pacific; Japan. The web site also stated that the exercise is a shining example of the continued commitment by the United States and Japan to work as dedicated partners in support of the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance, and for continued peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

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II, some whom stormed the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944. From the Adjutant General of Virginia, Maj. Gen. Robert B. Newman Jr., to WWII re-enactors, some not even old enough to enlist in the Guard, the 116th was recognized as one of the finest units the National Guard has ever seen.

Historically a Muster was the day designated each year when all able-bodied men were assembled on the village green for a roll-call. Thus, in every community, it was known exactly how many men could be counted on in the event of an emergency. Once the nation got away from using militias, the Guard ceased to muster.

According to retired Brig. Gen. Theodore G. Shuey Jr., Honorary Colonel of the Regiment, in 1967 the veterans of WWII felt the need to again muster, so for the last 41 years they have come together to celebrate the rich heritage of the unit. They first met at the armory in Staunton, and now in the ballrooms of the Stonewall Jackson Hotel and Conference Center.

Following the presentation of the colors and the introduction of general officers in attendance, 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.

For the valorous service of the Soldiers during the ongoing war on terror there have been 1,841 individual combat awards presented to Stonewall Soldiers, said Phillips. "This encompasses 15 Purple hearts, 97 Combat Infantry Badges, 70 Combat Action Badges, one Combat Medical Badge, 108 Bronze Stars, 68 Meritorious Service Medals, two Army Commendation Medals with 'V' Device, 730 Army Commendation Medals, six Navy Commendation Medals, 595 Army Achievement Medals, 18 Navy Achievement Medals and 131 Joint Awards."

In addition to the many individual awards received by the Soldiers the unit also received multiple unit awards and citations, to include a battle streamer from Operation Iraqi Freedom awarded to the Brigade Headquarters. Phillips had the honor of affixing the streamer, the first awarded to the unit since WWII, to the Regimental Colors at the muster.



Col. William R. Phillips, commander of the 116th Brigade Combat Team, affixes Iraq Campaign Battle to the brigade colors. (Photo by Sgt. Andrew H. Owen, 29th Infantry Division Public Affairs.)

Virginia Guard Hosts 2nd Annual Holiday Celebration

*By Capt. Dayna Rowden
Virginia Guard Public Affairs*

FORT PICKETT, Va. — The Virginia National Guard will host its second annual free holiday celebrations to be held at multiple locations around the state Dec. 5-7. The concerts will feature Virginia's own 29th Army Band and various guest soloists from the Virginia National Guard.

The celebrations, which will feature holiday music, children's activities, a visit with Santa, and refreshments, will be held in Weber City on Dec. 5, in Centreville on Dec. 6, and in Virginia Beach on Dec. 7 for the families of the Virginia National Guard and their communities.

"These celebrations are the Adjutant General's way of saying 'Thank

you' to the families and communities," said Lt. Col. Thom Morgan, Virginia National Guard J-1. "It is our gift to them for their commitment and continued patriotic support to the Commonwealth's Soldiers and Airmen."

Representatives from Family Programs, the state Chaplain's office, local Family Readiness Groups and the 29th Band have come together to organize the events.

"Last year's concerts were a huge success," said Morgan. "The music was great. It was a wonderful way to get into the holiday spirit as a community. We hope even more people will join us this year."

For more information, contact Dana Ivory, Virginia National Guard State Youth Coordinator by email at

dana.ivory@us.army.mil or by phone at 434.298.5330.

The Holiday Celebration will be held in the following locations and times:

First Baptist Church
362 US Highway 23 N
Weber City, VA
Friday, December 5, 2008
7:30 p.m.

Centreville United
Methodist Church
6400 Old Centreville Rd.
Centreville, VA
Saturday, December 6, 2008
7:30 p.m.

Thalia Lynn Baptist Church
4392 Virginia Beach Blvd.
Virginia Beach, VA
Sunday, December 7, 2008, 2:20 p.m.

Blum's time as chief ends with medal from SecDef, praise for others

By Staff Sgt. Jon Soucy
National Guard Bureau

ARLINGTON, Va., (11/21/08) – Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum handed over the reigns as chief of the National Guard Bureau to Air Force Gen. Craig R. McKinley during a ceremony at the Pentagon Nov. 17. He was also handed something in return.

For his more than five years of service as chief, Blum was awarded the Defense Distinguished Service Medal by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

The award recognized Blum's leadership of the Guard during his tenure, which saw more than 52,000 personnel deploy to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, resulting in one of the largest airlift missions since the Berlin Airlift of 1948; the growth of the Guard's State Partnership Program; and the transformation of NGB into a joint activity; all this while supporting operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and other overseas locations.

"Thank you for your outstanding service to the men and women of the National Guard and for your contributions to America's security throughout these past five years and your entire career," said Gates prior to presenting Blum the award.

Blum, in his last remarks as chief, focused on other events of the day—McKinley's promotion to the rank of four-star general before his swearing in as the new chief.

He stressed that the award was not his alone: "A lot has been said on this citation and absolutely none of it, not a single one of those great accomplishments could have been possible without every single one of you assembled here and those you represent," said Blum. "This is your award, and I am proud to accept it on your behalf."

He also looked back on his tenure as chief.

"It has been my honor and privilege to be chief of the NGB for the



Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates presents an award to outgoing Chief of the National Guard Bureau Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum during a transition ceremony at the Pentagon, Nov. 17, 2008. Blum has served as the Chief of the Guard Bureau for the past five years and recently relinquished his position to Air Force General Craig R. McKinley. McKinley will serve as the first four-star general in the National guard. (DoD photo by Cheri Cullen)

past five years and six months, each and every day of which while we're at war," said Blum. "(That is) a truly extraordinary opportunity and responsibility for someone who aspires to be a Soldier."

He also commented that the future of the National Guard has been left in capable hands.

"Before I go, I have to tell you if I were to invent my own successor, it would have to be Lt. Gen. Craig McKinley," he said. "What a superb selection Mr. Secretary."

Blum will take over as deputy commander of the U.S. Northern Command, which provides command and control of Department of Defense homeland defense efforts and coordinates defense support of civil authorities.

According to DoD's Institute of Heraldry, the Defense Distinguished Service Medal is only awarded to officers whose exceptional performance of duty and contributions to national security or defense have been at the highest levels.

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