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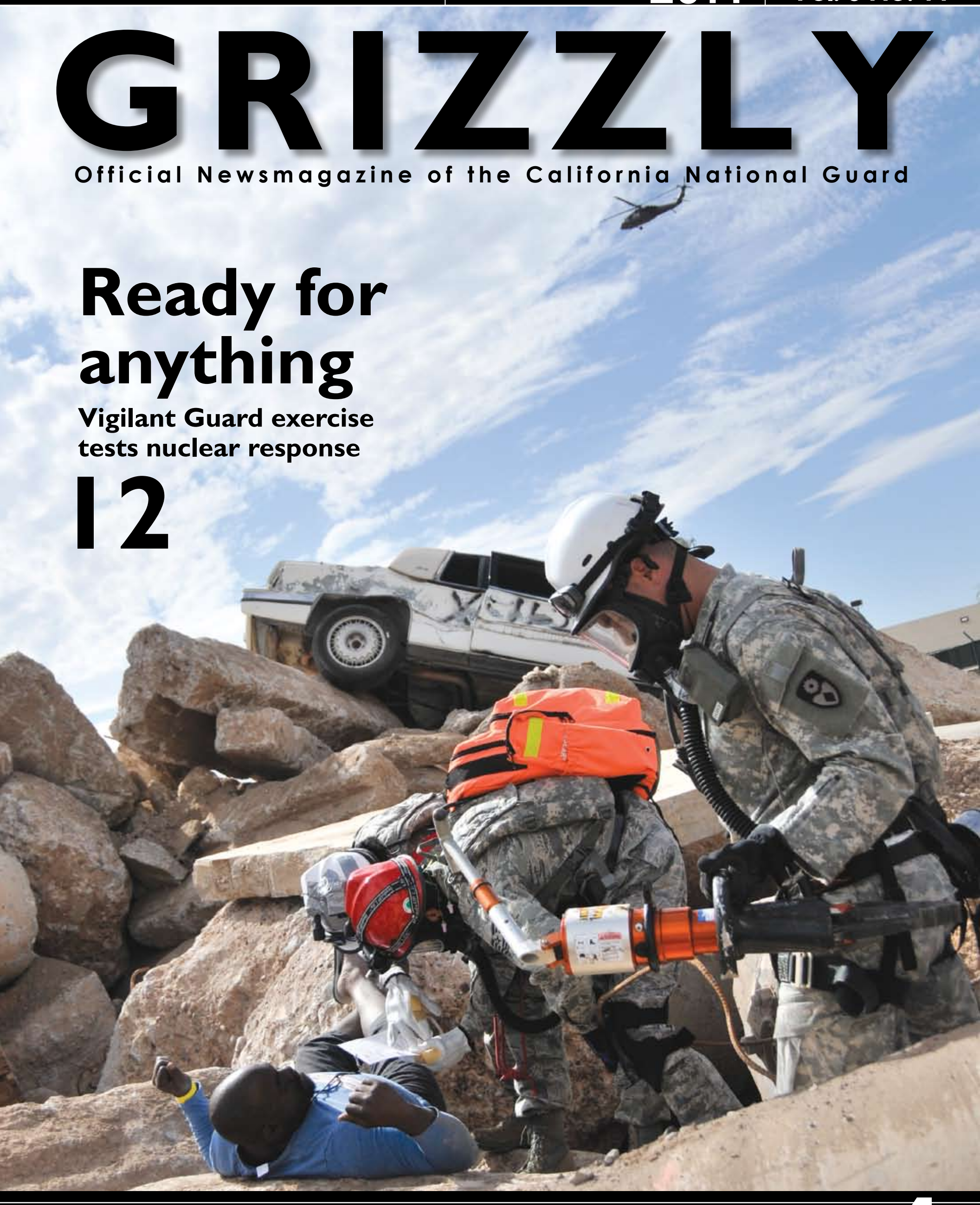
GRIZZLY

Official Newsmagazine of the California National Guard



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Leadership Corner

CNG continued great work in 2011

Maj. Gen. David S. Baldwin

My appointment as adjutant general on April 9 was a moment of great pride that I will remember always. That pride has not waned in the months since Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr. honored me with this command; rather, that feeling is reinforced every day as I review the many achievements of our Soldiers and Airmen at home and abroad.

Throughout 2011 this organization maintained an exceptional operational tempo, fulfilling training needs, responding to domestic crises and deploying in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The California Air National Guard deployed more than XXX Airmen to locations around the globe in support of combat and humanitarian missions in 2011. In the California Army National Guard, a total of 2,674 members were deployed overseas, including members of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB), which commanded the largest CAB in history in Iraq, and the 756th Transportation Company and 870th Military Police Company, two units that recently suffered great losses in Afghanistan.

On Oct. 28, Sgt. Carlo F. Eugenio of the 756th was killed by a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device while driving in Afghanistan (for more on Sgt. Eugenio, see page 4). That terrible blow was followed on Nov. 16 by the death of Spc. Sean Walsh of the 870th, who was killed by indirect fire in Afghanistan (for more on Spc. Walsh, see the upcoming January issue).

Their sacrifice is a stark reminder of the honor and dedication that is emblematic of our 22,000 members. Sgt. Eugenio and Spc. Walsh's sense of selfless service deserves our admiration, but in the California National Guard, their commitment is not uncommon: It is expected of each and every one of us.

Both Soldiers leave behind families and friends whose hearts will never be whole again. We cannot fill the void in their lives, but I hope they find solace in the knowledge that their brave warriors went down fighting for something noble and worthwhile, the effort to stop terrorism and end tyranny in that part of the world.

With nearly 1,500 troops currently deployed, many CNG families will spend the holiday season without one of their loved ones. Our families sacrifice along with their military members, picking up the slack to make ends meet and keep their families functioning without a key component.

During the past decade, CNG families have become accustomed to such demands as we have been called upon to play a growing variety of roles in the fight against America's enemies. Since 2001, CNG Soldiers have deployed overseas more than 23,400 times, and CNG Airmen have deployed more than 13,300 times, including multiple deployments for some individuals. Their families' sacrifices cannot be overestimated and should not be taken for granted. Our nation is in their debt.

Our members also stay ready to respond at a moment's notice to natural disasters or other situations at home that require the Guard's unique capabilities. In 2011, CNG firefighters doused blazes in California as well as in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, and CNG rescue personnel came to the aid of stranded citizens in several parts of our state.

The CNG's 49th Military Police Brigade took several steps toward fielding a fully mission-capable homeland response force (HRF) for FEMA Region IX and is on course to gain certification for the new HRF mission in March. The 556-member force will respond with medical, search-and-extraction, decontamination and security support for any incident involving an airborne pathogen, "dirty" bomb, nuclear detonation or other dangerous contaminant. The HRF's area of responsibility includes California, Arizona, Hawaii, Nevada, American Samoa, Guam and other Pacific islands.

Two smaller CNG elements, the 9th Civil Support Team (CST) and the 95th CST have been preparing for a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or high-yield explosive incident for years. In 2011, the 22-member 95th CST earned the Adjutant General's Meritorious Unit Commendation as one of the preeminent civil support teams in the nation.

The CNG also helps maintain national security by assisting U.S. Customs and Border Protection in its efforts to prevent illegal entry to the United States. As of late November, CNG personnel on the Southwest border had assisted in the apprehension of nearly 6,000 people attempting to cross the border illegally, and more than 2,000 additional border-crossers had turned back to avert apprehension. In November alone, the CNG border presence contributed to the seizure of 58 tons of marijuana.

The CNG personnel on the border work in concert with the CNG's Joint Task Force Domestic Support–Counterdrug, which also operates in other parts of the state. Throughout the year, the Task Force supported missions statewide that led to the seizure of 2.3 million marijuana plants, 32,000 pounds of processed marijuana, 907 pounds of cocaine, 8,900 pounds of methamphetamine, 41 pounds of heroin and 247 weapons. The combined value of the illicit drugs exceeded $11 billion. The Task Force also made invaluable contributions to our communities by meeting with children and adults to increase drug awareness and instill values that prevent drug abuse. The Drug Demand Reduction initiative of Joint Task Force Domestic Support–Counterdrug is one of many youth-focused programs that are helping build California's future.

The oldest of our youth initiatives, the California Cadet Corps, celebrated its 100th anniversary this year. During its century of service, the Cadet Corps has provided more than 1 million youths with a high-quality educational and leadership-development program. In the years since its founding, the Cadet Corps has been joined by several more CNG Youth Programs — such as the Oakland Military Institute, STARBASE and our two Youth ChalleNGe academies — that perform exceptional work in the community, pointing young Californians down the right path and teaching them skills they need to succeed.

As you look back on all we accomplished in 2011, I hope you experience the same pride in our organization that I feel. But also take the new year as a reminder to refocus and steel yourself for what lies ahead.

In the California National Guard, there are no easy years. We will be back at it in 2012, working hard to make us stronger, better-prepared and more efficient than we were in 2011. Our neighbors and our nation depend on us, and we will be ready for their call.

Photo by Master Sgt. Julie Avey

Members of a CNG honor guard carry the remains of Sgt. Carlo F. Eugenio on Nov. 14 at Riverside National Cemetery in Riverside, Calif. Eugenio, whose vehicle was attacked by insurgents with a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device Oct. 29 in Kabul province, was the first California National Guardsman killed in combat in Afghanistan. **For more on Eugenio, see page 4.**

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Many happy returns 6

Ultimate sacrifice 4

Distinguished gentlemen 8

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Articles:

- ★ 250-300 words for a half-page story; 600-800 words for a full-page article
- ★ Include first and last names, and verify spelling
- ★ Spell out acronyms, abbreviations and full unit designations on first reference
- ★ If there is a public affairs officer assigned to your unit, ensure he or she reviews it

Photographs:

- ★ Highest resolution possible: MB files, not KB
- ★ No retouched photos
- ★ Caption (what is happening, who is pictured and the date of the photo)
- ★ Credit (who took the photo)

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Cover Shot

Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr

Master Sgt. Angelina Perez and Tech Sgt. Eliza Villa (red helmet), both medics for the CNG's 144th Fighter Wing, assist a simulated victim as Sgt. Kyle Jordan of the CNG's 235th Engineer Company, far right, prepares to wrench open a vehicle Nov. 4 during the Vigilant Guard exercise, which simulated a flood followed by a nuclear detonation in Phoenix.

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California National Guard mobilizations as of November 2011

Loved ones remember 'ray of sunshine'

Killed in action, 'Kix' leaves behind many great memories

Sgt. Carlo F. Eugenio

Sergeant Carlo Francisco Eugenio died Oct. 29, 2011, when the vehicle he was driving was struck by a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device outside of Forward Operating Base Julien, Afghanistan. He is survived by his father, Cesar Eugenio Sr.; mother, Noemi Eugenio; sisters, Eleanore Coplan, Cynthia Valdez and Allenlee Johnson; brothers, Cesar Eugenio Jr. and Allan Adrineda; and many other family members.

Eugenio was born in Manila, Philippines, on Sept. 20, 1982. He enlisted in the 1112th Quartermaster Company, California Army National Guard, on April 28, 2006, and was attached to Detachment 1, Recruit Sustainment Program, 223rd Infantry Regiment. After earning the military occupational specialty of heavy construction equipment operator, he transferred to the 1498th Transportation Company in September 2007. In February 2008, Eugenio was awarded the military occupational specialty of motor transport operator, and in April he was advanced to specialist. In July 2008, Eugenio was ordered to active duty in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and was released from active duty Aug. 2, 2009. On June 10, 2010, Eugenio was promoted to sergeant, and in June 2011, he transferred to the 756th Transportation Company as a heavy vehicle driver. On Aug. 5, 2011, Eugenio was ordered to active duty in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

Among other awards and decorations, Eugenio earned the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Army Commendation Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal and Reserve Components Achievement Medal.

"To America, Sergeant Carlo F. Eugenio is a hero. To the family and friends he left behind, he was simply known as Kix. He was a ray of sunshine, a man of nature, a daredevil and adventurer and world traveler whose kind heart, gentleness, humor and selflessness touched everyone he met," Eugenio's aunt Ali Jones said recently.

Eugenio lived a life full of service to others, and family, friends and fellow Soldiers say it is a given that he gave all of his heart. A member of the 756th Transportation company, Eugenio was killed in action in Kabul province, Afghanistan, on Oct. 29.

Friend Jeffrey Lawrence spoke during Eugenio's memorial service about his patriotism, his pride at being in the military and how Lawrence had seen a difference in Eugenio since he joined the Guard.

"It was a new side of Kix, where he started to see that life was bigger than just one person," Lawrence said as he wiped away tears Nov. 14 in Alta Loma, Calif. "He showed us how selfless he was and that he understood what it takes for us to sit here free today."

Eugenio's middle name, Francisco, is often shortened to Kikoy in the family's native language, Tagalog.

"He was affectionately called Kiks or Kikoy," Eugenio's sister Eleanore Coplan said. "My brother had a tendency to misspell things, and so Kiks became Kix."

The youngest of five children, Eugenio was born in Manila, Philippines. He grew up in Fontana, Calif., and later moved with his family to Rancho Cucamonga.

Second Lieutenant Dalia Sanchez, Eugenio's company commander, said Eugenio exemplified what it meant to be a Soldier.

"He took pride in the work he did and was always a professional," she said. "The one thing I remember the most about him was he always smiled. … It has been a huge loss for all of us in the 756th."

At Eugenio's memorial service, Chris Nyberg read a letter from his brother, Sgt. Rick Nyberg, who deployed with Eugenio to Afghanistan and is currently serving there.

"No matter how bad things would be, he always stayed positive. He'd pick you up when you were down and never ask anything in return," Nyberg wrote. "You touched many hearts and will never be forgotten. You served your country well. You're an inspiration. I'm proud to call you brother."

Staff Sgt. Milton Morataya served with Eugenio in Afghanistan as well as in Iraq in 2008 and 2009.

"He was high-spirited, always wanting to push it to the limit to see what he could get away with without getting into trouble," he said. "He had a smile that radiated; it lit up a room. He never wanted anyone to be sad. He had the biggest heart in the world."

Eugenio's sister Cynthia Valdez agreed, adding, "He didn't just know people, he had relationships with everyone."

Though he was born in the Philippines, Kix was a true Californian in heart and soul, Jones said. On the civilian side, he was a heavy equipment operator for the U.S. National Forest Service at Angeles National Forest.

"He loved the outdoors—the sun, the beach, rivers, lakes and mountains. Yosemite was his second home," Jones said. "He was happiest when he could ride his dirt bike and fly up in the air in the style of Evil Knievel."

Kix was devoted to his parents and lived with them until his Iraq deployment, Coplan said, calling Eugenio his father's right-hand man and his mother's baby.

Jones added that Eugenio's sisters doted on him, and in return he made them laugh hysterically. His nieces and nephews, Emily, Kea, Saw Saw and Chachie, also each had a special place in his heart, she said, noting that he never turned down a chance to babysit and spoil them.

Eugenio also may have been planning to add another member to the family.

"Recently he started his own life journey and found who I believe to be is his true and only real love, Jessica Lee," Coplan said. "Kix was planning a life with Jessica upon his return from this deployment."

In a letter written after his death, the Eugenio family said Kix would prefer his loved ones celebrate his life rather than mourn his passing.

"We know that Kix has found the perfect spot in heaven, and we're sure it has a ski lift, snowboarding trails and endless dirt bike paths," Eugenio's family wrote. "He probably is hanging out with angels, teaching them how to pop wheelies, snowboard and shoot. But that doesn't lessen the pain we feel as we surrender him to his Maker."

ABOVE: Service members on Forward Operating Base Julien, Afghanistan, honor fallen Soldier Sgt. Carlo F. Eugenio and three other U.S. Army troops who died in an explosion Oct. 29. TOP RIGHT: Eugenio was an avid snowboarder.

CNG auditing 10 years of Army incentives

Army staff is seeking equitable resolution for each Soldier affected by audit

Fellow Soldiers,

As most of you know, the California Army National Guard has launched an investigation into discrepancies regarding the payment of recruiting and retention incentives. We have since implemented a series of controls to ensure these types of problems will not happen again.

Searching 10 years into California Army National Guard records, our new Incentives Task Force (ITF) has found this organization failed to distribute some incentive payments that should have been made. In many other cases, payments were made that should not have been authorized or that were improperly executed. All incentive files are now being reviewed to determine what action, if any, is needed to reach an appropriate resolution in each case.

My staff and I are committed to helping each CNG Soldier who is subject to the auditing process. My intent is to ensure that every Soldier is given the maximum opportunity to obtain or retain their well-deserved incentives. We are also strongly focused on taking appropriate action against any Soldier who is found to have willingly taken advantage of their position or authority to issue or receive an improper payment.

Soldiers who are contacted by the Incentives Task Force can call 310-478-5798 for the CNG Legal Assistance Office, which will ensure you receive every consideration and opportunity available to you. Information on recoupment rights will also be available on the Legal Assistance Office's website: www.calguard.ca.gov/sja/LA/Pages/default.aspx.

My intent is to ensure that every Soldier is given the maximum opportunity to obtain or retain their well-deserved incentives. We are also strongly focused on taking appropriate action against any Soldier who is found to have willingly taken advantage of their position or authority to issue or receive an improper payment.

- Brig. Gen. Donald J. Currier
Commander, California Army National Guard

The Task Force will begin contacting Soldiers in January concerning incentive payments that appear to have been improperly made and regarding payments that appear to have been improperly denied.

In all cases, open communication is key to a favorable outcome. Soldiers should engage the Incentives Task Force in dialogue early upon notification and respond promptly to requests for information. It is also important to retain your records and keep them accessible. In many cases, a Soldier may have personal records that could quickly remedy the identified problem or assist in processing an exception to policy or waiver/appeal to avoid recoupment of the incentive.

The Incentives Task Force is using several methods to resolve incentive issues at the lowest possible level. These include:

1. The Task Force will seek Exceptions to Policy for all issues that can be handled at the National Guard Bureau level;

2. A Soldier has the right to appeal to the Army Board for the Correction of Military Records if a violation was due to a lack of documentation or a violation of law, statute or Department of Defense Instruction; and

3. The Task Force will explore methods to seek a waiver of debt for Soldiers who are found to owe money.

The Incentives Task Force and your commanders understand that many Soldiers unwittingly received improper payments, though they had no intent nor desire to receive more than they were entitled. Please work with us to quickly and fairly resolve these issues so resources can be refocused on the selfless service that makes this organization great. If you are notified by the ITF concerning a problem with an incentive you received (or were denied), please contact the ITF and/or the Legal Assistance Office as directed in the letter quickly and respond to their requests for information.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Brig. Gen. Donald J. Currier,
Commander,
California Army National Guard

749th returns from Iraq in time for holidays

By SGT. 1ST CLASS RAFAEL H. RODRIGUEZ JR.
40th Infantry Division Public Affairs

A total of 78 Soldiers from the California National Guard's 749th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, based in Benicia, arrived at the Sacramento International Airport on Nov. 9 following a yearlong deployment to Iraq.

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Rafael H. Rodriguez

Sgt. Ennix Blackmon of the 749th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion gets a warm reception from his girlfriend at Sacramento International Airport on Nov. 9 after returning from a yearlong deployment to Iraq. Blackmon said there may be marriage plans in his near future.

The citizen-Soldiers worked closely with active duty Army counterparts in Iraq to provide seamless support for units of any military branch that were rotating out of the theater of operations in accordance with President Barack Obama's commitment to remove all troops from Iraq by the end of this year.

"We made a difference, that's what I'm most proud of after this deployment," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Nimfa Pana, a supply systems technician.

"U.S. Division–South is the largest of the three material redistribution teams in the country, [so] we knew we were going to make history," she said. "[Removal from Iraq] of all the containers was a lot of work, but the 749th CSSB was successful with this mission. There's a lot of equipment there, and a lot still that we left behind to help support the Iraqi government. … We recovered over $100 million in excess supplies and equipment."

Pana, a mother of two, said she was looking forward to letting her hair down and getting a manicure. But first she planned to go to her children's school and surprise them, as they didn't know she was already home in California.

The citizen-Soldiers returned to a standing ovation as they stepped from the plane into the airport terminal, shaking hands with an official reception party that included Col. Robert Spano, director of the California Military Department Joint Staff, and Col. Michael Herman, vice chief of staff.

The troops then quickly made their way downstairs to a throng of anxious family members, teammates and other well-wishers. Local news media also waited to hear from the returning Soldiers, who had made it home in time for Veterans Day and the holiday season.

While deployed, the 749th Soldiers faced a variety of challenges, such as the realization that they needed to conduct driver training. Members of the 749th took the initiative and created their own vehicle operator training center headed by Master Sgt. Oren Rae.

The oppressive heat was another, almost ever-present, challenge. Spc. Tommy Williams, a signal support specialist, said he was impressed by the unit's collaboration with active duty service members, which ensured that all convoys were properly tracked and that supplies reached their destinations.

"It was great to see the teamwork even under harsh 120 degree temperatures while working on vehicles," he said. "For all of us to deploy together and work together was really rewarding."

The 749th's extremely active pace of missions as they assisted units that were rotating out of Iraq also posed difficulties, as the 749th was simultaneously preparing to leave the theater.

"Troops are being shifted and moved home very quickly now," Pana said. "There's a lot being done to get our troops home."

40th CAB completes historic Iraq mission

The largest combat aviation brigade ever assembled played a crucial role in withdrawal from Iraq

By 1ST LT. JASON SWEENEY
40th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs

The 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, operating as Task Force Condor, officially completed its mission in Iraq on Nov. 9 when it cased its colors during a transfer of authority ceremony.

The 40th CAB transferred its mission to the 29th CAB, a Maryland Army National Guard-led unit, which will provide full-spectrum aviation operations during the final weeks of the drawdown of American forces in Iraq. Meanwhile, the more than 3,000 Soldiers who fell under the 40th CAB's command are headed home.

The 40th CAB began conducting full-spectrum aviation operations March 6 in support of Operation New Dawn. Since then it has performed more than 19,000 aviation missions — everything from medical evacuations to VIP flights, movement of cargo and personnel, reconnaissance missions and convoy security. Its 275 fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft logged more than 121,000 flight hours in Iraq.

"It is worth noting that the 40th CAB commanded the largest aviation brigade ever mobilized," Maj. Gen. Bernard Champoux, commander of United States Division-Center in Iraq, said during the ceremony in an aircraft hangar at Camp Taji, Iraq. "From March to May 2011, the 40th CAB was the only aviation brigade in all of Iraq."

The 40th CAB's helicopters, airplanes and unmanned aerial vehicles have been familiar sights in the skies of Iraq this year. Its aircraft played a critical role during the drawdown phase of the Iraq conflict by providing force protection and freedom of maneuver as American forces closed bases and moved out.

Col. Mitch Medigovich, the 40th CAB commander and a CH-47 Chinook helicopter pilot, said he felt mixed emotions about casing the unit's colors.

"There is a deep sense of pride and accomplishment in having contributed to the success and the honor of Operation New Dawn," Medigovich said. "There's excitement in returning home to our loved ones and our friends. At the same time, there's sadness in losing the camaraderie and the day-to-day contact with our valued team members. The memories of our mission here will certainly last a lifetime."

The 40th CAB is a California Army National Guard unit headquartered in Fresno. During the CAB's recent deployment, it oversaw active duty Army, National Guard and Army Reserve units in seven battalions with elements from 22 states.

Col. David Carey, commander of the 29th CAB, thanked Medigovich and the Soldiers of the 40th CAB for their mentorship during the two weeks since his unit had arrived in theater.

"My only concern is that you are a hard act to follow," Carey said. "I wish you safe travels and an eventful and happy holiday season."

Col. Mitch Medigovich, commander of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, addresses the audience during a transfer of authority ceremony at Camp Taji, Iraq, on Nov. 9.

640th ASB brings 500 troops home from Iraq

The aviation support battalion, designed to support three battalions, instead supported seven

By MASTER SGT. JULIE AVEY
San Diego Regional Public Affairs

Hugs were exchanged and screams of joy let out after a year of anticipation at homecomings in Northern and Southern California for the 640th Aviation Battalion (ASB) on Nov. 17.

"I am so happy we finally have him home," said May Alcantara, wife of Spc. Joseph Alcantara, during the homecoming at Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego.

Nearly 500 Soldiers of the 640th flew home to reunite with their families Nov. 17. This was the single largest return home by California National Guard troops since President Barack Obama announced on Oct. 21 that the U.S. would complete withdrawal of all troops from Iraq before the year's end.

"The 640th was asked to do what no other aviation support battalion has been asked during the current operations," Command Sgt. Maj. Bryon E. Robinson of the 640th ASB said in San Diego. "We were designed to support three aviation battalions, and the Army asked us to support seven."

Photo by Master Sgt. Julie Avey

Spc. Joseph Alcantara enjoys a warm welcome from his wife, May, and his 6-year-old son, M. Jae, at Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego following a yearlong deployment to Taji, Iraq.

During the yearlong deployment in support of Operation New Dawn on Camp Taji, Iraq, the 640th ASB was the only unit of its kind, playing a vital role in the maintenance, fueling and logistical requirements for more than 250 helicopters. The 640th also trained Iraqi Army personnel, helping to build and reinforce their aviation logistical capabilities to ensure Iraq's success as a nation.

"We fell into the fast-paced [operational] tempo and never failed a mission," Robinson said. "Each and every Soldier's dedication to duty and professionalism has made me very proud. To lead such a great group of Soldiers has been a pleasure, and I am sure I will never experience it again."

More than 70 Soldiers of the 640th ASB landed Nov. 17 in San Diego, where hundreds of friends and relatives stood proudly on the tarmac awaiting their loved ones. Earlier the same morning, before the sun came up, more than 250 troops of the 640th returned to Joint Forces Training Base-Los Alamitos, and in the afternoon more than 100 Soldiers returned to Stockton, Calif.

"She has the strength," said Will Salgado, husband of Sgt. Sahren Salgado, a support operations ground maintenance operator for the 640th. The Salgados' three sons stood beside Will in San Diego, proudly holding homemade signs in the air and waving the American flag while waiting for their mother to return. "The kids and I, we have each other during the deployment, but she just has herself. So for her to be able to deal with the loneliness and to continue to serve and carry out her duties reveals to me just how much of a strong woman she is."

Anais Moscoso, sister of Sgt. Javier Montano, said, "I am extremely proud and happy to have my brother home safe with our family. I know he is glad to be home just in time for his daughter's birthday."

Rocio Lizarraga also beamed at the return of her sister, Spc. Mayra Lewis. "We are filled with a tremendous amount of happiness [that] she is safe at home, and we are proud of her accomplishments," Lizarraga said. "Her nephew has been waiting to show her his new dance moves."

Since the war in Iraq began, the CNG has been at the forefront in responding to the nation's call. More than 15,000 CNG members have deployed in support of operations there, including multiple deployments for some individuals. Twenty-three CNG Soldiers have made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives in combat in Iraq.

95th Civil Support Team boards 'sick ship'

CNG unit responds to hazardous materials training scenario in San Francisco Bay

By SENIOR AIRMAN JESSICA GREEN
California Military Department Public Affairs

The CNG's 95th Civil Support Team joined forces with the U.S. Coast Guard and the San Francisco Fire Department to conduct combined arms training and a maritime hazardous materials exercise in the San Francisco Bay on Nov. 2 and 3.

The CST, based out of Hayward, Calif., is a 22-member, self-contained, self-sufficient team capable of rapid response to counter chemical, biological and radiological threats. The team is operational 24/7 and comprises both Army and Air National Guard members.

The two-day exercise was set for the 95th to perform reconnaissance and possible search-and-rescue missions to aid crew members aboard the Cape Hudson, a commercial vessel transporting mixed cargo inbound from South Korea, according to the training scenario.

The scenario kicked off when the Coast Guard in Sector San Francisco, headquartered at Yerba Buena Island, requested the 95th CST deploy to the vessel to provide intelligence on any hazards related to a substance that had been released on the Cape Hudson and to provide life safety operations.

For more, scan this QR code

Day 1 of the exercise was divided into two training operations. The CST section leaders hosted a "sick ship" workshop on Yerba Buena Island to prepare Coast Guard, Fire Department and other personnel to join the 95th CST on the Cape Hudson for Day 2. While those agencies prepared, the CST's survey and decontamination teams boarded the Cape Hudson, set up emergency decontamination sites and conducted initial inspections.

Aboard the vessel, Aaron Downa, an inspection specialist with Steel Group, played the role of the ship's captain. Steel Group is a defense operation emergency management company that trains all branches of the military to handle chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosive (CBRNE) devices.

Downa told the CST entry teams that the ship's crew was overcome by an unknown toxic material and needed help to continue searching for sick and missing crew members. Not knowing what to expect below deck, Staff Sgt. Esteban Peralta, Sgt. Joshua Gould and Sgt. Justin Hood, the CST's initial survey team, donned CBRNE protective gear and set up air-metering equipment.

As they worked their way through the vessel, the troops were faced with obstacles to entering lower decks and discovered contaminated victims and casualties who needed to be treated and reported to the joint operations control center.

Staff Sgt. Aaron Zuniga, the 95th CST health care specialist noncommissioned officer (NCO), recorded the vital signs of the entry team members after they completed the first inspection of the contaminated area.

"Not knowing what they're dealing with, it's a great way for us to determine how their bodies are responding to the workload they're bearing," he said. "We have to make sure they are staying hydrated, their breathing is normal and they aren't affected by the hazardous environment."

On Day 2, the CST entry team members, alongside Fire Department decontamination team members, geared up and made their way through the Cape Hudson. Along the way, while treating crew members, recording the ship's layout and reporting updates to the rest of the team, they continued to identify hazardous materials in the affected area.

"We all work really well together," said Sgt. 1st Class Jesus Siller, the 95th CST logistics NCO. "We're fortunate to have the great team and leadership we do. We all know our job, know how to help each other when necessary and have a good time doing it."

Steel Group instructors aided in scenario development and supplemented the training with obstacles for the teams to overcome. Instructors walked the teams through every development and setting.

Lt. Col. Zac Delwiche, the 95th CST commander, said the exercise was extremely beneficial for the Soldiers in the 95th CST and a great opportunity to build connections with all the agencies involved.

The 95th CST is capable of immediate deployment anywhere in the United States to affected sites providing primary functional capabilities in detection, identification, analysis, communication support, medical advice and decontamination of personnel.

Photos by Senior Airman Jessica Green

ABOVE: Staff Sgt. Esteban Peralta of the 95th Civil Support Team boards the Cape Hudson, a ship that was the site of a simulated toxic-materials release in the San Francisco Bay in November. BOTTOM LEFT: CST members assess the ship for the presence of contaminants. BOTTOM RIGHT: Staff Sgt. Aaron Zuniga measures Sgt. Joshua Gould's vital signs after Gould completed an inspection of the contaminated area.

A league of extraordinary Airmen

By Senior Airman Jessica Green
129th Rescue Wing Public Affairs

Photo by Airman 1st Class John Pharr

Eleven CNG members from the 129th Rescue Wing were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross at Moffett Federal Airfield, Calif., on Nov. 5 for combat search-and-rescue missions conducted in Afghanistan during 2009 and 2010.

The Distinguished Flying Cross is one of the highest honors an Airman can receive. It is awarded to members of the U.S. armed forces who distinguish themselves in combat through heroism or extraordinary achievement during an aerial mission. The cross signifies the recipient's unselfish dedication and gallant actions.

Three additional 129th Airmen were recognized with the Air Medal, which honors single acts of heroism or meritorious achievement in an aerial mission by members of the U.S. armed forces. It signifies commitment to duty and professionalism.

"Participating in a ceremony recognizing a single Airman with a Distinguished Flying Cross or an Air Medal would be an incredible opportunity. To witness 14 Airmen from the same unit receiving these awards at the same time is nothing short of extraordinary," said Brig. Gen. Matthew P. Beevers, assistant adjutant general of the California National Guard. "Your efforts and your service speak to the very spirit of what it means to be an American."

Maj. Thomas Keegan, an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter pilot, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor Device for heroism during an aerial mission near Bastion Forward Operating Base on June 29, 2009. Keegan led a two-ship formation, under the call sign Pedro 35, on an urgent medical evacuation mission into the volatile Helmand province. He displayed valor in the face of danger, flying his aircraft through multiple lines of fire, placing Pedro 35 directly between the origin of fire and the defenseless patient on the ground. His courageous decision-making and piloting expertise enabled his flight to successfully extract the wounded Soldier.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Kim Ramirez

Air Force Staff Sgt. Joshua Webster, a pararescueman with the CNG's 131st Rescue Squadron, 129th Rescue Wing, receives the Distinguished Flying Cross award Nov. 5 from Army Brig. Gen Matthew P. Beevers, CNG assistant adjutant general, at Moffett Federal Airfield, Calif. Webster and 10 other 129th Airmen earned the award for heroism and extraordinary achievement during aerial combat search-and-rescue missions in Afghanistan in 2009 and 2010.

The Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor was also awarded to Pave Hawk pilots Lt. Col. George Dona and Maj. Mary Jennings Hegar, flight engineer Senior Master Sgt. Steven Burt and aerial gunner Tech. Sgt. Tiejie Jones for an aerial mission near Kandahar Airfield on July 29, 2009.

Dona and Hegar, leading a two-ship formation in Pedro 15, used Burt's direction to execute a tactical landing alongside a convoy that had been attacked so they could provide medical evacuation for three Soldiers. Falling under heavy enemy fire, Pedro 15 dropped off a pararescue team and retreated from the hot landing zone. Jones established critical communication with higher command and relayed the details of their dire situation.

The Pedro 15 crew then voluntarily risked their lives to return and rescue their patients and pararescuemen. Once on the ground, Pedro 15 started taking heavy machine gun fire, which damaged multiple systems. The crew waited for the patients to be loaded on the battered aircraft before evacuating to safety.

Burt assessed the helicopter and urged a safe landing as soon as possible. Pedro 15 landed less than two miles away, where Burt and the pararescuemen transferred the patients to Pedro 16, which flew them

United States Air

Medal of Honor

Air Force Cross

Defense Distinguished Service Medal

Air Force Distinguished Service Medal

Silver Star

Defense Superior Service Medal

to safety. Dona, Hegar and Jones were extracted on the skids of a U.S. Army OH-58 Kiowa helicopter. The actions of the crew on Pedro 15 saved the lives of the three patients and ensured the survival of the crew.

"Major Dona had a lot of patience and confidence in his team to stay on the ground through all the chaos. His amazing pilotage skills saved all our lives," Hegar said.

Hegar, who was awarded a Purple Heart last year for her participation in the rescue, said she is thankful for her crew and their bravery. "I'm extremely proud of my crew's heroism."

For video of the DFC ceremony, scan this QR code

Less than a month later, on Aug. 9, 2009, another brave crew of Airmen flying under the Pedro call sign distinguished themselves during an aerial mission near Kandahar Airfield. Lt. Col. Rhys Hunt flew the lead aircraft, Pedro 15, in a joint formation of Air Force Pave Hawks and U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawks, Kiowas and A-10 Thunderbolts as well as an unmanned aerial vehicle to rescue five American Soldiers who had been critically wounded in an ongoing firefight.

After establishing communications with the ground controller, the Pedro 15 crew quickly realized the potential for enemy activity and landed in the hot zone. Second Lieutenant Andrew Hedin, a Pave Hawk flight engineer on Pedro 15, assisted in loading four of the wounded before the aircraft retreated.

While taking off, the Pave Hawk came under an intense barrage of small-arms fire and rocket-propelled-grenades (RPG), one of which exploded close enough to the aircraft that Hedin and Hunt felt the concussion from the blast. Reacting instinctively, Hedin and aerial gunner Chief Master Sgt. Jason Red engaged in retaliation fire, placing themselves between their wingman and the advancing enemy threat.

The crew's exceptional valor and superb airmanship helped save the lives of 16 people and two aircraft.

"I've never heard an RPG detonated [and fired at us] before," Hedin said. "Even though we risked our lives [that day], we saved people — and that's the important thing."

The actions of these Airmen, all assigned to the 129th Rescue Squadron (RQS), directly contributed to the Pedros' widespread reputation of bravery and dependability, giving much needed peace of mind to the Soldiers conducting ground combat operations, their award citations state.

On May 4, 2010, Master Sgt. Luigge Romanillo, a pararescueman assigned to the 131st Rescue Squadron, distinguished himself while participating in an aerial mission near Bagram Airfield. Romanillo flew a high-risk medical evacuation mission to extract wounded coalition forces engaged by more than 100 insurgents in an ambush site.

To witness 14 Airmen from the same unit receiving these awards at the same time is nothing short of extraordinary. ...Your efforts and your service speak to the very spirit of what it means to be an American.

— Brig. Gen. Matthew P. Beevers, CNG assistant adjutant general

The Distinguished Flying Cross is one of the U.S. Air Force's highest honors, awarded to service members who distinguish themselves in combat through heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial mission. The cross signifies an Airman's unselfish dedication on duty and recognizes their gallant actions.

While en route, Romanillo expertly prepared his team to evacuate the patients in minimal time under enemy fire. His actions led to the successful evacuation of two wounded coalition Soldiers and the repatriation of two Soldiers who had been killed in action.

On June 27, 2010, Senior Master Sgt. Larry Hiyakumoto and Staff Sgt. Joshua Webster, pararescuemen with the 131st Rescue Squadron, distinguished themselves in a mission near Bagram Airfield. The pararescuemen participated in eight non-stop casualty evacuation missions in support of coalition operations.

For nearly seven hours, Webster aided Hiyakumoto by prioritizing patients and treating wounded personnel, many of whom would not have survived without immediate medical treatment. Hiyakumoto and Webster's heroic actions helped save 13 American and coalition troops under extreme conditions and enemy fire.

Pave Hawk pilots Maj. Mathew Wenthe and Capt. Hung Nguyen and flight engineer Tech. Sgt. Joseph Kenney were also honored Nov. 5 with Air Medals.

Wenthe and Kenney earned the Air Medal with Valor Device for meritorious achievement during a mission near Bastion on June 29, 2009. Pedro 35, with Wenthe and Kenney aboard, conducted multiple urgent medical evacuation missions in Helmand province. While providing cover for Pedro 36, which was on the ground assisting a British vehicle that had overturned in a canal, Pedro 35 observed small-arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire from a compound 300 meters west of Pedro 36. Pedro 35 engaged the target, drawing fire away from Pedro 36 and enabling its crew to successfully complete their rescue.

Nguyen received the Air Medal for a mission in Kandahar province Aug. 9, 2009. He co-piloted the lead aircraft of an eight-ship force sent to recover five Afghan Soldiers who had been seriously wounded during a firefight that was ongoing. Nguyen flew into the fight and saved four of the five soldiers, all while receiving small arms fire.

"As we meet in Washington, sometimes in a fractious manner, it's important for us to remember the courage, bravery and generosity of people who volunteer to serve in our armed services," Rep. Zoe Lofgren said during the ceremony at Moffett. "You're going to get your recognition now. … The country is appreciative of what you have done, proud of the bravery you have shown and grateful to you and to your families."

Though she could not attend the Nov. 5 ceremony, Rep. Anna Eshoo sent each medal recipient a congratulatory letter and a certificate of recognition from Congress.

"This award speaks volumes about you and your embodiment of the Air Force core values of integrity, service and excellence, and we salute you for it," Eshoo wrote.

Providing 24-hour alert in the Helmand province of Afghanistan and performing up to eight rescue missions each day in active combat zones, Airmen of the 129th Rescue Wing were credited with saving 345 injured people, including U.S. forces, coalition personnel and Afghan nationals, in 2009 and 2010.

"Today's ceremony builds on the incredible reputation of the 129th Rescue Wing, a reputation forged through 10 years of persistent conflict," Beevers said. "The 129th has come to be recognized as one of the most highly decorated units to have fought in Operation Enduring Freedom," the U.S. war in Afghanistan.

Members of the 129th have served in every major conflict since World War II and saved a total of 947 lives. For their actions in the line of duty, 129th Airmen over the years have earned nearly 600 combat medals, including 45 Combat Action Medals, 36 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 26 Air Medals, four Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts.

Photo by Airman 1st Class John Pharr

Eleven Airmen of the 129th Rescue Wing await presentation of their Distinguished Flying Cross awards Nov. 5 at Moffett Federal Airfield, Calif. The Airmen were honored for heroism and extraordinary achievement during combat search-and-rescue missions in Afghanistan.

Force Top Honors

Legion of Merit

Distinguished Flying Cross

Airman's Medal

Bronze Star

Purple Heart

Defense Meritorious Service Medal

RIGHT: F-16C fighter aircraft from the CNG's 144th Fighter Wing fly over the start of the 92nd Annual Veterans Day Parade in Fresno. The Nov. 11 parade is touted as the largest Veterans Day event west of the Mississippi River. Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Chris Drudge

BELOW: Sgt. Eric Seiler of the CNG's 59th Army Band sings "God Bless the U.S.A." during the Veterans Day observance at Mather Airfield near Sacramento. The Guard provided speakers, bands, vehicles, color guards, firing parties and flyovers for 28 Veterans Day events across California. Photo by Staff Sgt. (CA) Jessica Cooper

ABOVE: A student at Ambuehl Elementary School in San J Angeles, a prevention specialist with the CNG's Joint Task F during Red Ribbon Week, a drug- and violence-prevention BELOW: Air Force Maj. Brian Finnerty, an HH-60G Pave H School in Folsom, Calif., during Red Ribbon Week. Photo by

For more on Red Ribbon Week, see page 15.

LEFT: Wade H. Scott, left, is promoted to sergeant first class Sept. 12 by Brig. Gen. Donald J. Currier, commander of the California Army National Guard, at the Community-Based Warrior Transition Unit office near Sacramento. Scott, a Purple Heart recipient, returned to the United States from Afghanistan in May after enduring nine gunshot wounds while deployed with the CNG's 870th Military Police Company. After months of rehabilitation, the 38-year-old Soldier, husband and father of two returned to the Golden State in September with plans to continue his military career. Photo by Spc. Eddie Siguenza

uan Capistrano, Calif., looks up at Army Staff Sgt. Robert Randall of Los Force Domestic Support–Counterdrug, while exploring a Humvee on Oct. 21 campaign observed annually in October. Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr
awk helicopter pilot, speaks to students Oct. 26 at Empire Oaks Elementary
y Senior Airman Jessica Green

TOP: Wounded warriors in the Community-Based Warrior Transition Unit (CBWTU) for Nevada and the West Coast states learn proper rowing technique during an adaptive sports clinic Nov. 16 in Long Beach. Adaptive sports help recovering troops remain positive and active. Photo by Master Sgt. Julie Avey. For more on the CBWTU, see page 14.
MIDDLE: Maj. Gen. David S. Baldwin, adjutant general of the California National Guard, far left, stands with troops of the 40th Brigade Support Battalion Mess Section after presenting them the Philip A. Connelly Award, recognizing the Top Tactical Mess Section in California during 2009 and 2010 and the National Guard's Western Region candidate for the nationwide Army competition. "The Soldiers should be especially proud of their recognition and accomplishment and, most importantly, the impact cooks have on their organization," Baldwin said. Photo by 2nd Lt. Andrea Ainslie
BOTTOM: Staff Sgt. Angel Alvarez (back row), Staff Sgt. Joseph Brito (front row), Staff Sgt. Edgar Arevalo and Staff Sgt. Bradley Logo (not pictured) of the CNG Recruiting and Retention Command team in Azusa, Calif., join educators, parents and students in the 2011 International Walk to School Day on Oct. 5. Walk to School Day encourages parents to walk with their children to promote physical activity, community involvement and safety awareness. "To see the National Guard taking part is an honor and shows how the Guard leads by example," said Azusa Mayor Joseph Rocha, whose son Roderick recently enlisted in the National Guard. Photo by Lt. Col. Rick Lalor

Nuclear scenario tests CNG forces

49th MPs secure area for first responders

Photo by Spc. Eddie Siguenza

By SGT. SALLI CURCHIN
Detachment 1, Operations Company, 40th Infantry Division

In a bus full of military policemen clad in white hazardous material (hazmat) suits with gas masks hanging by their sides, no one spoke. Their faces strained with worry, apprehension and, for some, excitement. The shout went out from their leader: "Gas, gas, gas!" The rustling and snapping of rubber straps being adjusted was all that could be heard as the Soldiers quickly donned their protective masks and, breathing heavily, rushed off the bus in a controlled but hurried manner.

What they saw next was mass annihilation: Casualties everywhere. Injured people staggering around, burned from radiation exposure. Buildings leveled. All indications of what the area once looked like were gone. It looked like a nuclear bomb went off.

The Vigilant Guard exercise in Phoenix, Nov. 3-5, simulated a flood followed by detonation of an improvised nuclear device. The exercise was created to put Arizona's Department of Emergency and Military Affairs through its paces and build a response plan with the help of 8,000 participants from hundreds of local, state and federal agencies.

Photo by Sgt. Salli Curchin

Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr

TOP: Air Force Tech. Sgt. Eliza Villa of the CNG's 144th Fighter Wing, left, and Army Pvt. Joe Freitas and Pvt. Garth Rozzano of the CNG's 235th Chemical Company carry an injured civilian role-player to a decontamination area Nov. 4 during the Vigilant Guard Exercise in Phoenix, which simulated a flood followed by a nuclear detonation. ABOVE RIGHT: Villa assists a simulated victim Nov. 4 during Vigilant Guard. ABOVE LEFT: Members of the CNG's 49th Military Police Brigade assist an unruly, injured role-player Nov. 5 following the simulated nuclear blast at Vigilant Guard.

Many of the Soldiers, who had been training for the exercise for months, were members of the California Army National Guard's 40th and 270th Military Police (MP) companies. The Los Alamitos- and Sacramento-based units belong to the 49th MP Brigade out of Fairfield, Calif. Vigilant Guard helped prepare the 49th MP Brigade to assume its role as the military disaster coordinator, or Homeland Response Force (HRF), for Federal Emergency Management Agency Region IX, which includes California, Arizona, Nevada, Hawaii, Guam and other islands in the Pacific.

The exercise also enhanced disaster preparedness for members of the Fresno-based 144th Fighter Wing and the Port Hueneme-based 146th Airlift Wing of the California Air National Guard, as well as troops who participated from the National Guard in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada and Utah.

The military policemen provided security and force protection for first responders who worked to restore order and coordinate recovery efforts.

"In this exercise we get to use our expertise to help civilians and help off-site resources that might be tapped out very quickly," said Capt. Cassandra Harris, 40th MP Company commander. "And this is all to save lives, and that is the underlying goal."

Security is critical in any large-scale disaster, which could bring chaos and conflict from secondary attackers, criminals or distressed citizens. The MP presence at Vigilant Guard enabled rescue forces to do their jobs under a veil of protection. Unlike civilian law enforcement agencies, the HRF security forces combine police and hazmat training to assist citizens in a disaster.

"What is unique with the HRF security element is that local law enforcement cannot put on a hazmat suit and operate in a contaminated environment," said Rob Conner, the security forces observer/controller for the exercise's Joint Information Center. "They can operate in a [chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear] environment."

During the exercise, Soldiers were continually confronted with individuals and mobs playing the roles of nuclear blast survivors. One unruly gang attempted to force its way into the blast site to see the devastation and attempt to locate friends and relatives. Individuals also attempted to flee the blast zone into the unaffected area.

Dealing with victims desperate for information on loved ones, injured to various degrees and worried about food and shelter, the Soldiers needed to be both caring fellow citizens and disciplined military policemen.

"We are trained as military police with a war state of mind," said Spc. Jennifer Swangnete, a San Jose resident with the 270th MP Company. "Here we have to have more of a helpful attitude, assisting civilians on a more personable and caring level than if we were in a combat zone."

Spc. Sergio Juarez of the 40th MP Company said he was proud of his unit's reaction to the scenario. "It got intense, but I was proud that all of our training came into play," he said. "Everyone stepped up and did what was expected. No one stood around. Everyone filled in the gaps and worked as a team."

Conner added that the MPs in Vigilant Guard were performing an assistance mission rather than a more traditional MP task such as guarding a tactical or offensive position. "This is making sure that the lifesaving potential is maximized," he said. "If the worst happens, we'll come to [civilians'] aid and provide medical triage [and] first responder and decontamination treatment."

The HRF is prepared to conduct security, search-and-extraction, decontamination and medical triage as a quick response force that can be notified for activation within six hours and have all forces en route within 12 hours (or longer, if units are airlifted).

"This is probably one of the best-suited missions for the National Guard in 40 years," Conner said. "They are getting back to a mission of helping the town you live in or the next town over. This is what the National Guard was built for."

235th Sappers dig for blast survivors

By STAFF SGT. EMILY SUHR
224th Sustainment Brigade

Responding to a simulated improvised nuclear device detonation in Phoenix as part of the Vigilant Guard exercise, about 60 combat engineers from the Petaluma, Calif.-based 235th Engineer Company (Sapper), 579th Engineer Battalion, 49th Military Police Brigade, picked up their ropes and jackhammers and dug into the destroyed city.

More than 500 California National Guard members took part in Vigilant Guard, responding to the attack just as they would in a real-world situation. The 235th Sappers provided one of the most important missions following a massive disaster: search and extraction. Working in a simulated disaster site that included crushed buildings, overturned vehicles, a four-story tower and live victims, the Sappers located injured persons and worked through the night to create paths for medics to reach them.

While search and extraction of victims has traditionally been a mission for local firefighters, the need for more manpower and the ever-growing responsibilities of the National Guard have allowed military units throughout the U.S. to train as search-and-extraction teams tasked with being on-site within six hours of a disaster. The 235th, which also continues to train for overseas missions, is ready to respond to any natural or terrorist disaster.

"As a combat engineer, your job is to remove obstacles. In Afghanistan [in 2009] we did route clearance," said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Lunsford of McKinleyville, Calif. "Our job was to remove [improvised explosive devices] and enemy combatants from the battlefield. Here, what we're doing is removing rocks from the battlefield and different types of obstacles, so they go hand-in-hand."

To ensure top performance during an emergency, all members of the 235th Search and Extraction Team attend a weeklong course run by firefighters in Oklahoma City, where they learn basic search-and-extraction techniques such as creating and navigating confined spaces, building and placing shoring structures to prevent collapse and breaking through obstacles to rescue victims.

"[The biggest challenge was] how tight the confined spaces were. Even our smaller guys were twisting and turning to get in there," said Spc. Troy Lynch of San Jose, a member of the 235th Shoring and Cribbing Platoon. "This [rubble pile] wasn't just north and south; it was all over the place. So there's times when you're going up and sideways, other times you're squeezing through holes."

Clad in gas masks, Kevlar helmets and radiation detectors, the engineers made their way through the rubble pile, methodically assessing the damage and casualties alongside medics from the California Air National Guard's 144th Fighter Wing. Wounded victims who could walk were directed to a decontamination tent, while non-ambulatory victims and areas where victims could potentially be trapped were marked for later rescue.

Once they had evacuated as many victims as possible, the Search and Extraction Team began digging tunnels, securing loose rubble and vehicles and climbing through the tower to aid trapped victims. To better manage large areas, the team was split into three platoons: Ropes, Breaching and Breaking, and Shoring and Cribbing.

The Ropes Platoon Soldiers used rigs to lower victims off buildings and out of holes. They also used pulleys as leverage to move large objects or keep them stationary. The Shoring and Cribbing Platoon created safe zones within the rubble by building and placing stabilizing structures that prevented further collapse during rescue operations. The Breaching and Breaking Platoon used tools such as jackhammers and large saws to create holes and tunnels to reach trapped victims. If their tools were broken or unavailable, the platoon used boards and leverage.

"Being combat engineers, we're pretty resourceful," Lunsford said. "We have guys on the civilian side who do a lot in the construction trade. We try to build our teams around guys who have different skill assets in the civilian world that will apply to their [search-and-extraction] job, so when we come across a situation where we don't have that tool, we request it, wait for that tool to get there, and if it doesn't happen, then we find a way to improvise."

The training gave the engineers an opportunity to work with other military and civilian agencies. Throughout the two-day mission, the company rotated 24-hour operations with a search-and-rescue team from Colorado.

"One of the primary purposes of this mission was for us to work with another [Chemical, Biological, Radiological/Nuclear, and High-Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package] team," said Sgt. 1st Class Brandon Morey of Dixon, Calif., the 235th operations noncommissioned officer. "We fall in on their equipment, they use our equipment, we know how they operate, they know how we operate. So in the real world, we can just show up."

Despite some delays due to lightning and cold conditions caused by a heavy downpour, the troops said this was some of the best training they've had.

"I've loved every minute," Lynch said. "Rain or not, it was a great mission and I learned a lot."

The teamwork, training, extensive planning and coordinated efforts were clear to many of the observers and controllers who oversaw the exercise, as well as the 235th leadership.

"The Sappers come in every time and really bust their butts to get these missions done," said 2nd Lt. Shane Guswiler of San Francisco, the executive officer for the 235th. "These guys have real motivation. Breaking, breaching, ropes, they're all trained up."

Photo by Spc. Eddie Siguenza

Army Staff Sgt. Jarrad Negherbon of the CNG's 235th Engineer Company, left, and Air Force Sgt. Robert Weis of the CNG's 144th Fighter Wing emerge from a hole cut through a wall to extract a victim Nov. 5 during the Vigilant Guard exercise in Phoenix.

Photo by Spc. Eddie Siguenza

Spc. Benjamin Lindsey and Spc. Stephen Lindsey, brothers who are members of the 149th Chemical Company, decontaminate a civilian role-player Nov. 4 during the Vigilant Guard exercise in Phoenix.

149th Chem Co. decontaminates nuclear victims

By SPC. GRANT LARSON
69th Public Affairs Detachment

National Guard units across the nation continually train for state emergencies, with simulated floods, fires, hurricanes, ice storms and earthquakes dominating the scenarios. Vigilant Guard in November, on the other hand, was the largest emergency-response exercise in Arizona's history, and the planners mainly steered away from Mother Nature and went with something we hope never happens: an uncontrolled detonation of a nuclear device on U.S. soil.

"We are chemical," said Staff Sgt. Henry Meza, a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) noncommissioned officer (NCO) for the 149th and the decontamination NCO-in-charge for the exercise. "This training is what we would be doing down range."

The Turlock, Calif.-based 149th responds to CBRN incidents and provides decontamination services for up to 300 casualties per hour. In the case of a nuclear explosion, the 149th Soldiers would scrub down the victims who survived, making them safe to touch, and pass them off to be treated by the medics.

"Seeing the different teams come together, that makes it interesting, because it takes everybody to complete the mission," said Pfc. January Bottoms of the 149th.

The Vigilant Guard scenario created situations that made it difficult for the teams to do their jobs. Volunteers who acted as contaminated citizens, for instance, saw their chance to be free of the radiation and rushed chemical cleaning sites, screaming and yelling in attempts to disrupt the operation.

Someone had to maintain order, and it fell to members of the CNG's 49th Military Police Brigade.

"This is the first time we've had the military police with us," Terry said. "Primarily at the top of the line is crowd control issues, and the military police have been very effective."

The chemical specialists of the 149th and other units at Vigilant Guard provided a distinctive skill that will hopefully never be used but will always be ready to respond.

"We're one of the specialty military functional areas that actually have a very relevant civilian mission as well," Terry said. "Decontamination is integral in the missions of the Incident Command System and [Federal Emergency Management Agency]."

Injured troops recover at home with WTU

By SPC. BRIANNE M. ROUDEBUSH
69th Public Affairs Detachment

Many Soldiers coming home from deployment are welcomed back with banners, celebrations and warm hugs from family members they missed while gone. But for soldiers who have been injured or who may suffer from numerous other effects of war, getting home to their families, friends and loved ones may take longer.

The Community-Based Warrior Transition Unit (CBWTU) based in Sacramento makes it possible for wounded Soldiers to live in their homes while still receiving treatment. The CBWTU's platoon sergeants and nurse case managers work together to provide assistance with counseling, surgeries and other therapies. They also maintain each Soldier's Comprehensive Transition Plan, which outlines their career, family, social, emotional, physical and spiritual goals. Platoon sergeants also ensure those planning to leave the Army are set up for success by helping them look for jobs, create resumes and refine interview skills.

"I would like to give kudos to the platoon sergeants and the case managers for how they treat each individual," said Staff Sgt. Toby Mack of Company F, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, based at Mather Airfield near Sacramento. "They are warrior-focused. From the commander on down, they are thinking about us."

While they receive care with the CBWTU, each Soldier is assigned to a worksite where they report daily. Worksites may be at a Soldier's own unit or with any other military installation or authorized federal agency. If a Soldier prefers to go back to school, a college campus can even be their place of duty.

"Worksites provide a means for them to keep active and continue being a Soldier rather than having to remain at home," said Maj. Jesse Basher, CBWTU commander.

The CBWTU currently cares for more than 260 Soldiers throughout California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. To maintain accountability and provide each Soldier the opportunity for face-to-face contact with their platoon sergeants and nurse case managers, the unit plans quarterly musters. Each Soldier must attend two of the four musters. In addition to updating their transition plans, Soldiers are presented opportunities to participate in adaptive sports such as rock climbing and wheelchair basketball.

Quarterly musters are not the only time CBWTU Soldiers come together. In Sacramento, for instance, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4647 and its Ladies Auxiliary serve the Soldiers lunch every Wednesday. The lunch serves to show appreciation for Soldiers who have just returned from deployment and to welcome them into the CBWTU.

Bill Holman, a member of the VFW, said he makes a point of shaking each new Soldier's hand and welcoming them home.

"I'm glad to be able to give back and serve the Soldiers that return," added Eva Fox Lorenz, the Ladies Auxiliary's junior vice president.

"I think the CBWTU is fantastic," said Sgt. 1st Class Brian Hess of Monterey, Calif., a member of the San Antonio-based 341st Psychological Operations Company. "Being able to be at home is integral to recovery. It's more of a holistic, psychological and spiritual approach. With family support, it makes it that much easier to get through the recovery process. I am thankful to the Army for providing this opportunity after multiple deployments to recover and continue to be of service to this country."

Photo by Spc. Brianne M. Roudebush

Maj. Jesse Basher, commander of the Community-Based Warrior Transition Unit (CBWTU) for injured Soldiers in California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington, presents a CBWTU coin to a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4647 Ladies Auxiliary in Sacramento on Sept. 21. The VFW and its Ladies Auxiliary serve a free lunch to the CBWTU every Wednesday.

Adaptive sports encourage activity, positive attitudes for injured troops in WTU

By MASTER SGT. JULIE AVEY
San Diego Regional Public Affairs

The morning dew was burning off Nov. 16 as Soldiers took to the seas, rowing in the California harbor of Long Beach and surfing along the shores of Seal Beach.

The Soldiers were participating in an adaptive sports program organized by the Community-Based Warrior Transition Unit, or CBWTU, for Soldiers in California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington who are recovering from injuries. Soldiers assigned to the CBWTU gathered in Los Alamitos, Calif., for a conference Nov. 14-18 to meet with leadership, train and build fellowship.

"I can see myself looking into rowing as a sport now," said Spc. Gareth Griswold, who was hit by a Humvee while serving in Afghanistan with the CNG's 670th Military Police Company.

The Soldiers were taught how to adapt to their ability levels, including the option of performing fixed-seat rowing as opposed to sliding-seat rowing. Others received individualized surfing instruction based on their injuries.

"This was my first time surfing, and I stood up over 15 times," said Staff Sgt. Jeffery Laurence, who deployed to Afghanistan in 2010 with Detachment 1, California Army National Guard Medical Detachment, based out of Los Alamitos. "It was easier once the instructor told me to stop looking at my feet and to look at the shore ahead."

As the Soldiers were enjoying these popular sports, they were also overcoming personal limitations.

CNG linguist Sgt. Clifford Dawson was hit with a rocket-propelled grenade while on a mission in Afghanistan, causing a traumatic brain injury that left him struggling with balance and memory. He participated in both the adaptive rowing and surfing activities while overcoming his fear of not being able to stand up on the surfboard.

"You have to heal yourself. You can't just sit around and wait for others to fix you," Dawson said. "I didn't think I was going to be able to do it because of my balance issues and all, but I was able to overcome."

Sgt. Emmanuel Cruz of the CNG's 79th Infantry Brigade Combat Team said this was the best CBWTU event he has attended.

"The adaptive sports are very helpful, but it is also a challenge for those of us with multiple injuries," he said. "I am thankful for our CBWTU staff because I have been in other [warrior transition units] who have not been able to provide this level of care."

continued on page 19

CNG linguist Sgt. Clifford Dawson, who was injured by a rocket-propelled grenade in Afghanistan, learns to surf Nov. 16 at Seal Beach, Calif., with his Community-Based Warrior Transition Unit.
Photo by Master Sgt. Julie Avey

CNG teaches anti-drug lessons, skills

By STAFF SGT. EMILY SUHR
224th Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs

Students from 27 middle and high schools across Orange County participated in a Rugged Outdoors Physical Experience System course led by four members of the Southern California Drug Demand Reduction (DDR) Team of the CNG's Joint Task Force Domestic Support–Counterdrug on Oct. 8. The event at California State University, Fullerton, was part of Red Ribbon Week, a drug- and violence-prevention campaign observed annually in October.

"This is a great event," said Lori Cervantes, a community liaison and Peer Assisted Leader adviser at Sierra Preparatory Academy in Santa Ana, Calif. "It's a great experience for students to learn how to help each other, to learn how to communicate with each other and to think critically."

The course consists of seven team-building exercises that challenged a total of 180 students to work in groups and communicate in order to succeed.

"I liked it because we were with these random people and we were working as a group," said Krupa Bhakta of Anaheim, 17. Teamwork is important, she added, because, "You can't always be on your own. Sometimes you need help."

The events ranged from challenges that required students to talk to each other and work as a team to non-verbal challenges like the "Teepee Shuffle," in which students silently rearranged themselves without falling off a balance beam.

Each event teaches a specific lesson. "Carpet Squares," for instance, a challenge that requires teams to figure out a specific pattern through trial and error, teaches students to learn from their mistakes and try other paths. "It makes them realize that when you're going in life, you don't always have to just keep going straight," said DDR member Spc. Joaquin Brambila Montero of San Diego. "You can always take a left, or go right, or take a step back."

"Handcuffs" is a challenging event in which two students, each with a piece of rope tied between their wrists, are intertwined and told to separate themselves without untying the rope. "It's showing the kids that everything is possible," said Staff Sgt. Leo Castillo. "It might be harder than the easy way out, but everything is possible."

The "Tomahawk Walk," a series of balance beams that a team must cross, and the "Spider Web," a tangle of ropes a team must navigate by crawling or being lifted through small openings, emphasize trust. Neither task can be completed without communicating ideas and trusting that each member will do their part.

"It's all about communication," said 16-year-old Jake Koskandy of Sonora, Calif. "Without communication things fail really easily."

The DDR members said that's exactly what they were trying to emphasize: Positive communication and leadership training are anti-drugs.

The DDR Team conducts the training every year by request of the Orange County Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Team, which hosts annual Red Ribbon Week events. The students, most of whom are leaders at their schools and members of anti-drug clubs, sharpen their leadership and communication skills at the events. Then they go to their schools to help peers stay drug-free.

"I watch kids take leadership roles who I would not normally see do it," said Susan Whitmire, a teacher at MacArthur Intermediate School in Santa Ana.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr

Army Staff Sgt. Robert Randall of the CNG's Joint Task Force Domestic Support–Counterdrug gives an anti-drug presentation Oct. 21 at Ambuehl Elementary School in San Juan Capistrano, Calif., during the annual Red Ribbon Week campaign.

"They go back to our school and they talk about it," Cervantes added. "They may not use the words — that it was 'team leadership' or that it was teaching them to communicate — not exactly those words, but they do go back to school and talk about all the experiences they've had here."

At-risk youths gain hope, learn responsibility

By SGT. AARON RICCA
Task Force Warrior Public Affairs

Nine puzzled team members stare at a series of ropes and wonder how they're going to use a 2 ½-foot plank to cross them. Their goal is to get themselves and a box of "serum" across five rope hurdles and over a wall to simulated disaster victims without touching the ground.

They begin by reaching over a starting line to bridge the first two ropes with the plank, but they can barely reach the first rope. In a moan of frustration, one of the exhausted team members asks a question: "Is this even possible?"

The others ponder chiming in with similar questions, but before they can open their mouths, Staff Sgt. Robert Randall dispels all doubt. "Anything's possible," he says.

These aren't Army basic training recruits. Seventeen youths from the Los Angeles area were either ordered by the court or volunteered by their parents to participate in a 12-week Juveniles at Risk (JAR) program that teaches children aged 12 through 15 to make positive life decisions. Some of the participants have already been involved in petty misconduct, such as vandalism and school suspensions. JAR is intended to reach out to juveniles before they become susceptible to serious criminal activity.

Randall and six other noncommissioned officers from the Drug Demand Reduction team of the CNG's Joint Task Force Domestic Support–Counterdrug worked Oct. 2-8 with the Huntington Park Police Department to host the annual JAR program at the CNG's Camp San Luis Obispo.

Photo by Sgt. Aaron Ricca

Participants in the Huntington Park Police Department's Juveniles at Risk program cross a rope bridge obstacle Oct. 8 on the Leadership Reaction Course at Camp San Luis Obispo, Calif.

Sponsored by the Huntington Park Police Department, JAR is a three-month intervention to change destructive behavior. The first week of JAR is a military-style boot camp to break down the youths and build them back up with a sense of discipline, teamwork, confidence and responsibility for making positive decisions. Students are then required to attend 12 weekly classes, participate in community service and be accessible for drug testing. Parents also attend 12 parenting classes.

"A lot of [parents] need support, and they come to the JAR program," said Karina DeLa Cruz, who runs the Police Department's youth programs. "They have their backs against the wall and ran out of answers, so they sign up."

CNG Soldiers handle multiple roles during the boot camp phase of the course. Most of their time is spent in the classroom teaching Stay On Track, a curriculum that pushes anti-drug and -alcohol messages, encourages positive life choices and a healthy lifestyle, and provides team-building experiences.

"We are here to run an adventure-based education program that consists of several components," said Air Force Capt. Ruel Fuentecilla, CNG officer-in-charge for JAR. Those components include a land navigation class and the Rugged Outdoor Physical Experience System, a portable obstacle course that involves a number of physical challenges. Students also test their teamwork by attempting the Leadership Reaction Course, a series of obstacles like the rope hurdles that separated the youths and their serum from simulated disaster victims. The activities challenge the youths mentally and physically, instilling skills to help them resist drug use and make positive decisions.

In the land navigation course, for instance, the youths may not find their first destination, Fuentecilla said. "The lesson is that you're going to make mistakes in life, and as long as you correct those mistakes, you can get back on the right path."

In addition to the CNG participants, the Police Department brought officers who assumed the roles of drill instructors, complete with piercing glares and in-your-face yelling. "I am just as hard if not harder," on JAR children as opposed to a military recruit, said Christopher Wasik, a former Marine Corps drill instructor who is now senior JAR drill instructor. "I have to be hard on these kids because they've had no authority in their lives."

Founded in 1998 and hosted annually at Camp San Luis Obispo, JAR helps youths develop a sense of hope and trust in their ability to contribute to society.

HS honors alum who gave all for his country

High school football game, plaque, scholarship recognize fallen Soldier Sgt. Arnold Duplantier II

By SGT. DAVID S. CHOI
69th Public Affairs Detachment

High schools play a critical role in their communities and in the upbringing of many individuals. Most high school graduates grow and do greater things beyond their high school education. Some even join the military. Thus, in a sense, when a service member becomes a casualty in an armed conflict, a piece of that service member's former high school and community, or a sense of their identity, is lost.

To honor and remember a former student who gave his life serving his country, C.K. McClatchy High School in Sacramento dedicated its Nov. 5 football game to Sgt. Arnold Duplantier II, who was killed by small-arms fire in Baghdad while providing security on June 22, 2005.

"This is a great event to commemorate a great Soldier and warrior," said Peter Lambert, principal of C.K. McClatchy High School. "We expect greatness from all of our students, which holds true to the traditions and history of those that have served in our military."

A plaque was also dedicated at the high school in honor of Duplantier, who served in Iraq with the California National Guard's Company C, 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry Regiment, and a $1,000 scholarship was created through volunteer fundraising events such as a golf tournament and an auto show. The scholarship will be awarded to the graduating senior who writes the best essay describing the contributions veterans have made to their community and country.

Photo by Sgt. David S. Choi

Tanya R. Duplantier and Isabel Duplantier of Elk Grove, Calif., widow and daughter of Sgt. Arnold Duplantier II, participate in a memorial ceremony for Sgt. Duplantier during a Nov. 5 football game at his alma mater, C.K. McClatchy High School in Sacramento. Sgt. Duplantier was killed by small-arms fire in Baghdad on June 22, 2005, while serving with the CNG's Company C, 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry Regiment. Command Sgt. Maj. Robert A. Matey, who was Sgt. Duplantier's first sergeant in Iraq, and Jim K. Blatchford of the Fallen Warriors Memorial Organization, stand on either side of Sgt. Duplantier's family.

The McClatchy dedication and scholarship were spearheaded by the Fallen Warriors Memorial Organization, a nonprofit that was founded by a group of veterans to pay tribute to fallen Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines where they attended high school.

"After a young Marine whom I knew very well was killed in [combat], the others and I founded the Fallen Warriors Memorial Organization in order to honor and remember the former high school students who gave their lives while serving their country," said John L. Cordova, a native of Eldorado Hills.

"There was an entire generation of Vietnam veterans who were forgotten," he continued. "We wanted to make sure that that did not happen again by embedding our program into local high schools."

Members of the Duplantier family and several Soldiers who served with him in Iraq attended the dedication and football game.

"I'm very honored that the Fallen Warriors Memorial did this for Arnold to keep his memory alive," said Duplantier's widow, Tanya R. Duplantier of Elk Grove, Calif. "I want to thank all the current service members and those in attendance for this event."

Command Sgt. Maj. Robert A. Matey, who served with Duplantier in Iraq, said the dedication will reinforce for McClatchy students what it means to make the ultimate sacrifice for your country.

"I can tell you that as Sgt. Duplantier's first sergeant at the time, all the aspects that made Duplantier embody a great Soldier and team leader can also show these students that there were others before them, like themselves, that paid the ultimate sacrifice for their future," he said.

Visalia armory named in honor of fallen Soldier

Spc. Daniel Unger died saving Iraqi contractors from a mortar attack in May 2004

By MASTER SGT. DAVID J. LOEFFLER
California Military Department Public Affairs

The armory's training floor was polished to a high shine and a four-person honor guard stood statuesque waiting for the ceremony to begin Nov. 11 as family, friends and co-workers shared stories of Spc. Daniel Unger and his unending willingness to sacrifice.

The National Guard armory in Visalia, Calif., was renamed the Spc. Daniel Unger Memorial Armory on Veteran's Day in honor of the Exeter, Calif., Soldier who died May 25, 2004, at the age of 19 while serving with the CNG's 1st Battalion, 185th Infantry Regiment. Memories and narratives of Unger's selfless sacrifice, which saved two Iraqi contractors during a mortar attack on Contingency Operating Site Kalsu, Iraq, echoed off the armory walls as the full-capacity assembly of people listened captivated by the words they heard.

"Daniel gave his life about 7 ½ years ago. He paid the price without even thinking, because he knew where he was going," said Unger's father, Marc Unger, who serves as a chaplain in the California State Military Reserve. "He said if he didn't make it back for some reason that he would be waiting for me in heaven.

"The grief is never supposed to go away," he continued. "The deeper the love, the deeper the grief. But mixed in with the grief is the honor, and there is no greater honor than what we saw today."

As rain fell rhythmically on the roof of the armory, Soldiers, Airmen, Marines and Sailors paid tribute to their brother in arms.

"I can't think of a better way to spend our Veterans Day," said Maj. Gen. David S. Baldwin, the adjutant general of the California National Guard. "This home of combat infantrymen will bear his name into the future, where others will look back on his sacrifice and be motivated and inspired by his sacrifice."

The ceremony was completed with the unveiling of a plaque dedicating the armory as the Spc. Daniel Unger Memorial Armory. It is inscribed with a verse from the Bible, John 15:13, that aptly describes Unger: "No one has greater love than this, that he would lay down his life for his friends."

The CNG's 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, which returned from Iraq last month, and the active duty 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment held a memorial service at the site of Unger's death on May 25, the seventh anniversary of his passing.

Photo by Master Sgt. David J. Loeffler

Command Sgt. Maj. William Clark Jr., the CNG's top enlisted adviser, (far left, back row) State Assemblywoman Connie Conway, and Maj. Gen. David S. Baldwin, the CNG adjutant general, join other dignitaries Nov. 11 in dedicating the armory in Visalia, Calif., as the Spc. Daniel Unger Memorial Armory in honor of a California National Guard Soldier who was killed in Iraq. A member of the CNG's 1st Battalion, 185th Infantry Regiment, which is based in Visalia, the 19-year-old Exeter, Calif., native died May 25, 2004, while ushering a group of Iraqi contractors into a bunker during a mortar attack on Contingency Operating Site Kalsu.

1-185th Armor Battalion shows off its skills

By SPC. NEVADA J. SMITH
69th Public Affairs Detachment

In the immense barren landscape of the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., hulking armored machines belonging to the California Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 185th Armor Regiment, grind and clank as their heavy steel tracks churn up the Mojave Desert. The sharp cracks of M4 Carbine rifles echo off the surrounding hills and blend with the sound of a biting wind and pouring rain as citizen-Soldiers send volleys of bullets down range and rip up terrain in their Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

The armored legion, which has 16 subordinate units commanded by its Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) out of San Bernardino, is the largest battalion in the California Army National Guard and its only armor unit. It supports a myriad of military occupational specialties such as mechanic, tanker, sniper, artillery and infantry, giving the unit the additional designation of a combined arms battalion, or CAB. All those elements were on hand Nov. 4-5 on Fort Irwin to showcase their capabilities at the Army's premier training ground in California.

The training started early Friday as troops fired their rifles on the qualification range.

"Shooting is a perishable skill," said Sgt. Thomas Wituschek, an infantryman and senior sniper for the 1-185th HHC. "You don't get to use these skills every day, but they are the most critical skills a Soldier needs to survive, because at the end of the day, you are a rifleman first. And that's why it's so important to come out here and train."

Though the Soldiers had to shoot in poor weather Friday, they were up to the task. Luck was on the Soldiers' side on Saturday, which presented clear blue skies for the crews practicing with mortars.

"We as artillery are essential combat multipliers," said Staff Sgt. Gregory Bell, a mortarman with the HHC, who lives in San Gabriel, Calif. "We have the ability to react to an enemy situation far faster than a quick reaction force. Our ability to provide timely and accurate indirect fire can save Soldiers' lives."

Another group of Soldiers on Saturday rolled out their preferred weapon, the Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle. The Soldiers operating the multi-ton, fast-moving behemoths had a chance to play the biggest game of hide-and-seek of their lives as they conducted vehicle maneuver operations in the hot, 1,000-square-mile sandbox of the Southern California High Desert on Fort Irwin.

The game didn't last long. A Bradley commander's independent viewer enables him to scan for the enemy using both laser range-finder and direct-view optics without interfering with the gunner's acquisition and engagement of targets. They hunt, they find, they kill.

Sgt. Patrick Castillo, a forward observer with an HHC fire support team, said the new Bradleys are able to track the battle better than ever.

"The gunner can laser a target without firing and giving away his position, and then the [forward observer] in the back can take that data and use it to call down [an air] strike," he said.

"We are not just training Soldiers to be familiar with their equipment; they need to be proficient," continued Castillo, who lives in Watsonville, Calif. "When we get the chance to train like this, we don't waste it."

The CAB Soldiers made it a special training weekend by inviting their families and employers to Fort Irwin to observe the various training events.

"We are showcasing to the families and employers just what the Soldiers do," said Marion F. Lattus, family support coordinator for the 1-185th. "We all have our families, but the [National Guard] is our family too."

The National Guard is a family dedicated to serving the American people, Soldiers said, and it showed in the Soldiers' enthusiasm for the training at hand.

"I'm proud to be here and be a part of this organization," Wituschek said. "For some Soldiers, coming to drill is a detriment to their pay. They make more as civilians, but they want to serve anyway. That's what makes me so proud, because here in California, it's not just about showing up and shooting a rifle. The California National Guard will always have a mission, and we will always be ready to serve."

Photos by Spc. Nevada J. Smith

ABOVE: Spc. Dustin Escobedo of Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 1st Battalion, 185th Armor Regiment, repeats a fire command during mortar familiarization training Nov. 5 at Fort Irwin, Calif. BELOW: Sgt. Patrick Castillo, a forward observer with HHC, 1-185th Armor Battalion, communicates with the gunner in a nearby Bradley Fighting Vehicle while conducting maneuver operations Nov. 5 at Fort Irwin.

CMD wins back-to-back Gov's Awards

By California Dept. of General Services

The California Military Department (CMD) received the top State Agency Recognition Award, the Governor's Award, for the second year in row for its accomplishments throughout fiscal year 2011. The Governor's Award is presented to the state agency or department that best exemplifies excellence and innovation in providing contracting opportunities to small businesses and/or Disabled Veterans Business Enterprise (DVBE) firms, epitomizing a superior standard for all state departments to model.

The Military Department, which handles many large-scale public works projects, uses the state's small business and DVBE programs as its primary source of services with a heavy emphasis on the recently expanded Small Business/DVBE option.

In the past year, nearly 95 percent of the department's public works contracts were issued to small businesses. The department awarded more than 31 percent of its public works contracts to DVBEs.

Every level of command in the CMD embraced the process and enabled the department to award 57 percent of its total business to small businesses and 15.8 percent to DVBEs. The department also maintained a close working relationship with the DVBE Alliance, which in several instances helped find DVBE vendors for hard-to-find specialties that might otherwise have been sent to public bid.

Department personnel also participated in many conferences and small business and DVBE events to ensure face-to-face contact with potential vendors. They also assisted small business and DVBE vendors by waiving the requirement for bid bonds, which cut out-of-pocket expenses for bidding on public works projects.

Photo by CA Dept. of General Services

Lt. Col. Jeffrey Kerns, deputy comptroller for the California Military Department (CMD), accepts the State Agency Recognition Awards' top honor, the Governor's Award, Nov. 9 in Citrus Heights, Calif. The Governor's Award recognizes the agency that best provides contracting opportunities for disabled veteran-owned or small businesses. The CMD has won the award two years in a row.

"Our priority, by policy, is whenever possible, we award a contract to a disabled veteran-owned business," said Lt. Col. Jeffrey Kerns, deputy comptroller for the CMD. "If not us … then who?

"The entire staff has and continues to work hard toward this end," he continued. "While we're happy to have the award, the real satisfaction comes from knowing the positive impact we're making in our community."

National Guard marks 375 years of dedicated service

By National Guard Bureau Public Affairs

The National Guard will observe the 375th anniversary of its First Muster on Dec. 13. The Guard traces its origin to the militias of the 13 English colonies in North America. The first units were organized Dec. 13, 1636, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, making the Guard the oldest component of the U.S. armed forces.

The founding fathers recognized the importance of the militia and therefore wrote it into the Constitution. Power over the militia was divided between the states and the federal government. This dual organization still characterizes the National Guard today and is unique in the world.

An early example of the Guard's service was during the Revolutionary War, when 164,000 militiamen served and played a key role, fighting alongside the Continental Army. Since the U.S. won its independence, the National Guard has contributed to the fight in every conflict: the Civil War, Spanish-American War, World War I and WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War and the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Guard has always been ready to serve as federal defender, but just as important is its distinct mission as a state protector during times of crisis, disaster and need. The National Guard rapidly responds to any natural or man-made domestic disaster, saving lives, easing human suffering and protecting property.

The Guard also runs unique programs that no other military force provides, such as the Agribusiness Development Team (ADT) initiative, which trains Afghan farmers and provides advice to Afghan universities, and the long-running State Partnership Program (SPP).

For nearly 20 years, the State Partnership Program has provided military-to-military activities to enhance 63 partner nations' capabilities and achieve greater military interoperability. SPP alignments have resulted in joint National Guard and partner-country deployments in support of multinational operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently, 22 SPP nations are providing 11,000 troops in Afghanistan, and 40 SPP countries are providing 31,300 troops to support United Nations peacekeeping efforts.

Much has changed since the first decades of the 17th century, when the British brought the militia tradition with them to the New World. But almost four centuries later, the men and women of the National Guard are still protecting and defending their neighbors from threats within U.S. borders and beyond. The National Guard is always ready and always there.

Berkeley student credits OMI for path to success

By Oakland Military Institute

When Juan Gonzalez entered 1st grade in the Oakland Unified School District, he was placed into a bilingual classroom with 20 other students of mostly Mexican descent who mainly spoke Spanish. At the end of 1st grade, Gonzalez was "no more knowledgeable than the year before," he said. So his mother placed him in a charter school for 2nd grade in an English-only classroom.

Photo by Michael Appis

Oakland Military Institute (OMI) graduate Juan Gonzalez achieved what he never thought possible: admission to the University of California, Berkeley. Now he tutors and mentors OMI cadets while attending college.

That year defined for Gonzalez "what could be accomplished with hard work." He remembers how tough it was to learn English, but he also remembers the positive emotions he felt when receiving accolades from teachers and others who marveled at his propensity for learning and the joy his education brought him.

Gonzalez has vivid memories of his fellow middle school students engaging in acts of violence against each other (one of his friends beat another child with a baseball bat after an argument over a girl), ignoring teachers, using drugs, getting pregnant and being victimized by gangs — all of which distracted from the education Gonzalez was trying so desperately to receive.

For high school, Gonzalez enrolled at the Oakland Military Institute (OMI) College Preparatory Academy. Founded in 2001 by Gov. Jerry Brown, who was then mayor of Oakland, OMI is a partnership between the city of Oakland and the Cal Guard.

"[OMI] was a break from all the things that happened in [my] neighborhood," Gonzalez said. "When I was at OMI, things were not about who was going to fight whom, or about what people had gotten into what gang. Students did not talk about wanting class to end to go do drugs, or of skipping school for a few days to hang out in the streets.

"Life at OMI was about what classes we were taking, who was on the same athletic team as we were and who was getting promoted to a higher rank," he continued. "If someone couldn't wait until classes were over, it was because the soccer team had an important game that evening or there was going to be a fun activity after school.

"Although attending OMI was a challenge for me, as a result of the high academic and leadership expectations of the school, the time I spent there was the most untroubled time of my life."

The biggest gift OMI gave Gonzalez was a clear path to college, he said. No one in his extended family had ever attended college, yet OMI college counselor Linh Le put the idea in Gonzalez's head that he could attend one of the most prestigious universities in the world — the University of California, Berkeley. Le helped him fill out the applications, obtain fee waivers, register for the SAT and stay on track with the right high school courses. Finally, Gonzalez was rewarded with admission to Berkeley.

Now a sophomore at Berkeley, Gonzalez returns to OMI almost daily to work as a tutor and mentor for OMI cadets. He often recounts how a conversation with his cadet company's training, advising and counseling officer, Maj. Pernell Johnson, inspired him to keep going when the going got tough, and he says he is grateful to OMI for changing his life and putting him on the path to a college diploma and future success.

OMI Superintendent Mark Ryan said Gonzalez is exactly the kind of student Brown envisioned benefiting from OMI.

"The governor founded OMI on the belief that if a student wanted to work hard, a quality military school could help that student get into a great college and be on a path toward a highly successful life," Ryan said. "The military framework of OMI provides important skills and dispositions that shape a student's success. Wearing a uniform, working as part of a team, staying organized and mission-focused, being a leader of character — all these things are what Governor Brown knows are the ingredients for success in both school and life."

OMI has ranked in the top tier of Oakland schools each of the past five years, and 95 percent of OMI graduates now continue their education in college immediately following graduation.

Soldiers of Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 1st Battalion, 185th Armor Regiment, scan the High Desert of Fort Irwin, Calif., from within a Bradley Fighting Vehicle during a training exercise Nov. 5.
Photo by Spc. Nevada J. Smith
For more on the 1-185th's Bradley training, see page 17.

Vehicle accidents up more than 30 percent in GSA, personal vehicles

California Army National Guard statistics show the number of vehicle accidents involving government service agency (GSA) vehicles increased 32 percent in fiscal year 2011, and accidents involving personally owned vehicles increased 41 percent.

The number of accidents in GSA vehicles grew from 41 in fiscal 2010 to 52 in fiscal 2011. The tally for personally owned vehicles climbed from 49 to 83.

Similar trends were found at the Army level, according to data presented in November at the National Guard Bureau Ground and Aviation Safety Standardization Conference.

"What this means to us as a force is that we have got to become better at situational awareness and risk mitigation on an individual basis when driving on or off duty, and in government or personally owned vehicles," said Maj. Vickie Panagopoulos, CNG state safety officer. "It hurts our readiness as a force when we lose a Soldier or government vehicle to accidents, and it also impacts our families and our own financial stability."

Leadership at the state and national levels are directing troops to take the task of driving seriously. Eliminating driving distractions and remaining situationally aware while driving greatly reduce the risk of an accident and the associated consequences of injury, death and lost resources. This becomes even more important as we head into the holiday season, as distractions increase with the rush of preparations for numerous holiday events.

There are many programs available to leadership and individual Soldiers to increase driver awareness. Please visit the California Army National Guard Ground Safety Portal and the online U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center for resources available to unit leaders and individual Soldiers.

California Army National Guard Ground Safety Portal:
https://portal.ca.ngb.army.mil/sites/Safety-OH-IH/default.aspx

U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center:
https://safety.army.mil/Default.aspx

DID YOU KNOW...

Army and Air Force regulations both require 100 percent accountability of unit property every year?

Unit commander involvement with inventory is crucial to the success of property accountability within the command. A valuable tool that units can employ to maintain property accountability is a Command Supply Discipline Program standard operating procedure. An up-to-date standard operating procedure that specifies responsibilities by duty position can help ensure units consistently complete property accountability tasks on time and to standard.

Lost, damaged or destroyed property must be adjusted from property records through either the Financial Liability Investigation of Property Loss (FLIPL) or Report of Survey (ROS) process. Regulations require a FLIPL be completed within 240 days and an ROS within 245 days.

Service members can be held liable for lost, damaged or destroyed property due to negligence or willful misconduct. Both the FLIPL and ROS processes require legal reviews and afford service members certain rights.

For additional info, see Army Regulation 735-5 and Air Force Manual 23-220.

CORRECTION: The photo on the cover of the November issue should have been attributed to Master Sgt. Julie Avey.

'Adaptive sports' continued from page 14

Capt. William Flores, CBWTU senior physician assistant, said the staff assesses each patient and manages their treatment plan. "We assign them a nurse case manager based on the region they live in and translate the civilian medical diagnoses into a treatment plan and military profile," he said. "They are assigned a case management treatment team who will discuss the best options and who are readily available to the Soldier on demand."

The CBWTU monitors medical treatment for its patients and also encourages positive change through activity.

"Adaptive sports can be a catalyst for change, for Soldiers to learn new skills, participate more in activities and to push away from perceptions of false limitations," said Suzanne Ovel, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Army Warrior Transition Battalion. "It's incredible seeing a Soldier going from the attitude of 'I can't' to 'I can.'"

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Staff Sgt. Nakia Weis of the California Air National Guard's 144th Medical Group greets a young spectator Nov. 11 at the 92nd Annual Fresno Veterans Day Parade. The parade is touted as the largest Veterans Day event west of the Mississippi River. Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Chris Drudge

The Grizzly Newsmagazine

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