



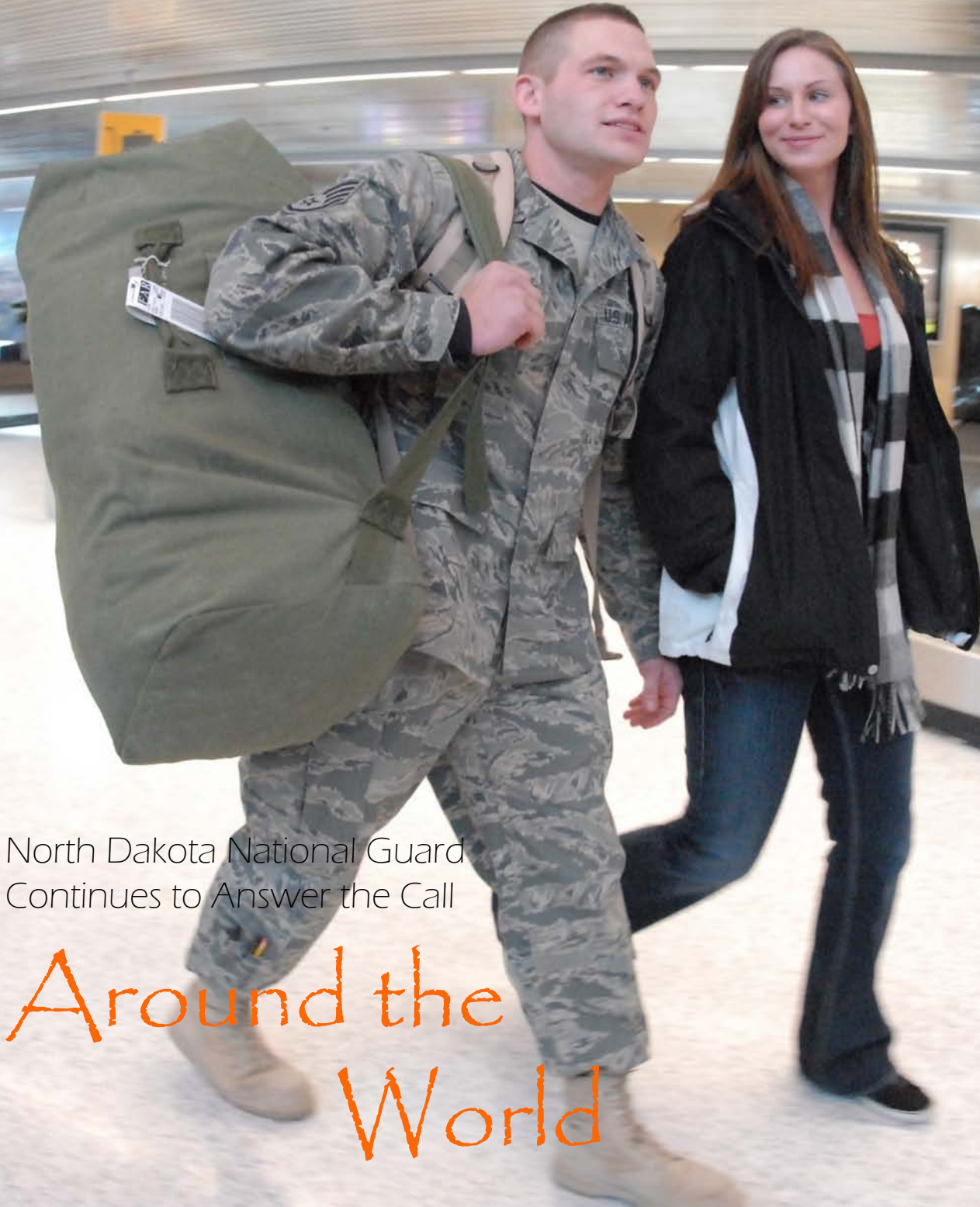
NORTH DAKOTA GUARDIAN



THE
Happy Kooligans

Volume 2, Issue 2

February 2009



North Dakota National Guard
Continues to Answer the Call

Around the World

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Many Happy Returns

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The Art of War

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- Editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of the Joint Force Headquarters, N.D. National Guard (JFND) Public Affairs Officer.
- Printed by United Printing, a private firm in no way connected to the U.S. Government under exclusive written contract with the JFND. Reproduction is by the offset method with a circulation of 7,500.
- The *North Dakota Guardian* is published by the JFND Public Affairs Office, Box 5511, Bismarck, N.D. 58506-5511, 701-333-2007

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Contributions to the *North Dakota Guardian* are encouraged! Send articles, photos and art to Editor, JFND PIO, Box 5511, Bismarck, N.D. 58506-5511.

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Phone: 701-333-2195 Fax: 701-333-2017

Digital photos should be at least 300 dpi.

On the Cover



Happy to be Home: Senior Airman Nick Guttormson, of the 119th Civil Engineer Squadron, walks through Hector International Airport in Fargo Dec. 31, 2008, upon his return from deployment to Kuwait. He is escorted by Senior Airman Joellen Ybarra, of the 119th Operations Support Squadron. (Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp)



Brig. Gen. Patrick Martin

North Dakota National Guard
Assistant Adjutant General

Back in 1973 when President Richard Nixon inaugurated the All-Volunteer Force for our country, many thought this concept was doomed to fail. As a graduating high school senior it was disappointing to see the draft system dissolve because I sought the diversity of character and personality that the military draft provided. Still, I enlisted in the Navy because I wanted to get as far away from home as possible and military service appeared to be the best avenue with which to “sea the world” — and they would train, pay, feed and clothe me in the process!

Fortunately, the All-Volunteer Force concept worked, and is still working today even after having been seriously tested in combat. Our military has been able to fill its ranks with volunteer, top-quality young men and woman who are, in most cases, better educated and motivated than their civilian counterparts. They are serving for the right reasons — “Selfless Service,” or put another way, “Service Before Self.” Our country needs these courageous, loyal and talented military members whose honor, integrity and good character allow us to remain the leader of the free world. However, as capable as they are, they

Volunteers ... Priceless!

cannot do it all alone. Fortunately, there are many others who have volunteered to serve our nation as part of our “Guard Family,” even though they may not be wearing a military uniform.

Our Guard Family extends beyond the walls of our individual dwelling. When our members are mobilized and deployed it often puts additional strain on those Family members still at home. The vehicles and appliances that have performed faithfully over the years will suddenly fail shortly after the Guard member deploys. Unexpected bills will materialize disproportionately to

“Taking care of Soldiers and Airmen is our adjutant general’s top priority, and that includes their Families.”

incoming income, and Family members will display behaviors that previously had only been seen on late night television. Where does one turn to when in these situations? One option is to keep it in the Family — specifically our Guard Family.

The North Dakota National Guard Family has a remarkable number of volunteers and volunteer programs to meet the needs of our members and their Families. Taking care of Soldiers and Airmen is our adjutant general’s top priority, and that includes their Families. We have invested many resources into our Family program to include hosting events geared toward assistance. So far this year there have been two Volunteer Academies and there will be two more in the near future. Attendees learn duties and responsibilities of Family Readiness Group Volunteers and how to address media information requests. All of

our volunteers become a “force multiplier” for our nation by helping our deployed Guardsmen to remain focused on their mission, knowing their loved ones will be cared for back home. Together with our dedicated volunteers, we can effectively care for our deployed Soldiers and Airmen.

A recent speech by Medal of Honor recipient Col. (Ret.) Leo Thorsness summed it up quite well. He was shot down in 1967 while flying his F-105 “Wild Weasel” aircraft over North Vietnam on his 93rd combat mission. As his parachute was floating toward earth amidst a hail of bullets using him for target practice, he recalled realizing that Family, faith, friends and fun were, and would always remain, his highest priorities. That is still rings true today.

We are all appreciative of those individuals, in and out of uniform, that go above and beyond in supporting our military service members and their Families. And also thank you to all who are willing to turn to a volunteer to seek assistance that will make their lives more manageable until their deployed loved one returns home, as this allows their Guardsman to remain focused on their assigned mission. Working together, our great organization will continue to grow even stronger.

Brig. Gen. Patrick Martin

Seekins Promoted to Brigadier General

William L. Seekins was promoted to brigadier general during a Jan. 10 ceremony in Bismarck. He is assigned as the N.D. Army National Guard's land component commander.



Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, North Dakota National Guard adjutant general, presided over the ceremony, during which Seekins' wife, Joanne, placed his new rank.

"Bill Seekins is fully deserving of this promotion having successfully led Soldiers from platoon- to brigade-sized units," Sprynczynatyk said. "This promotion is indicative of his superb leadership and dedication to mission accomplishment at all echelons of command within the North Dakota Army National Guard."

Seekins began his service as an enlisted Soldier in 1977 and earned his commission as a second lieutenant in 1979.

"I'd like to thank the leadership of the North Dakota National Guard for selecting me for this promotion and placing their trust in me," Seekins said. "Without the great support from my family and my employer, I would not have been able to successfully serve in the North Dakota Army National Guard these past 30 years."

Wang Becomes RTI's Enlisted Commandant

A 33-veteran of the Armed Forces became the 164th Regiment's Regional Training Institute's enlisted commandant.

Command Sgt. Maj. Orville Wang joins Col. Steve Tabor, officer commandant, in leading the North Dakota National Guard school that provides engineering instruction to Soldiers from across the nation. He replaces Command



Sgt. Maj. Gerald Miller, who will be assuming duties as the state command sergeant major in the near future.

Wang entered the military as a recovery specialist and welder in February 1976, and has worked full-time for the North Dakota National Guard since January 1984. He has served at his current rank for more than a decade, since November 1997.



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

Delton Steele, Vice President of US Bank, presents a check to Col. Robert Becklund, 119th Wing commander, as Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, North Dakota National Guard adjutant general, looks on at the North Dakota Air National Guard Outstanding Airmen of the Year banquet in Fargo Jan. 17. US Bank employees participated in a "Jeans Day" event and donated the money to the 119th Wing Hooligans Helping Hooligans fund. Last year, US Bank employees donated money to the Family Programs Office.

Happy Hooligans See Steady Stream of Returns

It has been a busy winter as 119th Wing members continue to return home from deployments. Airmen tend to deploy in smaller numbers and as a result return in small numbers, which make the trips to the airport to welcome Airmen home more frequent, but just as important.

In December, 13 Airmen returned from various locations including Spain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. In January, 27 Airmen returned home from Kuwait and Iraq. The Happy Hooligans expect to welcome home about 10 more Airmen in February who will be returning from Iraq and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, the 119th Wing is preparing for a Security Forces deployment to Iraq leaving in February.



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

Staff Sgt. Jacob Thiel, Staff Sgt. Donald Clarke and Master Sgt. Mark Foster, all of the 119th Civil Engineer Squadron, are greeted by flags and well-wishers upon returning Dec. 31 from a deployment in Kuwait.

188th Army Band Completes Whirlwind Tour of Western N.D.

Three groups from the North Dakota National Guard's 188th Army Band recently completed 21 concerts in six days. The "Music in Schools" tour provided musical enrichment for students in western

North Dakota while demonstrating how the unit supports the state and nation. Two additional performances were given at University of North Dakota hockey games.

Three of the band's modular groups — Dixieland Combo, Blues in Greens variety band and Three Time Rule variety band — performed for the bulk of the tour before coming together at Dickinson High School for a Jazz Band concert on the tour's final day.

In all, the band provided 21 performances to about 4,500 people. 1st Sgt. Mike Koshney leads the band as it's senior enlisted Soldier.

Health Coverage Available for Guard Families

By Brian P. Smith
TriWest Healthcare Alliance

When National Guard or Reserve sponsors are not on active duty, they may be eligible for healthcare coverage by purchasing and enrolling in TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS). Now, this coverage comes at a significantly reduced rate. With the start of the new year, monthly premiums decreased between 30 and 40 percent.

TRICARE RESERVE SELECT

TRS includes medical and behavioral health coverage and access to TRICARE pharmacy benefits. TRS allows enrollees to choose any TRICARE-authorized or network provider for health care. TriWest Healthcare Alliance, the Department of Defense contractor that administers TRICARE in 21 western states, offers a directory of network providers at www.triwest.com.

Information about the TRS plan and TRICARE benefits can be found at TriWest's Guard and Reserve Resource Center (www.triwest.com/ngr).

COSTS

As part of the TRS enrollment, a premium payment is due to TriWest each month — \$47.51 for individual coverage and \$180.17 for family coverage. TRICARE cost information can be found at www.tricare.mil/costs.

BECOMING ELIGIBLE

The sponsor's unit or service certifies TRICARE eligibility. Family members must be entered into the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) before they are eligible for any TRICARE benefits. Sponsors who are eligible for or enrolled in a Federal Employees Health Benefits plan are not eligible for TRS coverage.

QUALIFY AND ENROLL

The TRS enrollment process begins at the National Guard and Reserve Web Portal (<https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/trs/index.jsp>). Fill out the application online and print a copy. Sign the completed form and send (mail to TriWest Healthcare Alliance, P.O. Box 42048, Phoenix, AZ 85080-2048 or fax to 866-441-8843) with the first month's premium payment. TRS coverage can be purchased at any time.

VA Rating System, Retirement Age Remain Hot-Button Issues for Guard

By Daniel M. Dewey
Amvets National Service Officer

Things are improving for Guard members, but we need to stay on top of the issues. Here are two of which to be aware.

Veterans' Affairs Disability Evaluation System:

The trial/pilot period on the Veterans' Affairs' new rating system is over and it is branching out with it. The pilot for the Department of Defense's Medical and Physical Evaluation Board (MEB and PEB) proceedings will expand to 17 bases outside of the Washington, D.C., area during the next five months. The Army bases are Fort Carson, Colo.; Fort Drum, N.Y.; Fort Stewart, Ga.; Fort Richardson and Fort Wainwright in Alaska; Brooke Army Medical Center, Texas, and Fort Polk, La. The Navy bases include Naval Medical Center in San Diego and Camp Pendleton, Calif.; Naval Medical Center Bremerton, Wash.; Naval Medical Center Jacksonville, Fla.; and Camp Lejeune, N.C. The Air Force bases are Vance Air Force Base, Okla.; Nellis Air Force Base, Nev.; MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.; Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska; and Travis Air Force Base, Calif. These bases will provide more diverse data to better judge the effect of the new Disability Evaluation System.

Under the pilot, the VA conducts the single, comprehensive physical examination while members are on active duty, and prepares a single disability evaluation used by each department. The military service uses the findings to determine fitness for duty. Those members found unfit may be separated at 20 percent or less (with lump sum severance pay) or, if 30 percent or higher, medically retired with full retiree benefits.

The DOD continues to be allowed to base its decision and disability rating only on the medical condition that they determine makes the member unfit for continued duty.

The authority that DOD has to pick and choose which disability is the most unfitting as far as DOD is concerned and then deal only with that condition

For More Information

VA Announces Expansion Of Disability Evaluation System Pilot:
www.1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1614



in considering whether or not a Soldier may qualify for a 30 percent or greater medical retirement needs to be addressed and changed. All disabilities that occurred while on active duty should be considered in the PEB/MEB process.

The other part of this is that nowhere in this process is the veteran directed to a Veterans Advocate who could help advise him or her of options and benefits. If we are not in contact with the service member prior to their discharge from Title 10 by DOD, they miss an extremely important opportunity for help that they deserve to have.

Retirement Age Issue: As you know, we have gotten our foot in the door on this and they now allow you to use certain active-duty periods to reduce your retirement age. In other words, you can deduct these from age 60, normal retirement age.

But, once again, they have put in a required 90 days or more in a one-year period to qualify to take 90 days off from the age 60 retirement age. Put in only 89 days, and there will be no deduction; put in 179 days and only 90 can be deducted — again you lose. We need the 90-day rule to go away and any amount of time a service member puts in that qualifies under this program's provision be deducted from age 60.

As with all these issues we need to talk it up between ourselves and then e-mail, call or write our politicians to ask for their help.

Retired Master Sgt. Daniel M. Dewey works as the Amvets National Service Officer in Fargo. You may reach him at 701-451-4642 or dan.dewey@va.gov.

Discovering What Makes Us Persevere

By Chaplain (Col.) William Ziegler
119th Wing

February in North Dakota is not my favorite month. About now, I am sick of winter. The beautiful blanket of first snow has been replaced by hard SNERT, and the cold, gray days covering the valley are depressing. I am ready for spring. Yet, I know two months of stormy weather can easily lie ahead. I draw perseverance and hope from seed catalogs arriving via the mail. They help me recall my gardens and the joy of growing flowers, fruits and vegetables. Perseverance in North Dakota is important.

Perseverance for those of us who serve our nation's military is also important. Gen. Norton Schwartz, Air Force chief of staff, has recently written we are a nation "facing persistent conflict for the foreseeable future ..." If there is any "seed catalog" offering hope perhaps we can draw from Scripture and our history as Guardsmen.

For example, there is the persistence of David, the young shepherd boy of Israel who later became a king. He stood up against the giant Goliath with only a sling and stone saying "send me," even when the odds were not in his favor and all had deserted him. And, of course, the life of Christ is a story of God's persistence on our behalf, in spite of man's attempt to silence Him. Then, too, there is the inspiring persistence of Samuel Whittemore, a farmer, living in Menotomy, Mass., (present-day Arlington) on April 19, 1775.



Chaplain (Col.) William Ziegler
N.D. Air National Guard Headquarters

On that day, he became the oldest known colonial combatant in the American Revolutionary War.

On April 19, 1775, British forces were returning to Boston from the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Samuel was in his fields when he spotted a British relief brigade sent to assist the retreat. Whittemore loaded his musket and ambushed the British from behind a nearby stone wall, killing one soldier. He then drew his dueling pistols and killed another. He managed to fire five shots before a British detachment reached his position. Whittemore then attacked with his sword. He was shot in the face, bayoneted 13 times, and left for dead in a pool of blood. Found alive, he was taken to Dr. Cotton Tufts of Medford, who held out no hope for his survival. However, Whittemore lived another 18 years until dying of natural causes at 98. A monument in Arlington reads:

"Near this spot, Samuel Whittemore, then 80 years- old, killed three British soldiers, April 19, 1775. He was shot, bayoneted, beaten and left for dead, but recovered and lived to be 98 years of age."

The "seed catalogs of hope" are all around us. They feed our ability to persevere in the face of evil. They are as varied as a David saying "send me," or a modern-day Samuel leaving his North Dakota plow for his or her nation's need.



Join the Hooligan Team

The Hooligan Men's Masters team is forming for the 2009 season. The team is open to all current and retired Hooligan men who are at least 35 years old. Spouses and dependents of Hooligans also can join the team. The team plays Thursday evenings in the Fargo Softball Association League. The season starts in mid-May and runs through July. Initial rosters need to be submitted in March. Prospective players should contact Chief Master Sgt. Gibson at 701-451-2280 or james.gibson.1@ndfarg.ang.af.mil. Women's and mixed teams can also be formed in the Fargo Softball Association League.

Maj. Gen. Scherling Returns for Retirement

By Capt. Penny Ripperger
119th Wing

Maj. Gen. Terry L. Scherling ended her successful military career at the same place it began more than 30 years ago during a retirement ceremony at the 119th Wing in Fargo Jan. 17.

Scherling, a native of Davenport, N.D., enlisted in the North Dakota Air National Guard in 1975 and graduated from North Dakota State University in 1977. She served with the Happy Hooligans until she moved to Washington, D.C., in 1994.

She is the only female with the rank of major general to begin her military career in the North Dakota Air National Guard.

“There is no doubt that Maj. Gen. Scherling is highly respected at the North Dakota Air Guard. We are honored by the fact that she chose to come back to North Dakota to celebrate this monumental day. That says a great deal about the relationship she continues to share with North Dakota and the Happy Hooligans,” said Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, N.D. National Guard adjutant general.

Scherling is a second generation Happy Hooligan and also the second to retire as a major general; her father, Maj. Gen. Darrol Schroeder, also served in the N.D. Air National Guard.

At the retirement ceremony, Scherling began her speech by recognizing her parents who were in attendance and praised them for being great leaders, mentors and friends. She also addressed the many Air Guard members, past and present, in the audience.

“I see so many friends and mentors here today. I think of all the opportunities you gave me to fail and then to try again. Thank you for that. It means so much to me,” Scherling said.

When looking back at her military career, Scherling recalled that the best memories she has stem from the time she spent in Fargo as a Happy Hooligan.

“The N.D. Air National Guard gave me a great foundation in my military career,” Scherling said.

Most recently, Scherling served as the special assistant to the chief of the National Guard Bureau in Arlington, Va. Prior to that assignment, she served as the director of the joint staff at the National Guard Bureau. She also served as deputy director antiterrorism/homeland defense, operations directorate, the joint staff, Pentagon.

Scherling returned to Virginia to begin her new career as president and chief executive officer of TENICA, a national and homeland defense consulting company.



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

North Dakota Adjutant General Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, left, pins the North Dakota State Legion of Merit on Maj. Gen. Terry L. Scherling during her retirement ceremony Jan. 17 at the North Dakota Air National Guard, Fargo, as Col. Michael Wobbema, the N.D. Air National Guard headquarters director of staff, reads the award citation.



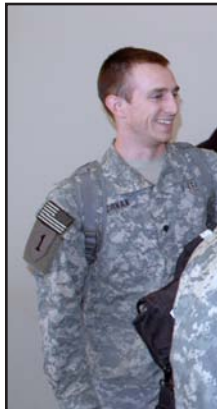
Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

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191st Back f



North Dakota Adjutant General Maj. Gen. David Sprynczyk greets returning soldiers of the 191st Military Police Company as they say goodbye to friends and relatives as she makes her way past Sprynczyk.



Spc. Eric Sansburn, of the 191st Military Police Company, gets re-acquainted with his son, Zakary, at the Hector International Airport in Fargo Jan. 14.

Gov. John Hoeven welcomes returning soldiers of the 191st Military Police Company at the Hector International Airport Jan. 14 among the 31 MPs who had p

MANY HAPPY RETURNS

**Military Police
from Iraq**



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

Story by Staff Sgt. Chris Keller
116th Public Affairs Detachment

More than 130 N.D. Army National Guard Soldiers from the 191st Military Police Company returned to North Dakota Jan. 14 after a yearlong deployment to Iraq. The sight was a welcoming one at the Bismarck and Fargo airports as children clutched balloons, and family members sported T-shirts bearing their loved one's name or phrases such as, "Get out of the way, my son is coming home today."

"It's amazing," said Capt. Benjamin Cleghorn, 191st MP Co. commander. "I haven't seen them (his children) in over a year. They've grown, grown quite a few inches. It is fantastic to be home."

The Soldiers, who deployed to several different locations throughout Iraq, were tasked with training Police Transition Teams and Iraqi Police advisors while in country.

Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, North Dakota National Guard adjutant general, along with other key officials, flew to McChord Air Force Base, Wash., to welcome the Soldiers as they began their demobilization process prior to returning to the state.

"It is important for us to be here and show these Soldiers that we are so very proud of them. They have sacrificed so much for their country and families," Sprynczynatyk said.

The 191st received their mobilization order in October 2007



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

and spent nearly four months at Fort Dix, N.J., training before starting their mission in Iraq.

More than 50 Soldiers completed their second tour and four completed their third. Sixteen Soldiers chose to extend their tour in Iraq.

Soldiers from the 191st Military Police Company are surrounded by loved ones as they walk into the Hector airport terminal.

Top, Sgt. Jimmy L. France Jr., of the 191st Military Police Company, is greeted by well-wishers as he arrives at Hector International Airport Jan. 14, after deploying to Iraq for a year.



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

Sprynczynatyk, right, and N.D. Gov. John Hoeven, center, greet Soldiers as they arrive. Spc. Chelsey B. Fosdick, foreground, looks on.



Sgt. Jessica Geffre

Spc. Joshua D. Dvirnak (left) as he arrives at the Bismarck airport. Dvirnak, as well as Sgt. Jeffrey A. Sorenson (center), were previously deployed.

Air Guard Bestows Enlisted Honors



By Capt. Penny Ripperger
119th Wing

The N.D. Air National Guard hosted its annual celebration honoring the best of the best of the enlisted force at the Outstanding Airman of the Year Banquet Jan. 17.

Supervisors nominate Airmen based on criteria focusing on their exceptional military service and community involvement. Only three Airmen take home the honor of Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, Noncommissioned Officer of the Year and Airman of the Year.

This year, two distinguished visitors with North Dakota roots traveled home to attend the banquet.

Maj. Gen. Terry L. Scherling, a native of Davenport, N.D., who enlisted with the Happy Hooligans in 1975, was the guest speaker at the banquet. Her most recent assignment was serving as the special assistant to the chief of the National Guard Bureau in Arlington, Va. Scherling retired from the Air Force during a ceremony at the 119th Wing earlier that day.

Chief Master Sgt. James Clemenson also attended the banquet. He is a native of Horace and Kindred, N.D., and serves as the senior enlisted manager of the National Guard Bureau Joint Staff in Alexandria, Va. Clemenson is the only enlisted Vietnam Veteran currently serving on active duty in the Air Force.

Master Sgt. Tanya Augdahl and Tech. Sgt. Jason Augdahl, of the 219th Security Forces Squadron, were selected as Outstanding Family of the Year and Master Sgt. Duane Kangas was named First Sergeant of the Year at the banquet.

Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

Staff Sgt. Jessica Green, of the 119th Security Forces Squadron, was awarded the Unit Career Advisor of the Year award for the 119th Wing by North Dakota Adjutant General Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk.



Staff Sgt. William Kennedy, a 119th Civil Engineer Squadron explosive ordnance craftsman, is presented the Air Force Combat Action Medal by N. D. Adjutant General Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk at the enlisted banquet. Kennedy is only the fifth person from the 119th Wing to receive this prestigious award that is granted to Airmen who have conducted their duties under lethal enemy attack under risk of grave danger.

Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

Airman of the Year

Senior Airman Theta A. Olson serves in emergency management at the 119th Civil Engineer Squadron. She began her military career when she enlisted in the N.D. Air National Guard in 2006. Family members who have served in the military include her grandfathers T-3 Duane Hanson and Airman 1st Class Robert Olson and her father, retired Master Sgt. Gordon Olson. She attends North Dakota State University, majoring in emergency management and sociology. In addition to her busy schedule as a full-time student, she enjoys her hobby as an amateur “ham” radio operator. She is also involved in the International Association of Emergency Management, Red River Amateur Radio, First Lutheran Church and the NDSU International Emergency Management Student Association.



Noncommissioned Officer of the Year

Staff Sgt. Brain L. Erdman is a full-time Security Forces journeyman in the 119th Wing Security Forces Squadron. He began his military career when he enlisted in the N.D. Air National Guard in 1998. Erdmann enjoys classic cars and collecting sports memorabilia. He also is a member of the 119th Wing Honor Guard. He is married to fellow Happy Hooligan, Staff Sgt. Dawn Erdmann. A unique and memorable experience for Erdmann was deploying to Baghdad and Tallil Air Base in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He has completed two tours of duty in the Middle East in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In 2003, Erdman was selected as a nominee for the John H. Levitow Award and recognized as a distinguished graduate at the Airman Leadership In-Residence Course at Grand Forks Air Force Base.

Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year

Master Sgt. Robert J. Vorce serves as the information assurance officer and communications systems superintendent in the 119th Wing Operations Support Squadron. He served in the U.S. Air Force for nine years prior to joining the N.D. Air National Guard in 1999. He attended the University of North Dakota Lake Region State College, graduating with an associate’s degree in criminal justice. He also received an associate’s degree in computer science from Park College in Grand Forks, N.D. He has received associate degrees in information technology and criminal justice from the Community College of the Air Force. Vorce works as the chief information officer at First National Bank of Bagley, Minn. He volunteers his time with his local church group and is involved with the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States. He also is a member of the 119th Wing Base Honor Guard.



First in a Three-Part Series

After deploying for a year to Afghanistan, Sgt. Cole LaRocque has turned his artistic talents toward recapturing his war experience. From life-threatening moments to everyday scenes, he guides his paintbrushes to create watercolor paintings that tell his personal story of combat. With each brush stroke, he seemingly wipes out the demons that have haunted him since an IED attack in October 2006. Behind LaRocque are three of his paintings: "Wreckage," "IED Attack" and "Moqur."

Below is a detail of "IED Attack," a rough, dark emotional piece, and at right is a detail from "Moqur," a landscape done to the tone of Winslow Homer, a 19th century painter.



The Art of War

Soldier Conquers Demons Through Watercolor

"It felt like a hammer hit me and smoke just blew up all around me. There was ringing in my ears. It was just surreal."

But now it's real. Tangible. In color. Permanent, not fleeting.

Condensed to a 21-by-29-inch watercolor painting, "IED Attack" by Sgt. Cole LaRocque preserves the moment of a powerful IED attack in Afghanistan. There on textured paper, it will stay for decades to come, long after the nightmares and flashbacks from that night in October 2006 have gone.

NIGHT FOR NIGHTMARES

On that night, LaRocque stood in the Humvee turret, manning the .50-caliber machine gun, while Spc. James W. Grote III drove and Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Roller served as the truck commander. Their interpreter, Sail, sat in the backseat. The security forces patrol of the 1-188th Air Defense Artillery, North Dakota Army National Guard, had spent the latter part of the day meeting with villagers in the Qarabagh District and was on its way to the District Center. The local Afghan National Police (ANP) accompanied them, leading the patrol on the way back. One ANP truck and then another passed over what was quickly discovered to be a land mine. The 5-ton Humvee didn't tread so lightly.

"It was really strong and powerful,"



that through how I worked with the medium,” LaRocque said. “I had to rethink how to work with the medium of watercolor. It’s not as polished as other work I’ve done but that’s because I wanted to show the feeling.”

Standing in front of the dark, rough piece brings the moment to life. A concussive pressure on the chest following an explosion. The unsteadiness of being knocked around a turret. Fearful anxiety of what’s out there beyond the thick smoke and night’s darkness.

“I had to paint that in particular to tell my story and to be a metaphor for what happened,” said LaRocque, who deployed from December 2005 through March 2007.

LaRocque’s professors at North Dakota State University, where he majors in art, encouraged him to paint from his deployment. He knew they were right.

“I wanted to do that for a long time to help deal with it,” he said. “It was a way to conquer some of my demons.”

TRAUMA RESPONSE ILLUSTRATED

LaRocque’s war-inspired art does not end there. He takes a different approach to the same attack by painting the Humvee’s remains as a still-life. Small pieces are carefully detailed

the overcast day reflects from their boot tops. In the building behind them, LaRocque said, the North Dakota Soldiers often joined the Afghans for tea.

The paintings are displayed at ecce art + yoga in downtown Fargo. Mark Weiler owns the gallery and represents LaRocque, calling him “one of the most talented student artists to come out of North Dakota in recent years.”

“The first detail that the viewer notices about Cole’s watercolors is his ability to precisely represent a scene,” Weiler said. “Cole successfully captures the essence of objects in a photorealistic, life-like fashion. People always comment that his watercolors look very similar to photographs. But beyond being just representative or photographic, LaRocque uses subtle color changes and shading to imbue his scenes with a complexity of character and subtle emotion. What is also appealing about Cole’s work is the evidence of his profound knowledge of art history. Cole pays homage to the masters through his artistic technique and in his language when discussing his artistic process.”

An acute observer also will notice the stages of trauma response play out on LaRocque’s watercolor paper. First, a powerful emotional state: “IED Attack.” Then, numb and disconnected, not fully realizing the intensity of the event: “Wreckage.” Finally, a broader view with greater understanding of the experience as a whole: “Moqur.”

Now, two years after his deployment ended, LaRocque can view the mission with the variety of emotions that such an experience would warrant.

“It’s a little bit of both (positive and negative),” he said. “I feel so many different ways toward Afghanistan.”

No matter what emotions drive LaRocque’s art, he always strives to approach the subject the same way, “honestly, philosophically and artistically.” His paintbrushes continue to narrate his deployment in that same way.

“I’ve taken my time on it, and I hope to eventually paint all or most of my experience there,” he said.

And one by one, LaRocque conquers a demon.

LaRocque and 151 other North Dakota Army National Guard Soldiers deployed in December 2005 with the 1-188th Air Defense Artillery Security Forces. Four Soldiers were killed in action before the deployment ended in March 2007; they were Sgt. Travis A. Van Zoest, 21, Cpl. Curtis R. Mehrer, 21, Cpl. Nathan J. Goodiron, 25, and Cpl. Christopher K. Kleinwachter, 29.

LaRocque’s work is displayed online at www.ecc216.com.



LaRocque said of the explosion.

The left front side of the vehicle took the bulk of the blow, leaving a few tangled pieces of metal where the voltage regulator and part of the engine once operated. All of the occupants received injuries, and the Soldiers were later awarded Purple Heart medals.

“That IED attack in particular was a strong emotional event for me,” LaRocque said. “It was the angriest I’d ever been.”

There was no place to target that anger. They were hit. It was over. There was no firefight to target the insurgents in return. The anger stayed for a long time before it found an outlet.

EMOTION BECOMES ART

The post-Impressionist 19th century painter Paul Cezanne once said, “A work of art which did not begin in emotion is not art.”

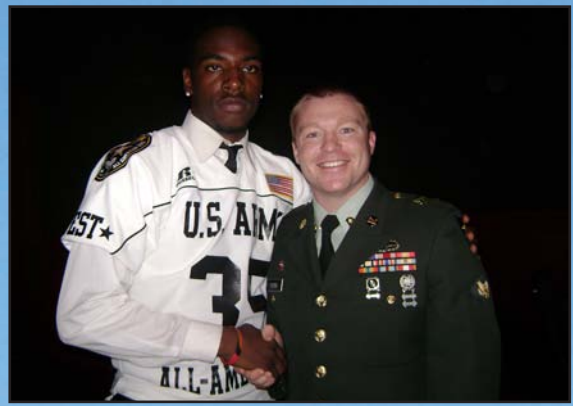
“IED Attack” began with emotion, emits that emotion, and certainly causes an emotional reaction.

“Pictures can only show so much, that’s why I had to take this to the next step to convey

and worked into the whole in “Wreckage.” Immobile, meticulous, composed, detached — it’s much the opposite of “IED Attack.”

Spanning 4-by-3 feet, “Moqur” presents a light, stunningly detailed landscape of a normal day in Afghanistan. Much like Winslow Homer relayed the mundane parts of the Civil War through oil on canvas, LaRocque wanted to take “a relaxed view” of his war experience, presenting it in a realist manner.

In the soft expanse of the painting, Humvees used by the International Security Assistance Force sit idle in a compound in Ghazni Province, where LaRocque and his fellow Soldiers would spend three to four days at a time working with the Afghans. Four men take a break in the painting’s foreground, smoking cigarettes and talking as the light of



Courtesy Photo

All-American Bowl: Spc. David Young (right) shakes hands with Chris Metcalf, the newest comeback for the University of Southern California. Young was one of only 20 Soldiers nationwide to be selected to attend the Army All-American Bowl expense-free. During his time in San Antonio, Texas, Young was paired with Metcalf. He also attended a number of banquets where he met Peter Chiarelli, vice chief of staff for the United States Army; NFL star Marshall Faulk; Karl Malone, NBA star and Olympic gold medalist; Pete Geren, secretary of the Army and Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth O. Preston, sergeant major of the Army.



Sgt. Amy Wieser Willson

Volunteer Academy: Ginny Bachmann, lead volunteer with the N.D. Air National Guard, reviews personality color differences in the "Real Colors" exercise that opened the second Volunteer Academy hosted by the N.D. National Guard's Family Program Office. Two more academies will take place yet this year — April 17-19 in Grand Forks and June 12-14 in Minot. For more information on an upcoming Volunteer Academy, contact Julie McKenzie at 701-333-4804 or julie.mckenzie@us.army.mil.



Hugs at Home: Tech. Sgt. Daniel Anderson, of the 119th Civil Engineer Squadron, gets a big hug from his young son at Hector International Airport in Fargo on Jan. 7 after serving as a supervisor for the Ali Al Air Base in Afghanistan.



Mr. Bill Prokopyk

Fighting Back: Vietnam Veteran and former Pittsburgh Steeler Rocky Bleier has Capt. Doug Larsen show off Bleier's four Super Bowl Rings at the N.D. National Guard's 2009 Safety Conference in Bismarck Jan 24. Bleier was the keynote speaker for the conference. The subject of the 1980 TV movie "Fighting Back," as well as the book by the same name, Bleier displayed his positive attitude during his talk. "Hey! Always look at the bright side. I wasn't drafted by the Steelers until the 16th round. That's better than the 17th round!" he said. He was the 417th player taken in the 1968 draft.



Guardian Snapshots



Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Pfingsten

Music in Schools: Spc. Joshua Peterson, of West Fargo, N.D., plays a saxophone solo as part of Three Time Rule, one of the 188th Army Band's rock/variety groups, at Washburn High School Jan. 7. The groups encourage student involvement throughout their performances. Staff Sgt. Lynne Krug, of Walcott, N.D., helps a student hold the microphone for Peterson before Krug provided vocals. The band performed 21 concerts in just six days this past month, bringing its musical talents to nearly 4,500 people.



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

s children upon returning from deployment in Kuwait. He arrived
ower production shop since September 2008.



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

On Their Way: Gov. John Hoeven shakes 1st Sgt. George Overby's hand after a send-off ceremony for the 1-188th Air Defense Artillery's RAID-III (Rapid Aerostat Initial Deployment) mission at the Grand Forks Armory Complex Jan. 11. U.S. Congressman Earl Pomeroy, behind the governor, also takes time to wish Soldiers well. 1st Lt. Amber Monette (right) commands the unit, which will leave for its mobilization station at the beginning of this month. The unit's 43 Soldiers will deploy to Afghanistan.



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

I Missed You Daddy!: Staff Sgt. Derrick Owens, of the 191st Military Police Company, holds his son as family and friends greet him upon returning home from Iraq to Hector International Airport, Fargo, N.D., Jan. 14. The 191st Military Police deployed to Iraq in January 2008 and spent the year providing security and training to the Iraqi Police. The unit's Soldiers completed more than 1,200 missions and traveled 120,000 miles in their work to help Iraq build a safe, democratic society.