



NORTH DAKOTA GUARDIAN

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Sixteen Army National Guard Soldiers competed in the Region VI Best Warrior Competition May 11-14 at the Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center in Wyoming. Among them were two North Dakota Army Guardsmen. Both displayed extreme tenacity, determination and physical and mental toughness while contending for top honors.



14 Survivor Support

The 21st Annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp were held May 22-25 in Washington, D.C. This year, 35 North Dakota survivors attended, along with 10 North Dakota service members who mentored children enrolled in the Good Grief Camp, which is designed specifically for children and adolescent survivors.

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GUARDIAN - JUNE 2015

NORTH DAKOTA GUARDIAN

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Digital photos should be 300 dpi, if possible.

On the Cover



Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk promotes Giselle (Gigi) Wilz to brigadier general May 20 during a ceremony at the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck, North Dakota. Wilz is the first female in the North Dakota Army National Guard to attain the rank of Brigadier General.

Photo by Chief Warrant Officer 4 Kiel Skager, Joint Force Headquarters

VIEW FROM THE TOP

A MESSAGE FROM THE CIVILIAN AIDE TO THE SECRETARY OF THE

THE GUARD FAMILY



Mrs. Connie Sprynczynatyk

Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army

Grief has been described in so many ways: as stages, as life's ultimate trial, as the price of love or as a journey. At the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, or TAPS, in Washington, D.C., definitions don't matter. Where you live, the circumstances of your service member's death, your age or stage of mourning do not matter.

What matters is that, at the annual grief seminar, you will find a safe place to feel whatever you are experiencing, and you will be paired with a kindred spirit — someone who has literally walked in your shoes.

In late May, Dave and I joined 35 family members of our fallen soldiers — and National Guard staff — for one of the most emotionally powerful weekends we've experienced in more than four decades of service.

TAPS was born in the early 1990s thanks to the efforts of Bonnie Carroll, a retired Air Force Reserve officer whose husband, Tom, a member of the Alaska Army National Guard, died in a plane crash while on a routine mission. Her experience gave her deep-seated desire to help other families learn how to live without those they've lost. She and what has become an army of volunteers now provide comfort and hope, 24/7 via a national peer support network. They also provide connections to grief resources at no cost to surviving families and loved ones.

At TAPS this year, each day, participants were presented with options for facilitated small-group discussions focused on people's similar experiences. We attended larger group discussions led by experts like Dr. Frank Campbell, a psychologist and researcher with decades of experience in leading weekly grief discussions.

We were welcomed by Gen. Martin Dempsey, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who told the gathering that until he welcomed his first seminar after assuming his duties as chair, he had no idea this powerful resource even existed.

"I love the fact that you're here, but I hate the way you got here," he said.

Before leaving the adult session, he sang a

version of "Keep Your Head Up," and then promptly joined the youth attending Good Grief Camp next door after promising to carry on his tradition of singing with the kids.

The TAPS national seminar includes the hardest work any of us can imagine facing, but fun is also a part of both life and of mourning. Giving oneself permission to laugh again can be a big step in the journey. As we traveled the hallways from session to session, we heard peals of laughter, witnessed quiet tears and shared many hugs.

Dave and I are proud of the efforts of people across North Dakota, who not only say they support our service members, families and survivors, but show their support via TAPS donations to the N.D. National Guard Foundation.

The night before Dave and I returned to North Dakota, our group found a quiet room, pulled chairs together and just sat around talking about the experience. We had expressed a desire to host a TAPS seminar in North Dakota, and we were interested in the ideas of family members. A significant feature of the weekend is its safe space to

mourn, so I'll not repeat any comments, but it is important you know how very much our family members appreciate your support.

Just before people began to thread back into the events of the evening, we closed with a prayer and our wish that if the seminar was not a life-changing event for the families, they would judge it a life-affirming weekend.

May God bless and keep our service members, veterans, their families and survivors. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Connie Sprynczynatyk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, North Dakota adjutant general, right, meets with TAPS mentors May 21 during the 21st Annual National Military Survivor Seminar in Washington, D.C.



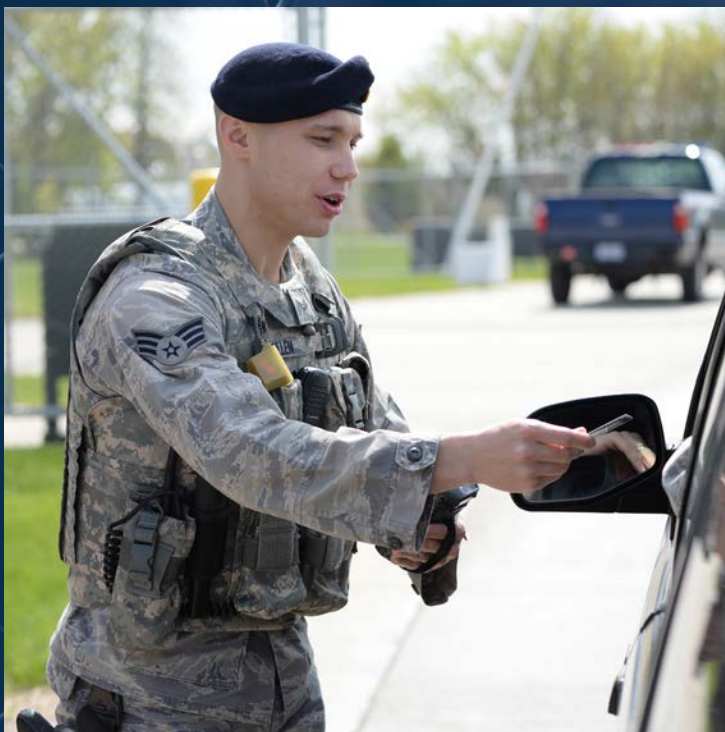
MAXIMUM SECURITY

Airmen Enhance Skills with Mixed Martial Arts

Story and photos by Senior Master Sgt. David Lipp, 119th Wing

Above: Tech. Sgt. Gemenie Strehlow works for a choke hold on Senior Airman Michael Bullen, both of the 119th Security Forces Squadron, as they practice mixed martial arts techniques at a gym in Fargo, North Dakota. The Airmen are training to enhance their fitness and skills to be better prepared in their career field for potential threats on duty.

Below: Bullen checks the identification credentials of personnel entering the N.D. Air National Guard Base in Fargo, North Dakota.



The U.S. Air Force trains security forces personnel to protect assets and people; the training is very effective.

The preparation required to become a professional in security forces requires extensive training in law enforcement and combat tactics since the Airmen work stateside on base security and potential domestic situations. They can also deploy overseas where they might go on patrols off base in areas that could become hostile.

It is possible they could have encounters with hostile forces in either case and must be prepared to engage them in a variety of ways, from the use of their weapons to close-quarters and hand-to-hand combat.

The career field is both physically and mentally demanding, and personnel need to be ready for those demands and be confident enough in their abilities to act without hesitation, if necessary.

119th Security Forces Squadron members Senior Airman Michael Bullen and Tech. Sgt. Gemenie Strehlow are taking those preparations to a higher level through their training in mixed martial arts (MMA).

“Not only is the training and competing fun, but we are working on sharpening the skills that we use to perform our

duties in security. I feel confident in the skills I have learned through MMA in my security role, and techniques I have learned in security forces have helped me in my competitions," said Bullen.

The training for MMA competition provides the motivation for intense workouts.

"It benefits me in my PT (physical training) testing. The lowest score I have earned since I started training about four years ago was a 97 (on a scale that tops out at 100)," Bullen said.

Bullen and Stehlow were both high school wrestlers, and Bullen is a volunteer coach in the Lake Park, Minnesota, youth wrestling program. MMA training is a way for them to continue competing, and they use the exercise as a stress relief from the rigors of life and work.

Both Strehlow and Bullen participate in competitive MMA fighting, with Strehlow having a posted record of two wins and one loss. Bullen has four wins and three losses.

"I just enjoy the experience of training and being in the ring. It's fun," Bullen said.

He takes the competition seriously, but his enjoyment was apparent May 16 when Bullen was seen smiling and bantering with his corner men throughout a fight held in front of a cheering crowd of about 2,000 people at the Kent Freeman Arena in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. His 155-pound fight was one of 17 fights on the card that night, with fighters of varying professional and amateur experience participating.

"I don't necessarily feel any pain when the adrenaline is pumping during a contest, but I feel the bruises the next day," Bullen said when asked what it feels like to get hit in the ring.

Strehlow and Bullen deployed to Afghanistan together in 2013 and were captivated by the U.S. Air Force pre-deployment combatives training.

While they started training in an MMA gym before the pre-deployment combatives, they were inspired to continue their

training while they were deployed, and even take it to the next level.

"We built a camaraderie through our deployment and our training. There was a need for us to be masters of our trade to be better prepared for our mission," Bullen said.

During their deployment, the Airmen were asked to perform a variety of tasks that had potential to put them in situations where knowing how to defend themselves could potentially help them perform their duties. It was apparent that their training in hand-to-hand conflicts would be very beneficial.

Some of their missions overseas included providing security for aircrews while transporting detainees along with the usual gate entry and security tasks involved with defending a base in Afghanistan.

"It's always great to have combative techniques for self-defense as a backup while working in security, and also for self-defense for all Airmen in everyday life," Strehlow said.

The MMA training and fighting comes with some risk of injury, but the Airmen do their best to minimize it.

"My career in the N.D. Air National Guard comes first and I make preparations for safety in my training and competing. I use practice gear while training and I haven't suffered any serious injury in the sport," Bullen said.

Strehlow and Bullen are two Airmen who are taking the U.S. Air Force and security warrior ethos to heart as they continue to hone their bodies and minds in preparation for any hostile situation, and they have been very willing to share their knowledge and techniques with other 119th Security Forces personnel.

"This type of training in combatives is very valuable to Security Forces members and Senior Airman Bullen and Tech. Sgt. Strehlow are taking it to another level. This is another tool in their tool belts, which could help them if they ever find themselves in a life or death situation," said 2nd Lt. Jason Augdahl, of the 119th Security Forces Squadron. ■



Bullen takes aggressive steps toward his opponent May 16 during a mixed martial arts fight as the official waves his hand for the fight to begin in the center stage fighting cage at the Freeman Arena in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota.

Some Kind of Miracle

North Dakota Guardsmen Support Military Youth through Local Hockey Tournament

Story by Staff Sgt. Eric W. Jensen, Joint Force Headquarters

Photos by Staff Sgt. Kayla Staub, 191st Military Police Company

The formation of the North Dakota Roughriders hockey team may have been something of a miracle. Staff Sgt. Paul Rohrer, Staff Sgt. Nicholas Suko, both of the 191st Military Police Company, and Sgt. Michael Herz, of the 141st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, had about eight days to fill their group's roster — positions played by those currently serving and former military members from all branches of service — to compete March 27–29 in the Minnesota Armed Forces Hockey Tournament at the Schwan Super Rink in Blaine, Minnesota. It was short suspense to bring together North Dakota Guardsmen from across the state to gear up, take to the ice and support local military youth. But, a few phone calls and emails got the job done.

“Honestly, it was a spread. We literally had people Friday night in the locker room tearing tags off their gear who had never skated in an indoor rink. And, we had people on the team who have coached hockey, all the way up to the college level. We kind of looked like the ‘Sandlot’ going into it. We had a whole hodgepodge of people,” Rohrer said, referring to the 1993 movie

featuring young baseball players forming a team in their local neighborhood during the summer of 1962.

The 17-member hockey team welcomed players from the 141st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, 164th Regiment Regional Training Institute, 1st Battalion, 112th Aviation Regiment (Security and Support), 2nd Battalion, 285th Aviation Assault Regiment and the 191st Military Police Company, as well as prior service members and one civilian goal tender.

“It was just by luck. By word of mouth. You don't really know all the people (in the Guard) who love and play hockey, until you start asking around,” said Lt. Col. Deb Lien, officer-in-charge of the N.D. Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion, who also played on the team.

And while the ability of team may not have emulated the U.S. Olympians who played the Russians during the 1980 “Miracle on Ice” game at Lake Placid, New York, the Guardsmen and their teammates did create something of which they could be proud. When the tournament was over, the participants had raised



Spc. Derek Palmer, of the 191st Military Police Company, takes the faceoff while playing with the North Dakota Roughriders hockey team during the Minnesota Armed Forces Hockey Tournament at the Schwan Super Rink in Blaine, Minnesota.



The North Dakota Roughriders team was comprised of National Guardsmen and military veterans from across the state. Back row, from left, are Staff Sgt. Kelly Schmidt, of the 191st Military Police Company; Chad Vinchattle, a North Dakota veteran; Staff Sgt. Tyson Mattson, of the 191st Military Police Company; Chief Warrant Officer 2 Scott Dickmeyer, of Det. 2, Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment; Sgt. 1st Class Steven Moser, of the 164th Regiment Regional Training Institute; Spc. Joshua Rebenitsch, of the 191st Military Police Company; Sgt. Michael Herz, of the 141st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade; Staff Sgt. Nicholas Suko, of the 191st Military Police Company; and Sgt. Tanner Stubstad, of the 191st Military Police Company. Middle row, from left, are Capt. Seth Vinchattle, of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 285th Aviation Assault Regiment; Lt. Col. Debra Lien, of the Recruiting and Retention Battalion; Gavin Myers, the team's lone civilian member; Spc. Derek Palmer, of the 191st Military Police Company; and Coach Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Webster, of the 426th Signal Company. Front row, from left, are Chief Warrant Officer 2 Drew Vinchattle, of the 1st Battalion, 112th Aviation Regiment; Spc. Thomas Helseth, of the 191st Military Police Company; and Staff Sgt. Paul Rohrer, of the 191st Military Police Company.

\$3,400 for Defending the Blue Line, a charity that provides hockey equipment and camps, NHL game tickets and grants for sporting association fees for military children.

“I think it’s great that we have all these organizations creating these things for veterans and helping families,” Suko said. “It was good to be able to be a part of that. This is the first annual (tournament) and it went well and sounds like it’s going to be a staple event. We’ll get to keep doing it, which is cool.”

Fittingly, the Roughriders even had representation from legendary hockey coach Herb Brooks, mimicked by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Webster, of the 426th Signal Company, who donned the persona as the team took to the ice. Participants were given the opportunity to compete in two separate divisions, depending upon their team’s level of experience. The North Dakota Roughriders played in the “C” bracket, which accommodates players who have played at the youth hockey- or high school junior varsity-level. At the end of the tournament, they had placed second in their division out of four teams.

That’s not to say that there weren’t team members who were far more immersed in the sport of hockey. Lien, for example, has coached youth, high school and college girls’ hockey for the last 25 years. She said the sport gives youth the opportunity to learn important life skills.

“They learn teamwork. They learn how to accept winning, how to accept defeat, and then how they can get better and learn how to become competitive. They can apply those skills later on in life,

whether it’s getting their first job, in their careers or in their family life,” she said.

Organizations like Defending the Blue Line, Lien said, help families with financial burdens that sometimes are associated with playing hockey. They can help children access equipment and give them a chance to see if the sport is a passion they’d like to pursue.

“At the end of the day, it’s really about an opportunity for young children to participate in a sport. It’s also an opportunity for that family to be together. My brothers have told me over the years that some of their best family times have been with their kids at sporting events. This gives them a chance to experience that,” she said.

While 17 players joined the North Dakota Guardsmen at the Minnesota Armed Forces Hockey Tournament, Rohrer said an additional nine expressed interest in joining the team. Because of that, organizers plan on creating two teams for a tournament in September, which also will benefit Defending the Blue Line. The team also is enjoying the support of generous sponsors, including the West Fargo VFW Cooties and West Fargo VFW Post #7564, who have volunteered to help with jersey and entry fees and travel costs associated with the events.

“It was a lot of fun. It was a huge camaraderie builder, not just for our unit, but with the other team members, as a whole. We don’t get to talk to (other Guardsmen in the state) very often, and to be able to have some face time with them was awesome. It was a good time and I can’t wait to do it again,” Suko said. ■

N.D. Guardsmen Finish Lincoln Marathon

Story by Sgt. Jennifer Joyce, 116th Public Affairs Detachment
Photos courtesy of the Nebraska National Guard

Seven members of the North Dakota National Guard Marathon Team were among the 1,147 participants who ran the 26.2-mile Lincoln Marathon May 3 in Nebraska.

Team coach Maj. Nathan Dicks, of Mankato, Minnesota, led the North Dakota runners in the Lincoln National Guard Marathon, a part of the Lincoln Marathon, finishing the race in 3 hours, 3 minutes. He and Sgt. 1st Class Sharlene Seefeld, of Bismarck, North Dakota, who finished in 4 hours, took first place in their respective age divisions.

Dicks, Seefeld and 1st Lt. Aaron Kramer, of Bismarck, who finished in 3 hours, 25 minutes, qualified for the National Guard Bureau's All-Guard Marathon Team, which is comprised of the fastest 15 female and 40 male participants in the Lincoln National Guard Marathon.

"Marathon preparation requires a lot of self-discipline, endurance and perseverance – highly desirable qualities of all Soldiers and Airmen," said Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, North Dakota adjutant general, who has completed 15 marathons. "Events like this are tremendous training opportunities and I applaud each of our Guard members for their efforts in preparing for and participating in this race."

Seefeld was the only female on North Dakota's team this year. After participating in the 2014 Lincoln National Guard Marathon, she spent the year training with the hopes of qualifying for the Boston Marathon. She missed her goal finish time by mere minutes, but that hasn't left her discouraged.

"I would love to run Boston in 2016, and I'm not going to quit until that happens," she said. "I have great support and as long as I have that, I can accomplish anything." She said that she would be happy to see more female representation on North Dakota's team, as well as more "rookie" participants.

To be considered for the Lincoln National Guard Marathon, participants must prequalify by completing a marathon in a predetermined timeframe within 12 months of the race, or they can register as the "team rookie," which doesn't require prequalification. Capt. Jarrod Simek, of Dickinson, North Dakota, filled that role this year and finished with a time of 4 hours, 50 minutes.

Also participating were veteran runners Maj. Jerod Tufte, of Dawson, North Dakota, who finished the course in 3 hours, 56 minutes; Tech. Sgt. Adam Krueger, of Fargo, North Dakota, who completed the marathon in 4 hours and Staff Sgt. Adam Walsvik, of Menoken, North Dakota, who finished in 4 hours, 2 minutes.

This year marked the 31st anniversary of the National Guard Marathon, which is facilitated solely by volunteers. It has been run in conjunction with the Lincoln Marathon since the early 2000s. According to the National Guard Bureau, the marathon program is designed to instill self-discipline and esprit de corps among Soldiers and Airmen and to enhance quality of life and well-being for the participants. ■



Maj. Nathan Dicks, of Mankato, Minnesota, veteran athlete and North Dakota Marathon Team coach, crosses the finish line May 3 at the Lincoln National Guard Marathon in Nebraska. With a pace of 7 minutes per mile, he finished the marathon in 37th place out of 1,147 Lincoln Marathon participants.



Maj. Jerod Tufte, of Dawson, North Dakota, crosses the finish line May 3 at the Lincoln National Guard Marathon in Nebraska. Tufte was one of seven North Dakota participants in the race.

OPERATION: MINUTEMAN

Story by Senior Airman Desiree Moye, 119th Wing

Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David Lipp, 119th Wing



U.S. Air Force and North Dakota Air National Guard personnel with the 91st Missile Security Forces Squadron and the 219th Security Forces Squadron, from left to right, Staff Sgt. Shareen Mendiola, Tech. Sgt. Nicholas Van Pelt, Staff Sgt. Erik Foss, Airman 1st Class Joseph Pain, Senior Airman Michael McLaughlin and Airman 1st Class Bradley Rayburn listen to a briefing May 20 at the conclusion of an exercise at the Minot Air Force Base launch facility.

The 219th Security Forces Squadron (SFS) participated in an integrated surge May 17-31 with the 91st Missile Wing in Minot, North Dakota, during an annual Operation Minuteman exercise.

The 219th SFS integrated with the 91st Missile Wing during the exercise, which afforded Guardsmen the opportunity to take primary responsibility for an entire sector of the missile field complex and for the drill-status Guardsmen personnel to work and train alongside the full-time National Guard and active-duty Airmen.

Operation Minuteman is a demonstration of the N.D. Air National Guard's total-force capabilities and the ability of the drill-status Guardsmen to perform their war-time duties.

Priorities for this year's exercise were reducing response times for simulated launch facility, or LF, attacks while securing and maintaining U.S. Air Force assets.

"Total-force" is the active-duty Air Force term used for integrating Air National Guard, Reserve and active-duty components together to conduct military missions around the world. The ongoing missions at the Minot Air Force Base missile field complex are an example of that concept. The work done there is considered by the U.S. Air Force as a model to be used at other installations.

Facilities, such as LFs, have comprehensive security systems, which are monitored for suspicious activity. Security Forces Squadron personnel respond to motion-sensing alarms triggered by unsuspected animals and even the wind. Low-threat drills, such as these, are a measurable hindrance to complacency and preparation for incidents that could occur.

"The commanders love having the Guardsmen (attached to the Minot Air Force Base) providing our support and expanding our

mission set," said Chief Master Sgt. Michael Schreiner, 219th SFS manager.

"The 219th detachment is an integral partner to us," said Chief Master Sgt. Chad Schulte, the 91st Security Forces Group chief enlisted manager. "Their seamless integration is unique in the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile community. You can't identify a Guardsman from an active-duty member, we're just one big team."

Active Guard Reserve, or AGR, personnel are full-time staff members. They work jointly with the U.S. Air Force active-duty personnel in the missile fields on a daily basis, and the drill-status Guard members are assimilated into the mix when they are on duty.

The traditional Air Guard personnel train one weekend per month and 15 days each year in their missile field security and support jobs. They sometimes work more than their fifteen days each year — when their civilian schedules allows — and it is beneficial to the military for them to do so. Traditional Guard members also are trained by AGRs on a monthly basis and perform full-time security work in the missile fields.

"The daily augmenting of local personnel gives our group the (edge) to sustain the mission," said Col. Raymund Tembreull, 91st SFG commander. "During turbulent times, when our force is very young, the Guard offers great stability and continuity through manpower and experience."

Additionally, National Guard Bureau Chief Master Sgt. Todd Miskelly, the Security Forces career field manager, met with Airmen and learned about the surge. It was his first visit to the Minot Air Force Base missile field complex and he had a first-hand view of the 219th SFS conducting their duties. ■

Breaking the Mold and Making History

Wilz Promoted to Brigadier General

Story by Sgt. Jennifer Joyce, 116th Public Affairs Detachment

Photos by Chief Warrant Officer 4 Kiel Skager, Joint Force Headquarters



Attendees at the North Dakota Heritage Center last month witnessed history being made within the ranks of the North Dakota National Guard as Giselle "Gigi" Wilz, of Bismarck, was promoted to brigadier general. She became the organization's first female Army Guard general officer.

"Brig. Gen. Wilz has proven time and again her value to the North Dakota National Guard," Gov. Jack Dalrymple said. "Service and strong leadership are the hallmarks of her military career. I wish her and her team all the best during their tour of duty in Europe and I know that they will represent North Dakota very well."

Wilz has since departed for a yearlong mission in Sarajevo, Bosnia, where she serves as the commander and senior military representative of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Headquarters there. While overseas, Wilz's role will be to advise local authorities on military aspects of security sector reform and command NATO forces operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She will be accompanied by four other North Dakota Guard Soldiers.

"Today we are promoting the most qualified colonel in the North Dakota Army National Guard to brigadier general," said Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, North Dakota adjutant general who presided over the ceremony. "Gigi Wilz has enjoyed a stellar military career and has worked hard for this promotion. She has made a difference in the lives of so many Soldiers across our organization as a mentor and leader".

Wilz, a native of Richardton, North Dakota, comes from strong military roots. Her father, the late Charles Wilz, was a Korean War veteran who retired from the N.D. National Guard as a colonel after 39 years of service. Three of her five siblings, retired Col. Greg Wilz, retired Maj. Gary Wilz and Lt.

"Always respect the Soldiers that are counting on you. Do your best and do what's right."

Col. Grant Wilz, also served as officers with the N.D. Army National Guard, along with her nephew Capt. Justin Wilz. Between them, they have more than 165 years of military service.

“We thank her and the entire Wilz family for their service. They have dedicated themselves to our state and nation, and represent selflessness and honorable patriotism,” Sprynczynatyk said.

Former North Dakota adjutant general, retired Maj. Gen. Keith Bjerke and Wilz’s brother, retired Army National Guard Col. Greg Wilz, placed brigadier general officer’s shoulder boards on her Army Blue coat.

Prior to the placement of the shoulder boards, Wilz donned a different “Army Blue” coat, since the coat for general officers has some differences. For example, the Army Blue uniform for a general officer has 1.5 inch gold braid on each sleeve instead of .75 inch braid consisting of two, .25 inch gold braids and the officer’s branch color in between.

After the promotion, Sprynczynatyk administered the oath of office for Wilz’s new rank. He then presented her with a red, U.S. Army brigadier general officer’s flag with a white five-pointed star in the center. This flag will be posted whenever she attends a formal event.

“This promotion wasn’t an expectation,” Wilz said. “But, my father always believed that I should be a general. I think we all dream about it, but for the last 10 or 15 years, this has been something I’ve been striving for.” She said that she hopes the things she’s done throughout her career have set a positive example for both men and women. “If somehow I’ve knocked a few barriers down for females along the way, then that’s a great thing, too.”

Enlisting with the 191st Military Police Company in 1983, Wilz later commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1986 at age 19, becoming one of the youngest officers in the N.D. Army National Guard. Throughout her 32-year career, she has served with the 136th Quartermaster Battalion, the 164th Engineer Battalion, the 141st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB) and Joint Force Headquarters. She has held a variety of leadership positions within the organization, from platoon leader to, most recently, the N.D. Army chief of staff.

Wilz has deployed overseas twice before. In 1990, she served with the 132nd Quartermaster Company in Operation Desert Storm/Desert Shield. In 2009, she mobilized to Kosovo with the 141st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade for a NATO international peacekeeping mission there. In 2013, she commanded a task force in Africa during a 10-day exercise.

She credits her success to the Soldiers she has served with and encourages Guardsmen to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them and to “stay a team no matter what.” She also thanked a number of mentors in the audience for their leadership and advice that helped guide her career.

“Always respect the Soldiers that are counting on you,” Wilz said. “Do your best and do what’s right.”

While Wilz is the first Army Guard general officer from the N.D. National Guard, she is the second female general officer in the state. The first to earn the distinction was Maj. Gen. Terry Scherling, of the N.D. Air National Guard, who retired in 2009. ■



Top: Former North Dakota adjutant general, retired Maj. Gen. Keith Bjerke (left) and Wilz’s brother, retired Army National Guard Col. Greg Wilz, affix brigadier general officer shoulder boards on Giselle “Gigi” Wilz during her promotion ceremony.

Above: Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, North Dakota adjutant general, administers the oath of office for Brig. Gen. Giselle “Gigi” Wilz May 20 at the Heritage Center, in Bismarck, North Dakota.



North Dakota's 'Best Warriors' Vie for Regional Titles

Story by Staff Sgt. Eric W. Jensen, Joint Force Headquarters

Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Jimmy McGuire, Wyoming Army National Guard

Spc. Nigel Helley, of the 426th Signal Company, leaps through an obstacle course May 13 during the Region VI Best Warrior Competition at Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center in Wyoming.

Sixteen Soldiers representing eight states' Army National Guards competed in the Region VI Best Warrior Competition May 11-14 at the Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center in Wyoming. Among them were two North Dakota Army Guardsmen. Staff Sgt. Jason Dittus, of Bismarck, North Dakota, a member of the 818th Engineer Company (Sapper), and Spc. Nigel Helley, of Fargo, North Dakota, assigned to the 426th Signal Company. Both displayed extreme tenacity, determination and physical and mental toughness while contending for top honors.

When the results were announced at the end of the closely-contested, four-day competition, Dittus was named the Best Warrior in the noncommissioned officer category. He now will go on to compete at the National Guard Bureau's "All-Guard" competition, which brings together the top Army Guard Soldiers in the nation. That event will be held in June at Camp Williams, Utah.

"Staff Sgt. Dittus and Spc. Helley both earned the honor of representing North Dakota in regional competition with their performances at our annual state-level competition last summer. They represent the best of the best in our organization and can be proud of what they've accomplished," said Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, North Dakota adjutant general. "Considering only a handful of Soldiers win regional titles, Staff Sgt. Dittus' performance was extraordinary. To prepare yourself to be competitive as a Best Warrior takes a tremendous amount of time and commitment. I know that Staff Sgt. Dittus will be ready and I wish him the best of luck at the national event in June."

In recent years, two other North Dakota Guard Soldiers have qualified to take part in the national Best Warrior Competition. Staff Sgt. Adam Walsvik, of the 188th Engineer Company

(Vertical), competed in 2009 and Staff Sgt. Ryan Lindberg, of the 817th Engineer Company (Sapper), won the "All-Guard" competition in 2011, later competing at the Army-wide event.

At Camp Guernsey, Dittus and Helley competed against Soldiers from Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington and Wyoming. From the rolling hills of Camp Grafton Training Center, near Devils Lake, North Dakota, to the rugged canyons and steeper elevation in southern Wyoming, Dittus said he noticed a shift in the physical demands presented between the state and regional competitions. Best Warrior competitors traverse a gauntlet of tasks and events designed to test their competencies as Soldiers, ranging from marksmanship and drill and ceremony to written and physical fitness tests.

"We weren't bussed anywhere. We rucked (marched with a full pack) to just about every training site. They pushed us a lot harder, physically, then at the state event," he said. "And I've never performed the land navigation event in such unusual terrain. The elevation of the hills and the cliffs was a complete game-changer for me. You definitely noticed the severe elevation changes if you're a North Dakota guy used to flatter terrain."

While many of the events at the state and regional competitions mirrored one another, Dittus said evaluators at Camp Guernsey did throw some curve balls. One of the most difficult events, for him, was presenting a series of briefings in front of an audience of competition facilitators. Soldiers gave 5-minute presentations about their military and civilian backgrounds and also about their states' histories.

"That's (the briefs) something that I've never encountered before in any of the other competitions," Dittus said. "The biggest thing

you can do to perform well is master the basics. You need to know common Soldier tasks to a point where you can still perform them in stressful scenarios.”

One of those scenarios was the “Pandora’s Box” event, a test that some of the Soldiers might have rather left unopened. Competitors were blindfolded and tasked with opening a foot locker filled with parts from three disassembled weapon systems, including an M9 pistol, M16 rifle and M249 squad automatic weapon. Their objective was to reassemble each of those and perform a functions check to make sure they had put together the various parts correctly. Dittus was the only Soldier to successfully complete the challenge.

“That was a really big event for me,” he said.

Dittus, who wound up winning the competition by only one point, said “Pandora’s Box” may have been the deciding event for his success. In fact, the competition in the noncommissioned officer category was so close that the second and third place winners scored exactly the same

until a written essay tie-breaker decided their rankings.

“Every year, the states that host this (regional) competition really step it up a notch in challenging and evaluating our Soldiers. This year was no different, and the Wyoming Army National Guard did an incredible job organizing a successful event,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Brad Heim, state command sergeant major for the N.D. Army National Guard, who attended the regional competition. “Our Soldiers did extremely well because they were ready to compete. With his win, Staff Sgt. Dittus truly left nothing on the table. In the end, it was his drive and determination that eventually earned him the top spot.”

In preparation for the regional competition, North Dakota’s Soldiers studied at Camp Grafton to be ready for any of the potential Best Warrior challenges and tests. Dittus said he expects to do the same training before the national competition. Additionally, he’s had help and mentoring from his sponsor, Sgt. 1st Class Jason Lothspeich. Lothspeich was the 2010

Best Warrior in state competition. He and Dittus are virtually neighbors, living across the street from one another in Bismarck. Lothspeich also serves as Dittus’ platoon sergeant in the 818th Engineer Company (Sapper).

Representing his unit, ultimately, is what motivated Dittus to excel in the Best Warrior Competition. He said securing a state victory was a great feeling, but the regional win made him even more proud, since he represented the entire N.D. Army National Guard.

“As soon as they called my name at the regional competition, I thought ‘this is a whole new level now.’ There’s pride in knowing you have that responsibility to represent North Dakota. That’s something that motivates me now,” he said. “I want to do the best I possibly can. I’m happy I am where I’m at and I have the best intentions to perform.”

In his civilian profession, Dittus is a wind turbine technician in New Salem, North Dakota. He serves as a combat engineer and squad leader with his unit. ■



Top left, Staff Sgt. Jason Dittus, of the 818th Engineer Company, puts together the final weapon in “Pandora’s Box,” an event at the Region VI Best Warrior Competition May 11-14 at Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center in Wyoming. Blindfolded competitors were given a foot locker with three unassembled weapons systems and were given 15 minutes to put together as many as they could. Dittus was the only warrior to complete the mission.

Below, Staff Sgt. Jason Dittus dons his protective mask May 13 during the Region VI Best Warrior Competition. Competitors were evaluated on their ability to react to a simulated chemical, biological, nuclear attack.

Bottom left, Spc. Nigel Helley eyes the finish line at the end of a 12-mile ruck march during the Region VI Best Warrior competition May 14 at Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center.



Good Grief: Mentors Dedicated

Story by Sgt. Jennifer Joyce,
116th Public Affairs Detachment

How long do we grieve the loss of a loved one? Well, how high is 'up?'

That's the answer Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt provides when asked this question. Wolfelt, a grief counselor, was this year's keynote speaker at the 21st Annual TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors) National Military Survivor Seminar held May 22-25 in Washington, D.C.

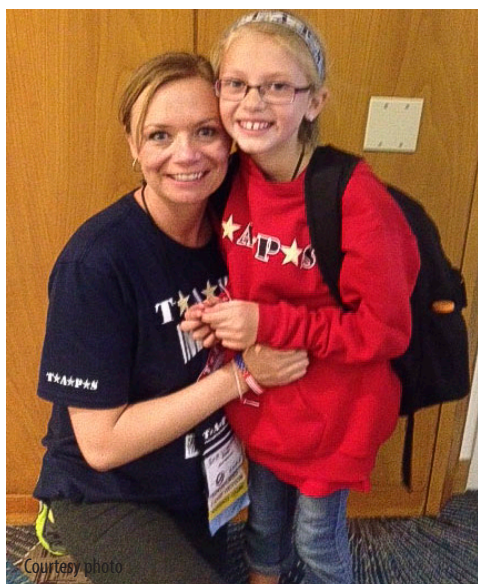
TAPS "offers compassionate care to all those grieving the death of a loved one serving in our Armed Forces," according to their website. This year, 35 North Dakota survivors attended the seminar and Good Grief Camp. The camp is designed specifically for children and adolescent survivors. Ten North Dakota service members also attended as mentors for children enrolled in the Good Grief Camp along with a North Dakota survivor who served as a mentor group leader.

"The Good Grief Camp helps children



Courtesy photo

Bradon Wallace plays Jenga with his mentor, Shawna Pfaff, during the TAPS Good Grief Camp last month. According to TAPS, Good Grief Camp functions and activities "show the children that they can still have a strong connection to the military life they grew up with."



Courtesy photo

Messa Kuehl stands with her mentor, Staff Sgt. Erin Weaver, of the 119th Wing, during this year's TAPS Good Grief Camp in Washington, D.C. The camp was held May 22-25 in conjunction with the annual National Military Survivor Seminar.

understand that, even though they've suffered a loss, they aren't forgotten by the military," said Staff Sgt. Kaila Margheim, of the 119th Wing. "In the camp, kids get to be with their peers who all have suffered some kind of loss and they can connect with each other."

Special Connections

Good Grief Camp attendees don't find out who their mentors are until the camp begins. Some years, youth participants are assigned to mentors they've had in the past, as was the case for 8-year-old Messa Kuehl. Staff Sgt. Erin Weaver, of the 119th Wing, has been her mentor for two consecutive years.

"Messa was excited to have Erin as a mentor again," said Messa's mother, Amy Kuehl. "They've stayed in touch over the

past year and I like that she has somebody other than a parent to talk to about her Dad." Messa's Dad, David Kuehl, was killed in action in 2007, when Messa was just 8-months-old.

"The TAPS Good Grief Camp keeps the bond between the military and the family alive and it gives kids the chance to talk about their experiences," said Weaver. "If Messa cries, I cry. If she's happy, I'm happy. I'm there for her."

Shawna Pfaff also mentored her assigned attendee, Bradon Wallace, for the second year. Bradon lost his mother, Brittany, in 2012. Pfaff's relationship with Bradon is unique because she and Brittany deployed together with the 957th Engineer Company in 2003.

"Sometimes he asks questions about his mom and what we did during the deployment," Pfaff said. "I tell him that I

ate Time for Youth Survivors

remember that his mom had a very pretty smile.”

Pfaff said that the Good Grief Camp is a “safe place” for kids who have lost loved ones. “They know that there are people who will always appreciate what their loved ones did for our country.”

Chief Warrant Officer 1 Janet Nitschke has attended six TAPS seminars, three as a staff member and three as a mentor. She has had the opportunity to mentor three different children and she has noticed significant benefits of the Good Grief Camp.

“TAPS improves their grieving process. They are put in a safe environment where they’re allowed to ask questions and receive any support they need,” she said. “They get one-on-one attention the whole time and they are able to cope, feel and communicate any way they need to.”

Like Pfaff, Nitschke also deployed with the 957th in 2003. She said her experience contributes to the bond she develops with the kids she mentors.

“I’ve experienced both personal and military loss so I feel that I can make a strong connection with the kids,” she said. “Every experience is different and I can empathize when I’m working with them. When they allow themselves to trust me and connect with me, it’s very rewarding.”

Growing Up with Grief

At TAPS, it is common for people to share their experiences during their “grief journey.” Just as people change as they age, so does that journey. Because of the unique situations that people face at different stages of life, the TAPS Good Grief Camp is divided into age groups to provide attendees with resources for their individual grief journeys and activities that pertain to their interests.

Jayne Lantt, 13, lost her brother, Thomas Doyle, to suicide in September 2012. The bond she formed with her mentor, Maggie, from Washington, helped her open up. She also enjoyed the activities within her age division this year because they were largely centered around music. Music, for her, is therapeutic and it has helped her grieve her loss.

“It was cool hearing the different types of music and seeing what other people liked,” she said. She added that music helped keep the atmosphere fun so it was easy to talk to other people.

“I’m shy,” she said. “But it was easy talking to people because they could understand where I’m coming from.”

Her brother, Burt Doyle, 18, also attended the Good Grief Camp. As an attendee in the oldest age division within the camp, he found the entire experience overwhelmingly positive.

“I would go back again, no question,” he said. “I like being able to talk about him (Thomas). The camp allows me to open up more to people and be myself again.”

Staying in Touch

North Dakota is the only state to attend TAPS as a group accompanied by staff members. The past nine years of the state’s involvement with TAPS has enhanced the bond between survivor families.

“What I expected was camaraderie and closeness, and that’s exactly what we got,” said Adrienne Linde. She and her son, Eric, attended TAPS for the first time this year.

Eric said that the relationship he developed with his assigned mentor, Sgt. Joe Nunez, an active-duty Marine stationed in Quantico, Virginia, was the most valuable part of his experience.

“He is someone I look up to,” he said. “I consider him a good friend now and I keep in contact with him on a daily basis.”

The Good Grief Camp mentors are paired with children to be their companions for the duration of the annual TAPS seminar. They also are encouraged to stay in touch with the children to assist them with their grief journey after they return home. For many of the mentors, TAPS is a way for them to give back to their Guard family.

“If something ever happened to me, I would want my Guard family to connect with my kids,” said Pfaff. “We are a military family. We take care of our own.” ■



From left, Chief Warrant Officer 1 Janet Nitschke, Adam Alkhafaji, Josh Ulmer and Staff Sgt. Rebecca Peterson, of the 119th Wing, visit the National Mall last month in downtown Washington, D.C. during the TAPS Good Grief Camp.

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Photo by Mr. Bill Prokopyk, North Dakota National Guard Public Affairs

Staff Sgt. Monte Roemmich, of Det. 1, 3622nd Maintenance Company, touches the new POW/MIA Memorial May 25 after the conclusion of the annual Memorial Day ceremony at the North Dakota Veterans Cemetery, south of Mandan, North Dakota. The memorial, still under construction, was unveiled for the public at the ceremony and is scheduled to be dedicated next month.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp, 119th Wing

Master Sgt. Nathan Carlson, of the 119th Medical Group, demonstrates cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) techniques last month at the Minot Air Force Base Clinic in Minot, North Dakota. Carlson was recognized by a U.S. Air Force Global Strike Command team as one of three outstanding performers in the clinic during a recent nuclear surety staff assisted visit.

Photo by Spc. Brandi Schmidt, 116th Public Affairs Detachment



Soldiers with the 957th Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge) complete the final stages of a dry-span bridge mission last month during their annual training. About 75 Soldiers from the unit conducted training at Fort Wainwright in Alberta, Canada, in support of Canadian-led Exercise Maple Resolve. More than 900 Canadian, British and U.S. service members participated in the exercise.

Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp, 119th Wing



219th Security Forces Squadron members, Airman 1st Class Angela Lage, left, and Airman 1st Class Alex Pauling, perform an area sweep May 20 as they look for anything suspicious at the Minot Air Force Base missile alert facility.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Brett Miller, Joint Force Headquarters



Command Sgt. Maj. Brad Heim, of Bismarck, North Dakota, assumed duties as the N.D. National Guard's state command sergeant major last month from Command Sgt. Harley Schwind, Jr., of Mandan, North Dakota.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp, 119th Wing

Members of the 119th Wing pose for a group photo April 30 with youth from the Frazee, Minnesota, middle school and high school during a tour at the N.D. Air National Guard Base in Fargo, North Dakota.

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Email high-resolution photos to Sgt. Jennifer Joyce, N.D. Guardian editor, at jennifer.m.joyce2.mil@mail.mil.



Two N.D. Units Conduct Training at National Training Center

Story and photos by Spc. Brandi Schmidt,
116th Public Affairs Detachment

More than 100 Soldiers with the 136th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB) Headquarters and the 426th Signal Company conducted their annual training this month at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California. NTC provides an opportunity for rotational training units to simulate a real-life combat environment that most home stations cannot replicate on a large scale. Evaluators were assigned to each unit for the duration of the training to observe, coach and train Soldiers.

Soldiers prepared for this year's training by practicing their military occupation specialty (MOS) and basic Soldier skills. The full-time staff also put in extra time to for personnel and logistic planning.

"We are from North Dakota where our work ethic is high and our drive for perfection is considered a priority," said 135th CSSB Command Sgt. Maj. Joe Lovelace.

North Dakota Soldiers, along with their active-duty and Reservist counterparts, conducted a tactical roll-out for their area of operations and then sustained operations for a 2-week period. During those 14 days, Soldiers encountered attacks from the enemy and had to respond in defensive and tactical positions. They also encountered situations posing social and cultural considerations including extremism and terrorism, poverty and corruption and political factors.

The 136th CSSB commander, Lt. Col. Davina French, described the training at NTC as "unique, invaluable and non-replicable."

"We are coming together with multiple components. Active-duty, National Guard and Reserve troops are working together to carry out the specific tasks for mission success," she said. "We are overcoming differences in training, skills and even personalities and learning from each of the echelons. Our veterans, or more experienced Soldiers, are taking the newer Soldiers under their wings to ensure they can take away as much as possible from this experience."

The 136th CSSB personnel performed

as the task force battalion, where several other units were under their command. They held positions in the staff, cook section and chaplain services. Reserve and active-duty units held positions in maintenance, medical and refueling operations.

"We are working really well together. I'm learning a lot in my MOS, as well as teaching the other components that are with us in the cook section how to do certain things," said Spc. Kendra Ulmer, of the 132nd Quartermaster Company.

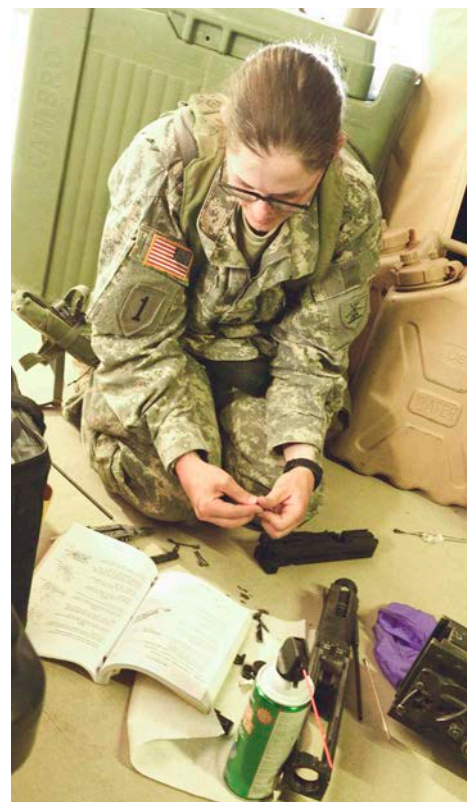
Ulmer volunteered to participate in the training to gain more experience in her field.

"They are teaching me how to use the portable kitchen by giving me tips and pointers. It really helps when good leadership is there to oversee everything," she said.

The 426th Signal Company had Soldiers in several locations across NTC conducting data and phone service missions. They were attached to a Wisconsin National Guard aviation unit. At one point during their training, they lost communication for 36 hours. During this time, Soldiers had to learn how to make survival decisions, enact

basic combat skills and maintain their MOS skills to ensure success during their mission.

"The biggest challenge is our communication loss," said 1st Sgt. Troy Skelton. "But it allows the junior enlisted to learn how to survive without leadership, experience things like rationing of ammo and other necessities. They are gaining a lot of noncommissioned officer training and leadership skills." ■



Right, Staff Sgt. Stephanie Thielges, of the 136 CSSB, cleans a .50 caliber weapon after it had been used in convoy operations during a large-scale combat environment training exercise at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, this month.

Below, Soldiers with the 426th Signal Company stand up a satellite tower to transmit data during their mission this month at the National Training Center.



Chaplains' Corner:

Leading with Empathy

By Chaplain (Lt. Col.) James Cheney,
119th Wing

A big part of leadership development is recognizing that everybody has something to give. Every single person has a gift to give and way to make a difference in the world. The enigma of being human represents many relational challenges because there is so much that goes into being human: temperament, personality and family of origin. Mind, body, and soul, every person represents a universe — a mystery. Leadership development involves having the courage to enter into that mystery.

The movement of any individual or group of individuals towards a goal involves recognizing where they are. One also would afford the group or individual the opportunity to understand that you as a leader appreciate where they are, who they are and what they represent. This represents the fundamentals of a relationship. We have to know and appreciate people in order to be effective leaders. Pope Francis has reminded his servants of the Church that we must smell like the sheep.

A relationship foundation is the cornerstone of any movement toward a

goal. Also, we need to have a person's best interest at heart by providing, teaching and imparting the skills to live life well. In short, we must do our best to inculcate virtue. Virtue is the learned habit or inclination toward decisions that bear the fruit and recognition of excellence. Helping those we are privileged to serve with stretch goals often helps a person understand that their decisions are important and matter a great deal. How do you want to make the world, this organization and your community a better place? Contributive goal visioning helps to draw us out of ourselves and recognize how we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Finally, it is important to understand that nobody is perfect. In other words, we can't give up on people, and we can't "throw them under the bus" because we find leadership decisions difficult. When faced with our own imperfections and other peoples' imperfections, we are bound to encounter interior tensions and anxiety. Our emotions and interior drama often are a side show that detracts from staying on course. Embracing the discipline of interior self-control helps give us the ability to put our best foot forward on the journey toward the



best interests of the individual and the common good.

So much of military service and heritage is reflected in the Scripture: "greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13)." Leadership development ought to include enough charity to lay down our lives to the difficulties of being human. For the ordered direction of a better shop, workplace, individual and community, lay it down. ■

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Bismarck Unit Conducts International Training

By Spc. Brandi Schmidt,
116th Public Affairs Detachment

About 75 Soldiers with the 957th Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge) conducted their annual training event last month at Fort Wainwright in Alberta, Canada, in support of Canadian-led

Exercise Maple Resolve. The exercise required multi-national and tactical level participation from more than 900 military members representing Canadian, British and U.S. forces.

Exercise Maple Resolve's three phases tested the unit's planning, combative and defensive skills. During phase one, the forces moved troops and equipment to operating areas. Troops encountered the enemy during phase two, and they

applied counter-attack and defensive skills during phase three.

"Camaraderie and morale has been at its highest during this annual training," said Capt. Lorna Meidinger, 957th Engineer Company commander.

The unit was notified of their planned involvement in Exercise Maple Resolve in December 2014. The unit immediately began preparation to ensure optimal readiness for the large-scale mission. ■



Photo by Mr. Bill Prokopyk, North Dakota National Guard Public Affairs

Retired Maj. Gen. Alexander Macdonald renders remarks May 25 during the Memorial Ceremony at the North Dakota Veterans Cemetery south of Mandan, North Dakota. Macdonald was the North Dakota adjutant general when the cemetery broke ground in 1990. The theme for this year's ceremony was "25 Years of Honor." About 1,250 people attended the annual ceremony sponsored by the N.D. National Guard.