

The Coyote

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South Dakota Army National Guard

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OIF II

SPECIAL EDITION

In the last issue of the Coyote, Soldiers from the 129th MPAD had an opportunity to travel to Afghanistan and report on the 109th Engineer Group. We featured the Coyote issue as a special edition, to call out all South Dakota Army National Guard units serving in Operation Enduring Freedom.

The 129th was fortunate enough again to send reporters to Iraq, and report on SDARNG units who were serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom II. We were able to visit the 153rd Engineer Battalion and the 2/147th Field Artillery Battalion.

It is unfortunate that we were not able to visit and report on other SDARNG units that participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom I, Operation Noble Eagle and other peacekeeping operations across the globe.

We are pleased, however, to bring to you those South Dakota Army National Guard units we were able to cover. Enjoy the issue.

1st Lt. Anthony Deiss
Editor

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153RD ENGINEER BATTALION - 147TH FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION
216TH ENGINEER DETACHMENT
OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM II

Engineers continue lineage of service

By 1st Lt. Anthony Deiss
129th MPAD

FOB DUKE, Iraq – Every National Guard unit has a story, a history, a moment in time that forever solidifies it as a viable component of our nation's defense.

The 153rd Engineer Battalion of the South Dakota Army National Guard has a history as rich and as proud as the Colonial militiamen before them, who fought for their freedom more than 200 years earlier. The 153rd continues to fight for a nation and a people whose freedoms and liberties are threatened today.

The Huron-based unit has not been mobilized since it was federally recognized as the 153rd Engineer Battalion on September 15, 1956. Prior to that, it served in Alaska during the Korean War as part of the 196th Regimental Combat Team. During World War II, the 153rd mobilized as a company of the 109th Engineers and later served with the 132nd Engineer Regiment (Combat). Now, the 153rd begins a new chapter in the unit's history.

On December 7, 2003, the 153rd Engineer Battalion reported for federal active duty in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. It was one of three South Dakota Guard units activated to support operations in Iraq during the second round of troop rotations since the war in Iraq began in March of 2003.

The 153rd began mobilizing through Fort Carson, Colo., to train and prepare for its tour in Iraq. After spending more than two months at Fort Carson, the unit finally arrived in theater on February 22, 2004. After arriving in Kuwait, the unit spent a few weeks staging equipment and preparing for the move into Iraq.

Once in Iraq, the 153rd were tasked with a variety of missions. Ranging from force protection and general engineering projects to cordon and search and route clearance operations.

"The Soldiers have done extremely well," said Lt. Col. Kevin Griese, battalion commander. "We've set the standard everywhere we have been in theater. There is no comparison between our Soldiers from South Dakota and other Soldiers that we have worked with here in country."

**"There's the adage that 'Freedom isn't Free.'
You really don't know that or it doesn't hit home
until you deploy to war and experience it."**

Lt. Col. Kevin Griese

The main mission for the 153rd was Task Force Pathfinder & Iron Claw; clearing convoy routes of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Every line company for the battalion has rotated through this mission, said Griese.

"IEDs are the primary threat within country and the primary killer right now. The Soldiers get a lot of satisfaction and comfort knowing that they are performing a mission that is relevant."

The battalion cleared more than 6000 kilometers of roads and located more than 100 IEDs since they took on the pathfinder mission.

"Pathfinder is not really a fun mission, but when you find IEDs that saves people



Photos by 153rd Engineer Battalion

Soldiers from the 153rd Engineer Battalion, watch the demolition of an IED discovered during Task Force Iron Claw. Spc. Todd Irvin informs his track commander that the blast is complete.

lives in convoys it makes you feel pretty good," said Sgt. Joseph Riddel, Company B.

The 153rd also conducted cordon and search operations. Working alongside light infantry units, Soldiers from the 153rd would use mine detectors to find hidden weapons caches in urban terrain and throughout the countryside.

"The infantry guys would do their thing and we'd be there helping them find weapons caches and they'd have us dispose of them afterwards," said Spc. Lee Plott, Company B.

"The days were long but we would actually have results (finding weapons) almost every time we'd go out."

When weapons caches were found, the Soldiers would then use their demolition expertise to destroy the weapons.

"Being engineers we always like to work with explosives," Plott said.

Elements of the battalion also provided



Photos by 153rd Engineer Battalion

Soldiers from the 153rd Engineer Battalion prepare to search for weapons caches during Operation Chuck Wagon outside Amariyah, Iraq.

to do. The fact that we did our jobs and did it well – probably saved some lives."

When the 153rd wasn't busy making the roads safer for American and Coalition forces, searching for weapons caches or assisting in major combat operations, the Soldiers were helping to make many of the bases safer. The battalion constructed Hesco (force protection) and concertina wire barriers, guard towers and trenches at a variety of different forward operating bases. They built various rifle ranges, detainee facilities and improved many of the Soldiers' living quarters.

During its deployment, the 153rd faced many challenges. From the stress of mission requirements and hazards to the hardship of being separated from family – the challenges were not only physical, but mental.

Along with the challenges, the experience was also met with many highlights.

"It's kind of neat to be able to go out and actually know your making a difference finding all these weapons caches," said Spc. Davin Johnson, Company B.

"The best part was that we got to blow

the weapons up – that was worth it – probably one of the main highlights!"

And for most Soldiers, something they said they will always take away from this combat zone is new experiences, friendships and life lessons.

"Being over here for a year, you build life-long bonds that will last forever. We sacrificed a lot leaving home, everybody did, but it was something that had to be done. I think I'm just going to more or less take home and relish the stuff that I got out of this experience, and the most of what I did over here and learned," said Plott.

After finishing up a year-long tour in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Soldiers from the 153rd have return home to their families, friends and communities. They will begin to pick up their lives where they left off over a year ago. The Soldiers of the 153rd join the ranks of all the veterans before them, knowing the cost of freedom.

"There's the adage that 'Freedom isn't Free.' You really don't know that or it doesn't hit home until you deploy to war and experience it," said Griese.



Photos by 1Lt. Anthony Deiss

Spc. Wade Anderson of the 2nd Battalion, 147th Field Artillery Brigade provides convoy security along a roadside in Iraq.

Artillery unit helps secure Iraq's future

By 1st Lt. Anthony Deiss
129th MPAD

TALLIL AIR BASE, Iraq – Known for firing the “big guns,” 2/147th Field Artillery Battalion is equipped and trained to generate “steel rain.”

But when mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom in December 2003, the South Dakota Army National Guard unit wasn't called upon for its multiple launch rocket capabilities it was comfortable in performing.

Instead, the Soldiers were called upon for stability and support operations such as securing critical sites, guarding prisoners of war and military police missions.

“One thing the artillery does really well, is they are structured to do non-standard missions,” said Lt. Col. Jeff Marlette, the battalion commander. “It's amazing how well the artillery structure fits into other missions, so many of the support pieces are there.”

One main mission for the battalion

was providing convoy security for Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR), a civilian defense industry contractor.

Marlette said the battalion would escort KBR convoys transporting food, water, supplies and petroleum products. Running 12 to 15 escorts a day throughout Iraq, Soldiers faced harsh conditions and hostile environments. Despite the challenges, many recall the convoy operations as a rewarding experience.

“The convoys really helped to make the time go by quickly,” said Staff Sgt. James Knox, of Headquarters and Headquarters Service Battery (HHS). “You see so much on the road – the Iraqi people, the culture, the way they live and the kids waving on the side of the road. It was a great experience.”

The unit completed more than 2,500 escort missions – driving nearly 1.26 million miles driven throughout the country.

According to Marlette, the unit provided security of captured enemy ammunition

(CEA) at 18 different ammunition supply points (ASP). Everything from large bombs to mortars and rifle ammunition were at these sites. The battalion was also charged with providing security at several of the ASPs until civilian Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) could arrive. Once on site, EOD would then destroy or dispose of the CEA to keep it out of insurgent hands.

The 2/147th hauled and escorted more than 145,000 tons of ordnance. Units logged another 500,000 miles during this mission. In all, the battalion logged over 2 million total miles on all its equipment during the deployment.

“Equipment readiness was a big factor,” Marlette said. “Our Soldiers and maintenance sections worked hard to keep us running at a 97 percent rate. That is excellent considering the conditions over there.”

Working with and earning the support of the local Iraqis also contributed to the success of the CEA missions. The Soldiers worked along side Iraqi National Guard and Police while securing ASPs, and also many general laborers.

“In every site that we worked – through the ASP's and other areas – we had Iraqis come up and share information,” Marlette said. “We had a gentleman that showed us where there were 30,000 tank rounds just laying out in the desert, that someone could have made Improvised Explosive Devices with.”

Winning the support of the Iraqi people was made easier with the help of the battalions Medical Civil Affairs Project (MEDCAP).

According to 1st Lt. Sean Kenny, the battalion's physician's assistant, the unit would visit local Iraqi schools and villages and render medical aid to those who needed it. The MEDCAPs also gave some of the Soldiers a chance to interact with the Iraqi people on a more personal level.

“When we do the MEDCAP missions, we get to go out and see the kids. They want to play soccer, shake your hand and get their picture taken with you,” said Kenny. “It gives you a couple hours of fun.”

Along with rendering medical aid to the Iraqis, the unit also provided basic comfort

items for the local populations they visited. Food, water, clothing, shoes and school supplies were a few of the items that were distributed.

“They love it when we come out,” said Marlette. “The Iraqis get very excited and they are generally very polite, friendly and very thankful.”

The unit was also involved in a few high profile missions. According to Marlette, one mission that made headlines involved A Battery Soldiers, who were tasked to escort the British Black Watch Regiment from southern Iraq to an area just south of Baghdad, in order to support American Soldiers for the Fallujah offensive.

“One of my personal goals while in Iraq was to not be anywhere that CNN had an interest,” wrote 1st Lt. Keith Voss in a battalion newsletter article. “While this attention certainly made us concerned about operational security, it did feel pretty good watching the news and seeing one of our Humvees going by.”

With the mission now complete, the equipment loaded and their bags packed, the unit returned back to South Dakota at the end of February.

After a year in Iraq, the accomplishments of the 2/147th Field Artillery Battalion have undoubtedly made Iraq a safer place. The battalion worked hard to collect and secure large caches of enemy ammunition, to protect military and civilian convoys and earn the support of the Iraqi people.

“It's an awesome experience to witness what a well-trained, clearly-focused battalion of Soldiers can accomplish when they are put to the task,” said Marlette. “I think all of us, as Soldiers, knew we could be successful in accomplishing our mission if we were mobilized. Now, our Soldiers proved it.”

The Coyote

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Photos by 1Lt. Anthony Deiss

Soldiers from 2/147th Field Artillery Battalion provides roadside security as their convoy passes by.

Engineers search for hidden IEDs

Spc. Mark Watson
129th MPAD

FOB DUKE, Iraq – Driving around Iraq looking for bombs may sound a bit crazy, but that is exactly what members of the 153rd Engineer Battalion did during their year-long deployment to the country.

Improvised Explosive Devices are the number one killer of people in Iraq and the job handed to the South Dakota National Guard Soldiers has become one of the most dangerous jobs in Iraq.

After the initial, “you want us to do what?” the Soldiers countered the danger of the job with high-tech, highly armored vehicles that locate the bombs and then dig them from their hiding spots.

Two of the vehicles the Soldiers used locate the hidden devices, and a third digs the IED up and disables it.

“The equipment we use is new to the military to locate IEDs,” said 1st Lt. Greg Darlow, the Company A commander. “They were used to locate minefields, but it works the same way. It’s basically a huge metal detector on a dune buggy.”

The vehicle operators, one in a Husky and the other a Muircat, drive along the road listening for the tell-tale sound of their equipment sensing metal in the ground.

Once the operator gets a “hit,” he can pinpoint the exact location of the buried object. He marks it with paint and calls in



153rd Engineer Battalion photo

Staff Sgt. Dan Poppen and Spc. Justin Clarke prepare to blow up an IED Task Force Pathfinder discovered buried on a bridge outside Fallujah, Iraq.

the Buffalo, another highly armored vehicle with a remote control arm, that can dig into the ground to explore the potential hazard.

“It would be an adrenaline rush,” Darlow said referring to getting a hit. You really didn’t know what you had found. It might be a coffee can or garbage, and the next time it might be an acetylene bottle

filled with PE-4, (a high explosive.)”

One of the Soldiers assigned to the Pathfinder missions said finding an IED was both rewarding as well as nerve-racking.

“It felt good when you found one,” said Spc. Mitchell Boe. “You’re getting the job done, and then you have that eerie feeling of ‘well, this one was here, are there more

hiding somewhere else?”

That feeling was well based as Soldiers on the Pathfinder mission often found multiple explosive devices daisy chained together to detonate at the same time.

One of the largest IEDs they found was a daisy chain of 10, 155mm artillery rounds. Each round weighs 98 pounds and if detonated together, they could have easily devastated an area the size of a football field.

With that amount of destructive potential armored vehicles are necessities.

“We were a sight for sore eyes when we showed up,” Darlow added, commenting about the light infantry unit that they replaced. “We had track vehicles and .50-caliber machine guns. Before us, they were dismantled and walking on the sides of the road looking for the IEDs.”

Throughout its time on the road the 153rd found about 100 IED setups. Sometimes the setup would be just one bomb, other times it would be a large daisy chain of explosives wired to increase the kill area.

“It is a very relevant mission that we do, and the Soldiers get a lot of satisfaction and comfort that it saves lives,” said Lt. Col. Kevin Griese, battalion commander.

“When you are deployed to a combat zone and perform a mission that you know saves lives, at the end of the day it makes you feel pretty good.”

153rd Soldiers reflect on Najaf mission

By Spc. Mark Watson
129th MPAD

FOB DUKE, Iraq – A wake up call in the middle of the night is how one platoon of the 153rd Engineer Battalion started a mission that would put them on front line action, in harm’s way and make headlines around the world.

Company A’s 2nd Platoon, received word in the middle of the night last August that they were to provide engineer support to 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division as they helped rid An Najaf of insurgents loyal to Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

The Soldiers went to work preparing explosives, making Bangalore torpedoes, drawing ammunition and readying themselves for an all out assault on a hornet’s nest of insurgent activity. The South Dakotans linked up with the task force early the next morning.

“The sun was just coming up, so it was about 6:30 to 7 a.m.,” said 1st Lt. Adam Romkema, the platoon leader. “The initial push was fairly intense. The insurgents knew we were coming. There was no secret about that.”

The cavalry tanks and the engineers’ armored personal carriers began their assault on the city rolling around a corner and up a hill. From the back of the convoy the South Dakota Soldiers watched the first shots of the battle.

An Improvised Explosive Device detonated near the lead tank. After that a frenzy of fire poured from the insurgents.

“We could see the tanks rolling up the hill – all of a sudden explosions started going



153rd Engineer Battalion photo

Soldiers from the 153rd Engineer Battalion work along side active duty forces .

off all over the place,” said Staff Sgt. Jeremy Kucera. “Probably 15 to 20 IEDs blew up on different tanks. Then the mortars started coming in.”

As the first mortars blew up only yards away from the vehicles, one soldier was baffled on what the blast really was.

“I heard the explosion and saw the white puff of smoke,” said Sgt. Christopher Schimke. “At first I thought it was odd. I thought ‘that was a weird place for an IED, and it wasn’t very big.’ There were more explosions and finally someone came over the net and said we were taking mortars.”

The tankers plunged into the city blasting away at insurgent positions with their cannons while the engineers staged at

the bottom of the hill returning fire until there was enough area cleared area on top of the hill. This wasn’t the first time the Soldiers had been shot at, but they said this was the most intense engagement they were involved in.

“This time wasn’t at the tail end of something,” Schimke said. “This time it was at the start of something. It was a lot more frantic. It was a well thought out; well planned, combined arms attack.”

Kucera agreed and said any feelings that the fight was not real were soon dismissed.

“When bullets start flying by and mortars go off within 20 to 30 feet from your track, it makes reality set in,” he said. “I thought this is the real deal. This is a real

offensive movement into a contaminated city.”

The battle waged on, but the engineers were finally able to enter the city and arrived at their objective, an old school that was used by the insurgents as a command post.

They set up the school as a casualty collection point and they guarded it round the clock before moving deeper into the city.

What was supposed to be a three-day mission soon turned into a 17-day ordeal where the guardsmen performed their true combat engineer missions.

“We put up a ton of concertina wire,” Kucera said. “We blew up a weapons cache that was probably equivalent to 500 pounds.”

The Soldiers even conducted a raid where they kicked in the door and found possible insurgents. The insurgents were finally pushed back into the Imam Ali Mosque, the second largest in the world. The insurgents finally laid down their weapons and the battle ended. After it was all over Kucera, who was the acting platoon sergeant said the Soldiers did a tremendous job.

“I was very proud of the Soldiers,” he said. “They did an outstanding job. They were all brave and did what had to be done. It was definitely something different and something they should be proud of.”

It was after the battle that Schimke said he witnessed a defining moment.

“At the end of it, we were parked in a compound and Iraqis appeared out of nowhere,” he said. “The street was packed with cars and people. They were honking and waving. They were happy. That was something that if you have any questions on what we are doing is right or wrong, that day was proof to me that this was a good thing.”

Artillerymen fire care at Iraqis

By Spc. Mark Watson
129th MPAD

TALLIL AIR BASE, Iraq – People watching the nightly news may sometimes wonder how anything good comes out of war. One channel reports on a bomb at a police station while another tells of an assassination. In the middle of all the violence and destruction however, a glimmer of hope shines through it all.

Members of 2nd Battalion, 147th Field Artillery Brigade from Watertown, Sisseton, Aberdeen and Redfield, often traveled to nearby villages and towns on Medical Civil Affairs Projects to deliver much needed medical care, school supplies and hope to the Iraqi people during the Soldiers year-long deployment.

“It makes you feel pretty good that you could do something to help someone,” said 1st Lt. Sean Kenny, the battalion’s physician assistant. “We would set up and have medical supplies, water and food. We would also hand out clothing, school supplies and shoes.”

Kenny said the medical care most Iraqis received was not enough.

“We would see the women and children first,” he said. “The men are usually the only ones in the country with decent medical care. The women and the children were put behind, all except for the first born son.

“We saw a lot of women with back and knee pain or stomach problems. They do the majority of the work, especially in the fields,” Kenny added.

Other ailments that the Soldiers saw included asthma, eye infections and infected cuts.

“One kid had a cut on the back of his heel that had been stitched up,” said Staff Sgt. Chad Stockland, a member of Headquarters, Headquarters Service Battery. “Stitches are usually in for only a week (these had been in for two months), so they were all infected. We had to pull them out and give him some antibiotics.”

Although it is nearly impossible to follow up on the patients, occasionally the Soldiers are able to find out about one of their patients.

“We saw a girl about 10 years old and her abdomen was very big,” Kenny said. “We coordinated with the 31st (Combat Army Support Hospital) and they performed an ultrasound. They found a 28 pound tumor. I talked to the doctor who removed the tumor and he said it would have eventually taken her life. Last I heard she had made a full recovery.”

When people found out that the Americans were in the area providing medical care, people flocked to the area. Often the doctors would stay for three hours before they had to start turning people away when they ran out of medicine. There were also times that they were told nothing could be done for them due to the severity and extent of their injuries. Two of the people who Kenny and his medics could not treat were a man in the late stages of cancer and a man who had been tortured with electrocution 10 years ago.

“A lot of the Iraqis thought that American medical care can cure anything, and if you can’t, then send them back to the states to be seen,” he said. “They don’t understand that some conditions have gone on so long that nothing can be done. Some people would be seen, go to the end of the line and come through again just to be told no again.”

Although the South Dakota Soldiers couldn’t treat all the people, Kenny said the time they were able to spend was beneficial.

“It was nice to see the kids for a while, and to know that for the amount of medicine we could give them, they will probably be better.”

Stockland agreed and said hopefully the people they treated remember the Americans who helped them.

“Hopefully some kid will remember we helped them,” he said. “We tried to be the good guys. We took time to help the sick and make them better.”



Photo by 153rd Engineer Battalion

1st Lt. Sean Kenny listens to a young Iraqis heart during one of the Medical Civil Affairs Program missions.



Photo by 153rd Engineer Battalion

2nd Battalion, 147th Field Artillery Soldiers hand out food and school supplies during a Medical Civil Affairs Program mission. The South Dakotans participated in several humanitarian missions during their year-long deployment.

216th Fire Fighters return home

By Sgt. 1st Class Don Matthews
JFHQ - PAO

STURGIS – Family members huddled up in frigid temperatures as they watched the landing of a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter carrying their loved ones to the football field near the South Dakota National Guard armory in Sturgis.

Ten Soldiers of the 216th Engineer Detachment returned home after serving for more than 11 months in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Each of the Soldiers received a heroes’ welcome complete with hugs, kisses, and a welcome home ceremony. The mayor spoke of the star banners that were put in the community center of Sturgis when the unit left. He said, “You’ve been a daily reminder for each of us here of the sacrifices you’ve made for us, and for that I want to say Thank You.”

During the ceremony, Maj. Gen Michael A. Gorman, the adjutant general, said it was great for the Soldiers to be back in South Dakota.



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Don Matthews

Members of the 216th Engineer Detachment, Fire Fighting, Sturgis, South Dakota, return to a Heroes’ welcome from family and friends as they arrived home after serving their country in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“On the 4th of December, 2003, there were a lot of tears of concern, tears of apprehension, and what I see today are tears of joy

and thanks that you all came home safely,” Gorman said. “The 216th Engineer Detachment and their families and their employers

answered the call and rose to the occasion. Every report that I heard from over in theater was good.”

The commander of the 216th echoed the general’s comments and said their Soldiers did a great job.

“The unit provided outstanding support to the 1st Infantry Division,” said Capt. Ken Kerfont. “They were designated as the first response effort for all emergencies within their area of operations.

They had primary responsibility for fire protection to the aircraft on the flight lines and always had medics available when they responded to an emergency.”

“All the Soldiers in this great unit deserve our eternal gratitude for the part they played in Operation Iraqi Freedom,” Gorman said.

“In this, the first war of the 21st Century, you defended your fellow citizens against ruthless enemies. And because of your sacrifices, you made this country a safer place to live. Because of your service, bravery and dedication, the world is better off today and the people of America are more secure.”

SDARNG NCO and Soldier of the Year



Borah

Iverson

Staff Sgt. Eric Borah, 109th Engineer Battalion, is the 2004 South Dakota Army National Guard NCO of the year and Spc. (now Sgt.) Daniel Iverson, 88th Troop Command, is the Soldier of the year.

SDARNG Major Command winners that were eligible for the State Board:

Joint Force Headquarters:	NCO	– Sgt. James Peck
	Soldier	– Spc. Francis Hinton
109th Engineer Group:	NCO	– Staff Sgt. Eric Borah
	Soldier	– Spc. Kara Kinsley
147th Field Artillery Brigade:	NCO	– Staff Sgt. Jay Pipes
	Soldier	– Pfc. Joshua Oien
88th Troop Command:	NCO	– Staff Sgt. Lori Bouza
	Soldier	– Spc.(Sgt.) Daniel Iverson
881st Troop Command:	NCO	– Staff Sgt. Kurt Gross
	Soldier	– Spc. Gerald Welsh
196th RTI:	NCO	– Sgt. First Class Glenn Miller

Physician's Assistant of the Year



Photo by Spc. Mark Watson

1st Lt. Tim Quinn, second from left, Capt. Phillip Tigert and 1st Lt. Dave Axtman, accept the South Dakota Association of Physician Assistant, Physician Assistant of the year awards from Diane Weber, the association's president. The three Soldiers are members of Company B, 109th Medical Battalion located in Vermillion, S.D.

Units receive Freedom Salute Award

SDNG Public Affairs Office

In December of 2003, the Army National Guard launched the "Freedom Salute Campaign", a program designed to recognize Army National Guard Soldiers, their families, and others who have supported them as they answered the call to duty. Since 2003, over 100,000 Soldiers have been recognized in "Freedom Salute" ceremonies across the country.

Eligible Soldiers include those who were mobilized in one of three Operational Orders Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom or were on orders in support of those Operations for more than 30 days. This includes state active duty mobilized Soldiers and Title 10 Soldiers.

"These ceremonies are great. One of the most rewarding factors is being recognized for what you're doing," said Staff Sgt. Craig Phillips, a team leader for the 727th Trans. Co. who lives in Sioux City, Ia., With his wife, Stacy and daughter, Karlee. "A simple medal, if we deserve it, makes you proud. I hope they continue to do this for every unit... everyone deserves it."

Each eligible soldier will receive an encased American Flag, a sequentially numbered commemorative coin; a "Defender of Freedom" certificate signed by Lieutenant General Roger C. Schultz, Director of the Army National Guard, and Command Sergeant Major A. Frank Lever, III, 7th Command Sergeant Major, Army National Guard; and a lapel insignia. The Soldier's spouse and children will also receive items recognizing their support and contribution.

"We're here today to recognize and honor your service to our country and your families sacrifices..." Rep. Herseth said at a recent Freedom Salute Ceremony. "The nation is in debt to the men and women who wear the uniform. We stand in your shadow."

In addition, each eligible Soldier will be able to recognize one center of influence (COI) for outstanding support during the

Soldier's mobilization. This recognition will be in the form of a commemorative lapel insignia and a medallion with ribbon. Examples of COI's include, but are not limited to, a supervisor, clergy, or college guidance counselor. The COI may also be a representative of an organization that supported the Soldier such as a church, a charitable organization, a business, the Soldier's employer, or school.

Accepting one of these prestigious awards was Nancy Montross, President of the South Dakota Beef Industry Council. While the 727th was deployed, the S.D. Beef Industry Council donated more than 2,700 pounds of beef (mostly jerky) totaling over \$20,000 to S.D. National Guard Soldiers serving in Iraq. For the council's contribution to the S.D. National Guard, the unit presented Montross with a framed mosaic print.

Two additional levels of recognition will be presented to the unit's choice of a person or organization deserving of the Outstanding COI and Distinguished COI honors. The Outstanding COI is an individual or organization that stood out as most helpful to the Soldiers during mobilization and will receive a framed mosaic American Flag print. The Distinguished COI is an individual or organization which the unit felt was most helpful to its Soldiers and their families during mobilization and will receive a 17-inch Minuteman statuette.

The Freedom Salute Campaign is one of the largest Army National Guard recognition endeavors in history and South Dakota has played a major role in this effort by recognizing more than 2500 Soldiers from the following units: 155th Engineer Det., 1085th Medical Company, 1/147th Field Artillery Battalion, 129th MPAD, HHD 109th Engineer Battalion, Det. 3, 665 Maintenance Co., 235th MP Co., 196th RTI, 727th Trans. Co., 200th Engineer Co, Co. B. 109th Medical Battalion, 1742nd Trans., Co 740th Trans., Co. 842nd Engineer Co. and Battery C 2/147th.



Photo by SDNG Public Affairs Office

Soldiers from Company B, 109th Medical Battalion wait to receive their Freedom Salute Award.



Photo by SDNG Public Affairs Office

Ernie Edwards (right) receives the Williamson Militiaman Award presented by Maj. Gen. Michael Gorman, Gov. Mike Rounds and Ronald Williamson.

Edwards receives Williamson Militiaman Award

By SDNG Public Affairs Office

PIERRE – Cited for his longtime dedication to education, the National Guard and his community retired Brig. Gen. Ernie Edwards, of Watertown, received the prestigious 2005 Williamson Militia Man Award during South Dakota National Guard's Legislative Dining Out ceremony in Pierre February 10th.

The Williamson Militia Man Award was established in 1987 by Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Williamson, who was the adjutant general at the time. The award recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-soldier through community leadership, support of the National Guard and the defense of our country.

The award, presented by Gov. Mike Rounds, is a U.S. Army Saber and Scabbard. It is regulation in size and design with detailed embossed blade and chrome finish.

Brig. Gen. (retired) Edwards enlisted in the South Dakota National Guard in 1957 and went on to graduate from Officer Candidate School in 1960. He went on to serve in

leadership positions in the 147th Field Artillery Brigade to include, battery commander, Commander of the 1st Battalion, and Brigade Commander of the 147th.

Edwards went on to serve as the Deputy STARC Commander and was appointed as the Assistant Adjutant General for the S.D. Army National Guard in 1992.

Brig. Gen. Edwards serves on Watertown Chamber's Military Affairs Committee. He is actively involved with the state committee for Employer Support to the Guard and Reserve.

Brig. Gen. Edwards graduated from the University of South Dakota in 1957 and went on to get his Masters in Education in 1960. He went on to teach Math in Watertown in 1957. He served as principal in Watertown's junior high and senior high school. He went on to become Watertown's Director of Secondary Curriculum.

For 10 years, Edwards served as Superintendent of Schools for the Brookings School District and went on to serve 10 years as the Superintendent in Watertown.

CURRENT SOUTH DAKOTA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD DEPLOYMENTS



Commander's Corner

AAG Comments

"Task Force Coyote has accepted all missions we have given them, and some of them were right on the edge, and they have completed them all." That was what we heard Maj. Gen. Eric Olsen, 25th Infantry Division Commander, say about the performance of Task Force Coyote, the tactical engineer Task Force in Afghanistan. The Task Force is led by our own 109th Engineer Group.

Command Sgt. Maj. Jerry Pope and I recently had the opportunity to travel to Afghanistan and observe first hand the operations and Soldiers of Task Force Coyote. Task Force has some 1,800 engineers from the U.S. Army, Army Reserve, Army National Guard, and Air National Guard, as well as the countries of Korea, Poland, Australia, and Slovakia. They are operating in a very dangerous environment with threats ranging from land mines to mortar attacks to enemy fighters. Coupled with Afghanistan's harsh and unforgiving weather, climate and terrain, has presented formidable challenges in all areas.

Despite all of those mission detractors, the engineers have completed the placement of some 65,000 cubic meters of concrete for additional ramp space for aircraft and support services at the Bagram and Kandahar Airfields. Simultaneously, they have cleared over 1,500 acres of countless mines and explosive hazards. They are accomplishing the full gamut of engineer tasks while assuming additional responsibilities for security at remote sites and forward operating bases.

CSM Comments

I had the opportunity to visit some of our Soldiers in Iraq during January. I had been trying to do this for the past two years and the trip finally came through. It was quite an experience just doing the preparations with training and going through the Soldier Readiness Process (SRP). There were times when I was low crawling in the desert at Fort Bliss and I asked myself if I was doing the right thing.

Let me tell you, seeing our Soldiers in Iraq when I got there made all the training to get there worth it. I got a feel for what our Soldiers go through when being mobilized. I will skip the details of the two-plus weeks of mobilization training and start with my arrival in Kuwait. I landed in Kuwait late at night. There were about 160 of us that had been through the CONUS Replacement Center (CRC) at Fort Bliss. We had more briefings and got to bed at 0330. The quarters we had were in a large warehouse divided into sections by chain link fence. It seemed like there were 1,000 of us there, but I could be wrong.

I got up early the next morning and was taken from Kuwait to the Iraq border, a trip of 1½ hours. At the border I was met by Soldiers from the 2/147th Field Artillery. I then convoyed across the border into Iraq for another 3½ hours to Tallil. You realize early on that you are in a war zone. Much of the training I received at Bliss was now very real. The country is desert in this area and not very populated. You travel at a good speed on convoys and don't stop very often, which accounts for all the water bottles along the route with yellow water in them.

I spent the night at Tallil and then convoyed another six hours north to visit Camp Duke and the 153rd Engineer Battalion. While with the 153rd, I presented the Connelly Award to the cooks. This is a prestigious award given to mess sections for excellence. The cooks had cooked for the first two months and since then have been



Carpenter

The engineers have also fielded provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs). Those two- and three-soldier teams work in local villages, establishing relationships and developing plans for upgrading buildings and infrastructure. Flexibility and innovation are critical, and our South Dakota Guardsmen bring plenty of both to their missions.

In our visits with the commanders and Soldiers of CJTF76, I was struck by the professionalism, the positive attitude, the spirit of self sacrifice, and the deep belief all had in the value of what they are doing for Afghanistan, the United States and the proliferation of freedom. I came away convinced that Afghanistan as a country is going to succeed. And a huge factor in that success is the efforts of U.S. and Coalition Soldiers like Task Force Coyote.

All of us can be incredibly proud of the 109th Engineer Group and the hard work and sacrifice the Soldiers are making to continue the South Dakota Army National Guard's tradition of excellence.

Raymond W. Carpenter
BG, SDARNG
Assistant Adjutant General - Army



Birnbaum

combat Soldiers doing missions like the rest of the unit. It seemed strange to see cooks with M16s and machine guns instead of pots and pans.

Our Soldiers were in Iraq fighting for freedom, yet they had less

freedom themselves. The Soldiers were very controlled in their movement outside their base camps. They lived in tents or trailers with other Soldiers and ate in dining facilities that fed thousands. Even though Tallil had a Burger King trailer, it is not like home where the Soldiers could just jump in their car and head downtown to the local store.

Our Soldiers were well trained and disciplined in their jobs. Each Soldier had a positive attitude and was making the best of the situation at hand. Many have been through a lot in the country, living everyday with the fear of not knowing what could happen to them in very dangerous situations. They had to be always on alert to their surroundings.

Having talked to the Soldiers, the worst thing about this deployment was missing their families. It was great in the areas that had Internet and telephone so the soldier could stay in contact with family.

I would like to thank all the Soldiers who escorted me around Iraq. It gave me the opportunity to see what our Soldiers go through and the environment you live in. Each of you was professional and dedicated. I thank each of you for your service to the SD Guard and country. I have never been more proud of all of you.

Michael L. Birnbaum
CSM, SDARNG
State Command Sergeant Major

SDSU receives Pro Patria Award



Photo by SDNG Public Affairs Office

Governor Mike Rounds presents South Dakota State University President Peggy Miller with the Pro Patria Award.

By SDNG Public Affairs Office

PIERRE – The South Dakota Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) presented its prestigious 2005 Pro Patria Award to South Dakota State University. SDSU President Peggy Miller accepted the award during the Guard's Legislative Dining Out ceremony February 10th in Pierre.

The Latin phrase "Pro Patria" translates "For the country." The award is given periodically to an individual, company or organization that has supported employees who are members of the Guard and Reserve. It symbolizes the patriotism shown by adopting personnel policies that enable employees to fulfill National Guard and Reserve training and deployment obligations, thus contributing to the success of our nation's defense.

Throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom, SDSU had 15 employees activated. All were assured they would have a home upon returning from duty. As employees of the State of South Dakota, Guardsmen and Reservists receive 15 days of military pay. Upon activation, SDSU made up the difference of military pay to civilian pay. Upon returning from activation, annual leave and sick leave are reinstated, and continue to accrue when the employee leaves to serve their country.

During the same period, SDSU had 213 students called to active duty. SDSU's leadership played a dramatic role in drafting policies for the Board of Regents during Desert Storm 1990, helping the mobilized students who were required to leave before completing the semester.

"The enthusiasm, patriotism, and support of South Dakota State University is outstanding," said Maj. Gen. Michael Gorman, adjutant general." The university and its leadership take great pride in the employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve, and go beyond what is required to support their mobilized employees. South Dakota State University is proud and committed to supporting its military members."

It was also noted that SDSU's leaders are eager to hire military members since they know that military experience brings a strong

work ethic and outstanding leadership skills to the university. Staff members with military backgrounds make excellent role models for students and other team members, and also have a positive impact on defining the university. The support that military members receive permeates throughout the university and can be observed at all levels of leadership.

"Led by Dr. Peggy Gordon Miller, the leadership team at SDSU provides the values and leadership that recognizes and rewards their military members for the experience and skills they bring to the workforce," said Gorman.

South Dakota State University's spirit of support goes far beyond paperwork and benefits. SDSU has shown tremendous support of our military for over 140 years by providing a home for Army ROTC. Former Professor of Military Science, Omar Bradley named SDSU the West Point of the Plains, for the quality and quantity of officer there. That name has stuck and continues to be respected for the caliber of officers produced in both the Army and Air Force ROTC programs.

Students required to withdraw from the SDSU before completing a semester could receive credit or refund privileges. Eligible students, who are required to report for military duty not earlier than four (4) calendar weeks prior to the date a semester ends. Or after completion of at least seventy-five percent (75%) of the enrollment period in a non-standard semester course, students may be given full credit for all courses for which they have an average of "C" or better.

Eligible students who do not receive an incomplete or credit for the course in which they are enrolled shall be entitled to a full refund of tuition and academic fees. SDSU's leadership team has always gone beyond the Board of Regents expectations when supporting mobilized students.

A recent memorandum reminded faculty, "that SDSU's philosophy is to do everything possible to facilitate the student so that his or her academic standing and progression are not harmed by the call up."

Your South Dakota National Guard Museum

While in Pierre, please stop and visit your South Dakota National Guard Museum. The museum has undergone some changes. Col. (Ret) Steve Gomez retired as the museum director in June 2004. Sgt. 1st Class (Ret) Bob Kusser is currently the director along with Seb Axtman as the Curator.

Hours of operation have expanded to Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. CST. We at the South Dakota National Guard Museum invite you, your family, and friends to visit the museum and learn about the guard history. The museum is located in downtown Pierre at 301 East Dakota Avenue.

The South Dakota Air and Army National Guard have an admirable history and South Dakotans are to be proud of the men and women who have put on the uniform. The Guard has been involved in nearly ever major military conflict, helping neighbors during natural disasters, and most recently fighting the war against terrorism.

Our mission is to preserve and honor the history of the South Dakota National Guard from the days of the Dakota Territory (1860's) to the present, with emphasis on various wars and conflicts, interpreting for citizens, veterans, and young people the story of the South Dakota National Guard.

The goal is to create a greater understanding of the significant role played by the South Dakota National Guard throughout history by caring for and preserving our collections, and working with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and groups whose valued guidance and support enhance our programs.

Admission is FREE. We are open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. CST

Contact us through our website: www.state.sd.us/military/military/museum.htm or phone us at (605) 224-9991.

The museum, in future additions of the Coyote, will feature articles pertaining to historical events, book reviews of publications available through the museum and museum updates.

Book Review Spring 2005: FROM COLD WAR to GULF WAR, The South Dakota National Guard 1945 to the Millennium, Author is Steven J. Bucklin. This 300 page book provides the reader information relating to the South Dakota National Guard as it transformed from the end of World War II through 2003. Items of interest are the unit reorganizations, Berlin Crisis, Persian Gulf Activation, Desert Shield, and Units Alerted and Released from Active Duty in 2003. The book is available for sale at \$26.50.



Military Appreciation Weekend July 8-10th, 2005

Sponsored by Game, Fish and Parks

- Free Entrance into all State Parks for you and your families during that weekend
- Free Fishing weekend for you and your families
- Many special events taking place in the state parks for you and your families.

Some of these parks include Adams HNP, Angastora, Big Sioux, Chief White Crane, Custer, Farm Island, Fort Sisseton, Hartford Beach, Indian Creek, Lake Herman, Lake Louise, Lake Poinsett, Lake Thompson, Lake Vermillion, Lewis and Clark, Mickelson Trail, Newton Hills, North Point or Randall Creek, Oahe Downstream, Oakwood Lakes, Palisades, Pelican Lake, Pickerel Lake, Pierson Ranch, Richmond Lake, Roy Lake, Shadehill, Snake Creek, Union Grove, West Bend, West Whitlock

For those of you that wish to camp that weekend you can make your reservations starting on April 9th by calling 1-800-710-2267 or by going on-line at www.campsd.com. All camping fees are the responsibility of the campers. There will be further information for you in the near future. We will advertise all events and let you know in advance of things that will be happening across the state. We hope you will come to the state parks and enjoy a great weekend with your families and to make some new memories.