

Joint Thunder returns to Hills

Exercise draws more than 2,200 troops across U.S.

SDNG Public Affairs Office

RAPID CITY – South Dakota’s premier Joint Forces exercise, known as Joint Thunder 2005, was held June 11-25. More than 2,200 military personnel from the Army National Guard, Air Force, Active Army, Naval Reserve and the Civil Air Patrol participated in the annual training exercise conducted in and around the Custer area, as well as Rapid City and Orman Dam near Belle Fourche.

South Dakota’s Army National Guard has conducted this training event for 21 years and has developed it into one of the Army National Guard’s most prominent training exercises in the nation.

Soldiers from as far away as Connecticut, Maine, and New Mexico attended this year’s gathering of forces, which included about 50 units from 23 states. About 5,500 Soldiers participated in Joint Thunder 2002 but numbers have dropped considerably over the last two years because most were actively involved in the war. This year’s totals are up nearly 1,000 from last year.

“Probably 90 percent of the units involved in this year’s exercise have



Photo by Spc. Katie Loseke - 111th Press Camp

Military police from the 235th MP Co. escort a casualty back to the quarantined area after he was contaminated with mustard gas as part of a mass casualty training exercise held at the Custer football field.

deployed to support Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and Noble Eagle,” said Brig. Gen. Ray Carpenter, assistant adjutant general for the South

Dakota Army National Guard. “We’re dealing with experienced Soldiers and units who have been in combat. Most of these folks are hometown heroes.”

Carpenter said units trained on the latest maneuver and survival techniques developed in Iraq such as vehicle convoy exercises and military operations in urban terrain.

“Our military is still at war and our goal has always been for these units to be better prepared for mobilization,” he said. “This is one of the few exercises that trains combat support and combat service support units in a realistic, yet simulated combat environment.”

He pointed out that two units currently on alert have used this training exercise to prepare for duty in Iraq.

Over the past 20 years, the National Guard has developed a good working relationship with government agencies like the U.S. Forest Service, S.D. Game Fish and Parks as well as area communities and youth organizations. In return, the exercise units had the chance to train in the Black Hills and train on realistic projects.

Training highlights included homeland defense missions, a simulated mass-casualty exercise on the Custer football field, road repair in Custer State Park and the Black Hills National Forest, river crossing operations near Chamberlain, and bridge building over the inlet canal at Orman Dam. Since its origin in 1985, this annual exercise has trained more than 60,000 Soldiers and has completed numerous beneficial projects in the Hills area. Turn to page seven for stories on SDARNG units involved in Joint Thunder 2005.

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A former South Dakota Guardsman recalls the events in which he received the Medal of Honor and reflects on the latest recipient.

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More benefits are coming to Soldiers. Recently deployed Soldiers can now receive low-cost health insurance. Life insurance increases to a \$400,000 maximum and tuition assistance now covers 100 percent.

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The recruiting age increases for new Soldiers.

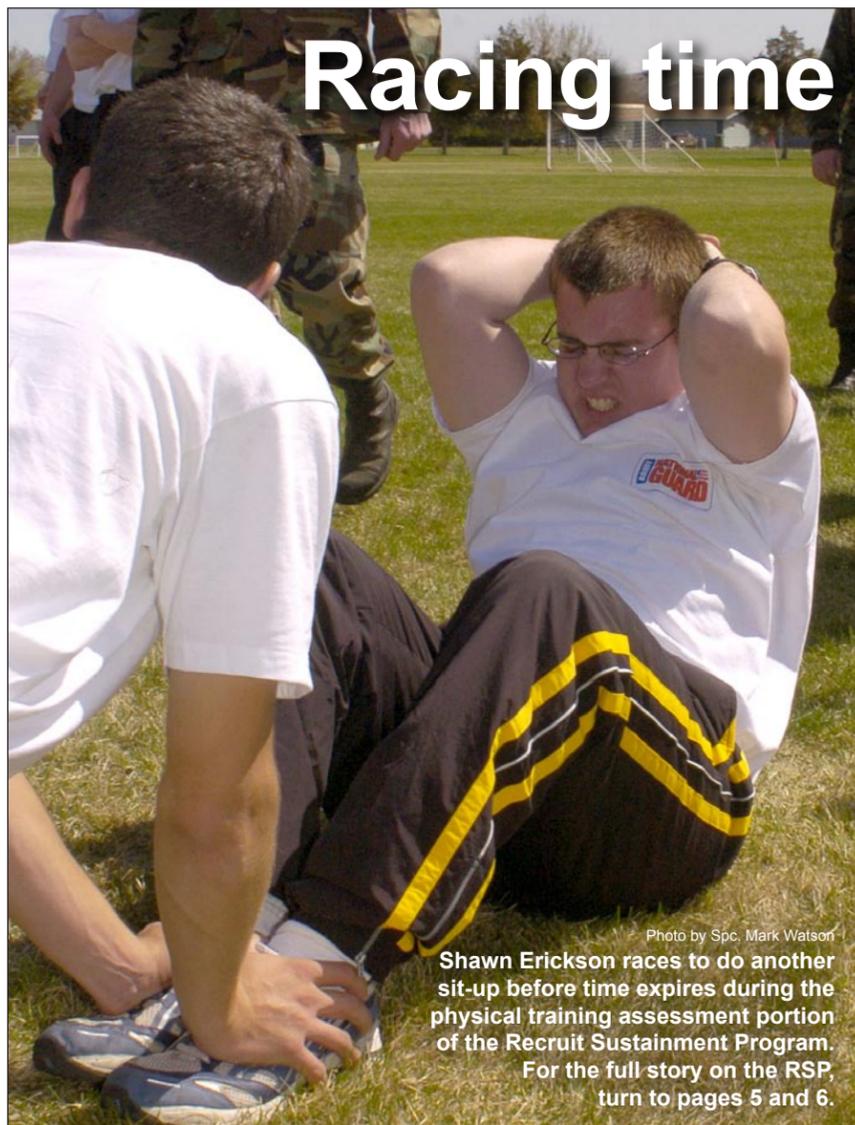
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South Dakota Soldiers shoot their way into high standings.

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People across the state take care of Soldiers.

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Racing time

Photo by Spc. Mark Watson
Shawn Erickson races to do another sit-up before time expires during the physical training assessment portion of the Recruit Sustainment Program. For the full story on the RSP, turn to pages 5 and 6.

Soldiers win regional competition

Sgt. Daniel Iverson, 147th Army Band, and Staff Sgt. Eric Borah, 235th Military Police Co. were announced as the 5th Army Northwest Region Soldier and NCO of the Year. After being selected as the Soldier (Iverson) and NCO (Borah) of the Year for the SDARNG,



Iverson



Borah

the two Guardsmen went on to compete in the 5th Army Northwest Region competition in May. The two Soldiers will go on to compete against National Guard, Reserve and Active Duty Soldiers from 21 states in the 5th Army Region competition in July.

Former S.D. Soldier credits OIF hero

Fitzmaurice knows full measure of selfless service

By Spc. Mark Watson
129th MPAD

For the first time in more than a decade and only the third time since the Vietnam War a Soldier earned the nation's highest honor, the Medal of Honor.

America posthumously honored Sgt. 1st Class Paul R. Smith, April 4 when President George W. Bush presented the medal to Smith's son, David Smith, in the East Room of the White House.

The day may have brought back memories for one South Dakotan who earned the Medal of Honor while serving in Vietnam.

"Once you get in a group like that, the people are more like brothers," Michael Fitzmaurice said. "They are not just someone you met. They are more like family, and you do the best you can for them."

Fitzmaurice, who later joined the South Dakota National Guard, earned the medal when he dove on an explosive device thrown into the bunker that he and three fellow Soldiers were in moments before it blew up. Somehow he survived and continued the fight.

He said Smith was doing the best he could for his family, the Soldiers under his command.

"We count ourselves blessed to have Soldiers like Sergeant Smith who put their lives on the line to advance the cause of freedom and protect the American people," Bush said at the award presentation.

Two years ago to the day of the presentation, Smith and his unit, 2nd Platoon, Company B, 11th Engineer Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division, were outside the then Saddam Hussein International Airport, setting up a prisoner of war holding area when 100 Iraqi Soldiers attacked the Americans.

According to reports, Smith organized the defense and ordered a nearby Bradley Fighting Vehicle to move through the courtyard and past the northern gate. Smith fired his personal weapon, threw grenades and fired AT-4s, anti-tank rockets, at the enemy. The Bradley fired at the enemy until its ammunition was completely spent. An



U.S. Army Photo

Paul Smith poses for a picture shortly before he was killed in Iraq. Smith is the first Soldier to receive the Medal of Honor during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Armored Personnel Carrier that was near the Bradley was hit by a mortar and the three Soldiers in it were wounded. Smith climbed into the hatch of the damaged APC and began firing the .50 caliber machine gun telling one of his Soldiers to, "feed me ammunition whenever you hear the gun get quiet."

Sgt. Matthew Keller, a team leader, yelled to Smith that they should pull back. Smith looked at Keller and gave a cutthroat symbol as if to say he wasn't leaving. After he fired at least three boxes of ammo at the Iraqis, Smith's gun went silent for the last time.

"Sergeant Smith's leadership saved the men in the courtyard, and he prevented an enemy attack on an aid station just up the road," Bush said. "Sergeant Smith continued to fire...until he took a fatal round in the head. His actions in that courtyard saved the lives of more than 100 American Soldiers."

Smith fulfilled the promise he made in an un-mailed letter which stated he "was prepared to give all that I am, to ensure that all my boys make it home," Bush added. He died shortly after he was hit at an aid

station.

The Medal of Honor was established in 1861 and has only been awarded 3,460 times with the strong majority awarded during the Civil War. Of those, 614 medals were awarded posthumously. Nineteen service-members received the medal twice and one woman received the medal during the Civil War. In South Dakota, four medals have been accredited to the state, Fitzmaurice being one of them.

According to his Medal of Honor citation, on March 23, 1971, Fitzmaurice, and three fellow Soldiers were occupying a bunker when a company of Vietnamese enemy attacked the area. The enemy threw three explosive charges into his bunker. Fitzmaurice tossed two charges away and then threw his flack jacket and himself on top of the remaining charge just before it blew up.

His actions shielded his fellow Soldiers from the blast but severely wounded Fitzmaurice. Despite this, he got up and charged out of the bunker firing his rifle until it was destroyed in yet another explosion. While searching for a new weapon, he came across another enemy

Soldier and overcame him in hand-to-hand combat. He found another weapon and returned to the bunker continuing the fight.

Despite all this, Fitzmaurice does not believe he is a hero.

"In my case I had friends there," he said. "I figured I wasn't going to make it out of there, so I figured I would try to get them out. I just wanted my three buddies out. We were going to fight to the end. There was nothing heroic about it. We were just there and we did what we had to do."

While Fitzmaurice believes he is not a hero, he said Smith is.

"I feel he is a hero," he said. "He knew that he probably wasn't going to make it out of there and had his buddies with him. He tried to make sure they all got out."

Fitzmaurice said there are only little more than 100 Medal of Honor recipients alive today, but there are many more heroes whose stories are not as recognized.

"There are a lot of people who do things that aren't recognized," he said. "It just depends on who was there and who saw what happened. I was there by the luck of the draw and I was lucky to have made it back."

CURRENT SOUTH DAKOTA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD DEPLOYMENTS



Since 9/11, more than 3,000 South Dakota Army and Air National Guard members have deployed to the Middle East. During that time many were put in harm's way when they took mortar rounds, witnessed Improvised Explosive Device attacks or received direct small-arms fire.

According to the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the medal was first known as the Badge of Military Merit, created by Gen. George Washington in 1783 during the Revolutionary War. Although scores of Americans earned the medal, there are only three known recipients of the badge. On May 3, 1783, the first medals were awarded Continental Soldiers.

In more recent times the name changed to the Purple Heart and 11 South Dakota National Guard Soldiers received the medal when they were injured due to hostile fire.

Listed below are South Dakota Soldiers who received the medal while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

KILLED IN ACTION

- Sgt. Dennis Morgan, 153rd Engineer Battalion.

WOUNDED IN ACTION

- Sgt. 1st Class Todd Bartels, 854th Quartermaster Detachment
- Spc. Dana Bindert, 1742nd Transportation Company
- Sgt. Tyler Campbell, 200th Engineer Company
- Staff Sgt. Daryl Devries, 200th Engineer Company
- Staff Sgt. Guy Gronewold, 1742nd Transportation Company
- Sgt. 1st Class Steven Gruener, 1742nd Transportation Company
- Sgt. 1st Class Michael Hudson, 153rd Engineer Battalion
- Sgt. Luke Perman, 200th Engineer Company
- Sgt. Jason Veen, 740th Transportation Company
- Staff Sgt. Eric Jennings, 109th Engineer Group

Soldiers receive more health benefits

By Spc. Mark Watson
129th MPAD

More than 2,500 South Dakota National Guard Soldiers who mobilized since September 11, 2001 are now eligible for more military health coverage.

The new program will initiate medical coverage for at least a year and up to eight years, depending on the extent of the Soldier's deployment.

The new program started April 26 and offers low-cost coverage for both returning Soldiers and their families after their six-

month Transitional Assistance Management Program coverage expires, said Mike Ochenbein, a Congressional relations representative for Triwest.

Under the new Tricare Reserve Select plan, Soldiers returning from active duty are eligible to purchase a year's coverage of Tricare for every 90 days of service on active duty, if they remain in the select reserves. The program is offered at 75 dollars a month for members only and 233 dollars a month for members and their family members enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System

"This will provide good medical coverage to service members and will give them something back for their sacrifices," said Michele Anderson, the family assistance coordinator for the South Dakota National Guard.

The coverage does come with certain restrictions however. Soldiers must sign up for the coverage and a commitment to serve for the expected time of coverage. Once the enrollment is established, it cannot be changed Anderson added. For example, a Soldier who has four years of eligible coverage, but chooses to only sign up for

two years, can't add the other two years later on, she said.

According to Tricare, Soldiers who served in a contingency operation since 9-11 and decided to leave the military can choose to re-enlist and receive the new benefits, she said. If a service member has been discharged from the Guard prior to April 26, 2005 and would like to use the TRS, the Soldier may reenlist by Oct. 28 to use the plan. After Oct. 28, they will forfeit their benefits.

For more information on the program, visit, www.tricare.osd.mil.

New SGLI law to increase coverage for Soldiers

By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – Defense and Veterans Affairs officials are ironing out details of programs that will expand benefits provided through Service members' Group Life Insurance.

The \$82 billion supplemental legislation signed into law by President Bush May 11 increases maximum SGLI coverage to \$400,000 and provides payouts of up to \$100,000 for service members with traumatic injuries, said Stephen Wurtz, the VA's deputy assistant director for insurance.

The increased SGLI coverage will take effect Sept. 1, and the so-called "traumatic SGLI" benefit, Dec. 1. Wurtz said the legislation directs that both benefits will be retroactive to Oct. 7, 2001.

Traumatic SGLI benefits will be retroactive for troops who have lost limbs, eyesight or speech or received other

traumatic injuries as a direct results of injuries received during Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom. The benefit does not apply to service members suffering from disease.

The retroactive coverage increase is payable as a result of deaths in either operation, or under other conditions prescribed by the Secretary of Defense, Wurtz said. Service members enrolled in the SGLI program will notice an increase in their premiums when the increases take effect. The traumatic SGLI benefit will be rolled into the basic SGLI program and will likely cost about \$1 a month, Wurtz said.

Troops opting for maximum SGLI coverage - \$400,000 vs. the current \$250,000 - will see their monthly premiums increase from \$16.25 to \$26, Wurtz said. This is based on the rate of 6.5 cents per \$1,000 of insurance coverage.

SGLI coverage is currently available in

\$10,000 increments, but as of Sept. 1, the increments will increase to \$50,000.

Because the rates have not changed, service members who retain \$250,000 or less coverage will see no increase in their premiums, Wurtz said, except for the \$1 "traumatic SGLI" premium. While these expanded benefits will be provided retroactively, affected service members won't be charged retroactive payments, he said. The Department of Defense (DoD) will absorb that cost.

In a new twist, introduced through the supplemental legislation, troops with dependents must get their spouse's approval to purchase less than the full amount of SGLI coverage. When members are unmarried, notice will be provided to the designated beneficiary when the member purchases less than the maximum coverage.

The new traumatic SGLI benefit is designed to provide "a quick infusion of cash" for cash-strapped families of troops

recuperating from traumatic injuries received in the line of duty, Wurtz said.

Compensation will range from \$25,000 to \$100,000 and is designed to help families of wounded troops leave their homes and jobs to be with their loved one during recovery. "These families incur a lot of expenses, and this is designed to help them financially," Wurtz said.

While VA staff members consult with DoD to write regulations that will put the new SGLI benefits into effect, Wurtz said, "lots of details have to be worked out."

Among outstanding issues is the fact that the expanded SGLI coverage is part of the supplemental legislation package that funds operations only through Sept. 30. That's 30 days after the new SGLI limit takes effect and two months before the traumatic SGLI benefit begins.

Wurtz said the VA is confident Congress will resolve this issue before there's any lapse in coverage.

Tuition assistance increases for Guard

Program covers all tuition, \$4500 in fees for Soldiers

By Kristen M. Strissel
SDNG Public Affairs Office

In the 2004 fiscal year, South Dakota National Guard Soldiers used \$493,000 in federal tuition assistance. This fiscal year, that number has already skyrocketed to \$857,000.

The reason for this dramatic increase in aid are recent alterations made to South Dakota's tuition assistance policies. The changes are so extensive that the S.D. Education Support Center forecasts the amount of federal tuition assistance used by South Dakota Guard members to increase to \$1.25 million by the end of the fiscal year.

Under the changes, instituted on Oct., 1, 2004, the Federal government will now cover 100 percent of student tuition, as well as fees up to \$4500 yearly. This is a big change from the 75 percent coverage and limited fee payment previously offered. It is particularly useful when typical tuition and fees total roughly \$2200 per semester at state schools.

Maj. Charlie Blasdel, South Dakota's Education Officer, said this change may even have a positive effect on Guard retention. "The National Guard Bureau has put a high priority on funding federal tuition assistance," said Blasdel. "One of the reasons we have found for that is that

people who use tuition assistance more often stay in the Guard."

In addition, new policy dictates that Soldiers are no longer required to complete Basic Combat Training or Advanced Individual Training before receiving educational benefits.

One of the biggest changes to the educational assistance program is benefits no longer apply only to undergraduate and vocational education. Soldiers can now direct their assistance to parochial high school costs, recertification training, earning a general equivalency diploma, or earning an associates, bachelors or masters degree. In fact, if the Soldier did not apply any federal assistance to his or her first bachelor's degree, federal tuition aid may be used to complete a second bachelor's degree in a different field of study.

Following the changes, the Education Support Center fielded so many tuition assistance requests that it became financially overextended and in need of additional federal assistance to fund the applicants. "We were totally unprepared for the usage and the amount of money the program has taken up," said Blasdel.

However, the National Guard Bureau stepped in and sent an additional \$400,000 in funding to South Dakota to pay for the spring semester assistance.

This is not entirely uncommon with Minnesota having also been sent an additional sum of \$200,000.

One of the significant components accompanying this transformation is

streamlining the cumbersome application process. Instead of a time-consuming method involving multiple pre-approvals and a great deal of paperwork, the new system is simplified by three easy steps. First, the applicant must fill out a form online. Next, the form is submitted to the S.D. Education Officer, who sends it to the applicant's school of choice for approval. Once the education officer receives the school's invoice, the Guard will pay the bill within two business days.

Previously, the online application form was just one way of applying for tuition assistance; however, in upcoming months, the online application will become required.

"Because of changes in the program, we have been flexible on accepting late and improperly submitted applications," said Blasdel. "Starting this fall, we will accept only tuition assistance applications submitted online before the first day of class begins."

There are options of recourse if those guidelines cannot be met though. "In special cases when there are extenuating circumstances, we will accept applications endorsed by the Soldier's chain of command," said Blasdel.

As of June 1, 2005, roughly 13.6 percent of National Guard members have used the federal tuition assistance program, this equates to 440 members. Blasdel anticipates that this number will increase to 530-550 by the end of the year.

the Coyote

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New Soldiers New Program Fewer Losses Training for Basic

By Sgt. Wes Nowitzki
129th MPAD

In an effort to reduce new recruit losses during initial entry training, the South Dakota National Guard has started a Recruit Sustainment Program.

The program will teach rank identification, drill and ceremony, familiarization with the M-16 rifle, Army values, physical training readiness and other military procedures.

The South Dakota Army National Guard started its program in April at three different locations; Fort Meade in

Sturgis, Pierre, and Sioux Falls. Sturgis had 15 participants, Pierre had about 30, and Sioux Falls had about 70 new recruits for the opening program.

“In the past it was the unit’s responsibility to train their Soldiers,” said Maj. John Weber, Recruit Sustainment Program commander. “We are conducting recruit training to take better care of Soldiers.”

In the past, basic training had a short, three-day field exercise, but now it has a 21-day field exercise, so some of the tasks, such as rank identification, were shortened.

Continued RSP pg. 5



Photo by Spc. Mark Watson

Julieanne Morse finishes the one-mile run during the physical training assessment portion of the Recruit Sustainment Program in Pierre.

A CLOSER LOOK

Recruit Sustainment Program is an intense environment to better prepare new Soldiers to the shock and rigors of basic combat training.

The RSP is at three Locations across the state. One is at Fort Meade near Sturgis with another located in Pierre and the last is in Sioux Falls.

The RSP gives new recruits an in-depth look at basic Soldier skills such as drill and ceremony, rank identification, Army values, familiarization with the M-16 rifle, physical training and map reading.

The program allows for an easier transition from civilian life to Army life.



(left) New recruits learn the inner works of the M-16 rifle during their first day of training. (right) Philip Karber heats his Meal Ready to Eat during the first day of Recruit Sustainment Program.



Photo by Sgt Wes Nowitzki (left) Spc. Mark Watson



Photo by Spc. Mark Watson

Joe Meyer, having already exceeded the standard, strains to get one more push-up before time expired during the physical training assessment. The recruits are tested during one minute of push-ups and sit-ups and a one-mile run.

Guard, Reserves boost new recruit age cut-off

By Spc. Mark Watson
129th MPAD

South Dakota National Guard recruiters may start seeing a new trend with potential recruits, a few grey hairs.

A change raises the National Guard and Reserve age cutoff for new recruits from 34 to 39, increasing the number of potential recruits by scores.

The change does not affect the active duty Army.

"The effect of the age increase remains to be seen," said Lt. Col. Tracy Settle, the South Dakota National Guard's recruiting and retention manager.

There hasn't been a rush of potential older recruits, but the program has attracted the eye of several aspiring Soldiers.

"I have one person who 37 and is very interested in joining," said Staff Sgt. Ryan Harris, a recruiting and retention officer. "I

think this new program is good. In the past, I've talked to people who were 36, 37, 38 and came in or called for more information but they were too old."

Harris added the older recruits not only boost the strength of the Guard, but they also bring more experience and maturity to the military.

"With age come wisdom," he said. "If anything, the older recruits will know why something is necessary more than the younger ones."

One thing recruiters have seen as an increasing trend in new recruits is enlisting for the chance to serve their country.

"We've seen a lot more people come in, not for the student loan repayment or the GI Bill, but a lot are coming to us for pride, patriotism and service to their country," he said.

The first Soldier who enlisted with help of the new age category shipped off

to basic training June 1. Ken Regalado joined the 727th Transportation Company in Brookings as truck driver.

"He came in before and wanted to join before the age cut-off went up," said Staff Sgt. Pat Chapman, a recruiter in Brookings. "I told him there was nothing I could do for him at the time. After I learned about the age increase I was actually looking for his phone number to tell him when he called me."

Regalado saw the story on the morning news and was quickly on the phone with his recruiter.

"I was ecstatic," he said. "I asked if he saw the news, if I could sign up now and where I had to sign."

After the proper paperwork and a trip to the Military Entrance Processing Station, Regalado, the son of a former Marine, signed the dotted line and enlisted in the South Dakota Army National Guard.

"This is going to be an adventure, and I will be ringside for it," he said. "This is a dream for me. I want to keep a log of this because it is a one-shot deal. Joining the military is a very big deal. Serving your country is probably the biggest honor you'll ever get to do."

While the new age increase will give recruiters access to a new patch of recruits, Settle said his recruiters are not focusing on the new group.

"This is a young person's Army, and we are not changing our efforts to recruit the 17-24 year olds at this time," Settle said.

Regalado understands he is almost 20 years older than the youngest recruit, but said he feels he will do fine at basic training.

"I think some things will be difficult for me: the physical things will be hard, but other aspects, the more mental ones, I'll be above average," Regalado said.

RSP: Consolidates new recruit training in state

Continued from pg. 4

"Whenever we lose (trainees) it is usually because of physical training failures, injuries or they are not mentally prepared," said Weber. "This program better prepares them for these issues."

The environment, at the one weekend-a-month training, "Is an intense atmosphere that is not an abusive," said Weber. The cadre, mainly consisting of sergeants, teaches self-discipline and respect while creating a realistic basic training environment. The recruits must ask for permission to speak and must address the cadre as 'sergeant' or reap the consequences through push-ups or other physical activities.

"We learn to be quick thinking and to pay attention to detail, all while learning Army values," said Pfc. Crystal Walker.

Walker will be going to basic training at Fort Jackson in July. She joined Company B, 109th Medical Battalion as a medic.

The 'Warriors' will participate in this program until they go to basic training. The first phase is the red phase, which is only one weekend long. Their next weekend will be in the white phase. They will spend most of their time in white phase. The weekend before they leave for basic training they will be in the blue phase.

"It's all really helpful and will make it that much easier," said Pfc. Cameron Lynch. With this new information and training, the recruits will be given the chance to excel in their new field; well, right after they encounter the wrath of the drill sergeant.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Matt Johnson

Angela Johnson prepares to start the sit up portion of her physical training assessment under the watchful eye of the scorer as Private Tiffany Henriksen holds her feet.



(left) Staff Sgts. Tracy Fuerst, left, and Jonathan Nesladek encourage Melissa Wilslef as she finishes the one-mile run portion of the Recruit Sustainment Program's physical training assessment. (right) Warriors with the Recruit Sustainment Program watch Staff Sgt. Jonathan Nesladek over-exaggerate marching in place.



Photos by Spc. Mark Watson

SDNG names LT and Warrant Officer of Year

Congratulations to 1st. Lt. Jason Kleinschmit (right) of the 727th Transportation Company as the recipient of the 2005 John J. Steele Lieutenant of the of the Year Award, and to Chief Warrant Officer Jerry B. Eaton of HHC, 153rd Engineer Battalion as the recipient of the 2005 Warrant Officer of the Year Award. Congratulations to all Soldiers and Airmen who were selected to represent their MACOMS for each award.



Marksman gather for annual shooting competition



Photo by Spc. Mark Watson

Sgt. Scott Wallace (left) uses his rifle scope to estimate the range to his target while Sgt. Jeremy Evans, both with the 200th Engineer Company, acts as the spotter. The two both shot the sniper rifle in the competition.

SDNG Public Affairs Office

CAMP RAPID – South Dakota Army and Air National Guardsmen gathered at Camp Rapid May 21 and 22 to participate in the annual Adjutant General's Outdoor Combat Marksmanship competition hosted by the small arms readiness training section of the South Dakota National Guard Joint Force Headquarters.

Soldiers and Airmen from across South Dakota tested their skills with rifle, pistol machine gun and sniper rifles in this intense, two-day competition.

"This is more than a shooting match, it is an intense, hands-on training event that enhances basic but essential military skills," said Chief Warrant Officer John Gregor, state marksmanship coordinator for South

Dakota.

Lessons learned in places like Iraq and Afghanistan show that basic marksmanship is a critical skill for our military forces and the more opportunities there are to work with their issued firearms, the more successful they are in a combat theatre of operation.

Recently, military leaders have increased the training time and ammunition allowed so Soldiers can improve their marksmanship skills, said Chief Warrant Officer B. J. McGuire, range officer.

"It's been found that most Soldiers are not as proficient with their individual firearms as they should be," McGuire said. "The military has doubled the amount of ammunition for Soldiers to train with."

Leaders said it is very beneficial to

have experienced marksmen in a unit to help train other Soldiers and competition reinforces that training and capability.

"This is as close to the real thing as you can get," said Col. Nancy J Wetherill, who has been the commander of engineer forces in Afghanistan for the last year. "This gives Soldiers the experience of firing their individual weapon at close quarters in rapid succession."

This competition is the beginning of the competitive ladder that can lead South Dakota National Guardsmen to multi-service and national level competition. "We have been very successful with our teams at National level competition," said Chief Warrant Officer Walt Hofmann.

Top competitors from this match will be selected to compete as part of the South

Dakota National Guard team at the sixth region competition to be held in Guernsey, Wyo., in September. And if successful in that competition, they will move on to National level at the Winston P. Wilson, National Guard championship matches in Little Rock, Ark., in October.

This competition is open to all members of the South Dakota National Guard regardless of the individual level of experience. "We are always on the lookout for talented Soldiers with a desire to show they're stuff in competition," Gregor said.

For more information on competitive marksmanship activities or how to join the state shooting team, call Chief Warrant Officer John Gregor, state marksmanship coordinator at 605-737-6526.

Citizen Soldiers prove extremely tough to beat

By Sgt. Wes Nowitzki
129th MPAD

CAMP RAPID – Bam, the bullet screams forward as it spins and twists its way through the barrel on a catastrophic collision course with a target down range at a mere 1000 yards away.

"We're the Army's greatest threat when we show up to a match," said Chief Warrant Officer Walter Hofmann, officer in charge. "We have beat the Army team the last two times we met them, at Creedmore Cup and then in the Nevada State Regional."

Sgt. 1st Class Darrel Barry from the South Dakota National Guard finished as the match winner for the individual 200, 300, and 600-yard competition in the Creedmore Cup held at Camp Pendleton, Calif. by shooting a 790 out of 800. Each shot is worth ten points at the center of the target and decreases down to 5 at the outer edge. A complete miss is worth zero points.

Team members use slightly modified M-16 rifles. Most modifications are done to the barrels, triggers, and rear sites, and shoot at targets from 200 to 1000 yards away. An 80-grain bullet is used for all distances under 600 yards and a



Photo by Spc. Mark Watson

Sgt. Wes Spencer readies his rifle during the competition.

90-grain bullet is used for the 1000-yard competition.

"The members are some of the most highly qualified shooters from the Air and Army National Guard," said Hofmann.

There are two big competitions coming up that the team is preparing for. The Inter-Service National Championship in Quantico, Va. which only includes service members, and the National Championship in Camp

Perry, Ohio which draws about 1500 individuals from all the services and private civilians.

Last July, Sgt. Rick Zolnowsky from the South Dakota National Guard finished as the match winner proclaiming him as the top military shooter. Zolnowsky is a previous Presidents 100 winner.

Most recently, the team went to Florida to shoot in the Orange Blossom Regional

where they won the team competition, out shooting more than 100 competitors.

Being this competitive makes the All Guard Team.

"The number one threat for the Army," said Hofmann. "As a matter of fact they come down and put somebody behind us just to watch us shoot and keep track of our score."

The Army and the Marine Team have a huge advantage over the Guard Team because they can recruit people from National tournaments, they don't get mobilized, and they get a full time job shooting for three years.

Guard teams don't get the chance to practice together unless they are at a tournament or special arrangements are made. However, individual team members, being the experts that they are, have been helping train units to be designated marksmen. A designated marksman team consists of one or two members who engage targets from 300 to 600 meters.

Even with their lack of practice, compared to the Army and Marine Teams, Hofmann's outlook for this year is very positive, "I think we will beat the Army and Marines."

Soldiers and Sailors train for joint mission

By Spc. Steve Hardesy
111th Press Camp

CUSTER STATE PARK – Working together to complete a mission is paramount, be it in the workplace or in the battlefield.

Sailors from the United States Naval Reserve and Soldiers from the South Dakota Army National Guard assisted each other Saturday, June 18 at Custer State Park as part of the training that took place during this year's Joint Thunder exercise.

The exercise was a mass casualty scenario that evaluated the response of Soldiers and Sailors in a battlefield event with a large number of injuries to deal with. With the addition of an opposing force attack, it was more realistic for the battlefield.

"The attack stressed them," said Lt. Cmdr. Leslie Pafford, Operation Health Support of the Navy Fleet Hospital, United States Naval Reserve in Dallas, Texas. "It really forced them to think of alternate resources to use and how to utilize it."

However, there were barriers to take care of even before this exercise. It is rare that different branches of the military, get to train together and learn how each branch works specifically.

"There is a need for as much interaction as you can get with other branches of the services. The Army has different resources than the Navy have and vice versa," said Rear Adm. David Maserang from the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery of the United States Navy in Washington, D.C. "We need to learn everything that we can about how to integrate and operate within each other's environment."

Interaction between the two branches wasn't the only learning experience. Frequently, units and different companies do not have the opportunity to train together.



Photo by Spc. Shelley Brown - 111th Press Camp

A medic from Company B, 109th Medical (Ground Ambulance), SDARNG, assesses the severity of injuries after a simulated car accident at Custer State Park. Medics from the 109th and the 1085th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), SDARNG, evaluated the victims.

Medics from the 1085th Medical Company and Company B, 109th Area Support Medical Battalion combined the use of their air and ground ambulances in this exercise. Normally, annual training is the only time that these units get to work together.

"A lot of times we don't have the opportunity to train with other medical assets," said Maj. Michael Snow, commander of the 1085th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), "It really helps us to understand our job

better and train with a degree of realism."

While this is required training, it reflects on what is going on with the current situation in the Middle East.

"I have friends that are deployed in Kuwait and Iraq right now," said Pafford. "They point out what we need to train on."

In preparation for the field training, the Soldiers and Sailors trained throughout the week to get ready for the exercise.

"The Sailors are fired up and ready

to utilize all of the training that they have received," added Pafford.

And according to Snow, the training had a high degree of realism and is congruent with what is being seen on the battlefields in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere in the world.

"In this day in age, deployment is very likely," said Snow. "Opportunities like this training help us to prepare for it."

Joint effort helps prevent wildland fires



Photo by Spc. Shelley Brown - 111th Press Camp

Spc. Nate Scott from the 842nd Engineer Company, receives training from a local firefighter in setting up a waterline to fight wildland fires.

By Spc. Steve Hardesy
111th Press Camp

CUSTER – Wildland fires are not an uncommon occurrence in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Residents know all too well that a single spark can escalate into a raging inferno, burning large areas of forest land.

This year's Joint Thunder exercise gave Soldiers and local firefighting personnel the chance to work together in a classroom and a field setting to learn how to effectively extinguish a wildfire.

"It's a great opportunity to work with the local personnel," said Senior Master Sgt. Gene Gillen from the Joint Force Headquarters of the South Dakota Air National Guard in Rapid City. "We are helping each other. And when we go to a fire, we aren't leading. We are assisting."

This year's training has the Soldiers of the 842nd Engineer Company and local firefighting personnel from the Black Hills area going through 40 hours of training in four days to prepare themselves if an event arises.

Training consists of three days of classroom instruction and then a complete day of hands on training in the field.

"The training is outstanding," said 1st Lt. Stuart Muzzy from the 842nd Engineer Company, Detachment 1 in Belle Fourche, "We're making sure that all of our Soldiers are getting a chance to get their hands on the equipment and do their job."

The wildland fire training is important in the area and to the residents of the Black Hills. Just five years ago, the largest wildfire in South Dakota's history tore through the Jewel Cave region and beyond burning over 80,000 acres of land.

"This training is making sure that the Soldiers and local personnel know how to take care of themselves," said Gillen. "And this training is all about the safety of the firefighters and the local residents."

The wildland fire training also gave a lot of young Soldiers from the 842nd the opportunity to actually use classroom knowledge out in a field environment.

"You never know what could happen," said Spc. Marshall Osloond from the 842nd.

"This will better prepare you for the unexpected. And with this training, people will remember what to do."

Afghanistan veterans return from deployment



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Don Matthews

Master Sgt. Dan McGough hugs his grandchildren at the 109th Engineer Group's return to South Dakota.

SDNG Public Affairs Office

RAPID CITY – The 109th Engineer Group returned home Friday, May 13 after serving a year in Afghanistan.

The unit arrived at the old terminal at the Rapid City Regional Airport where they were greeted by family and friends.

The veterans were honored with a downtown parade and a welcome home ceremony at Rapid City Central High School.

Many people were on hand for the welcome home ceremony to include guest speakers Gov. Mike Rounds, Senator Tim Johnson, Senator John Thune and Rep. Stephanie Herseth.

"I remember almost 13 months ago we were here, and we talked about what was going to happen. I told families that I wished I could take away the hurt you were feeling, but we couldn't. Well, tonight, we get to feel the joy of the homecoming, and that's special," said Gov. Mike Rounds.

The 109th departed South Dakota April 12, 2004 for Fort Carson, Colo. where they trained on a variety of tasks to prepare them for the deployment.

The engineer group was the first South Dakota National Guard unit to serve in Afghanistan supporting Operation Enduring Freedom.

During their time in the country, they supervised all engineer projects to include clearing some of the estimated millions of land mines, pouring millions of cubic feet of concrete and building a massive road connecting Kandahar to Tarin Kowt through the heart of Taliban country.

The South Dakotans worked with more than 1,800 engineers in the Air Force, Army and Army National Guard as well as Soldiers from five different countries.

The 76 members of the 109th Engineer Group now rejoin the nearly 3,500 Soldiers still serving in a non-active duty status in South Dakota to continue to provide support for state and national emergencies and homeland defense.

Operation Cares helps Guard families in need

By Spc. Mark Watson
129th MPAD

In the small, tight-knit communities of South Dakota, the townspeople are more like a family than just neighbors and when hard times come, they pull together to help one another.

Operation Cares reflects this togetherness. It is a charitable program with a mission solely to take care of the families of deployed Soldiers.

"We have done absolutely everything to help these families," said Les Cummings a retired South Dakota National Guard state command sergeant major. "We have fixed cars, bought cars ... we've paid grocery bills and heat bills. We've paid for baby sitting and flown mothers to see their sons in the hospital. It's been absolutely phenomenal what we've been able to do."

Operation Cares began in 2003 when 1st Battalion of the 147 Field Artillery mobilized to Fort Sill, Okla. Since that time, Cummings said hundreds of people have helped with the program and founders of the program have collected more than \$100,000. Mike Heineman and Cummings, creators of the program, have spent more than \$90,000 in the Sioux Falls community since it began.

"Military families are full of pride and don't often go looking for help," Cummings said. "I've had people call me in the middle of the night crying, thanking me for what we've done to help them out."

The organization, made up solely of volunteers and relies on its funding strictly

from donations made by people and businesses throughout the communities, helps the families of deployed service members in any way it can. The program also reaches out to reservists and active duty service members' families in the eastern part of the state.

Rebecca Anderson, the 114th Wing family coordinator for the South Dakota Air National Guard said she received tips of families in need from a variety of places. She also serves as a Red Cross lead volunteer where she occasionally works with families of deployed Soldiers.

"When I am done talking to them about what the Red Cross can do, I take off the Red Cross hat and ask them what Operation Cares can do for them and what they need," Anderson said.

The gratitude is easy to see when the program can help someone, she added.

"Absolute relief," she said about the program's offering. "You can see it's a huge load off their shoulders and just absolute relief. They don't have to pay it back. This is truly a gift and a thank you for their families' sacrifice. This isn't just dollars and cents, this is a significant amount for significant problems."

Cummings said if it weren't for the generosity of the communities, the program would not be operational.

"We have an absolutely outstanding civilian task force," he said. "They know freedom isn't free. They know the American Soldier will go anywhere around the world to defend democracy, and this is their way of helping them."

Program set to remodel Soldiers' homes

By Spc. Mark Watson
129th MPAD

Extreme Makeover: Home Edition has become a popular Sunday evening show that takes a well deserving family's, often times run-down house, a hand full of gifted designers, a dedicated construction crew and a neighborhood full of volunteers and transforms the house into a magnificent home in seven days.

Projects have included rebuilding a house for a family of eight children who just lost both their parents and remodeling a house for a wheelchair bound family member.

A spin off is set to remodel its first home in South Dakota. However, founders of Operation Opening Doors hope their services are never needed.

The operation works hand-in-hand with the Associated General Contractors of South Dakota and is designed to help service members who have been or injured during the Global War on Terrorism.

"They have stepped up to the plate and have said they will do all the labor and donate all the materials needed free," said Les Cummings, a retired state command sergeant major of the South Dakota National Guard. "That is huge. Just one home could have easily taken up all the money we have raised."

Certain modifications have to be made to a house with someone wheelchair bound,

so it complies with the housing codes. One of the most obvious is that doors have to be widened to allow the wheelchair to pass thru.

"We want to make sure that when they leave the hospital and go home, it is handicap accessible," Cummings said. "We will build a ramp, we'll take out doors, we'll make things in the kitchen so they can reach them. We'll do things in the bathroom and the bedroom so he can get into stuff. We'll do everything we can so he doesn't have to struggle when he gets home."

Getting a handicap accessible home up to "code" could easily wipe out many families' finances.

"It could cost as little as \$500 if we only needed to put in a ramp, or I might be conservative when I say \$25,000 for widening the doorways, putting new fixtures in the bathroom and kitchen," said Bob Weerheim, the public relations community chairman for the group.

This program isn't just for South Dakotans either. Cummings said if a service member needs a home remodeled in the corner of Iowa or Minnesota, the group will cross the state lines to help out if they do not have a similar program.

"I feel that they are making a sacrifice for us," Weerheim said about the group's decision to help out. "It was pretty much 100 percent unanimous that we wanted to do this for the troops."