



# Cowboy Guard

Volume 2, Number 3

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# Cowboy Guard



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## On the Cover



Eli Lilley, Wyoming ARNG's NCO of the Year, eyes the finish line of the 12-mile ruck march during the culminating event at the 2015 Region 6 Best Warrior competition. See full story on Page 7. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class James McGuire

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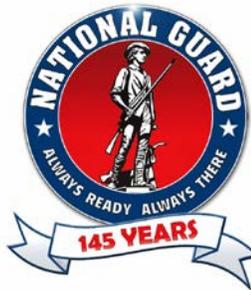
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Members of the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee prepare to embark on a simulated convoy mission in a combat zone with the instruction of Phillip Merlino at the Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center Simulation Center. MAC members toured several CGJTC facilities including the improvised explosive device "Petting Zoo" and Wyoming Cowboy Challenge Academy. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class James McGuire



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As responders in Wyoming domestic emergencies, I can attest to the fact that our Wyoming Guard members are among the best.

7.5 inches of torrential rain had fallen in four hours over Niobrara County, which led to the emergency response of our guardsmen to the communities of Lusk and Manville.

Within two hours of notification we had guardsmen on the ground taking measures to keep people safe and help in any way possible.

The local command center had spent the night taking calls and sending out teams to rescue stranded families. Our community leaders need to be complemented on their swift action that saved lives.

The effects of the flood are the worst I have seen during my tenure in the Wyoming Military Department and it's absolutely heart-wrenching.

What I would share with you though is that the arrival of men and women in uniform brought hope and a sense of comfort to the community.

Our guardsmen responded immediately to ensure all members of the community were safe and then went on to assist in recovery operations.

Our high-water vehicles carried staff to the prison, delivered water, rescued a stranded vehicle and helped clear debris from choke points in the river.

They teamed with swift water rescue units from Casper and Laramie and what they accomplished together was phenomenal. Watching them operate reminded me of why we wear this nation's uniform.

Our state, our communities, and our state's residents rely and depend on you, the citizen soldier. Your demonstrated ability to rapidly respond and to make a difference was noted and appreciated.

I am also very proud of the way the communities,

**The Adjutant General  
Maj. Gen. Luke Reiner**

## Generally Speaking

**The Adjutant General  
Maj. Gen. Luke Reiner**



Niobrara County and the state came together over the four days. The contributions and willingness to help extended from beyond the borders of Niobrara County.

The state has come together and continues to help rebuild the communities involved in the flood.

I am proud of our National Guard, proud of the community connection that make the guard unique among the armed forces and proud to serve with each one of you.



Maj. Gen. Luke Reiner addresses the crowd at the Moving Memorial Wall in Cheyenne in late June. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class James McGuire

In this issue I want to talk about *the joys of personal readiness*.

We speak of our Guard asking more and more from us. Monopolizing our time and seemingly driving us crazy.

Interestingly enough not all people believe this. In fact we think some troops seem to have all the luck. I submit to you that the soldiers with the most luck are very hard working.

Think about it if you are physically fit you are looked highly upon in this organization. If you have a great attitude, peers and supervisors alike enjoy being around you. If you have taken the time to stay current with SSD & NCOES, you are ready for the next promotion.

The facts are as follows:

80 soldiers are coded non-promotable on the EPS list because they have not completed SSD1.

101 soldiers are coded non-promotable on the EPS list because they have not completed SSD2.

I know we have had some problems with SSD2, but it's up and running now, so if you want to be promoted and make more money, get it done!

We all know that in AR 350-1 the Army has set forth required training. Add to that the things that just seem to pop up, and suddenly we have no time to accomplish all the things being asked of us.

Hold on some soldiers do.

It is all in our priorities. We can choose to be overwhelmed or dig deep, work hard, and accomplish what needs to get done. Admit it, sometimes we spend more time complaining about the task than what it takes to just do it.

I have faith in all the soldiers of this great organization. If you choose to stay personally ready it will happen. If you choose to get your SSD complete it will happen.

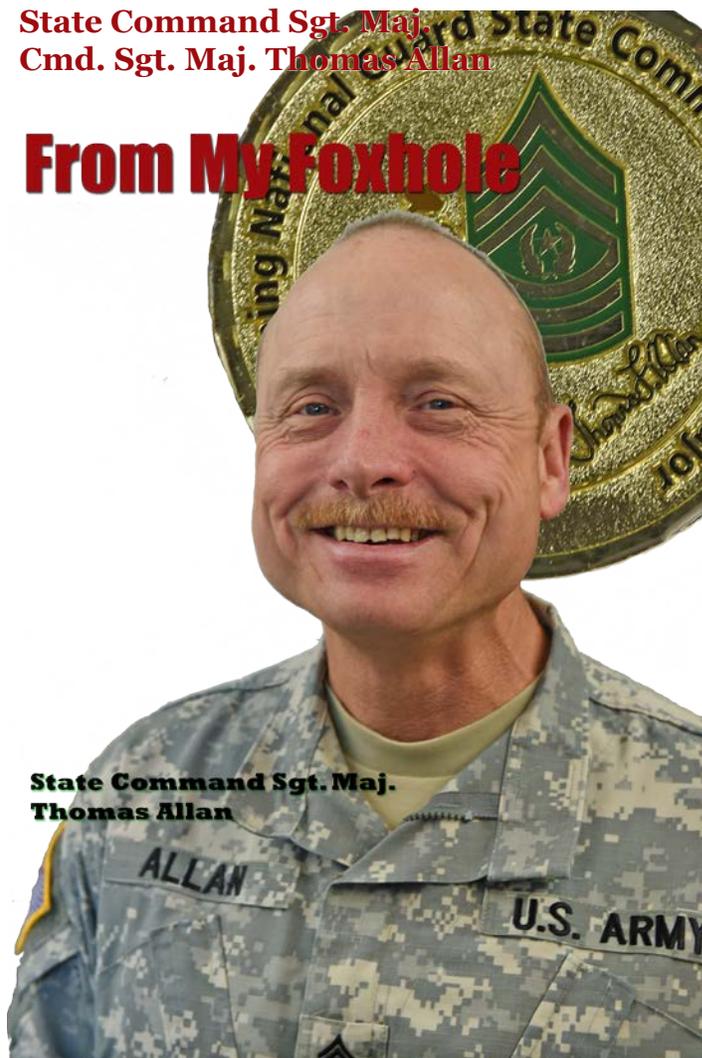
If you continually look for reasons not do it, it will not happen!

In choosing to watch our caloric intake, and maintain a serious physical fitness routine we will be

**State Command Sgt. Maj.  
Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Thomas Allan**

## From My Foxhole

**State Command Sgt. Maj.  
Thomas Allan**



successful in staying fit. If we don't, well you get the picture.

Choose today to be the lucky soldier that always seems to be at the right place at the right time. You might be surprised how jumping in and doing the hard stuff will increase your success.

Remember to thank the people most important in your life that support you in this noble profession of arms.

Without you, the troops of the Wyoming Army National Guard, we cannot be successful in protecting this state and nation.

## *Help us make Cowboy Guard better*

Let us know what you like about Cowboy Guard and how we can make it better. We've created a web-based form for you to provide inputs to our magazine. Please take a moment to fill out the form found at this link: <http://bit.ly/cowboyfb>.

I had not shed a tear since my father died in 2010. But, here I was, standing in a room full of Vietnam veterans, paying remembrance to the men who stepped off a plane in the humid air of Vietnam, but never stepped onto a Freedom Bird to go home. And the emotions hit me.

To my left stood a man with a clean shaven face, buttoned up shirt, khakis, a reunion badge with his name and service on it and sunglasses on his head, wiping away tears. To my right, a man with a greyed beard down to his chest, a t-shirt tucked into his jeans, and a vest with a POW/MIA patch on it. His tears were running down the vest.

And in the middle, was me, a son of a Vietnam veteran, who had grown up listening to the stories of patrols in rice paddies, rides in Huey helicopters and the smell of Nuc Man sauce. Stories that resembled so many that I heard during the weekend at the Wyoming Vietnam Veterans Reunion in Casper.

In 1973, as acid rock hit the airwaves, moviegoers shrieked at Linda Blair in "The Exorcist," and the World Trade Center reached for the heavens, American service members returned home from the jungles and mosquito-infested land of Vietnam.

The appreciation communicated from the home front was as unpleasant as the heat and mosquito bites.

I'm sure that many of you who have deployed or worn the uniform in the community have received handshakes and thank you messages from people aplenty.

For myself, I've been thanked and hugged by extremely nice elderly ladies in the Bangor, Maine, airport, unknown families have picked up my bill at restaurants, and embarrassingly for myself, been asked for my autograph from children.

But, I never received so much appreciation than I and my fellow soldiers received from the nearly 700 veterans at the reunion. It was endless, and each moment made me emotional, because I knew from my father's stories, that many of these same veterans, who had in-processed at Cam Ranh Bay, served on ships in the South China Sea, or humped the highlands, did not receive the welcome home chants that my current brothers and sisters in the military are presented.

In previous decades, the communication to the returning vets was poor. Stories of returning incidents all feel like something from an Oliver Stone film: spit on, baby killer cursings, fights, and worse, snubbing – sometimes by the veteran's own family.

My father spoke of how when he came home, his friends and family never talked about the war. It was

**Deputy PAO  
Capt. Tom Blackburn**

# Comm Check



yesterday's news; and if anyone actually served, then the service was ignored, forgotten, replaced with questions of today, as in, "Where do you work now, after being gone so long?" The war never happened.

In 1973 communication toward a Vietnam veteran was painfully absent.

Today's soldier or airman returns through airports with fire trucks blasting water as if to symbolize a clean return. Lines of volunteers, ranging from veterans, to elder ladies and men, to thankful American citizens, await aircraft arrivals at the Atlanta and Dallas Fort Worth International Airports. Governors and distinguished visitors strive to pay homage to the warriors returning back to their community, all well deserved.

Today the thanks is clearly communicated.

During the first weekend in June, Wyoming thanked its Vietnam veterans 50 years after that war started at the reunion. It was a great opportunity for veterans from Cheyenne to Sheridan,

**See COMM CHECK on page 7**

You might ask, what is a trusted agent, what's the difference between a good trusted agent and bad trusted agent?

Have you ever been invited to a birthday party and on the invitation it goes something like this, "Shhh.... it's a surprise."

The person who sent you the invitation expects you not to tell the person who's having the birthday.

At that moment, you are their trusted agent along with all the other people who received an invitation. This is really putting it into the simplest terms. Let's explore this scenario a little deeper and see how being a trusted agent can affect you as a member of the Wyoming Military Department.

Membership entails a responsibility to uphold, since many of you have access to personal information such as: financial records, personnel files, medical records, etc.

Failure to keep these details private can be detrimental not only to the person involved, but also to your career!

Looking at the surprise birthday party example, someone had to do a lot of work to put it together and they don't want the individual having the birthday to know.

Trust is crucial in order to organize the party effectively while keeping it a secret. When a surprise birthday party is done correctly, the person being surprised and the party organizer are both elated.

However, what is invisible to the person being surprised is the fact that the party would not have been possible without everyone involved keeping it a secret. This not only built trust among the party organizers, but also made the surprise much more entertaining.

In order for an organization to function properly, trust amongst all members must be attained. Without trust people refuse to cooperate and chaos ensues.

Nevertheless, it is a win-win situation when a trusted

**State Command Chief  
Chief Master Sgt. Bill Whipple**

**The Chief's Corner**



agent keeps private information to themselves. They keep their career intact and build momentum for the Wyoming Military Department to improve interpersonal communication skills.

If people can trust one another with private information, they will be more willing to share important personal information that will build relationships and promote a more effective environment.

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### COMM CHECK from page 6

Evanston to Jackson, to gather to remember and share with brothers whose youth was shaped by the jungles of Southeast Asia.

It also gave those of us who serve now, who have been on the receiving end of hundreds of handshakes and hugs, to offer our appreciation for the selfless service of the Vietnam generation. I shook the hands vigorously of each veteran who approached me to thank me for my service. The exchange went like this in most cases: "Thank you for your service," the veteran would say, and my reply

was "Thank you for your service and laying the foundation. Welcome Home."

Each time, the feeling was great. I was in a position to offer thanks to others for their service. It felt even greater knowing it was my father's generation, a group of young men and women flown across the Pacific to wage a war for their country, and then to return to a world that had moved on.

They were shunned. Now, the shunning ends.

Fifty years later we clearly communicated "Thank you and welcome home." ~

# Life skills and dragsters share the track at WCCA

Story and photos By  
Sgt. 1st Class Jimmy McGuire  
Public Affairs NCOIC



Wyoming Cowboy Challenge Academy Deputy Director and Drag to Learn founder Mark Knickerbocker burns out at the Guernsey Airfield for a group of Wyoming Cowboy Challenge Cadets. Below, Knickerbocker shows his Auto Club participants around the pits at the Douglas Motor Park. Most of the drivers at Douglas are Drag to Learn sponsors and welcome WCCA cadets into their trailers to view the vehicles and answer questions. These dragsters belong to a family of racers.

**M**ark Knickerbocker loves automobiles and drag racing, but more importantly, he loves helping kids succeed.

Bringing those passions together as the deputy director of the Wyoming Cowboy Challenge Academy (WCCA) and the founder of the nationally recognized Drag to Learn program allows him the best of both worlds.

“Mr. Knick,” as he’s called, could punch out at the end of any workday at the National Guard-sponsored course for at-risk youth, but instead, he chooses to run an extracurricular automobile club on Thursday evenings.

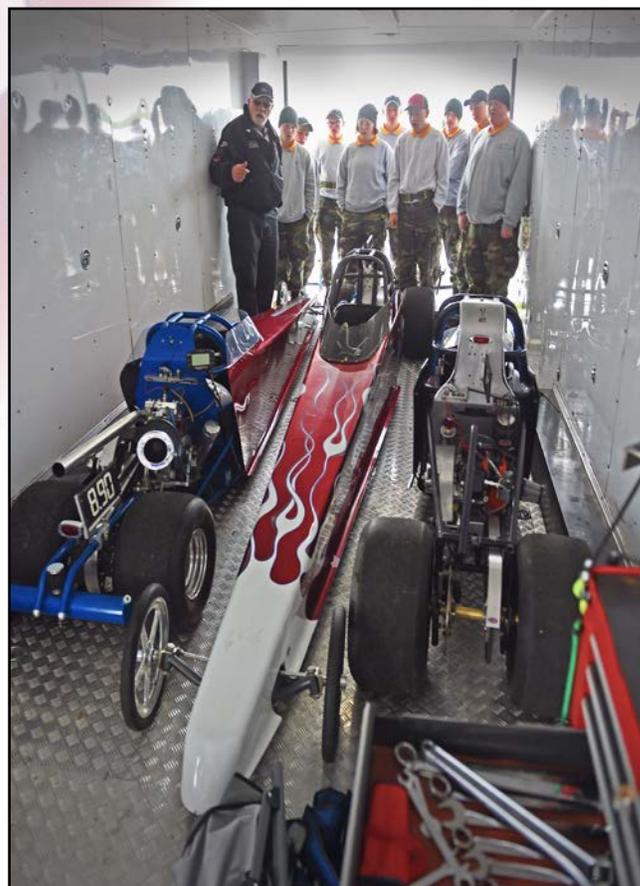
While not all of the cadets take advantage of the evening offering to volunteers interested in how automobiles run, they are all introduced to the key elements of Drag to Learn (DTL) during the course of their 5½-month residency at the academy.

With multimedia and hands-on teaching tools, Knickerbocker augments the core components of WCCA curriculum using the vehicle he knows and loves – drag racing.

WCCA aims to make its graduates more employable, and COASY for Work goals enhance that effort by focusing on work ethics and employment skills.

Come to Work to Work; On Time to Work; Attitude; Stay Until the Job is Complete and You

Represent your Employer 24/7 are emblazoned on Knickerbocker’s 1973 F-100 racing truck and on the educational materials he shares with the **See DRAG on page 15**



STARBASE Academy Instructor Mark Nowotny and academy graduate Rose Threewitt launch a rocket to kickoff the National Guard-sponsored science and math learning center's 20th anniversary May 28. Guest speakers included Maj. Gen. (ret.) Chuck Wing, who was state adjutant general who gave the green light to the nationally known program, and first director, Col. (ret.) Jim Barr. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class James McGuire



# Learning to fly with the 213th

A soldier in camouflage uniform and a grey beanie is holding a small, white, V-shaped unmanned aircraft (Raven) in his hands. The soldier's uniform has "RIVERA" and "U.S. ARMY" visible on the chest. The background is dark, and the lighting highlights the soldier and the aircraft.

**Story and photos by Capt. Christian Venhuizen  
Public Affairs Officer  
197th Public Affairs Detachment**

The Wyoming Army National Guard expanded its unmanned aircraft system credentials from providing the secure airspace to actual flight training.

The 213th Regional Training Institute, based at Guernsey, graduated the first 10-day basic operator's course for the RQ-11 Raven class in the fall of 2014, a mix of Army National Guard and Air Force students.

The second class, all Army National Guardsmen, graduated in April 2015, after conducting their field training at Camp Guernsey.

"It's a very advanced class and you basically hit the ground running at a very fast pace," said Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Oakes, of

Cheyenne, a guest instructor with the RTI.

The 213th RTI instructors attended a similar 10-day basic course, followed by a three-week master training course. In Oakes' case, he completed the basic course at Redstone Arsenal, in Alabama, and the master course at Fort Benning, Georgia. Both courses focused on flying the Raven.

The cadre of instructors means Wyoming students can stay in Wyoming for the basic Raven course and draw students from around the nation.

Ravens, weighing just over four pounds, are carried by troops from multiple branches of military service. They provide an aerial view, including infrared night vision, of the battlefield or can scout a forward location to ensure areas are safe, however, these UAVs are unarmed.

The classes of eight students, separated into two groups, learn to setup the remote system and pilot the aircraft using telemetry fed to both a computer and

a control box.

“They learn how to fly, they learn instruments, they learn emergency procedures paramount to safeguard the aircraft in case anything happens to the aircraft,” said Oakes. “The aircraft is about a \$30,000 system. They learn a little bit about the weather and they learn a little bit about themselves as well.”

“My thoughts (coming into the class) were, as far as the class itself, that it was going to be more of a ‘just fly the aircraft around and have fun,’” said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Clancy, of Lander, one of the students in the April class. “I didn’t really expect the level of operating the camera and the different cameras that are available on the aircraft, which really make it a force multiplier.”

Clancy is an artilleryman with the Wyoming National Guard’s 2nd Battalion, 300th Field Artillery. He said he sees the potential for

UAVs and the different cameras they carry to survey targets hit by artillery fire. It is a potential that could save lives by keeping American troops out of dangerous areas.

Camp Guernsey is no stranger to providing training areas for artillery or UAVs. The camp’s location, literally across the street from the RTI, and its proven record of hosting units using the unmanned aircraft helped make the unmanned course possible. Additionally, the rural training area and secure air space allow the students to fly the aircraft without coming near residential communities.

“The flying environment is great. We have so much acreage we can utilize,” said Oakes of the environment.

Clancy said the variable winds and terrain enhanced the training, adding obstacles to flying and retrieving the aircraft. “It’s just a really good course and its fun.”

Not only is it fun, but potentially could lead to civilian employment. Clancy and Oakes said the training may add another marketable skill set for military personnel outside of uniformed service.

Soldiers have the opportunity to request the training at the RTI, which plans to offer the course up to twice a year. 



Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Michael Clancy, of Lander, Wyoming, assigned to Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion, 300th Field Artillery, uses a remote system to view the camera feed and fly the RQ-11 Raven UAS. He is assisted by Staff Sgt. Samuel Bloom, of Sheridan, Wyo., also with the 2-300th; and supervised by Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Oakes, an RTI guest instructor.

Sgt. Gabriel Rivera, left, of Cheyenne, assigned to C Company, 5th Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, prepares to launch a RQ-11 Raven unmanned aircraft system.

# SOME TROOPS ARE INSPIRED INSPIRE



Story & photos by Sgt. 1st Class Jimmy McGuire  
Wyoming Army National Guard  
Public Affairs NCOIC

**M**ilitary career fields vary as widely as the number of religious denominations.

As well, the career path for those called to military chaplaincy may have many turns and twists.

Divine inspiration routinely fuels that career decision for potential chaplains, as the job requires education and dedication before it may be attained.

The Chaplain Corps incorporates many experience levels and specific roles for enlisted and commissioned service members. Regardless of their personal religion, chaplains must be willing and able to communicate with and serve troops from all faith groups.

The Wyoming National Guard chaplains and chaplain assistants, from all over the state, and as far away as Utah, who attended this year's State Chaplaincy Annual Sustainment Training at Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center's Gray Rocks Lodge, have a desire to bring their best to soldiers and

Wyoming Air National Guard Chaplain, Maj. Wade Jensen, makes a presentation to fellow chaplains and chaplain assistants during a conference at Grey Rocks Ranch at Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center. Jensen addressed topics from his book *The Pathological Grieving of America*. "I thought I dealt with this, now why am I crying," he asks. "Because grief doesn't forget."

# PS ND TO

airmen across the state and to share ideas that will help bring that goal to the forefront, while leading classes and workshops for each other.

Unlike many of Wyoming's chaplaincy members, who started their career path with an undefined vision, Spc. Nikki Borden, a chaplain assistant from Evansville, knew what she wanted to do from the start of her military service. She serves on the 960th Brigade Support Battalion Unit Ministry Team with Chaplain, Rob Peterson, a major, in Casper.

Borden recently transferred from the Minnesota Guard and was worried she would have to change the military job she's held from the start of her four-year career. She reported with a smile, she didn't.

"I love what I do," Borden said. "I've met a lot of people, and from what I've heard, helped a lot of people."

Spurred by a conference topic about suicide ideation, she recalled a story about a friend she talked to after drill one weekend in Minnesota. She was worried about him and called him later that evening.

"I just can't do it anymore," her friend said. "What can't you do?" Borden asked. "Any of this," he answered.

"You're not thinking about suicide, are you?" was her next question.

"Well, I am," he said before disconnecting the phone.

"I ended up calling my chaplain," Borden explained. "I told him my friend might be mad at me forever, but I'd rather have him mad than dead."

They decided to call the police, who found the soldier. Borden talked to the soldier several days later, and he thanked her for her action. "He's doing really well now. It was a hard decision, but the right one."

Peterson is in his eighth year as a Wyoming Army



Wyoming Army National Guard Chaplain, Maj. Rob Peterson of the 960th Brigade Support Battalion in Casper, addresses a chapel full of Vietnam veterans, friends and family members during the memorial service held as part of the Vietnam Veteran Welcome Home Reunion. Peterson, like many military chaplains, is a full-time pastor at a local church.

National Guard chaplain. Like most chaplains, he graduated university, served in the ready reserves while at four years of seminary and while fulfilling a two-year commitment to pastor a church with his endorsing denomination.

He said he hadn't always planned on being a military chaplain, and it wasn't until his last year of college that his calling was revealed.

"I went to college to be a game warden," Peterson said.

He was working as a resident assistant in the dormitory at that time, and noticed he was doing a lot of counseling and helping people transition from high school to college life.

"I was a Christian, and I was living for the Lord.

**CHAPLAINCY from page 13**

The more I talked to the guys and helped them figure out what was important to them and what they believed in, the more I sensed a calling from God to do this with my whole life," he explained. "The chaplaincy made the most sense. You've got a group of people that you are with and are shepherding through issues in life. And in the Army, the same kind of transitions—being away from home for the first time and living on your own."

When that light came on, Peterson intended to join the active duty Army, something he thought about doing right out of high school, until a recruiter told him he should go to college first. He said he is pleased with his path and the opportunity to build relationships in the military.

"I'm really glad I went the Guard route," Peterson said. "You can be with the same group of people over a much longer time. It's very gratifying knowing someone five, six years, and watching them open up about some issue in their life that maybe they wouldn't have if we had just a couple of years."

Maj. Randy Sawyer, the chaplain with the 2nd Battalion, 300th Field Artillery, started his military path as an enlisted Marine infantryman. He left the Marines in 1983, as a corporal, and went to college in Sheridan. He subsequently joined the Guard unit there as an artilleryman, earned his associate's degree, and enrolled at the University of Wyoming and its ROTC program. He was commissioned in 1988.

"Then I went off to Officer Basic Course at Fort Sill. It was kind of a weird thing. I failed an aca-

demics test with a 69.7," Sawyer explained. "They looked at my scratch sheet, and they noticed I had seven of the problems right, but when I had transferred them to the answer sheet, I had them wrong. They told me I had dyslexia."

He said the diagnosis was confirmed, and he was told he could not be a combat arms officer.

"They said 'you're a good officer, and we want you to stay,'" Sawyer continued. "I said I want to be a chaplain then. They said you have the grades, but you will have to get out and come back after seminary. I thought it was just an Army school, like three months and I'd be good."

Sawyer decided to take some time off to think it over, as he struggled with his dislike of academics and the potential for four more years of school to earn his Master's of Divinity. He decided to go for it, after a year or so, but then there was an issue with the school he chose and getting the endorsement an Army chaplain is required to have. After 18 months, he reentered the service and began seminary.

In September, 2005 he became a battalion chaplain. He said it was a rough road getting to that point, and there were times when he thought he wouldn't make it. He credits 115th Field Artillery Brigade Chaplain, Lt. Col. Dave Hall with keeping him focused.

Sawyer said he sees his struggles as a source of strength today, not just for himself, but the troops he serves.

"It's the whole resiliency thing, you know, bouncing back from adversity," he said. "If you keep pushing on the door, that spiritual door, you'll find God never closed

the door, and He never did close the door on me, even though it took me a long time."

Derek Moore is a 26-year-old Army brat from Mississippi, who received his commission after receiving his bachelor's degree and completing ROTC. He is now a first lieutenant Army Reserve chaplain candidate, while completing his fourth and final year of seminary. He plans to accession as a chaplain in the Wyoming Army Guard this summer in conjunction with his denomination's church assignment in Laramie.

"I knew I wanted to be a chaplain in the Guard or Reserve, and when I found this (church pastor) opportunity, I called a Wyoming recruiter and he told me he had a slot," Moore said.

While he hadn't fortified his long range military career goals until a period between his junior and senior years, he knew he wanted to do something that would involve his passion for ministry.

"I was sorting out what I wanted to do in the Army at LDAC (Leadership Development Assessment Course) and that's where I had that final clarity. I knew I didn't want to do what your typical officer does. I wanted to serve soldiers in a spiritual way too," Moore said of his choice.

He said he may have had subconscious inklings in early life about this career choice, because his dad is an Army chaplain.

"I never said to myself, that I remember, 'I'm gonna do what my dad does.' But now I do what my dad does," he explained with a chuckle.

Rest assured, if you need someone to talk to about anything imaginable, your unit ministry team is a great place to start. 

**DRAG from page 8**

WCCA cadets and other students in the region.

Another acronym, COASY for Life stands for Commitment; Organized Plan; Attitude; Service and You Are Responsible.

“Your success or failure is up to you,” Mr. Knick tells the kids, “There are no excuses. It’s really not about intellect. It’s about attitude.”

Throughout the presentations that include racing-related math and science lessons, Knickerbocker shares his experiences and observations within the drag racing community.

Tyge Polston, a 16-year-old cadet from Arvada, Colorado, has been a drag racing fan and regular attendee at Bandimere Speed. He said the DTL life lessons presented through racing-centered curriculum make good sense to him, and may even inspire a career focus.

“If you lose a race, you can always do something to fix it, or get better at what you do. You keep learning and you keep trying,” Polston explained.

“My big thing is, failure’s gonna come, but you never quit,” Knickerbocker said while at the race track in Douglas. “Like right now I’m having a transmission issue. I was pretty discouraged yesterday, but I can fix it and we’re going to be back. I’ve got a lot of great people helping me. That’s one of the unique things about drag racing. We compete like heck, but at the end of the day, if you break, everyone’s there helping. People really care about one another.”

Knickerbocker was as old as some of the WCCA cadets are when he caught the racing bug.

“I must have been 16 and

worked for a man at a gas station as a pump jockey – there wasn’t any self-service back then. He was a gearhead, and I worked on his race cars,” Knickerbocker said of his induction. “Then a real good friend of mine’s father owned a wrecking yard and we got to drive whatever we could fix.”

With family commitments and a career in education taking precedence over the years, racing was on a back burner until 1998, when Knickerbocker acquired the truck he still races.

Around 2000, he started using it as a teaching tool and giving rides to youth.

“It actually started when I was a sales manager for a Ford dealership, and one of the young men I had in school when I was a principal, and whom I’d actually thrown out of school a couple of times, said ‘we really need to get this thing going.’ We knew it would be a big deal to some kid, sometime.

It’s better than winning a race.”

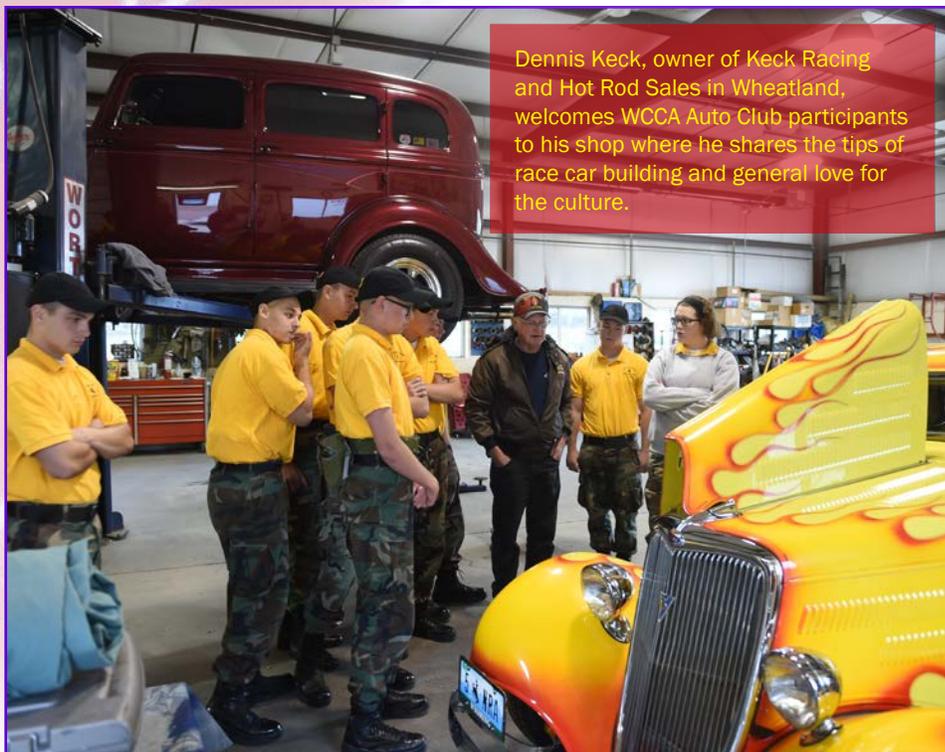
From there, Knickerbocker got some sponsors for Drag to Learn and gathered support from other racers who sport DTL stickers.

“A lot of times when I visit a school, and they’re in the area, they will bring their car over to show it,” Knickerbocker said. “They’re all very supportive.”

Another cadet, Marcos Byrn, from Fort Collins, Colo. didn’t know much about cars before attending WCCA and DTL sessions. Now, he would like to race, but he learned racing takes more than passion

“I learned that you have to make a budget and take good care of your cars and vehicles,” he said.

So, even if a young person in southeast Wyoming and beyond doesn’t become a race driver, they can say they gained some inspiration from one. 



Dennis Keck, owner of Keck Racing and Hot Rod Sales in Wheatland, welcomes WCCA Auto Club participants to his shop where he shares the tips of race car building and general love for the culture.

# State Partnership Program



**By Capt. Megan Hoffmann  
Public Affairs Specialist  
Wyoming Military Department**

The best relationships are like fine wine - they get better with time. This paradigm holds true in that in order to build trust, understanding and vitality in any relationship, the concept of time is a key component.

The National Guard's State Partnership Program is no exception to this idea. Its roots have grown deeper, stronger and more complex in the more than 20 years since the program's inception. According to the National Guard, the SPP first evolved in 1991 with the idea that it would be beneficial to pair soldiers and airmen with military partners from host nations, therefore bridging the physical, political, economic and military gap between the United States and foreign territories. It was the hope that this partnership would become a mutually beneficial tool for both the U.S. and the host nation, facilitating cooperation, understanding and friendship along

the way.

The proverbial SPP 'bridge' between the U.S. and host nations was initially built in 1993 when three inaugural SPPs formed between the Pennsylvania National Guard and Lithuania, Maryland's Guard and Estonia, and the Michigan National Guard and Latvia respectively. Since that time, 68 total partnerships with 74 countries have formed, spanning more than 20 years of mutually beneficial cooperation.

The Wyoming National Guard was able to jump on-board with the SPP program in 2004 when they partnered with Tunisia, a small country in Northern Africa that sits between Libya and Algeria.

"It started as the Partnership for Peace. At the end of the Cold War the United States didn't want those countries going back communist, so we got the idea that our National Guard channels would be good conduits for developing relationships in order to stop communism and build relationships with foreign countries," said Lt. Col. Henry Cudney, who served in Tunisia for the Wyoming National Guard from August 2010 - July 2012, as the bilateral affairs officer.

Wyoming's pairing with Tunisia was far from coincidental as the decision was made due to com-

# continues bridging the gap

*10 years and still going strong*

Wyoming Army National Guard State Partnership Program Coordinator Maj. Eric McCoy and Standardization Pilot Brandon Erdmann (third and fourth from left) with Tunisian Air Force officers Capt. Sofien Stambouli, Maj. Nejb Nrad, Capt. Tarek Blel and Col. Mohaned Tellili return to Cheyenne after a visit to Fort Carson, Colo. where Wyoming's partners inspected similar aircraft frame their country will use. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class James McGuire



monalities the state and country shared in climate, environment, economy and military interests. Militarily, the Wyoming Air National Guard operates C-130 aircraft, as does the Tunisian military; the Wyoming Army National Guard is heavily focused on field artillery, as is the Tunisian military; the Wyoming Army National Guard flies UH-60 aircraft, and Tunisia is in the process of procuring that airframe and training prospective UH-60 pilots. The partnership just made sense.

“I was there during the Arab Spring, when it was very difficult,” Cudney said. “Tensions were

extremely high after the overthrow of the dictatorship, but eventually things settled down and we were able to coordi-

nate resources and help the Tunisians in a way that they wanted and needed to be helped. When I first got there,

the Tunisians were very stand-offish; the uneasy relations were palpable

See SPP page 19

# Meet the Military Department

Editor's note: Each quarter we spotlight two Wyoming Military Department employees by asking them a series of 10 questions. Meet Tech. Sgt. Matt Edwards and Master Sgt. Joshua Phillips.

## How long have you worked for the Wyoming Military Department?

Edwards: Seven years

Phillips: 19 years

## What is your current job title/position in the organization?

Edwards: Logistics Specialist in the 153rd Logistics Readiness Squadron, Wyoming Air National Guard

Phillips: 115th Brigade Supply NCO

## What other positions (to include prior military service) have you held in the organization?

Edwards: Nuclear weapons technician, protocol assistant, customer service specialist, command support staff, JFHQ support staff.

Phillips: I started my military service on the M198's as a driver then moved up to gunner and made it to section chief. I performed security duties during 9/11 and then in 2003 became a unit supply NCO in B Battery/2-300th. I Deployed in 2005 as the Supply NCO for 2-300th, came back from that and was transferred up to HHB 2-300 FA for supply NCO. I then deployed with the 115th Brigade as a battalion supply NCO for 2-300th and after the deployment transferred over to 94th Troop Command as their battalion supply NCO.

## What is your favorite aspect about working for

## the organization?

Edwards: Working with great people.

Phillips: The challenge that is presented to me every day is my favorite aspect about this organization and how we can work together as a team to complete the mission.



**Tech. Sgt. Matt Edwards**  
153rd LRS

## What is the best piece of advice (personal or career-wise) you have ever been given?

Edwards: Be true to your core values and leave it all on the field.

Phillips: The best advice I have ever received is be a good teacher and student and the day you stop learning is the day you need to leave. This advice sheds a light on how you operate in this organization.



**Master Sgt. Joshua Phillips**  
115th FAB

## What are your favorite hobbies?

Edwards: Reading, running, motivational speaking

Phillips: My favorite hobbies are to go camping with the family overall spending any time with my family.

## If you were granted three wishes for whatever you want, what would you ask for?

Edwards: Perfect memory

Creative and strategic genius

The ability to connect with anyone on the planet.

Phillips: SGM AGR position in the G4 section

Full logistical team for the state of Wyoming (BDE, BN, and UNIT Supply

See MEET page 29

## SPP From page 17

as they were cautious about developing a relationship with Americans. However, after the revolution took place, the Tunisians were more open. I observed their first elections, which went really, really well,” he added of his Tunisian experiences.

SPP has also extended their reach beyond military-to-military relations, as it served as a catalyst for initiating the Arabic Studies Program at the University of Wyoming. This program, which came about after former U.S. Ambassador Gordon Gray visited Wyoming in 2011 urging support for educational initiatives for Tunisians, allows five students per academic year to attend the University of Wyoming, in Laramie, to attain their bachelor’s degree while receiving in-state tuition.

“We have an Arabic program at the University of Wyoming in no small part due to the State Partnership Program’s assistance in tying us with universities in Tunisia, facilitating faculty exchange and program initiation. It’s been a real boom to us,” said Anne Alexander, director of UW’s international programs.

Alexander, who also serves as the university’s associate dean of

the UW Outreach School, said Tunisia has also asked Wyoming to help build an educational curriculum that would mirror what Wyoming Technical Institute, also in Laramie, teaches to those interested in fields dealing with automotive, plumbing, electrician and heating, ventilation and cooling systems as those fields furnish a particularly useful and transferrable skill-set.

“The State Partnership Program has led to great ties in business and in other areas of higher education, which has been wonderful,” she added.

Members of the Cheyenne Frontier Days committee, local elected officials, and staff at the University of Wyoming, have had the opportunity to visit Tunisia while in their official capacities,

with the goal of fostering this mutually beneficial relationship with the Tunisian military and civilians.

The SPP has also allowed the Wyoming National Guard to consistently have a physical presence in-country serving as the bilateral affairs officer. Currently, Maj. Terry Oedekoven is serving in that capacity.

“I see having a presence in Tunisia as being crucial for the program. Where else could a major in the military help guide and mold a partner military? To me, the State Partnership Program goes beyond just the events, exercises and engagements. I have made lifelong friends here,” she said.

Besides having someone stationed in the partner country, the SPP also has someone in

Wyoming coordinating the program. Maj. Eric McCoy is the Wyoming National Guard’s SPP coordinator.

“The program has morphed from hosting a few events each year when the program started in 2004, to now seeing Tunisians and the United States reaching out their hands to one another not only militarily, but also in the civilian sector,” he said. “These partnerships have evolved tremendously over the years, and built solid, trusting relations, so much so, in fact, that from 2003-2013, 15 countries co-deployed with their SPP host-state to Iraq or Afghanistan over 79 times. If that doesn’t speak volumes about the relationships that this program has built, I don’t know what will.”



Wyoming Army National Guard Standardization Pilot Brandon Erdmann and Tunisian Air Force Capt. Tarek Blel discuss the maintenance of an aircraft similar to the type Tunisia is hopeful to acquire. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class James McGuire

# State Vietnam veteran's reunion welcomes home hundreds

Story and photo by Capt. Tom Blackburn  
Deputy Public Affairs Officer  
Wyoming Military Department

The tears flowed freely as the words echoed in the vastness that was the Casper Events Center.

700 veterans sat, listening, taking the words in, letting them settle in their ears and hearts.

Welcome home.

Repeatedly, that phrase was said during the four-day Wyoming Vietnam Veterans Reunion in Casper, Wyoming. It was a well-attended event, with friends and family members joining their loved ones who had served in Vietnam. But, unlike many of today's returning service members who return home to welcome receptions and gyms full of cheering loved ones, the Vietnam era veteran never received that treatment.

Until now.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the U.S.'s initial involvement of combat troops in the Southeast Asia war, the Wyoming Veterans Commission, in partnership with the Department of Defense and its national commemoration program, organized the first state sponsored Vietnam veteran reunion, with welcome home as the theme.

"We learned from most Vietnam era veterans, their service was never acknowledged and they definitely were never welcomed home," said Larry Barttelbort, director of the Wyoming Veterans Commission, whose agency spearheaded organizing the event. "That generation of veterans is directly respon-

sible for ensuring our post-9/11 veterans receive the welcome home they so richly deserve.

"Welcome Home was the natural theme."

For the nearly 700 veterans in attendance, most returned home to cold, harsh realities. When Saigon fell in 1975, the Vietnam veteran's service faded into the history books, much like Saigon and South Vietnam, renamed Ho Chi Minh City and consolidated into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, respectively.

"We didn't have a welcome home when we got home," said Lee Alley, a Vietnam veteran and veterans commission commissioner. "When I came home, I immediately went back to the University of Wyoming and the veteran wasn't accepted on campus. I basically hid my veteran identity. You couldn't talk about it on campus."

The reunion's mission was to bring together as many Wyoming state veterans as possible and give them a proper welcome home.

"The state's Wyoming Veterans Welcome Home Day law was signed by Gov. (Matt) Mead in 2011 and each year a team has visited three to four towns with a welcome home ceremony," said Barttelbort. "We learned these lo-



cal events were very well received and wanted to replicate that on a statewide basis."

Besides a welcome home ceremony, presided over by Gov. Mead and other dignitaries, there was a benefits fair, memorial service, parade and a dinner with special guest, war correspondent Joe Galloway. It was an event focused on remembering the past, and also cherishing the service of so many Wyoming veterans.

"Our planning team truly had one focus, keep the veterans in mind. The Vietnam veterans on our team ensured we had something for everyone, but also keeping true to the mission of honoring the veteran," said Barttelbort.

There had been previous reunions, but this was the first event that was state sponsored. The reviews were positive.

"I was amazed at the scope of



Vietnam veterans dismount and say the Pledge of Allegiance during a parade at the Wyoming Vietnam Veterans Reunion in Casper, Wyo. The event drew almost 700 veterans from all over the state to the first state sponsored Vietnam veteran reunion. Photo by Capt. Tom Blackburn

and Young,” and guest speaker. “I was proud to be invited to participate and speak to and for those Vietnam veterans.

From June 4-7, veterans visited with each other, sharing stories of patrols through rice paddies, missions on the Huey helicopter and remembering the spray of the South China Sea on U.S. naval ships. It was a great time to rehash old memories that possibly had laid dormant since the image of Huey’s lifting off from the U.S. embassy in Saigon in 1975.

The reunion also gave the local community an opportunity to be involved in welcoming home these veterans.

During the parade, after a long line of vehicles, motorcycles and military trucks passed, a large group of walking Vietnam veterans were applauded loudly and cheered.

the Wyoming celebration and at the turnout of Vietnam veterans – nearly a thousand of them,” said Joe Galloway, co-author of the book “We Were Soldiers Once...

Also family members were warmly invited to all events, so that they could witness and hear some of the stories that may have never been told. The interest from the community was evident after the first day of registration.

Expectations were modest from the planning committee, with numbers of attendees expected to be in the 400’s. However, that estimate grew quickly.

“Initially, we had 380 vets register with about 400 family members,” Barttelbort said. “We had another 300 vets and untold number of family members walk-up (to registration). We knew we would have walk-ups, but never in those numbers.”

Even with the increased amount of veterans coming, the event rolled forward. As veterans throughout the weekend signed a big map on the floor, documenting their tours overseas and inspected military equipment they once used years before at the Wyoming Veterans Museum, the message remained the same.

Welcome home. 🍀

## Famed author Joe Galloway shares Vietnam experience for Wyo. vets

**Story and photo by Capt. Tom Blackburn  
Deputy Public Affairs Officer  
Wyoming Military Department**

“These veterans were denied a simple Thank You and Welcome Home when they returned from the Vietnam War,” replied the greying, highly experienced war correspondent.

He is a man who has seen the war that ravaged the jungles of South Vietnam and blaze across the desert of the Persian Gulf region. One of the most popular Vietnam War books ever written, “We Were Soldiers

Once...and Young,” which has sold over 1.3 million copies since 1992, was penned by him and Lt. Gen. (ret.) Hal Moore.

The man is Joe Galloway.

During the Wyoming Vietnam Veterans Reunion held in Casper, June 4-7, he was the guest speaker of a veterans and family member barbecue on June 6. There he mingled with many veterans who served in the war in which many veterans returned home to icy receptions and little gratitude.

“Those words spoken today in communities all across America are balm for old wounds,” Galloway said, when referencing the ‘Welcome home and thank you’ theme of the reunion. “They are the key words emphasized by the Vietnam War 50th Anniversary Commemoration project.”

Galloway is traveling the country, working alongside the commemoration project that is remembering the Vietnam era veteran for their service

See JOE page 23

# Former ATAG one of few to go Guard after Vietnam

By Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Jimmy McGuire  
Public Affairs NCOIC

One of the nearly 700 Vietnam veterans gathered in Casper for the statewide reunion and welcome home June 4-7 was former Wyoming Army National Guard Commander Brig. Gen. (ret.) Henry Castillon, who retired in 1998 after 36 years of soldiering.

Prior to becoming assistant adjutant general, Castillon was commander of the 115th Field Artillery Brigade and of Camp Guernsey among other roles in the Wyoming Army Guard.

The Green River resident was somewhat surprised to discover there were so many Vietnam vets in the state that didn't continue a career in the Guard.

"We had a handful," he said. "We should have had more, and I don't know why we didn't."

On top of acknowledging Americans' widespread opposition to the war, Castillon highlighted an often overlooked reason why many soldiers returning from the Vietnam War weren't recognized in the same way many are today.

"As you've heard throughout the reunion, when most of us did come back we really did not get an opportunity to welcome back Vietnam veterans," Castillon explained. "I attribute a lot of that to the fact we didn't really deploy units. We deployed soldiers and fillers to locations. We had location soldiers and location fillers, as opposed to today how we deploy units. Now you leave as a unit and come back as a unit.

"As far as this reunion this weekend, it's really something we needed to do for the soldiers, and I thank all the organizers and political entities and everyone that made this happen. It's good."

Castillon joined the Army while still in high school, starting out as an enlisted radio communications wireman. With encouragement from his NCO leadership, he went on to the military academy and became a commissioned officer in 1968.

His first tour in Vietnam, from 1968 to 1969,



Former Wyoming Army National Guard Commander Brig. Gen. (ret.) Henry Castillon marches in the Welcome Home Reunion parade in Casper. He is one of the few Wyoming Vietnam veterans that continued a military career after the war. Photo by Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class James McGuire

was as an infantry forward observer. He said he loved working with the infantry, but chose to stay in country after that tour and expand his knowledge and experience in the role of an aerial field artillery observer.

Then he returned stateside where he completed the Field Artillery Advance Course and soon after, his active duty career.

From there he joined the Guard and was assigned as executive officer of B Battery.

"I didn't miss a lick," Castillon said of his return to Wyoming. "I came right into the Guard and started

the various stages of the military education system.”

Vietnam confirmed some notions he had about himself and cemented what would be his lifelong credo.

“I’ve always been a risk taker,” Castillon said, “If you’re not taking some risk, you’re not doing your job. One of the highlights of my career as a brigade commander was taking the whole field artillery battalion and brigade headquarters to Korea which was unheard of during that time and it made a lot of people mad here, but we got a lot of support from NGB and I Corps, and it was good training in the place our unit first deployed. It was definitely a

highlight of my career, risky, but a highlight.”

Since retiring and returning to Green River, Castillon served two terms as mayor, and is active in veterans’ organizations including American Legion, VFW and Military Order of the Purple Heart.

“Like I tell my fellow veterans, we were dealt a bad hand, but we have to deal with it.” Castillon said of his continuing leadership role in the military community. “But you know, we went, we answered the call to our nation, we took an oath to support the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic, and I think that’s something sacred and honorable. Now we’re part of history and I believe there is a silver lining.”

### JOE from page 21

The project is chartered by Congress.

“The Commemoration is urging communities and states, everyone, in fact, to come together and hold events welcoming home all Vietnam veterans,” Galloway said.

The Wyoming reunion saw veterans fill the entire floor space in the main event area to hear Galloway. It was a wonderful surprise for the veteran correspondent. He was amazed at the scope of the reunion and the turnout.

“I was proud to be invited to participate and speak to and for those Vietnam veterans.”

Galloway brought many to cheers and laughter as he recounted several stories, including clarifying some misleading scenes in the movie “We Were Soldiers” based off his book.

“You see the sergeant major hand me that M16,” Galloway said when referencing a movie scene. “That never happened. I brought my own.”

During the barbecue as memories of the war filtered back into the arena floor, veterans wept. It was a unique scene as so many of the veterans came home to a unkind reception.

“Some weep for their brothers who fell in battle and are forever 19 or 20 years old....while we have all grown older and lived a full life,” Galloway said. “It is only as you live that life – marry a good woman, have children

you see grow and mature – that you realize fully what your friends who died in combat can never know. We try to live our lives partly for them. But we now know the terrible sacrifice they made so that we might live. And that brings tears to all of us.”

For the generation that served in Vietnam, they were an assembled assortment of young men and women who gave a year of their lives in service to their country, some giving it all. For those that returned home, in the shadows of the men who fought in Europe, Pacific and then Korea, they returned not as victors, but as bearers of bad deeds.

“They call those who fought in World War II “The Greatest Generation,” Galloway said, when referencing the many veterans he had seen. “The Vietnam veterans may not be the greatest generation but by God they are the greatest of their generation. They did their duty and they never turned their backs on our country, even when the country turned its backs on them. If there is one word that captures them it is honorable.”

For some current Wyoming National Guard members, the reunion saw them thanked in great numbers by the veterans assembled. “Many Vietnam veterans took a quiet solemn oath that never again would one generation of veterans turn its back on a younger generation of veterans,”



Joe Galloway speaks at the Wyoming Vietnam Veteran Reunion.

Galloway said. “We were determined that those who took up arms for our country would be honored and welcomed properly when they came home. We appreciate the fact that our fellow citizens now understand that it may be all right to hate war, but they must never hate the warriors sent out to fight under our flag.”

In the eyes of a famous war correspondent, there is no more hate for his fellow generation. Finally, they received their just appreciation.



Life is full of these things called “be-  
life that are extremely enjoyable or  
how to find them. One such secret  
which are spread across the country.

Cheyenne is home to the 84th CST, who  
thorities in a plethora of incident responses  
radiological and nuclear, as well as natural  
nation in times of disaster when local au-  
base or resources to respond to the situa-

As I sat down to talk to Sgt. 1st Class Tr  
initially joined the Wyoming Army National  
friend as he hoped their enlistments would  
in their friendship.

“I think the two of us were probably the  
said Cotton as he reminisced about the d-

# What it takes to be a

**By Capt. Megan Hoffmann  
Public Affairs Specialist  
Wyoming Military Department**

**m**



Members of the 84th Civil Support Team take part in  
training, honing their vast set of occupational profici-  
while preparing for possible natural or man-made dis-  
The team led the nation in responses in 2014 as the  
ported civil authorities in a variety of responses.  
Photos courtesy 84th CST

est kept secrets.” The things in  
r rewarding, but you have to know  
is the military Civil Support Teams

ose mission is to support civil au-  
es, to include chemical, biological,  
al disasters. They help the state or  
horities don’t have the knowledge  
tion at hand.

evor Cotton, he told me that he  
Guard in 1998 with his best  
ld serve as a lasting bond, or pact,

easiest enlistments of the year,”  
ay he took his oath. He was a

senior at Hot Springs County High School in Thermopolis, and he longed for  
some type of challenge in life, and thought serving his country would fulfill  
that criteria. He couldn’t have forecasted then that his decision to enlist that  
day would be one of the best decisions of his life.

Cotton, who holds four different military occupational specialties, started  
his military career as a towed artilleryman, then served an active-duty stint  
with the military police, and proceeded to sign on as a global war on terror-  
ism recruiting and retention non-commissioned officer. He then volunteered  
to mobilize in 2005 for Operation Iraqi Freedom, and when returning home,  
he was re-trained as a multiple launch rocket systems operator. It was in late  
2007 when Cotton seized the opportunity to become a member of the 84th  
CST as a survey team member. After serving in this capacity, he was selected  
as the Wyoming Army National Guard NCO of the year in 2010. Shortly there-  
after, he applied for the medical NCO posi-  
tion at the 84th CST, the position which he

See CST page 28

# A Civil Support Team member in the Guard



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# Wyoming shines for the west's Best Warriors

Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Jimmy McGuire  
Wyoming Army National Guard  
Public Affairs NCOIC

Far outnumbering the 15 soldiers and non-commissioned officers from eight western states participating in the 2015 Region 6 Best Warrior Competition was the number of Wyoming Army National Guard soldiers facilitating the events, ranges and training lanes.

Soldiers from all commands and throughout the state were on hand in Cheyenne and Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center, May 11-14 to run weapons ranges, conduct the fitness test, lead marches and deploy surprise attacks that produced mock casualties to be treated.

From uniform inspections and supplies and ammunition issue to medical attention and safety officers, Wyoming guardsman brought their best to the competition.

That effort did not go unnoticed by State Command Sgt. Maj. Tom Allan, and other sergeants major from the region.

"I'm extremely proud of the people in Wyoming. Some of the bigger states with more money and more personnel can plan almost all year," Allan said. "We pull this together with minimum resources. I'm always amazed by the resiliency of Wyoming soldiers. I'm hearing from my peers, this is as good as they've seen."

The competitors, some of whom have been at this level of competition, agreed.

"The whole thing was really well laid out and consistently flowed from start to finish," said Sgt. Matthew Croft of the Washington Army National Guard's B Troop 1st Squadron, 303rd Cavalry Regiment. "They kept us really busy and kept us on our toes. Nothing ever backed up on us, and there wasn't much sitting around at all."

Sgt. Eli Lilley, of the Wyoming Army National Guard's 115th Field Artillery Brigade was Wyoming Soldier of the Year in 2008 and moved on to the Region 6 at Helena Montana, and competed at All-Guard. He compared the two competitions.

"It was actually pretty comparable, big difference being we didn't have a 12-mile ruck march in that one," Lilley said. "Both were basically the same pace though — high."

While cleaning his rifle and getting his feet checked by medics, on the night before the 12-mile culminating event, and after a third day full of grueling challenges that started on the obstacle course and moved on to various shooting competitions and long marches through the hills of Camp Guernsey JTC, Lilley said he was impressed with the Wyoming effort.

"I am completely worn out right now, and we're not even done yet, so I'd give them a high score for keeping us on our toes. I think

See BEST WARRIOR on page 31

Spc. Tyler Nieters, of Cody, Wyo. and the Wyoming Army National Guard's 133rd Engineer Company battles the obstacle course during the third day of the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition at Camp, Guernsey Joint Training Center. The annual competition pits the best noncommissioned officers and soldiers from eight western states. Top right, Spc. Joshua Beal of the Washington Army National Guard's HHC 898 BEB, 81st Armored Brigade Combat Team, works the obstacle course. Below middle and bottom: Wyoming soldiers test and evaluate competitors, and feign casualties.



## CST from page 25

currently holds.

In order to hold a position in the CST, a member must first go to eight weeks of basic military training, followed by the civil support skills course. At that point, the laundry list of training begins, and includes, but is not limited to: chemical/biological warfare agent and illicit labs course, confined space and high angle rope rescue course, advanced trauma course, advanced burn life support course, field identification of biological warfare agents, basic microscopy, applied radiation response training and advanced and applied sciences. The average training to qualify a CST member is 18-24 months and around 1,800 hours. This does not include the additional professional military education or annual refresher training.

The training can seem exhausting and never ending.

“The training is not for the weak of heart, but it encourages a love of learning,” said Cotton, who loves the training facet of his job.

Cotton also values the unique experiences his job has provided him.

“I’ve seen inside nuclear reactors on field trips, been in the live nerve agent training center, rotated through a metropolis emergency department, trained with detection robots and traveled most of the country seeing things that most people never will.”

He also says that throughout his numerous responses during his almost 8-year career in the CST, there has never been the same situation or mission twice, which always makes it fun because his job is constantly changing and evolving, while also remaining challenging.

Another bonus to the unparalleled training and experiences is the opportunity to work side-by-side with civilian counterparts while helping the state and nation.

“Once I got on the team, the driving factor that kept me going was easy, that this is my state, this is where I serve and this is where my family calls home. With this job I have a good chance of helping any community in my state when they need it.”

However, it’s not fun and games all the time as the job does require sacrifice. At any point, day or night, the team might get called out by state or county officials to assist with an incident response.

“When they call for assistance in the middle of the night, we start rolling. We have a high operational

tempo with a constant mission and are always traveling and training. However, we possess multiple skills that are in excess to civilian equivalencies and it’s awesome to roll onto a scene in the middle of the night and see how happy the local incident commander is to see us arrive – no one else does what we do in as many different disciplines.”

As Cotton finished regarding his job as a CST member and prepared to go back to work cleaning small pieces of equipment that he trained months on to learn to use, he added one more thought.

“You know, there are only 58 other people in the whole world that have my job description?”

He left it at that, because honestly, nothing more needed to be said. ☺

# Wyo CST among country’s busiest

**By Capt. Megan Hoffmann  
Public Affairs Specialist  
Wyoming Military Department**

They accept varying work schedules, being on-call 24-7, 365, and committing several hours to several days to the scene of an incident - their mission necessitates they do so.

Members of the Cheyenne based 84th Civil Support team have the mission of supporting civil authorities at incident sites, operating throughout the entire cowboy state and in CST sector 6, which includes Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska. The team is a conglomeration of Army and Air Force personnel that have formed a very close relationship with the Wyoming Office of Homeland Security and local and state emergency management officials.

“Their ability to respond quickly and work with local first responders is phenomenal,” said Rob Cleveland, who has been the director of emergency management for Cheyenne and Laramie County for the past 15 years. “They possess the ability to supplement local first responders through the use of critical equipment and their extensive knowledge base. They also work very well with the local populous and the relationship that the community and local first responders have with them is a pretty special one.”



The team, which responds to chemical, biological, and nuclear incidents, as well as natural and man-made disasters, are largely self-sufficient at what they do. At any given time, the team consists of around 22 full-time Active Duty Guard personnel who possess more than 15 different military specialties. They are required to deploy a functional response force within 3 hours of being called upon, and it can take each team-member 24 months to be fully trained for a position on the team, averaging 1,800 hours of job training.

“Theoretically we can

respond to any incident in all 50 states and territories. If something bad happens, a local responder will call in a request, typically to the Wyoming Office of Homeland Security, and from there several follow-on phone calls run through the proper channels and the response is staffed,” said the 84th CST’s commander, Lt. Col. Christopher Troesh.

Not only does the CST cover widespread territory in their incident responses, but their list of qualifications is extensive.

“We are constantly, training, maintaining and responding,” said Sgt. First Class Trevor

Cotton, medical noncommissioned officer for the 84th CST. It’s what we do. “The very technical, specified training we receive is phenomenal.”

In 2014, the 84th CST - in the least populated state - led the nation in total responses with 11. In fact, over the last three years, the 84th CST has been at, or near the top of, the national rankings in responses each year. They are able to operate in contaminated environments, perform mobile laboratory analysis and provide robust communications capabilities, as well as a plethora of other capabilities.

Last year, their re-

sponses varied from dealing with natural disasters and suspicious packages, to environmental crimes and chemical detection. They worked several flood responses in Carbon and Albany counties as well as the Big Horn Basin. Just recently the team responded to flooding in Niobrara County in June, primarily in Lusk, and assisted with a swift water rescue for a stranded motorist.

During those responses, they provided communications and reconnaissance, proactive flood planning aimed at predicting flooding potential, and actual

**See CST page 30**

**CST from page 29** flood response efforts where they gauged the impact and severity of flooding and advised county and state officials on the best course of action.

The team also responded to potential environmental crimes last year as they worked alongside the Wyoming Department of Agriculture to investigate a case where unknown substances were killing trees in Jackson, Wyoming. The team was tasked with determining what was causing the trees to die and how to prevent further damage in the area. The team determined what chemicals were present and traced them back to a civilian who was killing trees for a better view around their property. The findings in this instance mitigated any further damage to vegetation in the area.

The team also responded to chemical spills on Wyoming highways and interstates as well as assisting the county coroner's office in Gillette in identifying the presence of possible chemicals utilized in a suicide.

"When we got the call about the chemical suicide, it was a blizzard and it took us three days to get on site," said Sgt. First Class Trevor Cotton, medical noncommissioned officer with the 84th CST. "When we finally got to the scene, it was 25 degrees below zero outside, but the local responders were extremely happy to see us arrive."

After running lab analysis, the CST was able to detect the chemicals present in the suicide, which provided essential information for the follow-on investigation and ensured the coroner would not be exposed to lethal chemicals when performing his job.

"Not every response we deal with is life or death. However, certain responses could be fairly serious or even catastrophic if dealt with improperly. We always take our job extremely seriously, regardless of the specifics of each incident," said Troesh.

The relationship the CST has formed with local officials is rarely seen, as it is very strong with the WOHS and Laramie County EMS.

"The cool thing about Wyoming is that the entire state and WOHS have fully embraced the Wyoming Military Department and CST. We are integrated extremely well and have a great partnership. We feel extremely fortunate to have this kind of relationship."

"This is the coolest gig in the guard," Troesh added. "We get to travel all over the state, we do a

lot of cool training, and most of all, we are always out helping in the community, which is what really matters." ☺

**If you are interested in becoming a member of the 84th CST, or learning about career opportunities in the Wyoming National Guard, contact Wyoming Army National Guard recruiting at 307-772-5217, or Wyoming Air National Guard recruiting at 307-772-6333**

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### **MEET from page 18**

NCO's)

I have trained and mentored all soldiers that I come in contact with to the best of my ability so they can have successful careers.

### **If you could hold any job you wanted, what would it be, and why?**

Edwards: President and CEO of my own international youth leadership development company so I could positively impact others' lives.

Phillips: The position doesn't exist right now but I would like to be the G4 SGM and the reason why I would like this position is because of the influence. What I mean by that is from the top down to the units and from the units up to the top. I have been down in the weeds the mud I know what works and what does not. I would be able to help train everyone and address problems from the state as a whole in the logistical field.

### **Where do you see yourself in 20 years?**

Edwards: Traveling the world with my wife and family doing leadership development for young people.

Phillips: I hope I'm in a position where I can provide the best knowledge to help better this organization before I have to say good bye.

### **Finish this sentence: I think the most important thing in life is. . . ?**

Edwards: God, Family, and Contribution.

Phillips: is family and that entails personal family to our military family that we have all built.

## BEST WARRIOR from page 26

we're all tired, but nobody wants to say exactly how tired we are. There might be a handful that would actually say, but it's a good indicator that it's a good competition. At national, they would have a training event right before a graded event. Here we had a few training events, but mostly graded competition and that's good because this is a competition."

Sgt. Gerardo Lopez of the Alaska Army National Guard's A Company, 49th Missile Defense Battalion learned a few things when he represented Alaska at the Region 6 in Oregon as a specialist in 2013.

"I learned you should never underestimate any of your competitors," he said. "You may have the quietest guy or the loudest guy, but you don't know until they come out on top."

"I don't think anyone is here because they were volunteered to be here. That's what makes these competitions hard. Not the events, necessarily, but that we all want to be here, and we want to win," he explained. "Wyoming has set up a good competition for all of us. They've made it difficult both mentally and physically, which is what you should expect and what you should want in order for your regional winners to represent well at nationals. We should be well set up for competing at nationals and all Army."

That is exactly what Allan and his fellow planners had in mind when rolling out the welcome mat in Wyoming.

"We key off what active Army is going to do. We fully believe that someone from Region 6 is going to make it all the way. Our sole goal is to make this competition harder than anything they're going to see down the line. Here in region 6, we're from the

mountain area...we push our people a little harder. Just a few years ago, a Montana Guardsman went all the way and won All Army. We place at All Guard often, and we've had one more go to All Army since winning."

Spc. Tyler Nieters, from Cody, and the 133rd Engineer Company didn't know exactly what to expect, but he knew it would be harder than anything he'd done before. While working, going to school, training for, and during the competition, he gladly accepted lessons and coaching. Sgt. Michael Whitley competed last year and his twin brother, Joseph, was Nieters' sponsor, helping coach the Wyoming Soldier of the Year. The sponsors, much like a pro golfer's caddy, are at the side of the competitors throughout the event.

"Sgt. Whitley (Joseph) helped me out a lot with studying and getting ready," Nieters said of his coach. "Michael helped me a lot with what to expect, and he gave Sgt. (Joseph) Whitley here a lot of advice to help me through it."

"By the time you get to this level, everybody's here to win," said Croft, a traditional guardsman. "Everyone spends months training for the academic stuff and training for the physical stuff, training for the soldier tasks. It's an experience like no other we have in our training environment."

"We're in the whole warrior concept," Allan concluded. "We want to know how intelligent they are. We want to know how they do under pressure. We want to know how they will react with the lack of sleep and of course, the physical goes without saying with the Army. This isn't just fun to win a prize. This is what war is like. These are best warriors." ∞



Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Edwards, supply NCO for 94th Troop Command, feigns an injury and times the response of a contestant.

# AG Match emphasizes the fun in 'fundamentals'

The skies are clear and the weather is mild as 12 soldiers line up along their marked points.

As the instructor gives the command, a dozen rifles are raised to the ready position. A horn lets out a piercing squeal, and the surrounding hills echo with the sounds of dozens of bullets exploding



Master Sgt. Morgan Jenkins coaches a shooter during the Adjutant General's Match. Jenkins has helped coordinate and lead the event for the last 11 years.

through their chambers and whizzing through the air toward their targets.

It is late May and the Adjutant General's Marksmanship Match is underway.

Every year, the Wyoming Army National Guard

hosts the AG Match for soldiers who want to improve their marksmanship skills and shoot competitively.

The event took place May 29-31 this year at the Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center, a dry weekend during a month of unseasonable rain. However, the main take away for both instructors and participants was the positive experience of the event.

"I didn't think it was going to be this much fun," said Spc. Felicia Jo Stamen, a logistics technician for the Wyoming Army National Guard's Training Site Command, at Camp Guernsey. "When you (qualify with the M16 each year), your military career depends on it. Here it's just fun. If you mess up, people here are really understanding and they've actually been really helpful."

While this year was Stamen's first time participating in the match, for many shooters it was a return to form. Master Sgt. Morgan Jenkins, a senior marksmanship coordinator for the Wyoming National Guard, and one of the coordinators of the event, explained there are many different levels of proficiency at this specific match.

"This is a beginner's level match. We shoot rifle, pistol and shotgun," he said.

"This is kind of a gateway into other levels – we have a regional match and then a national level match. We use this to select people to participate on the team for the regional level and then we use the regional level to select people for the national level match."

This year, 27 Soldiers participated in the match, coming from seven units, including the Joint Forces Headquarters, in Cheyenne; the Regional Training Institute, in Guernsey and the Recruiting and Retention



Story and photos by  
Staff Sgt. Meredith Vincent  
197th Public Affairs Detachment

# es ntals'

Battalion, in Cheyenne. Jenkins, who has helped coordinate Wyoming marksmanship matches and clinics for 11 years, said there is a reason why they try to encourage involvement in this particular match.

"We want everybody to come to this level. It's a good training event," he explained. "The more people we have show up, the more people we can pull from to go to the other level matches."

The benefits for the soldier from participating in events like these are easily recognizable, said Jenkins. "The matches give soldiers feedback on their marksmanship levels. They can try different techniques, and get the results from using those techniques, and then they can take them to the units, train the soldiers in their units and it increases the marksmanship level at the units."

Sgt. Joey Whitley, an administrative non-commissioned officer for Joint Forces Headquarters, said he has experienced those benefits first hand. Whitley attended the AG Match for the last four years. He said he was inspired to improve his marksmanship by a non-commissioned officer.

"My NCO back when I was a private told me that to be a good NCO, you had to be well-rounded," he recalled. "You've got to have every part about being a soldier - you can't just be good at one part, you've got to be good at every part."

After four years, the sergeant said his scores have improved significantly.

"I've raised my score on rifle and pistol tremendously from what it was, and just keep

on adjusting to get better," he said. "So you've got to find your weakness and then build on that. This was my weakness, so I built on it."

Whitley acknowledged his success is in no small part the result of the instruction found at these matches. Echoing Stamen, he said the environment cultivated by Jenkins and the team of volunteers is a big reason why he has become so successful.

"They definitely have the tools and techniques and the time," said Whitley. "They put the time in to do it and they're very dedicated coaches. They want you to have fun, and they want you to learn, that's the two main things."

"They do a super professional job," agreed Stamen. "It's laid back, but not to the point of complacency; it's laid back to the point of, if you don't know what you're doing, you feel comfortable asking."

There is a method to their success, said Jenkins, and it's not very complicated.

"Usually at a qualification, everything's pretty locked down," Jenkins elaborated. "They're trying to rush people through; they want to get through the qualification and get everybody done. And here we're laid back, we want them to enjoy shooting, we want them to enjoy the event. It's more about focusing on the fundamentals and techniques, trying different things, than it is just shooting the qual and getting through."

In the time Jenkins has worked on these matches, six soldiers have moved from the beginners AG Match to the Wyoming All Guard Team, including him-

**See MATCH page 37**



Participants in the Adjutant General's Match take a kneeling position as they prepare to shoot their targets that are then scored and graded, photo left. Twenty-one representatives from seven Wyoming units took part in the match, held May 29-31 this year.

# History corner

By Staff Sgt. Dan Molineaux  
Historian  
Wyoming Military Department

ember 1946. Originally classified as the P-51 Mustang, the USAF Strategic Air Command re-designated the

**D**uring World War II, throughout every region involved with the conflict, the importance of air superiority became apparent to allied and axis commanders alike. This realization would lead to a major reorganization of the armed forces in the United States, and the Wyoming National Guard was at the forefront of this fundamental shift.

Before the founding of the U.S. Air Force in 1947, Wyoming was already putting into the works a small group of men, many of them veterans of the preceding war, who would form the roots of the WyNG that exists to this day. First organized in a small hangar on the southwest side of Cheyenne Municipal Airport on 10 August 1946, these early guard members would begin drilling even before the first aircraft arrived.

The 187th Fighter Squadron was equipped with P-51 Mustang fighters which began arriving in No-

aircraft F-51 in 1948.

By mid-1947 the number of personnel and aircraft assigned to the unit had vastly increased, however, no field training was held during the year due to a shortage of vitally needed equipment.

By 1948 the unit was operating with a full complement of aircraft and pilots.

Enlisted ranks were also increasing. The first field training exercise was held in August 1948 at the Cheyenne location. Five squadrons, including the Wyoming unit, attended field training in Casper,

# Mustang



Wyo. in 1949. Intensive gunnery and bombing training was run at the Split Rock range near Casper. In 1950, the unit saw full training operations in Grayling, Mich.

Present at this training was 1st Lt. Robert Rock, a veteran of World War II, and Cheyenne resident. He remembers the Mustang pilots as being a great bunch of men and “the rowdiest, wildest bunch of guys I ever knew.”

Although Rock never had the opportunity to deploy with the pilots to Korea, he spent several years working and training with the group in Cheyenne

guard, the plane was enjoyed and appreciated by the founding members of the unit.

“It had a very distinct sound, which I loved,” remembered Rock. “I could always pick one out of other aircraft noises since it sounded so throaty and harmonious. Its profile was also unique, the plane could always be identified among aircraft.”

The early flyers of the WyANG would serve with distinction with their Mustangs in the Korean War, but pay a high price for their service.

On the final day of their annual training in 1950, the Korean War would officially begin, with the unit

being called to active service on April 1, 1951. Midway through that year, pilots of the unit were ordered to Southwest Asia. Eighteen pilots flew over 1,500 combat missions and eight were killed in action. Airmen of the unit served in Korea and

all corners of the globe. Late in 1951, the unit was moved to Clovis Air Force Base, Clovis, N.M. The unit was released from active duty on January 1, 1953.

“I still feel sad about all those guys” Rock said, referring to the high pilot loss during that war. “Such

fine young men, they never had the chance to grow old.”

Making the ultimate sacrifice for their country, and laying the foundation for decades to come, the early guard members of the Wyoming Air Guard stand as heroes for the

# JS and \$2 Bills

and on their annual summer training missions. He also remembers fondly a practice put into place by his superiors who wanted to demonstrate to local businesses the importance of the guard to the business community.

“The Guard at that time wanted to be better known in the community because most of our activities were not well publicized,” Rock said. “So our commanding officer took to paying us in \$2 bills each month. When we spread them around town, people began to take notice.”

This practice continued for many years, with business owners quickly coming to understand the importance of the guard to the local economy through the use of the unique denomination.

The Mustangs would stand as the primary aircraft from the beginning of the Wyoming Air National Guard from the earliest days until being replaced by the C-45 Expeditor in 1953. During its usage in the



current generation to revere.

Integrity first, service before self and excellence in all we do are the U.S. Air Force values, as well as playing a key role in the local community, were the foundations and the missions of the founders of the air guard.

They were shining examples of how the guard works today, serving in its local and global community. ~

# Soldiers face evaluation evolution

The Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report received a major overhaul this year, and is slated for use starting in January 2016.

NCOERs are used to mentor and develop subordinates, as well as identify soldiers for promotion and positions of greater responsibility.

“The Department of the Army found that the cur-

Story and photo by Sgt. Ashley Smith  
197th Public Affairs Detachment

assess the soldiers on five performance standards: presence, intellect, leads, develops and achieves.

Each standard will include a “met” or “did not

meet” block along with space for written assessments of each category.

Senior raters will evaluate the soldier’s promotion potential as “most qualified,” “highly qualified,” “qualified,” or “not qualified” and will have to justify their evaluation with written comments.

**Organizational Level** – Staff sergeants, master sergeants and first sergeants will fill out a two-page form focusing on organizational processes and systems.

The soldier will be rated on the same five performance standards listed for Direct Level evaluations, but will be judged on a scale of “far exceeded,” “exceeded,” “met standard” or “did not meet” the standard.

Senior raters will determine promotion potential based on the same standard as the direct level.

“However, unlike the Direct Level evaluation, the senior rater will be constrained to give the ‘most qualified’ selection to less than 50 percent of the NCOs they senior rate in that grade, like the OER system, helping to ensure rating the best of the best,” said Hill.

**Strategic Level** – This level evaluates the ranks of sergeant major and command sergeant major. It will focus on organizational and strategic initiatives, Hill

tions 6-22 Army Leadership:

**Direct Level** – Soldiers in the rank of sergeant will fill out a single form focusing on technical proficiency.

Raters will



Staff Sgt. Meredith Vincent, of Laramie, reviews the basics of the noncommissioned officer evaluation report with Sgt. Chris Kirk, of Cheyenne, during annual training with the 197th Public Affairs Detachment, at Camp Guernsey JTC. The Army will implement a new NCOER system in January 2016.

rent evaluation was being overinflated as a whole,” said Sgt. Maj. Michael Strasser, Wyoming Army National Guard personnel sergeant major. “They wanted a way to better reflect the soldiers’ performance and potential for boards at the DA level.”

The new system will force rating chains to show only the “best of the best” on the evaluations, which will reflect to promotion and retention boards, said Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Hill, Joint Force Headquarters Readiness NCO.

Hill and Strasser were among the Wyoming National Guard soldiers who attended training to prepare for the launch of the system.

The new NCOER aligns with the three different levels of leadership identified in Army Doctrine Publica-

said.

Raters and senior raters will judge in narrative format the soldier's knowledge and leadership abilities. Senior rater rating selections will be constrained the same as the Organizational Level evaluation.

Under the new system the raters will solely focus on performance, while senior raters will focus on potential for promotion and future service. Within the current system, the roles are not clearly defined, said Hill.

"While currently the NCOER support form is a requirement per (Army Regulation) 623-3, the new format will help the use of it," Hill said.

The form will allow the soldier to clearly see what they need to do for promotion and other aspects to improve their career, Hill said.

The support form will identify Structured Self Development and Noncommissioned Officer Education System requirements for the next grade, and have a senior rater comments block.

Raters and senior raters will use the online program, Evaluation Entry System, to create the evalu-

ations. The program consolidates the data and tools needed to write the evaluations.

"This allows for a real time, single point of storage for regulations, support forms, and NCOERs for the rating chains," said Hill. "It no longer requires numerous emails back and forth."

EES will also be able to track the status of the evaluation all the way through the process.

"This will allow for ease of use for everyone from the full-time staff, to the rating chain, to the rated soldier," Hill said.

Although there are many changes, a few aspects will remain the same. The soldier's performance will be evaluated, said Strasser. Soldiers will still be counseled quarterly and the report processed annually or as needed, including when raters or senior raters change.

"Learning a new system and format will take some time and patience," said Hill. "This is a major culture change for our organization." √

**MATCH from page 33** self. He said participating in these matches is always beneficial to the soldier's skills.

"From what I've seen, it gives them confidence in their ability to handle a weapon," he said. "They get to do things here that they won't get to do anywhere else. We move with weapons, transition with weapons, shoot different positions that you don't normally shoot in a unit qualification."

"Plus," added Jenkins, "they'll shoot probably three times the amount of ammo in a weekend that they would normally shoot (all year)."

Twelve more soldiers take their places and line up in front of their targets, readying themselves to take aim. Ammunition is definitely not a problem today. √

## Cheyenne MAC honors Guard units

The Wyoming Army National Guard's Detachment 53, Operational Support Airlift Command, and the Wyoming Air National Guard's 187th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron were honored as outstanding units by the Greater Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce's Military Affairs Committee in May.

Each was presented with the Cheyenne Trophy, an

annual award presented to one outstanding unit from the Wyoming Army National Guard, the Wyoming Air National Guard and the units stationed at F.E. Warren Air Force Base for selfless contributions, patriotism, off-duty volunteerism and community involvement.

Nomination documents for the 187th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, cite the unit's 2014 participation in Operation Enduring Freedom, joint forces recovery exercises, Ebola-specific training and missions to Antarctica and Tunisia as some of the highlights of that unit.

"Our unit members also enjoy being active in the Cheyenne community," said Lt. Col. Holly Shenefelt, the squadron's executive officer. She said members belong to Kiwanis, serve as trustees on various boards, volunteer as cowboy medics for Cheyenne Frontier Days, serve meals at community events and volunteer for numerous other local charities.

Similar accolades were cited for Det. 53.

That unit spent more than half of 2014 in Afghanistan. While there, the members flew missions for Task Force ODID, which involved observing, detecting, identifying and neutralizing enemy threats.

Lt. Col. Jim Cudney, who nominated the unit for the award, said "Det. 53's mission was instrumental to the operations that increased survivability of U.S. troops through detection and defeat of improvised explosive devices from the air." √



Artillerymen from A Battery, 2nd Battalion, 300th Field Artillery, Wyoming Army National Guard, based in Gillette, Wyo., load training rockets on a High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, at the Camp Guernsey North Training Range, June 26. The soldiers were firing in preparation for an upcoming deployment.

## 2-300th FA Battalion preps for historical deployment

Story and photos by  
Sgt. Ashley Smith  
197th Public Affairs Detachment

The Soldiers of A Battery, 2nd Battalion, 300th Field Artillery, validated their field artillery skills June 26 as they stepped closer to becoming the first Wyoming Army National Guard artillery unit since the Korean War mobilized to perform field artillery missions.

A Battery Soldiers, fired rockets from the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, at Wyoming's Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center.

It is an annual requirement for the fire direction center and launcher crews to certify on the HIMARS, but this year it is imperative to mission readiness, said Maj. Robert Lejeune, 2-300th FA operations staff officer.

"They'll repeat it one more time before going down range," he said. "But it's a significant step in their training, and their annual certification will carry them

forward so that they can be ready to do their job down range."

The validation verifies the crews are able to receive the mission, input the information correctly to ensure calculations are accurate, affirm the rocket will land on target and then send the rocket when an execution order is given, said Lt. Col. Henry Cudney, 2-300th FA commander.

In addition to the live fire, Cudney said the Soldiers spent 21 days training, not only on their mission essential tasks firing rockets, but learning to protect themselves in a combat environment through warrior tasks and battle drill training.

Soldiers participating in the training were handpicked by their command, all of whom are sworn to protect and defend this country, said Cudney.

"Some of them are pretty ex-

cited they got selected, some of them not so excited," said Cudney. "There are Soldiers not going that wish they would have been selected."

Even though the unit has deployed several times during the last 13 years, the deployment ushers in some historical moments for the Wyoming Army National Guard.

"It's very significant from our standpoint," said Lejeune. "This will be the first time the unit has deployed to Afghanistan, but, more importantly, since the Korean War, it's the first time the unit has deployed to execute its field artillery mission."

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the 2-300th FA was tasked with missions they were unfamiliar with, he said. The new missions varied from security to convoy escorts. A few soldiers even got the

opportunity to go out on embedded training teams.

Now, it is the legacy from the 300th Armored Field Artillery Battalion deployment to the Korean War that continues on. "I think it informs our mentality and our drive," said Lejeune. "It takes a person who is aggressive, who has a quick mind, and is willing to work hard to do the things that need to be done.

"The kinds of situations we're

going to be thrown in are very demanding of our soldiers and require a high-level ability."

Those abilities are abundant in the Cowboy State, said Cudney. "There is no better soldier than a Wyoming Army National Guard soldier." ~



"Thank you for your service."

When some soldiers receive a handshake from a stranger accompanied with these five words they beam with pride and eagerly return the handshake with a "thank you."

Not me.

This phrase has always

made me feel uncomfortable.

I feel like no one should thank me for showing up at the right place, at the right time, in the right uniform and getting paid to be there.

In my mind, a thank you simply isn't necessary.

Or is it?

Several weeks ago I was covering the Vietnam Veteran's Reunion in Casper with the Public Affairs section.

As I was running around with my cameras trying to capture video and images of the event I kept getting stopped.

Veteran after veteran, along with their spouses and sometimes even children, would stretch out their hands, grab mine, shake it with gusto, look me in the eye and say, "thank you for your service."

I would mumble back something like, "thanks but it's just a job."

Then I would shrug off the interruption and head back to work.

After a day of this I decided that I needed to change my behavior.

## Thank you for your service

By Maj. Rebecca Walsh  
Army National Guard PAO

I needed to view every handshake as an opportunity to meet a fellow war veteran rather than an interruption.

I needed to figure out why taking a few minutes to thank me was so important to these men and women who had fought in Vietnam.

That's when it hit me.

No one had met these veterans with a hand-shake and a "thank you for your service" when they came home from Vietnam. Entire airports hadn't stood up and cheered as they walked through while traveling to and from the Southeast Asia. They weren't seen as brave men and women defending freedom, instead they were wrongly perceived as baby killers and war criminals.

Because of that they wanted to make sure that someone thanked me for my service.

Once I figured out why the simple words, "thank you," were so important to them I couldn't help but want to listen to their stories. To compare my experiences in Iraq with their experiences in Vietnam. To talk about how the Army has transitioned in the past 40 years. I believe that a generational gap, and even a gender gap, closed once I opened my mind.

At the end of the reunion I didn't mind being stopped for a handshake and a "thank you."

I'm probably still going to find it awkward when a complete stranger stops me on the street to thank me for my service.

But now I promise to follow it up with a "you're welcome."

I might even add the phrase, "did you serve too?" ~

Wyoming Military Department  
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Use the links below to stay up to the minute on Wyoming National Guard news on our Facebook page and to see all the photos we don't have room for here on Flickr

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