

Happy Homecoming

Units across the state return home from Operation Iraqi Freedom.



pg. 11

Keep Them Flying

Company F mechanics keep Chinooks fixed and flying in Afghanistan.



pg. 10

Direct From Iraq

Officer candidates report to OCS directly from the battlefield.

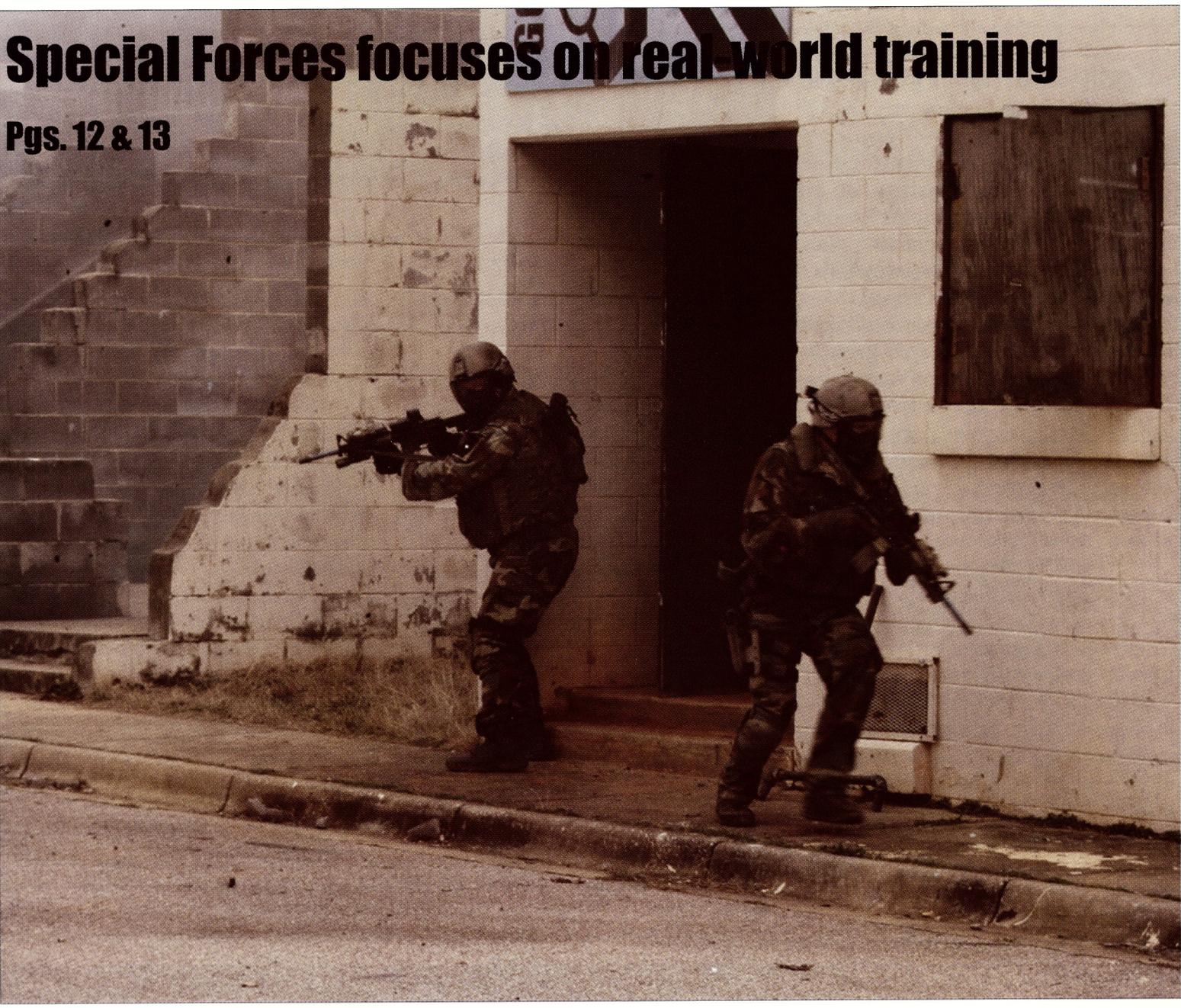
pg. 16

ALABAMA GUARDSMAN

Vol. 4, No. 1 A publication for the citizen-soldiers of Alabama Spring 2005

Special Forces focuses on real world training

Pgs. 12 & 13



ADJUTANT GENERAL

Alabama Guard faces future downsizing and closures



Maj. Gen. C. Mark Bowen

During the past 3 1/2 years, the Soldiers of the Alabama National Guard have continually amazed me with their "can do" attitude when they have been mobilized. You have answered the call to arms, some 10,000

strong, and gone about performing your assigned missions with pride and a high degree of professionalism. I want to express my sincere appreciation to each of you for the job you have done.

The hard work begins early on with the vast number of actions you must complete in the mobilization stage at your home armory. It continues as units deploy to their area of operations and doesn't let up as units return home and go through demobilization procedures. Special thanks are also in order for all the personnel who work in our Family Readiness Groups. Your efforts in taking care of our Guard families back



Martin Dyson/Photo

Under the new restructuring plan, older armories similar to this could be closed as units are given new missions.

at home are vital to our efforts. All of you have truly gone above and beyond in every area and you are my heroes.

We have a critical area that needs immediate attention in our units. We must work harder on retention efforts in our units. Beginning this year through 2008, we will take a cut of 2,000 slots in our Army Guard authorized strength levels. This is based on the fact that we have over 2,000 vacant positions in our units. We will see a reduction in force over the next three years with the majority of the cuts taking place in 2008. To preclude more cuts in the future, we must all help with this effort by working harder to recruit and retain members. We need to seek out potential recruits and furnish our recruiters with the leads. While strength losses are

never pleasant, I can assure all our members that everyone will have a slot for them. Some may have to drive a bit further to drill than before, but everyone will have a Guard home.

The pending troop cuts have also forced us to develop a major Army Guard re-stationing plan in the state. A major part of that plan entails the closing of several armories in the state. These armory closures are being implemented because fewer facilities will be needed to house our reduced strength levels. The closures will also lessen the expense of maintaining Guard facilities. All major commands have had input in the formulation of this plan. I ask for your patience cooperation and understanding as we work to complete this major action.

Again, thank you for all you do for your state and nation.

ALABAMA GUARDSMAN

The Alabama Guardsman is published by the 131st Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Alabama Army National Guard. Submissions are encouraged and should be mailed to the 131st MPAD, PO Box 3711, Montgomery, AL 36109-3711, (334) 213-7572. The views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Department of Defense, the Department of the Army, the National Guard Bureau or the Alabama National Guard. This publication is printed quarterly with a circulation of 15,000.

- Adjutant General.....Maj. Gen. C. Mark Bowen
- Public Affairs Officer.....Lt. Col. Robert Horton
- 131st MPAD Commander..... Maj. Cynthia M. Bachus
- Press NCOIC.....Sgt. 1st Class Michael P. McCord
- Senior Editor.....Staff Sgt. Jamie Brown
- Editor.....Sgt. Martin Dyson
- Associate Editor.....Sgt. Taylor Barbaree
- Contributing Editor.....Norman W. Arnold

On the Cover

Members of the 20th Special Forces Group, take part in MOUT Training at the Fort McClellan National Guard Training site. (Photo by Martin Dyson)

STATE COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR

Engineer Sergeant Major named state's top non commissioned officer



Command Sgt. Maj. Danny Ashley

I feel honored to have been selected to serve the Alabama Army National Guard in the capacity of State Command Sergeant Major. For those I haven't met, let me give you a little background on myself. I am a DeKalb County native and worked in the school system there for more than 32 years as an educator. I spent my last ten years as Principal of Fyffe High School before retiring at the end of December.

I also have more than 32 years of service in engineer units of the Alabama Army Guard, with assignments as a company clerk, battalion retention NCO, personnel support team NCO, operations sergeant, and First Sergeant. I spent two years as the Command Sergeant Major of the 1343rd Engineer Battalion and then seven years as Command Sgt. Maj. of the 1169th Engineer Group before coming to state headquarters on Jan. 1, 2005.

I am excited to be working for the Soldiers of such a great organization. We face many challenges now as well as in the future.

We are all concerned about the loss of force structure, possible armory closings, transformation of the force, and of course, recruiting and retention.

I think retention is probably the key challenge that may affect all the

other concerns. We must retain good Soldiers in the Guard. Currently we are losing more Soldiers each month than we are recruiting.

We all know and understand that a certain amount of attrition is normal and healthy for any organization. However, with continuing deployments and the Operational Tempo, we must all become recruiters and retainers. The best way to prevent armory closures and loss of force structure is to insure we have a strong recruiting and retention plan.

I look forward to meeting and working with each and every one of you in the near future. I will be visiting armories and Soldiers during training, and calling First Sergeants and Command Sergeant Majors on a regular basis to keep abreast of your concerns and issues.

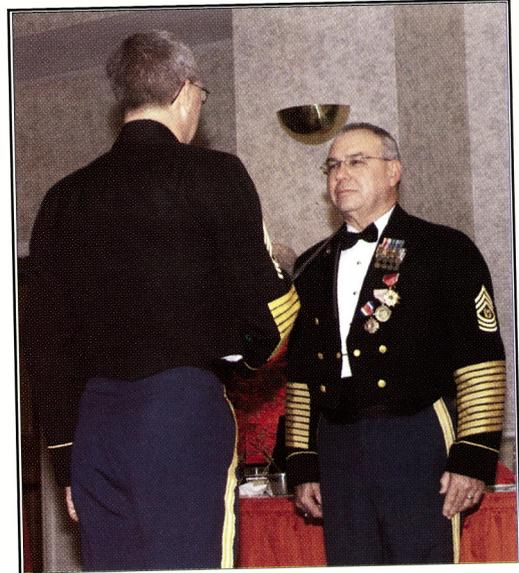
I have already been on the road several days visiting armories across the state and at the Fort McClellan Training Site.

I saw good and exciting training at Fort McClellan as I observed the Accelerated Officer Candidate School and the Non Commissioned Officer/Soldier of the year competition in January.

I hope to see many of you in Mobile April 15-17 at the first combined conference of the NGAA / ENGAA Associations.

In closing, let me encourage each of you to support our great force by helping to recruit and retain good Soldiers that you would be proud to serve alongside.

Let us remember each day our fellow Guard members who are deployed around the world or those who are currently in training for future deployments.



Jamie Brown/Photo

Command Sgt. Maj. Don Wood (right) is inducted into the "Royal Order of the Sword" by Command Sgt. Maj. Danny Ashley during Woods retirement ceremony.

Command Sergeant Major retires after 42-year career

Command Sgt. Maj. Don Wood retired from the Alabama Army National Guard recently. Wood, a native of Cherokee County, had been State Command Sergeant Major of the Alabama Army National Guard since May 1996.

Wood was honored at a retirement dinner in Montgomery with plaques and other special gifts from Army and Air Guard commands in the state. He also received state medals and ribbons from several other contiguous states. Maj. Gen. Mark Bowen, adjutant general of Alabama, presented Wood the Legion of Merit, one of the nation's highest service awards, and the Alabama Distinguished Service Medal, Wood's second award of the state's highest award.

"One of the major achievements while he has been here has been the implementation of EPPS, the enlisted personnel promotion system," Bowen said. "This was a completely new system for enlisted promotions and required a lot of hard work from many people. Don went above and beyond over a long period of time to ensure the success of the program."

"Being selected as the State CSM nearly nine years ago was a dream come true for me," Wood said. "It has been a tremendous honor and privilege for me to serve with the Soldiers of the Alabama Army National Guard."

NEWS TO USE**Guardsmen eligible for tax filing deadline extension**

Deployed Alabama National Guard soldiers are eligible for extensions on the April 15th deadline for filing tax returns with the IRS. In general, the deadlines are extended for the period of service in a combat zone, plus 180 days after the last day in a combat zone.

This extension applies to the filing and paying of income taxes that would have been due April 15. During extension period, assessment and collection deadlines will be extended, and the soldier will not be charged interest or penalties attributable to the extension period.

Soldiers who perform military service in an area outside a combat zone also qualify for the extension if their service is in direct support of military operations in the combat zone, and they receive special pay for duty subject to hostile fire or imminent danger as certified by the Department of Defense.

For more information visit <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/military/index.html> or call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040.

New law allows higher limits in VA home loan program

Legislation recently signed by President George Bush makes home ownership more affordable for many veterans. Changes under the law mean veterans will be able to get no-down payment loans of up to \$359,700. The previous ceiling was \$240,000. VA-guaranteed home loans are made by banks and mortgage companies to veterans, service members and reservists. With VA guaranteeing part of the loan, veterans can receive a good interest rate without having to make a down payment. The changes took effect Dec. 10 when President Bush signed into law the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2004. The law also allows for loan limits

to keep pace with rising home values. More information about VA home loan benefits is available on the Web at <http://www.homeloans.va.gov>.

Salute to honor America's military and their family

The American Legion and the Sons of the American Revolution are partnering to sponsor a nationwide "Blue Star Salute to America's Military and their Families" at the American Village in Montevallo, on May 21st starting at 9:00 a.m.

The salute will be one of the largest military tributes of the year in the country and will feature more than 65 military organizations including the Alabama National Guard.

Admission is free with ID for Guardsmen and their families. For additional information send an e-mail to bluestarsalute@americanvillage.org

Deployed Guardsmen eligible for membership in VFW organization

The Veterans of Foreign Wars has a rich tradition in enhancing the lives of millions through its community service programs. From providing free phone cards to raising money for the WWII Memorial, the VFW is there.

National Guardsman who have earned either a campaign medal, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary medal or have drawn hostile fire or imminent danger pay are eligible to join the VFW.

For more information on membership benefits or to join, visit www.vfw.org or contact your local chapter.

National Guard Bureau names new Command Sergeant Major

The Kentucky Army National Guard's state command sergeant major is preparing to

become the eighth senior enlisted advisor for the entire Army National Guard.

Command Sgt. Maj. John Gipe, 47, will assume the duties as the command sergeant major for the Army Guard's 306,000-member enlisted force later this year after observing and evaluating Army Guard Soldiers and their training and personnel issues for three months in Southwest Asia and Africa.

"I've always liked a challenge, and this is about the biggest challenge I'll ever find," said Gipe who has been the command sergeant major for Kentucky's 5,800 enlisted Army Guard members.

He will succeed Command Sgt. Maj. A Frank Lever III who will step down after serving as the Army Guard's senior enlisted advisor since January 2001. Lever, from South Carolina will retire after serving for more than 35 years in the National Guard since graduating from The Citadel in 1969.

DoD launches "Healthy Choices for Life" program

The Department of Defense recently launched a new program called "Healthy Choices for Life."

The program focuses on putting information in the hands of servicemembers and their families to persuade them to quit smoking, moderate drinking habits and lose weight and stay in shape.

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

-Editor's Note: "News to Use" is compiled from various on-line reports. The appearance of this information does not constitute endorsement by the Alabama National Guard of the linked websites, or the information, products or services contained therein. The Alabama National Guard does not exercise any editorial control over the information you may find at these locations.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Soldiers jobs protected by Congressional Legislation

Contributed by: Family Readiness Program Office

MONTGOMERY - Soldiers from units across Alabama that were deployed during 2004 are returning home to a hero's welcome and are experiencing the joy of being reunited with loved ones who they've barely seen for the past 18 months. Once the welcome home festivities are over and the banners are taken down, the returning Soldiers put away their uniforms relax for a short while and then return to the workplace. They do so without having to worry about if their job is still waiting for them, thanks in large part to the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

More than 50 years ago, the Veterans Re-employment Rights (VRR) was first established by Congress to protect Reserve Component members and their employers in the event of being called to active duty. In the 1990s, more frequent and longer deployments rendered the original VRR obsolete. In 1991, Congress passed the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act (USERRA) to clarify the protection a Soldier was entitled to as well as the responsibilities of the employer when dealing with a soldier's absence from work. In 1994 Congress updated the USERRA act to strengthen and expand the reemployment rights of all uniformed service members.

These rights extend to any soldier who has been absent from the workplace because of "service in the uniformed services." This means not only is the Soldier covered if they are deployed, but also if they leave for active duty training, basic training, inactive duty training or any full-time National Guard duty. When they return for these duties, they return as if they had never left. Everything from pension contributions and vacation days to promotion status continue without interruption.

The latest update to USERRA makes it easier for soldiers to perform their military duty. They no longer have to request permission to leave for military duty. Instead, all they have to do is provide written notification prior to leaving. There is no longer a differentiation between vol-



Robert Horton/photo

As Soldiers return home and transition back to their civilian jobs; they can do so without worry, thanks to the protection afforded them under the USERRA Act.

untary and involuntary service and an employee cannot be required to use vacation or sick days to cover their absence from work.

Once a Soldier has completed their military duty, the timeline for returning to their job is based on how long their service was. For periods up to 30 days, a Soldier must return to work on the next regularly scheduled shift on the day following the completion of duty, safe travel home and eight hours of rest. For longer periods, the timeline can be extended to days or even weeks. If a Soldier is gone for a period of service of 31-180 days, he must apply for reemployment within 14 days following release. If the period of service is more than 181 days, a soldier has up to 90 days after release from duty to return to work.

Using the guidelines spelled out under USERRA, Soldiers should have no problems returning to work after finishing their duty. Unfortunately, that's not always the case. Whether it's a genuine issue or just a breakdown in communication between employee and employer, there is help available for both parties to resolve the

conflict.

The Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Ombudsmen Service Program was established to address any problems that might arise between employers and employees. The all-volunteer Ombudsmen force is fully trained on all aspects of the USERRA act and can provide information, counseling and informal mediation to all parties involved.

If a Soldier feels that they need assistance dealing with a reemployment issue, they can send an e-mail to NCESGROMBUB@OSD.mil or call 1-800-336-4590. For a complete rundown of the USERRA act visit <http://www.esgr.org/members2/thelaw.asp?c=userra.html>

If you have a question or concern for the Family Readiness Program Office, contact Sgt. Maj. Hubert Chance or Staff Sgt. Billie Ivey at 1-800-231-2846 or on the web at www.alguard.state.al.us

New full-time chaplain puts soldiers first

by JAMIE BROWN
Senior Editor

MONTGOMERY – At the State Military Department headquarters, full time employees support the Alabama National Guard in such important matters as mobilizations, pay and training. Now there is a full time employee here who can help with what perhaps are the most important matters of all, spiritual matters.

Second Lieutenant Wylly Collins recently became the Alabama National Guard's first full-time chaplain. Collins has served in the Guard for two years as a chaplain in the 31st Forward Support Battalion in Enterprise. He was also a minister in Florala for four years before moving into his new full-time Guard position.

For Collins, who was born in Georgia and grew up in Wisconsin, becoming a full-time chaplain was a natural progression that stemmed from his love for the military.

"I've always loved the military," he said. "I had four cousins, two were in the Army and two were in the Navy, and I always looked up to them when I was little. I thought about the military many times, but I just didn't feel right about joining at that time. I think I was a little nervous about it."

But duty would call Collins again, and this time he would answer.

"When I was a pastor, I really felt a strong desire to be a minister in the military. I heard a lot about what chaplains did. So I basically talked to a lot of chaplains, and the neat thing is, I called all the reserve services and the Army Guard was the one that really met with me and answered every ques-



Martin Dyson/photo

2nd Lt. Wylly Collins, the new full-time chaplain for the state, keeps an open-door policy when it comes to counseling soldiers.

tion I had. They were the most responsive. So, I'm really glad I'm in the Guard."

Collins found that he enjoyed being in the Guard; so much that he wanted to make it a full-time career.

"I was thinking and praying about active duty," Collins said. "I told our State Command Chaplain about that. I said, 'Hey Chaplain Leak (Col. Sidney Leak) I really love working as a Guard chaplain, but I really want to do it full time.' He said 'well we've got this opening for a full-time chaplain, why don't you check that out?' I would really love to live here for the rest of our lives if that is God's will. And to be a Guard chaplain and be long term in place and to do full-time military ministry, I'm really interested in that, and to stay in the Guard, because I've had a good experience with the Guard."

As the state's first and only full-time Chaplain, Collins has several responsibilities.

"First is to do direct ministry to any Air Guard, Army Guard, civilian workers here on the compound," Collins said. "Just basically be available to minister to anybody here at the State Military Department. My second lane of ministry is to help our state chaplain with administrative work, answer e-mails, do queries, reports, things like that for him. And I represent him at every staff meeting for the TAG, as his representative just to hear what's going on to give a chaplain's report. And the third type of ministry I do is ... I'm sort of the assistant pastor for Alabama. He (Leak) is the senior pastor, I'm the assistant. We've got a bunch of chaplains al-

over the state. In a sense, I coordinate ministry. If we've got someone in the hospital in Birmingham, I'll call the chaplains up there and say, 'Hey we need some area coverage, there's a Soldier in the hospital. I coordinate the ministry for the whole state.'

There is one particular area that Collins would like to concentrate on as a chaplain.

"My goal is to be out and have a presence ministry with Soldiers, Air men, civilians here on the compound," he said. "That's really the heart and soul of chaplain ministry, being out on the ground. And lately I've had a lot of administrative things on the ground. But once I come back from OBC, that will be my primary emphasis, just to be available, to be out. To walk in to offices, motor pools, anywhere on the compound just to meet Soldiers and Air men. That is probably the first and primary goal. They call it presence ministry, or ministry of presence.

(Please see *Chaplain*, page 14)

Guardsmen volunteer for “tough” duty

by JAMIE BROWN
Senior Editor

Even though it occurs far away from the battlefield, it is one of the toughest missions in the military. Informing families of the death of a Soldier is never easy, but it is job that must be done, and the Alabama National has begun assisting the active Army with that mission.

When a soldier from Alabama dies, there is a good chance that a member of the Alabama National Guard, acting as the casualty notification officer, will inform the surviving family. The casualty notification officer will then step aside to let a casualty assistance officer from the Regular Army assist the family. It does not matter what component of the Army (active, guard or reserves) the casualty came from or the cause of death; the Alabama Guard is there to help with the difficult task of notifying families.

According to Maj. Jim Hawkins, the assistant training officer for the state, the idea to get Alabama National Guard soldiers to assist with casualty notification came a couple of years ago when the state training officer, Lt. Col. Scott Gedling, remembered the Regular Army training National Guard soldiers to do casualty notification during Desert Storm. Gedling put Hawkins in charge of the project.

“I called Fort Rucker, because they have a Casualty Assistance Command (CAC) there,” Hawkins said. “I told them who I was and what we wanted to do. I talked to Roy Watkins, who’s head of personnel down there ... I told him we figured with our geographic distribution across the state we could get to people faster than they could. So we coordinated with them and they came up and did the training. The first time was three years ago, and we’ve done it annually. We just did our third iteration of it.”

Watkins said that the help of the Alabama National Guard has been tremendously beneficial to the Regular Army.

“What we do is train these guys up to make notification in the case of an active duty death, and we like using the National Guard, because you’re everywhere,” Watkins said. “If we get a notification, say, north of Birmingham, it may take us six or seven hours to get somebody in, get them briefed up and get them up there. I can call Maj.

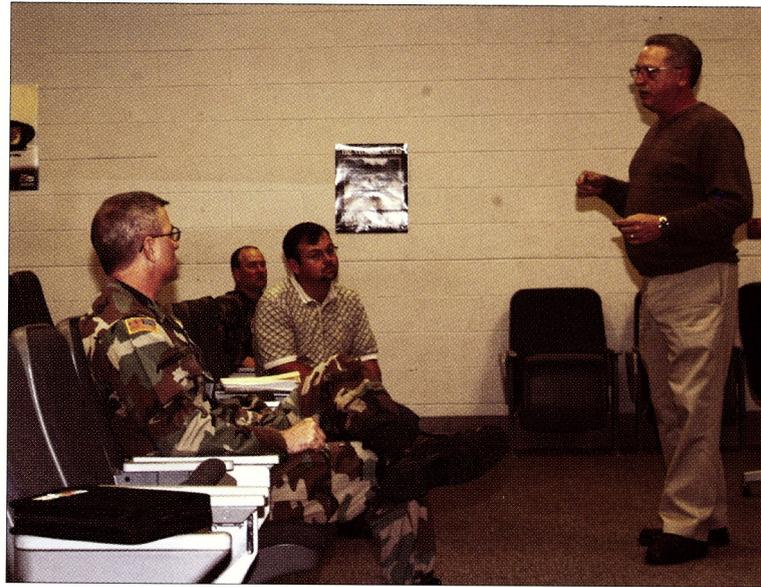
Hawkins and in two hours he’s got somebody standing by ready to make notification, and the quicker we make it, the better it is. We want the families to hear it officially from us, not turn on CNN and see their son or daughter lying there.”

The importance of making notification to a family as quickly as possible was something Hawkins stressed.

“The standard is to notify in about four hours, so, by being geographically spread out like we are, we can get there faster than the Army,” Hawkins said. “A guy from Rucker is going take almost four hours just to drive from Fort Rucker to say Florence, where I can call a guy and he can be there within the hour. Also, they know the area. A lot of times when you get these notifications, you get very sparse information. You may get an address. You may get a partial address, but they don’t give you directions to the house or anything. So knowledge of the area also helps.”

Another benefit of having Guardsmen assist with casualty notification is that it frees up Regular Army personnel to help the family in other ways.

“There are two types of officers



Martin Dyson/photo

Roy Watkins, head of personnel with the Casualty Assistance Command at Fort Rucker, briefs Alabama Army National Guard soldiers on how to serve as a casualty notification officer.

involved in this process: You have casualty notification officers and casualty assistance officers,” Hawkins said. “On an active duty post, like Fort Rucker, they use the same pool of people to do both duties. One person will be the notification officer and another person will be the assistance officer. By taking on the notification duties for the Regular Army, that frees up more of their people to be assistance officers. We don’t have the ability to do the assistance, because that requires TDY and staying in the area and helping the family through it. So doing notification, allows the Regular Army to use more of their guys in the assistance role, which is a benefit to them too.”

Even though casualty notification is a difficult mission, finding volunteers from the Alabama National Guard has not been an issue, according to Hawkins. “It’s a volunteer basis,” he said. “You’ve got to be an E-6 or above. The first time, we put out a call statewide for people to come to this training, and we required one person per battalion.

The first class was large, a
(Please see *Duty*, page 14)

Snapshots

A look at some of the recent highlights in the Alabama National Guard.



Members of the 200th Engineer Battalion prepare to board busses at Camp Shelby, Miss. that will carry them on the first leg of their journey to Iraq. Once in country, the 200th will be attached to the 20th Engineer Brigade (Airborne), Fort Bragg, N.C.

Contributed/photo



Alabama Commissioner of Corrections, Donald Campbell (center), Maj. Gen Mark Bowen, the Adjutant General, and Alabama Governor Bob Riley, make history, as Campbell signs an ESGR statement of support for the National Guard and Reserves, on behalf of the Alabama Department of Corrections. This marked the largest mass signing by any employer in the history of ESGR.

Martin Dyson/photo



Maj Fredrick Franklin, a medic with the 200th Engineer Battalion, stationed in Afghanistan with the Afghan National Army, provides shoes to local children. Guardsmen worked to collect shoes for the children. Franklin is shown here with one of the children.

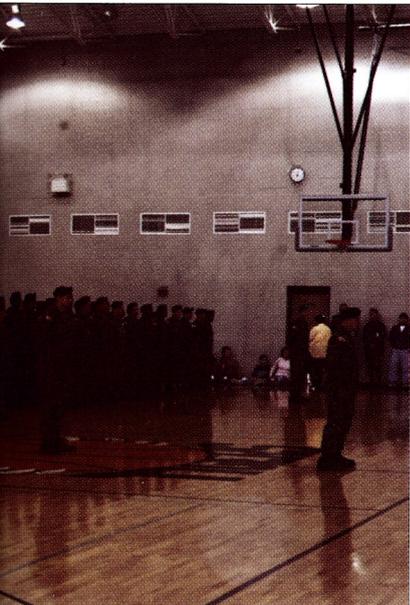


Members of the 258th Chemical Company, 1st Cavalry Division, are shown in a gymnasium at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., during their deployment. The unit is used for security missions.



Contributed/photo

of the 167th Theater Support
 as an Embedded Trainer with
 in is taking part in a mission to
 Franklin and other Alabama
 distribute the donated shoes.
 waiting to receive his shoes.



Robert Horton/photo

stand in formation in the Springville
 ceremony. After completing training
 and overseas where it will be primarily



Robert Horton/photo

Lt. Col. Mark Weeks (right) presents the 117th Field Artillery Guidon to Col. Mark McDonald, Chief of Staff, United States Army Field Artillery Center. McDonald was the guest speaker at the 117th's annual dining in.



Martin Dyson/photo

Command Sgt. Maj. Danny Ashley, presents the winners trophies to the 2005 NCO & Soldier of the Year, Staff Sgt. Michael Cardamone Det. 1 Co B 1/20th Special Forces and Spc. Michael Ward Battery C 1/117th Field Artillery. The two will represent Alabama in the regional competition in St. Croix, USVI later this year.

Aviation unit carries a heavy load in Afghanistan

by Claudia Bullard
105th MPAD

Kandahar Air Field, AFGHANISTAN—Near the flight line at Kandahar Air Field (KAF), the main operating base for Afghanistan's Southeast region, Capt. David Crenshaw, executive and maintenance officer for F. Co., 131st Aviation, observes mechanics repairing a leaky starter in the engine of one of fourteen CH-47's his unit flies and maintains. Across the air field the late-afternoon sun bathes the battered hangar that houses F. Co. in a golden glow. Large pieces of the hangar's outer skin are missing. The remaining sheet metal is pockmarked with bullet holes—signs of the intense fighting that took place in 2002 between Coalition and Taliban forces.

The CH-47's, known better as Chinooks by U.S. Army personnel, are powerful, double-rotored machines capable of carrying 25,000 lb. loads of equipment and troops into combat. It is not uncommon to see these birds hoisting a humvee or generator sling-loaded underneath the chopper for transport to the field.

Commanders in Southeastern Afghanistan depend heavily on Chinooks to get troops and supplies to forward operating bases (FOB); (therefore 131st Aviation's mission to keep these birds flying is vital to the war effort in southern Afghanistan.) Chinooks are the link between the FOB's and their base of supplies at KAF. Without the air support the Chinooks provide, personnel and supplies would have to be moved on the ground through some of the most rugged terrain in the world to reach those who need them.

Crenshaw and his crew of some 80 mechanics, pilots, crewman and logistics personnel know how important their mission is. They are running a 24-hour operation that hasn't slowed since their arrival in March. Currently the unit has logged nearly 6,000 hours of flight time and has carried over 37,000 passengers.

Indicating a patch on his uniform Crenshaw says it represents what the 131st is all about. Embroidered on the patch is the country of Afghanistan with a Chinook hov-



Claudia Bullard/photo

Capt. David Crenshaw, of Co. F, 131st Aviation, inspects an engine being repaired outside the hangar at Kandahar Air Field, Afghanistan. The engine belongs to one of 14 CH-47 helicopters the unit is responsible for repairing, maintaining and flying in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

ering above it. A Georgia flag, an Alabama flag and a Washington apple represent personnel from the three states coming together to accomplish a very important mission.

"Because of resources, because the unit is spread out," said Crenshaw of 131st Aviation's personnel, "it is very rare that they train together." Crenshaw said that despite this fact, members came together very quickly.

These particular Chinooks are not 131st Aviation's regular aircraft, but were left here by the former unit. "When we fell in on these Chinooks there were a lot of deficiencies," said Crenshaw who compared the process of aircraft repair to how an individual might take care of their personal vehicle. "There is yourself, a shop and a dealer," said Crenshaw.

The unit's mechanics repair and maintain almost everything on the Chinooks. If a repair falls under a higher level of maintenance, which is not authorized for the 131st, mechanics at an intermediate level determine if the problem can be fixed at KAF or must

be sent off to a repair depot at Kuwait.

Crenshaw said even though his mechanics are very thorough, there are problems with a Chinook that may not necessarily ground the aircraft. "We register deficiencies in a logbook and then determine whether the deficiencies are critical or non-critical," said Crenshaw. "Critical deficiencies are repaired first. Non-critical deficiencies are prioritized according to short-term or long-term depending on parts needed or work that needs to be performed," said Crenshaw.

Finally, because of the nature of 131st Aviation's mission, Crenshaw's personnel undergo a strict evaluation of their job performance. Crenshaw said everyone must be willing to take advice and criticism to maintain high standards of safety and performance.

"If we have problems, we find creative ways to solve problems or find a job they are better suited for."

"The positive thing about the National Guard," said Crenshaw, "is that members know each other over a wide period of time creating cohesiveness and continuity."

Units provide vital support during deployments

by Martin Dyson
Editor

Flags, banners and yellow ribbons have been the order of the day for many communities recently across Alabama as they welcomed home their local heroes from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

The bulk of the returning Soldiers were from the second rotation of Iraqi Freedom units coming off of a yearlong tour of duty in the desert. They started returning in early January when the first group of Soldiers from the 711th Signal Battalion returned stateside.

Headquartered in Mobile, with companies in Atmore, Grove Hill, Chatom, Foley and Bay Minette, the 711th represented the largest group in the second rotation. Assigned to the 3rd Signal Brigade in Iraq, the 711th worked with their sister unit, the 115th Signal Battalion to provide voice, data and video services for operations throughout Iraq.

The 115th, headquartered in Florence, with additional units in Russellville, Haleyville, Sheffield and Moulton, started returning home from Iraq in mid-February with the last members of the unit arriving in March.

Part of the signal battalions' mission success can be attributed to the Soldiers of the 279th Signal Battalion. Although their units were not mobilized, many of them were transferred to fill the ranks of the 711th and 115th.

One unit of the 279th that deployed intact was Company B from Guntersville. The unit was mobilized in November 2003 and attached to the 30th Heavy Separate Brigade of the North Carolina National Guard. Company B joined units from five other states to provide support to the 30th HSB.

To sustain operations in a desert environment, one of the essential items Soldiers need is potable water, which is what the 1206th and 1209th Quartermaster Detachments from Wetumpka provide by the tanker-full.

Broken down into smaller groups, the detachments were spread out to several loca-



Edgar "Chip" Brown/photo



People across Alabama turned out in droves to welcome home local troops. Nearly 2,000 Soldiers returned home from Iraq during the early part of the year.

Norman Arnold/photo

tions around Iraq, where they supported several units including the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, the 1st Infantry Division and the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

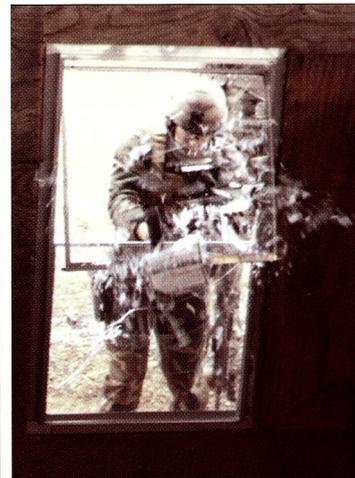
After providing millions of gallons of potable water over 12-months, both units returned home within 72 hours of each other in mid-February.

One of the last units to return home was the 231st Military Police Battalion, who arrived home in Prattville in mid-March. During their time in Iraq, the 231st served as the

headquarters unit for several subordinate MP companies.

They were involved in a wide variety of missions including supporting the new Iraqi Police Force, convoy security operations, detainee security, force protection and VIP security.

At press time, one unit that deployed in 2004 was in the process of coming home. Company F, 131st Aviation based in Birmingham were wrapping up their yearlong deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (story on Pg. 10).



Martin Dyson/photos

Special Forces Soldiers learn a variety of breaching techniques during the Shoot House phase of the advanced urban combat course, including window entry (above) and door entry (left).

Special Forces train to win on the urban battlefield

Editor's Note - Due to security concerns, members of the 20th Special Forces Group will be referred to by rank and first name only.

by **Martin Dyson**
Editor

FORT MCCLELLAN – For the average Soldier, formal military training ends on the day they graduate from Advanced Individual Training. For the members of the Alabama National Guard's 20th Special Forces Group, training is a constant as they continually expand and sharpen their skills in order to be prepared for whatever mission they could face on the battlefield.

Based on the current situations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the majority of these missions could center in and around the urban environment. To better prepare their soldiers to fight and win in this environment, the 20th SFG designed and implemented a two-part Special Forces Advanced Urban Combat (SFAUC) course at the Fort McClellan Army National Guard Training Site.

While both parts are similar in training, they are aimed at two different sized groups. The first part is for A-Teams only; a Special Forces A-Team is made up of 12 soldiers and is the operational element of a Special Forces Company. The second part of the training is conducted at the Company level, which incorporates up to six A-Teams and one 11-Soldier B-Team, which serves as the command and logistical support element for the A-Teams.

The training and mission scenarios of the course are based in large part on the tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) learned by Special Forces companies that have previously deployed overseas. The intense 21-day course leaves little room for downtime. "It's a fast paced course. We throw a lot of stuff at them in a short amount of time," said Staff Sgt. Frank, a course instructor. "It's kind of like force feeding them with a fire hose."

Broken down into three phases of training, the course is designed so that the training in each phase ties di-

rectly to the next. In the first phase, known as Flat-Range week, Soldiers work to develop their skills with the M-4 carbine, the 9 mm pistol and the 12-gauge shotgun.

"It's primarily advanced combat marksmanship involving a lot of shooting and moving, definitely nothing like a traditional range," Staff Sgt. Frank said. "This builds the skills they will need during close quarters fighting."

These skills are put to the test in the second phase of the training, which centers on what is known as a Shoot house, a live-fire training area designed to test their reactions and skills under stress in close quarters fighting. Consisting of several different rooms, Soldiers start with the basic principles of entering and clearing a room and quickly move on from there.

"It starts out pretty simple, working one room at a time," said Staff Sgt. John, a course instructor. "As the week progresses, it gets more and more complicated to the point where there are multiple teams working together to clear the house."



Martin Dyson /photo

All members of a Special Forces Company are involved in planning missions during MOU training. This, coupled with the increased mission tempo, lends a real world feel to the training.

The final phase of the course focuses on Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOU). The Fort McClellan MOU site covers roughly five blocks and has a variety of buildings, which allows the teams to work together on a much larger scale than they did in the shoot house.

Instead of clearing one or two rooms, the Special Forces companies plan and execute up to nine different missions, incorporating air and ground elements.

According to Staff Sgt. Tim, a SFAUC instructor, "The B-Team focuses on planning the mission and providing the mission orders and intelligence to the A-Teams, who carry out the mission. Once they complete one mission, they come back in and get ready for the next one."

Adding to the realism of the training is the use of "Simunition" which uses a paintball based ammo, instead of the laser based MILES system that most soldiers are familiar with. The simunition system is not only more accurate and reliable than MILES, but also provides valuable feedback during the training. "There's a definite

pain response when you get hit with it," Staff Sgt. Chris said. "Hopefully it will help them better remember their mistakes in the future."

SFAUC is only one of the many training opportunities available to the members of the 20th Group. Courses that teach sniper skills, escape and survival as well as jumpmaster, pathfinder and HALO training are all available.

"That's the great thing about being Special Forces in the National Guard, the training opportunities are always there for you to take advantage of," said Staff Sgt. Tim.

With the varied and constant training it takes to be a member of the 20th Group, no matter what the future holds, they will be ready to accept any challenge and complete any mission.

-Soldiers interested in becoming a member of the 20th Special Forces Group, can contact Sgt. First Class Aaron Edwards (1-800-562-2090 x2343 or aaron.edwardsjr@us.army.mil) for more information.

20th SFG wins 2004 safety award

FORT BRAGG, N.C. (USASOC News Service) — The U.S. Army Special Operations Command's Safety Office announced Feb. 3 the winners of its major Army command safety awards program for fiscal year 2004.

The USASOC Accident Prevention Awards Program is designed to recognize individuals and groups for superior performance and achievement in the field of accident prevention, according to the USASOC Regulation 385-1, Safety Accident Prevention and Reporting.

The 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Birmingham, Ala. was named USASOC Safety Program of the Year (Category 2).

"We are honored and privileged to receive this award," said Group Commander Col. Leonard Kiser. "We go to great lengths to protect and safeguard our most valuable resource, our soldiers."

"We expend over one million rounds of ammunition each year in our Group-run training courses. When you conduct that much training to enhance war-fighting skills and net zero injuries, I think our reputation for safety speaks for itself."

Unit safety offices submitted nominees for the awards and voted on the winners, said Ronald C. Knight, USASOC safety director.

A ceremony recognizing the award winners will be scheduled in the next few months.

The MACOM award winners will also compete later this year at the Department of the Army level.

Red Cross unveils new coin for Guard donors

by Jamie Brown
Senior Editor

MONTGOMERY- The Alabama National Guard and the American Red Cross unveiled a new symbol of their partnership when Maj. Gen. Mark Bowen accepted a new coin honoring Alabama Guard members who support the Red Cross.

Guardmembers of all ranks, Guard family members and civilian support staff are all eligible for the coin. Those who donate blood to the Red Cross three or more times in a year or perform an exceptional act(s) in support of the Red Cross/Alabama National Guard blood collection partnership are eligible to receive the coin.

We have a long and cherished history of serving side by side in our nation's conflicts and supporting one another in peace and war," said Keith Jordan, communications manager of



June Fletcher, CEO American Red Cross, blood services, Alabama and Central Gulf Coast Region, presents Maj. Gen. Mark Bowen, the Adjutant General with the new coin (pictured below) for Alabama Guard members who exceptionally support the Red Cross.

the American Red Cross Blood Services, Alabama and Central Gulf Coast Region. "This is an excellent opportunity for the Guard to help Alabama citizens in another manner, by donating blood."



(Duty, continued from page 7)

hundred people. I told them 'this isn't for everybody. If after the training you don't feel like you can do this, just let me know and I'll take you off of the list. And I said, likewise, if you feel strongly about doing it, let me know and I'll make sure I put you at the top of my list. Out of the three courses, I've had three people e-mail me and say take me off the list. I've had about thirty e-mail me and say 'count on me, call me.' Which I think is impressive."

(Chaplain, continued from page 6)

And that is the most important thing. I guess my second goal would be to support Maj. Gen. Bowen and Chaplain Leak in any way that I can.

And the third goal is just to be available to Soldiers and Airmen. If they want to talk about something, I have my office always open to anyone that comes by."

According to Collins, being there to listen to and counsel the troops is one of the most important things he and the

It is that volunteer spirit that has allowed the Alabama National Guard to help the nation in any way possible, even with a unique and difficult mission like casualty assistance.

"No one that's ever done it has said take me off of the list," Hawkins said. "In fact, once they've done it, they come back and say, 'use me any time.' It's difficult duty. The guys at Rucker say it's the hardest duty you'll ever do. And I agree,

other chaplains in the state can do.

"A chaplain is for the troops. The unique thing about a chaplain is our primary mission is the troops ... Say, for example, a Soldier comes by and needs some counseling, that's my whole mission, is to be with that Soldier.

I would tell soldiers and Airmen to use their chaplains. We are an incredible type of steam valve. A Soldier or airman can come to us at any time, share anything they want to, and as long as

having done it. It's hard but everybody feels like it's the right thing to do. All the folks that have made notification are folks that have not deployed on this particular war and the kind of general comment I get is 'If I can't go over there and do that type of duty, then I want the toughest duty I can find. If those guys can go pay the ultimate price for their country, then the least we can do is go and look their family in the eye and tell them what happened.' "

they're not going to harm themselves or someone else, it is completely confidential.

It won't reflect on their OER NCOER, and they can just let off all of their steam, get off all their frustration and there are no ramifications.

It's always an open door. That's the heart and soul of a chaplain being with people. I would encourage troops to use their chaplains to understand what they're all about."

National program honors units that mobilized

by Taylor Barbaree
Associate Editor

FORT DEPOSIT- More than 300 people gave up their pre-Super Bowl parties to pay tribute to the efforts of the Alabama Army National Guard's 781st Transportation Company during a Freedom Salute Ceremony held February 6 in the town's community center.

The Freedom Salute Campaign is one of the largest Army National Guard recognition endeavors in history, designed to publicly acknowledge Army Guard Soldiers and those who supported them during the President's call to duty for Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

To be eligible for the recognition, Soldiers must have been mobilized 31 or more days in support of one of the three operations.

The ceremony recognized the sacrifice and accomplishments of Soldiers as well as the support of family members from the Fort Deposit and Georgiana units during their recent deployment to Iraq.

Currently, more than 4,800 Alabama Guardsmen and their families representing 76 units located throughout the state have been honored for their



Taylor Barbaree/photo

A member of Det. 1, 781st Transportation Company in Fort Deposit, receives her Freedom Salute items. The units ceremony was attended by freinds, family and local civic and Guard officials.

active duty service during Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

During each ceremony, Soldiers

receive an encased American flag; a sequentially numbered commemorative coin; a "Defender of Freedom" certificate signed by Lt. Gen. Roger C. Schultz, Director of the Army National Guard, and Command Sgt. Maj. A. Frank Lever, Army National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. and a lapel insignia for the Soldier's spouse.

"This is an excellent way to (commemorate) our deployment while also letting our families know just how much they mean while you are wearing this uniform," said Sgt. James Giddens Jr., a 19-year Guard veteran and truck driver with the 781st.

In addition to honoring 781st Soldiers and their families, officials representing the city of Fort Deposit and Georgiana where the unit is located were presented with Minute-man statuettes by 167th TSC Deputy Commander, Brig. Gen. Frank Speed.

"We certainly appreciate the sacrifice that each of you (and) your families have made to our nation, state and to our community," Georgiana Mayor Mike Middleton said after being presented with the 17-inch statuette.

(OCS, continued from page 16)

Their deployment experiences turned out to be more of a benefit than a drawback. "They've taken their experience and used it as strength rather than an excuse or a crutch," Rothfeldt said. "They seem better prepared to lead from the front and make the right decisions."

With the first group going through the course, the 200th Regiment has already started preparations for the second group. According to Cloud, they have already started the application process with several soldiers in the 231st Military Police Battalion, which recently returned from a deployment.

Interested in attending Officer Candidate School ?

The National Guard is looking for the future leaders of the Army National Guard. By entering OCS, you have the opportunity to become one of those leaders.

Region D OCS runs three OCS courses throughout the year. The traditional course runs from June 2005 to August 2006, a summer accelerated course runs from June to August 2005, and another accelerated course runs from January to March 2006.

Potential candidates must be between the ages of 18 and 30, have completed basic training, advanced individual training and 60 semester or 90 quarter hours, have a GT score of at least 110, meet height and weight standards in accordance with AR 600-9, and be able to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test.

For complete details on the application process or for more information visit www.alguard.state.al.us/ocs.htm or e-mail Master Sgt. Jerry Harris at jerry.harris@us.army.mil

Deployed Guardsmen attend OCS for first time

by Martin Dyson
Editor

FORT MCCLELLAN – Officer Candidates come to Fort McClellan each year from all 54 states and territories hoping to complete the Alabama National Guard’s Officer Candidate School and earn their commissions. The latest class of candidates raised the number of locations to 55 when candidates arrived here directly from the battlefields of Iraq.

This marks the first time that National Guard soldiers have returned home early from a deployment in order to attend a professional development course. Active duty soldiers have regularly been allowed to return home for all types of courses during a deployment. “There was no regulation saying they weren’t allowed to attend,” said Capt. Anthony Cloud, administrative officer for the 200th Regiment which runs OCS. “It was more a case of units not knowing that they could send the candidates back early.”

Traditionally, most OCS candidates start the application process several months before the start of class. They use the time to properly get their paperwork together, make sure their equipment and uniforms are squared away and get physically ready for the course. The candidates coming back from Iraq, in some cases found out less than a week before the start of class that that



Martin Dyson/photo

Officer Candidate Marlon Joiner (left) applies camouflage face paint to a fellow candidate. Joiner is one of six candidates who arrived at OCS directly from Iraq.

they were going to attend. Officer Candidate Marlon Joiner, a member of the Arkansas National Guard, who deployed with Charlie Company, 3/153rd Infantry, was in the process of getting ready to come home when he found out. “It was getting close to the end of our deployment when I found out that my unit was going to send people to OCS,” Joiner said. “They told me I was leaving in four days for Fort Hood, once there I had five days to get my packet together.”

Having only a few days to get ready for the start of class led to more than a few problems for the candidates, but the 200th were more than willing to help resolve their issues. “They were missing clothing

and equipment and the only uniforms they had were desert camouflage,” Cloud said. “We issued them new BDU’s and new boots which unfortunately they had to break in during the course.” The 200th Regiment also gave the candidates a 10-day window, as opposed to the usual 72-hours, to track down all the necessary paperwork for their packets.

Even with the paperwork and equipment issues straightened out, there were still some issues that concerned the staff, mainly how the candidates would react to the stress placed on them during the initial part of

the course. “We were concerned about the possible effects of post traumatic stress disorder,” said 1st Lt. Morris Rothfeldt, Tactical Officer for three of the candidates. “We were worried that the stress they had endured overseas could affect their ability to handle the stress we place on them.”

Despite these concerns most of the candidates easily made the transition from the battlefield environment to training environment. “This is a piece of cake coming from a deployment,” Joiner said. “There were people missing their families after a few weeks, we haven’t seen our families in almost 15-months, plus nobody is shooting at you here.”

(Please see *OCS*, page 15)

ALABAMA GUARDSMAN
PO Box 3711
Montgomery, AL 36109-3711

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO.
MONTGOMERY, AL