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THE

ISPATCH

DEC 2015

THE MAGAZINE OF THE TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

TXANG
Helps
local
community

TXSG
Wings
over
Houston

136th MEB
conducts
completes
Warfighter





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The Cover



Staff Sgt. Patricia Gutierrez and Santa Claus, 1st Sgt. Matthew Matzen, pose for a photo at the Annual Christmas Tree lighting at Camp Mabry in Austin, Texas, Dec. 5, 2014.



Spcs. Jerrico Lloyd, Dylan Reed, Daniela Rivera and Margil Garcia, soldiers from the 436th Chemical Company, 6th CBRNE Enhanced Response Force Package, 136th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Texas Army National Guard, practice to clear a building at Camp Swift, near Bastrop Texas, Nov. 15, 2015. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Matthew Verdugo)



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Putting People First

Commentary by Brig. Gen. David M. McMinn
Commander of the TXANG

Putting People First

Okay. Everybody knows what it means to put people first. But how does that get the job done? We all know that if we take care of the people, they will take care of the mission. But how do we actually do that? Well, in my 31 years of service, including 12 years in command positions at the squadron, group and wing-levels, I've picked up a thing or two. One of the clearest things I picked up was this – The Adjutant General has made it clear that he expects us to take care of one another and grow the next generation of leaders. So, there are some things we should be doing culturally to put our people first and get the mission done.

I have learned we can put people first in three ways: Institutionally, professionally and personally.

Institutionally

This is done for us. The National Guard is a great place to work and there are a lot of people programs out there. You'd be hard-pressed to find an employer anywhere that offers a pension after 20 years, or a pension at all. Try to find an employer that offers the same Tricare benefits that our members enjoy. There are also a myriad of online and in-person resources made available to us covering everything from financial advice to marriage counseling to suicide prevention counseling. As leaders, we need to constantly highlight this to our soldiers and airmen. We have a tough job, but we are a military family and we have a lot of great resources and benefits. Not many institutions do that in the cold, hard world outside the fence line. That's worth a lot.

Professionally

Our members joined us because they want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. They want to serve. They want to learn teamwork, leadership and skills. Are we creating the right environment for this? Start with this: Everyone in our organization wants to know two things – what is expected of them and how are they doing. It's that simple. We should provide direction, opportunity and feedback to everyone – evenly and fairly. We must find ways to challenge and grow our soldiers and

airmen and be honest when they don't meet expectations. Secondly, delegate and empower. I recall attending an Air Force senior leader's conference on base years ago. There must have been 25 generals, including a 4-star, and 50 colonels checking into billeting at once. The billeting manager was an airman first class (E-3) and she had a one-striper and two civilians working for her. The check-in line went out the door and more were arriving by the moment. She ran that place like a McDonald's drive-thru manager at rush hour! She was prepared, professional, calm with pop-up changes and requests and courteous and encouraging to her staff. She was trained, trusted and empowered. Do you think she learned some leadership skills during her first term enlistment? Did she do something to be proud of? I wonder how many E-3s we have challenged like that. Have we trained, trusted and empowered the people we supervise? What have they learned under our leadership? What leadership skills have we impressed upon them? What do they tell their parents about the exciting things they are doing? Or, have first-term soldiers and airmen left us to seek opportunities that we failed to provide?

Personally

Maintain standards and don't show favoritism – that creates an even and fair playing field. We must be transparent and reasonable when making our decisions and explain our thought processes – this mentors the entire organization at once. Putting people first means being high- energy, committed to the mission, optimistic and encouraging. The best leaders never show they are tired or discouraged – nothing brings morale down faster than that. Be a beacon! Give them what they crave: Guidance, training, optimism, energy, knowledge, challenge, opportunity, power, and honest feedback. We all have our own style and ideas about how to put people first. Usually, not putting yourself first takes care of it. This is our only chance to serve our great State and Nation. Let's be proud of what we've done and remember to always strive to make our organization worthy of the great young men and women that choose to join us.

- FROM THE TOP



Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Mindy Bloem
149th Fighter Wing
Public Affairs Office

Gunfighters set aim on local community



Airmen volunteer at Meals on Wheels of San Antonio

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO Lackland, Texas - Texas Air National Guard members assigned to the 149th Fighter Wing's Operations Group volunteered at a local Meals on Wheels organization, Nov. 23-24, 2015.

Each weekday, Meals on Wheels of San Antonio prepares and delivers nearly 4,000 meals to homebound senior citizens of Bexar County, according to volunteer coordinator Kristin Rivera.

Rivera, who has been working there for the past three years, said the non-profit relies heavily on its volunteers who comprise about half of the workforce.

Master Sgt. Martha Vasquez-Medevez, volunteer and member of the 149th Operations Group, called the organization this time last year to inquire about her family delivering Thanksgiving Day meals. This year she decided to recruit fellow members from her squadron to help with the high-volume food preparation that occurs each year during Thanksgiving week.

"It's been rewarding knowing that you're helping seniors who can sometimes get forgotten, she said. "I also have a better appreciation for people who do food serving - now that's work," Medelez said after spending much of the morning

servicing food onto thousands of microwave-safe plates to be sealed and distributed later in the week.

Fellow Meals on Wheels volunteer and 149th Operations Group member, Tech. Sgt. Tracy Potts, agrees with his co-worker about it being a rewarding experience. Like Medelez, Potts is no stranger to volunteering. He and his family volunteer for various local churches and charity organizations.

In addition to prepping and serving the food, he also volunteers to deliver the food to homebound residents on his days off.

"There's this one guy ... we talk Spurs," Potts said. "He loves Tim Duncan. He loves David Robinson. He'll always be talking about how Robinson needs to suit up again, and I'm like, 'I don't know, man.' He also loves the Cowboys, so we have that in common."

Potts said he enjoys the delivery aspect because he's able to strike up these types of conversations with seniors who don't always get a lot of outside interaction.

For the volunteer coordinator, going out on deliveries is something she enjoys as well. Because of the organization's reliance on volunteers, Rive-

ra said she sometimes has to balance her administration duties with going out into the field.

"As soon as you get out there, you remember, this is why I do this," Rivera said about being called upon to deliver the meals when someone can't make it.

For Rivera, volunteers are one of her favorite parts of the job. "I love dealing with the volunteers," she said. "I mean how many other jobs do you get where you get to deal with nice people all day?" she added.

Both Medelez and Potts said they volunteer because they just enjoy

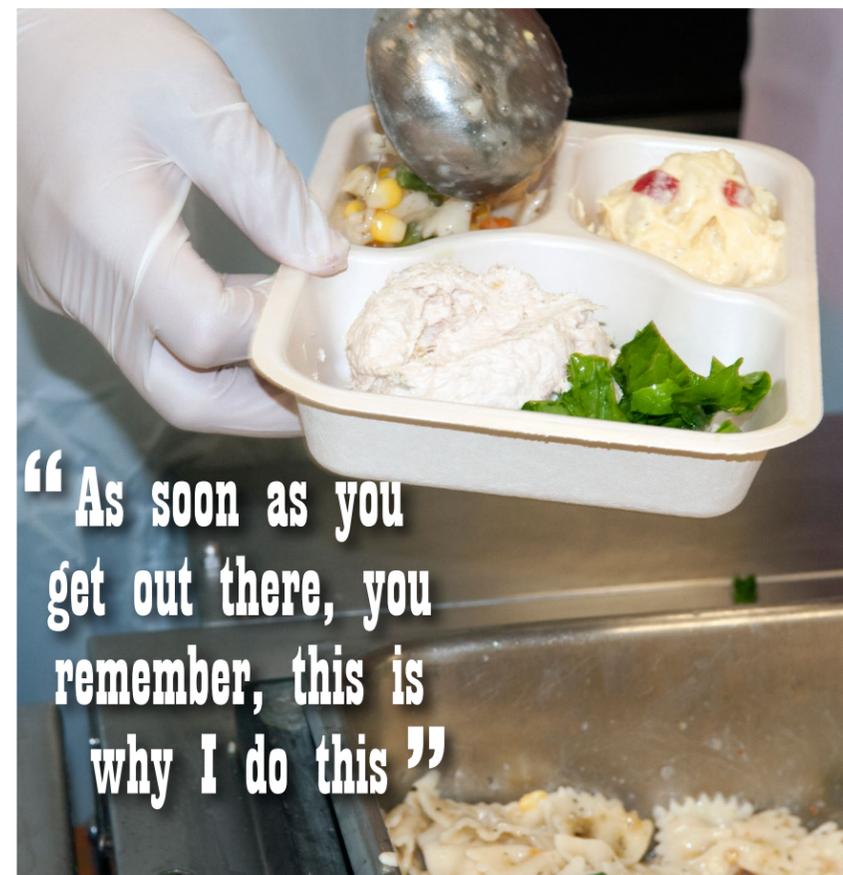
making a difference in the places around them.

Potts recommends checking out the myriad of opportunities available on the Internet if unsure of where to get involved. "After that, you begin to network and hear about other opportunities from the people volunteering with you," he said.

Volunteering, for Medelez, is mostly a matter of follow-through. "Once you get that thought, just do it," she said. "Rather than letting it linger then leave your brain, actually make it happen." - 149th FW PAO



Members of the 149th Fighter Wing's Operations Group from Joint Base San Antonio served food onto microwave-safe food trays at a Meals on Wheels kitchen in San Antonio, Texas, Nov. 23, 2015.



"As soon as you get out there, you remember, this is why I do this"



REVISITING SPIRITUAL BEGINNINGS

TOP AIR NATIONAL GUARD CHAPLAIN VISITS 136TH AW

Courtesy story and photos by Senior Airman Seth Holderby, Staff Sgt. William Gasch and Sgts. Jason Robertson, Angela Melton and Hector Valladares, UPAR Program

NAVAL AIR STATION Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth, Texas – Chaplain Brig. Gen. Steve Chisolm, Air National Guard assistant to the U.S. Air Force Chief of Chaplains, led a packed room of Texas Guardsmen from the 136th Airlift Wing during a service held at the base Nov. 15, 2015.

For Chisolm, this visit was a chance to spend time with a program he helped build and the airmen he served.

“Then a lieutenant colonel, Chisolm was my mentor. He influenced me even before I became a chaplain,” said Chaplain Capt. Nathan Tucker, 136th Maintenance Squadron, 136th Airlift Wing. “He has never lost touch with me since the first time we met.”

During his service in the wing, Chisolm mentored chaplains like Tucker and devoted his efforts to building a support network where airmen could maintain their spiritual fitness.

“I think with almost 15 years of continual deployments, constant war has worn on all of us from all the different components, physically, emotionally, but certainly spiritually,” said Chisolm. “You think about comprehensive airmen fitness and about those four components, the spiritual aspect is just as important, more important in my opinion.”

It was this vision that inspired the program so many service members in the wing know today.

“We have an excellent chaplain program,” said Staff Sgt. Patricia Johnson, noncommissioned officer in charge of chaplain operations and chaplain’s assistant to the wing chaplain. “It’s growing. When I came to this wing about six years ago, we had single digit numbers.”

The growth in the program Chisolm helped start was obvious, as more than 100 airmen packed the chapel for service.

“He laid the foundation to build the program,” said Tucker. “He built it through three things – trust with the leadership, being a man of integrity and understanding pastoral care.”

The chaplains’ program offers service members a time to set aside during drill to focus on their spiritual fitness. Because of the trust Chisolm built with wing leadership, wing chaplains have been able to work closely with unit commanders to ensure guardsmen have the option to attend chapel services with minimal effects on unit training.

“Seeing how it evolved to this, it is really refreshing to my soul,” said Johnson. “I know it’s making a difference in the members’ lives.”

Military chaplains are charged with the responsibility to provide spiritual care and the opportunity for service members, their families and other authorized personnel to practice their faith through religious observanc-



Chaplain Brig. Gen. Steve Chisolm, Air National Guard Assistant to the U.S. Air Force Chief of Chaplains, preaches to Texas Air National Guardsmen and their families during a chapel service held at the 136th Airlift Wing headquarters, Nov. 15, 2015.





Local musicians lead Texas Air National Guardsmen and their families in song, during a chapel service held at the 136th Airlift Wing headquarters, Nov. 15, 2015.

es, providing pastoral care and advising leadership on spiritual, ethical, moral, morale, core values and religious accommodation issues.

“My job as a chaplain is to provide for the free exercise of religion, as provided by the founding document,” said Tucker.

Placing spiritual fitness and pastoral care first, Chisolm honed a program to do just that.

“Our members feel like we really do care about them, not just their personal growth or professional growth, but their spiritual growth as well,” said Johnson. “It helps them and their productivity. It helps enhance the mission.”

Chisolm continues mentoring others in his job at the Pentagon, serving as the liaison between the director of the Air National Guard and Headquarters United States Air Force Chief of Chaplains to ensure that the

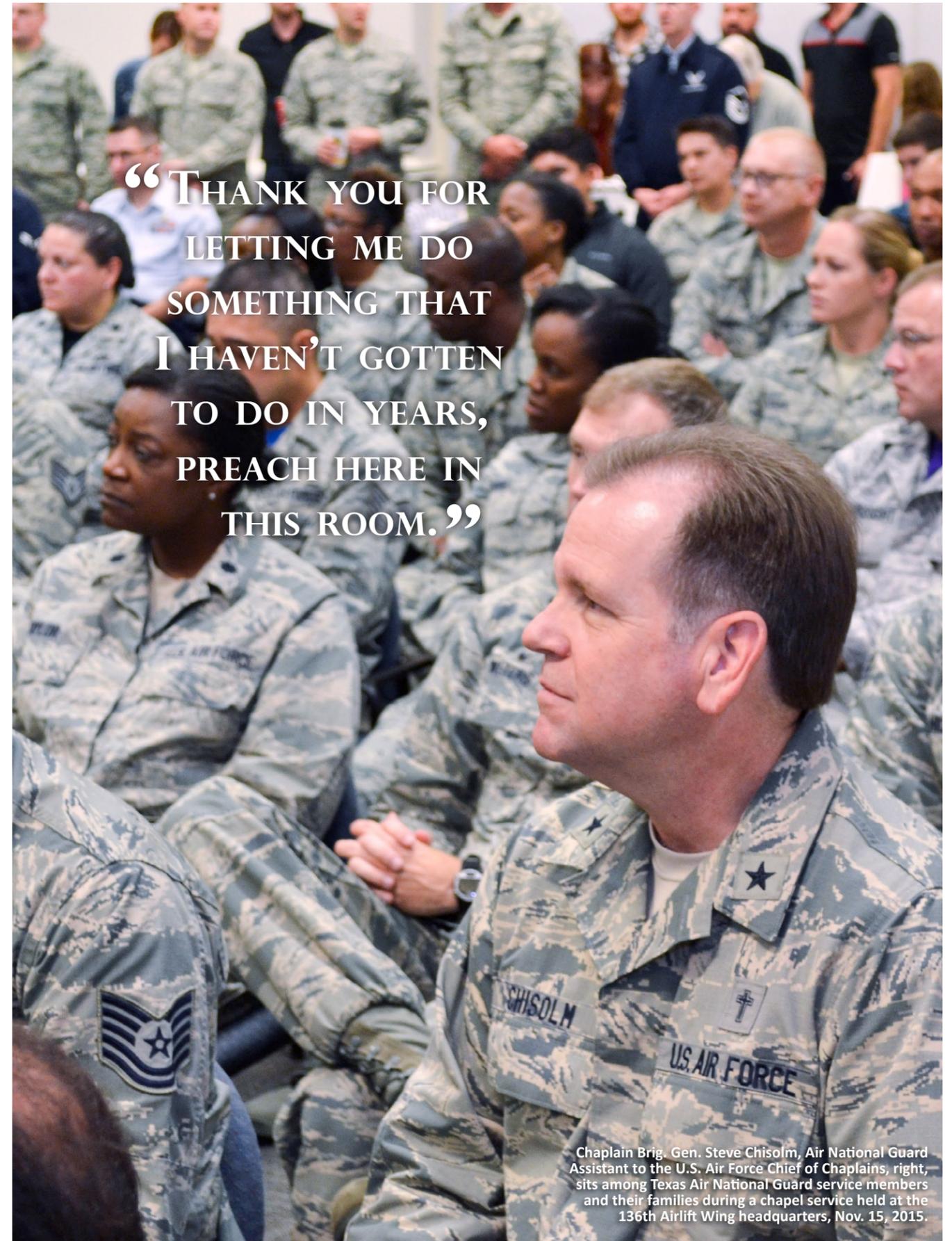
Air National Guard is providing airmen needs, as well as, making sure the Air force understands the needs of the Air National Guard.

Once in a while, Chisolm is able to make a guest appearance at units within Texas to provide spiritual guidance.

“Thank you for letting me do something that I haven’t gotten to do in years,” said Chisolm. “Preach here in this room.”

Coming back to the wing, Chisolm was able to see his vision for the unit’s chaplaincy program fulfilled.

“This chapel is successful because Chaplain Chisolm wanted to have the best program in the National Guard,” said Tucker. “And he succeeded.” - **DISPATCH**



“THANK YOU FOR LETTING ME DO SOMETHING THAT I HAVEN’T GOTTEN TO DO IN YEARS, PREACH HERE IN THIS ROOM.”

Chaplain Brig. Gen. Steve Chisolm, Air National Guard Assistant to the U.S. Air Force Chief of Chaplains, right, sits among Texas Air National Guard service members and their families during a chapel service held at the 136th Airlift Wing headquarters, Nov. 15, 2015.



WINGS OVER HOUSTON

Texas State Guardsmen provide support for the event and receive valuable training in the process

Story by Warrant Officer Malana Nall, Texas State Guard Public Affairs Office

HOUSTON - For almost 30 years the Texas State Guard has provided logistical, operational and medical support to the Wings Over Houston Air show. Working alongside the Commemorative Air Force and local law enforcement, soldiers from the Texas State Guard Army Component 8th Regiment, 447th Air Wing, Maritime Regiment 2nd Battalion, and Medical Brigade 2nd Battalion guided visitors through entrance and exit gates, supplied information on air show venues and offered other assistance to ensure that the 50,000 visitors had an enjoyable time at Ellington Field, Houston, October 17-18, 2015.

This community event allowed the soldiers to hone their mission-essential skills, such as shelter management, food and water distribution, radio communications and medical support. Soldiers practiced working together in a joint operation with different units of the Texas State Guard. These skills are used to support residents and local communities during a disaster or emergency, such as hurricanes, tornadoes and flooding.

Soldiers handed out candy and ear plugs at a recruiting tent in front of the Air Wing communications trailer.

Children were encouraged to try on Texas State Guard caps, boots and equipment belts.

Staff Sgt. Cheryl Lemmings and Sgt. Sasha Shepard with the 8th Regiment, volunteered to escort children from the Make-A-Wish Foundation to a VIP tent to watch the U. S. Air Force Thunderbirds practice that day. They took that time to answer questions about the Texas State Guard.

Col. Edwin Grantham, commander of the 8th Regiment, explained that “the job here is part of our support to civil authorities. We want Texans to have a high confidence level in our ability to take care of them when called upon. We take great pride in what we do for Texas residents and events like the air show allow us to practice our mission skills.”

Wings Over Houston is one of the top air shows in the country and attracts visitors from around the world. Featured were the U. S. Air Force Thunderbirds, who are known for their aerial acrobatics in F-16 Fighting Falcons, as well as Breitling Jet Team, “Tora, Tora, Tora” air re-enactors and the U. S. Navy F-18 Super Hornet.

- TXSG PAO



Texas State Guardsmen with the 8th Regiment provide safety instructions and interact with visitors during the Wings Over Houston air show at Ellington Field in Houston, Oct. 17-18, 2015.

TEXAS GUARDSMEN EARN THE PATCH

Story by Sgt. Elizabeth Peña
136th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade
Public Affairs Office



FORT CAMPBELL, KY. - Texas Guardsmen from the 136th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, based out of Round Rock, Texas, exercised their combat readiness skills during a three-week Warfighter at Fort Campbell, just in time to get home for Thanksgiving.

The 136th MEB went to Fort Campbell November 5-22, 2015, in support of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) for the real-time scenario spanning three fictional countries in the Middle East. The purpose of Warfighter is to test a unit's battle skills and ensure it is fit for overseas combat.

"This is our available year, so generally that is when you are going to see a brigade assigned to a warfighter exercise," said Col. Scott Mac Leod, commander of the 136th MEB. "It's part of the [Army Force Generation] cycle, which means, theoretically, that if an overseas contingency requirement occurred, it's possible that the 136th MEB could be assigned to deploy in support of that assignment."

During the exercise, each participating brigade or division is assigned an observer team to help guide them in the right direction.

"We pretty much just coach. We don't control anything," said Lt. Col. Randy Spell, chief observer coach and trainer for the Mission Command Training Program. "If y'all have a process that needs some improvement or you have some gaps within that process, we help you through them with a doctrinal example for a way that

we have seen successful."

Warfighter is a great opportunity for soldiers to exercise their duty roles while training to respond quickly to incidents and short-term objectives within a full-scale scenario.

"There were priorities of work for our unit in support of the division," said Mac Leod. "Protection of critical assets, security and clearance of all of the routes within division area, providing security forces to the base defense clusters, as well as the employment of tactical combat force to find fix and destroy level three threats that might appear in the rear area."

These real-life scenarios gave the brigade's combat veterans a chance to mentor their less-experienced team members on the best plans and procedures, should a real-world contingency occur.

"I've been on six deployments and I can tell you that most of the things we are doing here, just from the tactical side, are things that I think about, worry about, address, fix and react to on the battlefield," said Maj. George Hurd, chief of operations for the 136th MEB. "Having the whole brigade be exposed to these systems, whenever we go forward and the next time we deploy, is one less roadblock we have to worry about."

Throughout the three weeks, the 136th MEB demonstrated the greatest proficiency in staff communication and ensuring everyone knew the status of the conflict

at any given moment through the live battle tracker.

"Our common operational picture put us in a position to follow the [division] commander's intent. So basically the tools that the staff developed from the beginning to the mid point put them in a position to help me know if, when and what to decide so they supported my decision cycle. By increasing the rate at which they were able to do that, it enabled us to work more rapidly to solve the problems we were encountering."

For some of these soldiers, this is as close to a deployment as they have experienced.

"The thing that I really got out of it was getting to see how the 136th MEB interacts with other units around it," said Spc. Shane Wilson, an intelligence analyst with the 136th MEB. "The MEB has a unique role, which the Army is trying to test and trying to figure where it belongs. [It] was pretty interesting to see how the staff functions and how complex it really is."

The 136th MEB was distinguished as the only National Guard outfit participating in the Warfighter, joining the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and one of its subordinate brigades, the 101st Sustainment Brigade.



"There is no question that y'all have come a long way,"

said Spell. "We are very proud of you; we feel like we are integrated as a part of your staff. National Guard, active duty, it doesn't matter. We all respond to one fight."

When the 136th MEB isn't training for their overseas mission of area support operations, they are back home in Texas where they are custodian of the FEMA Region VI Homeland Response Force mission. There, they train alongside first responders and civil authorities to combat the threat of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High-Yield Explosive incidents throughout Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arkansas and Louisiana.

"There is a lot of what we do here that can be run over to our Defense Support of Civil Authorities," said Hurd. "One is having to make swift timely decisions. I'm looking forward to taking these products home. I've got a lot of good examples of ways to better synergize our efforts."

These vigilant guardsmen can return home with confidence knowing they are fit for the fight.

"I'm immensely proud of our soldiers, said Mac Leod. "Everyone here is just a little bit sleep deprived, a little bit worn out but they've got a lot to be proud of. We came here, we wanted to do well tactically and technically but we also wanted to represent Texas and I think we achieved that objective." - 136th MEB PAO

TRAINING FOR DUAL ROLES

Chemical Soldiers train for home and overseas missions



Pfc. Jasmine Swayzer, a Texas Army National Guardsman from the 436th Chemical Company, 6th CBRNE Enhanced Response Force Package, fires the M249 machine gun at Camp Swift near Bastrop, Texas, Nov. 15, 2015.

Story and photos by 1st Lt. Matthew Verdugo
136th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade UPAR

BASTROP, TEXAS – Texas Army National Guardsmen with the 436th Chemical Company conducted dual-mission training exercises at Camp Swift near Bastrop and at San Marcos during their annual training period Nov. 13-18, 2015.

The soldiers practiced their traditional warrior skills at Camp Swift, in areas such as land navigation, security clearing, basic rifle marksmanship, machine gun familiarity, reacting to improvised explosive devices, and physical fitness. This training is essential to maintaining a state of readiness and deployability in support of the citizens of Texas and civil authorities at home or abroad.

“It is always important to return to basics and improve upon warrior tasks and drills that lay the foundation for everything we do as soldiers,” said 1st Sgt. Dianne Overshown, first sergeant for the 436th Chemical Company. “In many cases, our soldiers can bring valuable insight from their civilian careers to enhance the training the unit receives in the field.”

The 436th Chemical Company’s core mission is to decontaminate friendly units that have come under a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack in theaters of operation. In addition, the unit specializes in the reconnaissance of CBRN threats and the surveillance of biological dangers. However, their basic Army fundamentals are the foundation that allows the unit to excel in their more technical responsibilities.

“It was fascinating to see some of our soldiers with law enforcement backgrounds take the lead on room clearing and marksmanship,” said Sgt. 1st Class Stephen Snyder. “Training like this really gives the soldiers confidence for future, more complex operations.”

Experienced leaders shared their lessons and best practices with subordinates throughout the week, refining team skill sets in reacting to IEDs, clearing buildings, and weapon familiarization. Each drill reinforced the common themes of teamwork and cooperation.

“It was great to shoot rounds down range and learn from our experienced sergeants some of the finer points of marksmanship,” said Spc. Zacharias Trigo. “I never realized the infinite number of situations that could present

themselves during the clearing of a building and how all team members must work as one.”

The service members also practiced mass casualty decontamination operations as part of their FEMA Region VI Homeland Response Force mission. The HRF mission calls for guardsmen to augment first responders during stateside natural or man-made disasters requiring specialized decontamination capabilities.

“Our unit has the unique challenge and privilege of being able to help our fellow citizens in a time of crisis,” said 1st Lt. Luis Lopez, 436th Chemical Company commander. “We train, hoping that a day like that never materializes. It is training like this that makes it real for everyone involved.”

The 436th Chemical Company also participated in a simulated downed plane scenario at the San Marcos Municipal Airport alongside area first responders and other elements of their National Guard battalion, the 6th CBRN Enhanced Force Package. The exercise simulated dozens of casualties and the release of toxic elements in and around the crash site. The chemical soldiers practiced setting up the decontamination infrastructure and conducting mass casualty decontamination while wearing personal protective equipment.

“Exercises like this really bring to light the responsibility our unit has to help our fellow citizens survive such a potential tragedy,” said Staff Sgt. Vanessa Stange. “I am amazed by the professionalism of the area first responders and how our soldiers are performing under stress.”

In addition to the simulated plane crash, 436th Chemical Company soldiers were certified during a three-day course as hazmat operators and recognized by the National Guard Bureau as qualified to perform their decontamination duties. This gives the troops an academic component to augment their practical application exercises throughout the year.

“Having two missions is a lot of work, but it is rewarding and feels good that we can help,” said Spc. Katty Gracia. “I can’t wait until the next annual training.” - 136th MEB PAO

**“ We train,
hoping that
a day like
that never
materializes.”**



Soldiers from the 436th Chemical Company, 6th CBRNE Enhanced Response Force Package, 136th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Texas Army National Guard, decontaminate a volunteer at the San Marcos municipal airport during a simulated plane crash exercise, Nov. 16, 2015.

Pilot for a Day

149th Airmen help put smiles on children's faces

Story compilation by Sgts. David Mercado and Anthony Powell and Spcs. Sondriqua Cunningham and Kimberly Pena, UPAR Program



JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO Lackland, Texas - Texas Air National Guardsmen with the 149th Fighter Wing welcomed a patient from Methodist Children's Hospital to their quarterly Pilot for a Day program held at the unit's headquarters at Joint Base San Antonio - Lackland, Oct. 16, 2015.

Upon arrival, Justen Lawrence was given a flight suit, flight gear and a front seat tour of an F-16 fighter jet all while guardsmen from the 149th cheered him on.

Justen is just one of many children who have been honorably inducted as pilots into the wing.

The Pilot for a Day program invites sick children from the Methodist Children's Hospital in San Antonio to come and experience life as a pilot and was created by Lt. Col. Bryan Carlson, an F-16 instructor pilot for the wing's 182nd Fighter Squadron.

"The whole goal is to take them out of that hospital environment and just brighten their day," said Carlson. "We want to make it special for him or her."

Children are assigned to their own personal fighter pilot who accompanies the child through a day that includes gearing up in a tailored personal flight suit and fighter gear, flight simulations and a front row seat to the adrenaline filled take offs and landings of the unit's various fighter jets.

"Kids come through beaming," said Senior Airman Rhannon Cardenas, an air crew flight equipment technician for the 149th Fighter Wing who helps the children gear up. "As soon as they come in, we all go to the middle of the hallway and clap for them."

Cardenas is also a part of the team who embroiders the children's name tags, pillows and bags that are presented to the children at the end of the day.

"I think what we do affects them in a positive way," said

Cardenas. "Their faces, just light up."

Guardsmen state they value the opportunity to support and interact with these children and that the bonds formed last long after the child has left the base. Many children who participate in the program return to visit the wing during air shows and public events.

"I think it shows the community that we care about them, that it's not just about the job, it's not just about flying jets. We're here for them as well - reaching out," said Master Sgt. Nicholas Jenkins, air field manager, 149th operations group, 149th Fighter Wing.

Some children, however, are never afforded this opportunity to return.

"We've also been able to attend their funerals and three of them have been buried in their flight suit," said Carlson. "We fly a flag for them."

The Pilot for a Day program started as a small effort by Carlson to get involved in the local community and has since grown to incorporate the entire 149th Operations Group. Carlson says the program not only leaves a lasting impression on the children's lives but also on every guardsman involved.

"It's been a wonderful opportunity for us to be able to think a little bit outside of ourselves and be able to help some of the children in the community," said Carlson. "There are a lot of opportunities to do small things to make a big difference in peoples' lives."

Since its inception, the wing has honored more than 30 critically-ill children with this program, a program that is funded entirely out of donations given primarily by airmen and their families.

"It's been a remarkable experience for me," said Carlson. "I look at it as the highlight of my career to be able to participate." - **DISPATCH**



Justen Lawrence



Caleb Carter



Jacob Cisneros





**REAL
Guidance**

Courtney J. Lynch, PhD, LCSW
and Tracy K. Ward, M.Ed, LPC

This page: Lynne and Persia. Opposite page: Julie. (Courtesy photos).

HEALING DOESN'T always involve talking and doesn't have to occur in an office behind a closed door. Healing, learning and growth can happen outside surrounded by nature. It can also occur in a quiet atmosphere or when we experience a new environment. It may take place when we are alone, or when we are around other people or animals. More and more we hear about animals, horses in particular, helping people in various ways. For example, working with horses can help strengthen self-confidence and relationships, as well as address anxiety, depression and PTSD concerns to name a few.

We, along with several service members, recently had the great privilege to visit one such equine therapy

program just outside the Austin area, called HorseLink. All of us were quickly on board and eager to get out of the office and into nature for part of the day. In fact, soon after we arrived, as we took in the fresh air and nature sounds and smells, we began to notice our systems slowing down and relaxing. Some even commented on wanting to stay longer, or return to volunteer their time.

Our collective experience that day made us realize the great value of a program like this one. What follows is a brief interview with the founders and facilitators at HorseLink: Julie Puentes, Lynne Silver and Sarah Janosik. ☞

Tell us about HorseLink.

Julie: HorseLink is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. We provide sanctuary and renewed purpose to retired competition horses and a place of healing and growth for people. At HorseLink, we believe that reestablishing the age-old bond between humans and horses can be both restorative and deeply rewarding.

How did you become interested in working with people and horses?

Julie: I started HorseLink in 2012 after two pivotal events in my own life. I had to retire my horse at an early age and almost lost him to a severe illness, and I almost lost my farm to the Bastrop fires in 2011. When both were spared, I wanted to give back because I felt both were saved for a reason. I decided to finally start HorseLink, which had been a quiet dream of mine for a while.

Lynne: Horses have been my most important life teachers. They see through my trying to act like I am in charge, when I really may feel unsure or afraid. They never let me get away with not being present and attentive when I am with them. I have learned more deeply how to be in a relationship through their responses and willingness to connect. Horses can help us find our way back to what is authentic and true within ourselves and in community with others.



Sarah: Over the years, I would have clients come to work with my horses because they learned lessons themselves in direct ways that was honest and powerful and in the moment. Co-facilitating with the horses is the most powerful therapeutic work I have ever done.

What is Equine Assisted Therapy/Learning?

Lynne: Equine Assisted Learning has been around for about 20 years. It was first developed and used in Sierra, Tucson with addictions and since then has been adapted to many different populations.

Through a series of hands-on, non-riding activities, participants deepen their awareness of personal issues, core

feelings and areas of bodily tension that inhibit their ability to reach their true potential. With equine assisted therapy/learning, participants work closely with one or more horses to gain insight into their own strengths and challenges.

In our program we value horses as a respected member of our team. They help participants develop skills in staying present, being authentic and congruent in their actions, listening with awareness and learning the difference between being present and trying to control a situation. These unique experiential workshops provide opportunities for participants to expand their capacity for self-awareness in a playful and safe environment.

Why does Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) work?

Lynne: Equine Assisted Learning/Therapy is primarily about establishing a trusting respectful relationship with another being. All the things that come up around relationships with people get highlighted with the horses.

Horses are highly social and seek connection for survival with other members of their herd. Because they are preyed upon in nature, horses are extremely hyper-vigilant. They are attuned to the slightest changes, either positive or

negative, in their environment, in people, and in other horses. Their reactions give moment-to-moment feedback as to a person's conscious or unconscious state. It is threatening to horses when a person feels one way and acts another. When horses sense this inconsistency, they respond by either avoiding contact, fleeing or acting out.

For example, in a workshop exercise a very mild-mannered man entered the arena 200 feet away from a male horse that was very gentle with children. Suddenly, the horse began showing very aggressive signs. As I helped the person get in touch with his feelings, he was able to connect to anger he had buried. As soon as he recognized the anger, the horse calmed down. And in 20 minutes they were walking together like old friends.



Horses do not care if you are mad or sad. They just want you to be present with your feelings so they feel safe to connect. As a sense of trust unfolds, deeper relationships can develop between a person and a horse.

Another example was with a woman who came into the round pen feeling like no one liked her. The horse did not pay any attention to her and avoided her despite her friendly advances. When she was able to feel her sadness instead of the negative self talk, the horse came right over and put his head on her shoulder. She sobbed softly, feeling a level of connection that she had longed for.

Horses teach us to recognize our emotional, mental and physical states, and that we have choices in how we relate to ourselves and others. It is easier to understand your own behavior when you see it reflected in the horse. If we are aware, present and listening to our bodies, horses are willing partners. Horses help us learn to create healthy relationships with ourselves and others by respecting needs for safety, communicating authentically and setting clear boundaries.

What are the benefits of EAL?

Lynne: The experiential nature of Equine Assisted Learning allows for whole body learning. Participants learn through their experiences rather than just through their minds. This is especially important during stress and trauma which disrupts the nervous system and emotional balance, and distorts thinking. It is very difficult to take in information, make changes, or make good decisions when your system is in survival mode. Horses have resilient nervous systems and have a balancing, calming effect on the whole body. New patterns of thoughts and feelings are created in the experience with a horse.



We see a big change in participants from the beginning of the day to the end of a day in our workshops. Stress, anxiety, anger, fear and pain seem to decrease. The physical presence of the horse allows people to

gain courage to confront fears. Being in the presence of a horse brings feelings to the surface. Because horses offer unconditional support and love without judgment, people tend to feel safe to let down their guard and open their hearts.

Why are horses well suited to this type of therapy?

Sarah: Horses are prey animals. They are tuned into the environment around them so that if a predator is close by, they can run to get away.

Prey animals use their emotions and senses to scan the environment to make sure they are safe. Horses are uncomfortable when someone or something feels incongruent. This makes horses great therapists because they can sense if a person is acting differently than they are actually feeling.



How does one take part in the HorseLink program?

HorseLink for veterans is one of our signature programs and one we are tremendously proud and honored to offer at no charge to eligible participants. To apply for the program or to learn more about Equine therapy contact HorseLink at: on the web at thehorselink.org, by email at info@thehorselink.org or by phone at 512-360-8499.

• **REAL Guidance**

Above: Lynne and Persia; Sarah and Doll. (Courtesy photos).



Testimonials

CPT J.M. Orozco - DSS, OSArS:

“First of all, I was excited to be invited and included to participate in the equine therapy demonstration. As a medical administrator most of my support comes from behind my desk, so this was definitely a treat for me. As a soldier who has deployed twice and animal lover I was hopeful for a personal experience”

“Our hostesses guided us through personal introspection, education on the program and how to establish a meaningful and respectful connection with the horses. My one-on-one connection with [the horse] Ricky Ricardo was humbling and empowering all at once. To know that our soldiers will have the ability to have their own experiences at equine therapy excites me personally and professionally.”

CH (MAJ) Jeremy Stirm - Operations Chaplain, TXARNG:

“I was delighted to be invited and glad to have been able to participate in the equine therapy field exercise. I am usually reluctant to refer service members to services that I am not acquainted with in some fashion myself. Having experienced the equine therapy demonstration first-hand, I can say that it is a welcomed resource and will no doubt prove beneficial for service members who participate. Coupled with guidance from the onsite counselors, the distinctive nature of the program and the direct, honest interaction with the horses offers a unique and significant experience for those involved.”

Bios

Julie Puentes, MS:

Julie Puentes is the founder and director of Horse-Link. She received her Master of Science degree in Organizational Leadership & Ethics from St. Edward's University and her B.A. in Psychology from the University of Texas.

Julie is a lifelong horse person and rider. She is a trained facilitator in the Epona Method and has been facilitating Equine Assisted Learning workshops and individuals for the past eight years.

Lynne Silver, MA LPC:

Lynne Silver, MA in Psychology, is a Licensed Professional Counselor in private practice for the past 20 years. She works with an integrative approach with individuals, couples and groups to facilitate personal, professional and spiritual development. She has specialized training in trauma resolution, somatic psychology, meditation, and equine assisted therapy.

Lynne is the co-founder of Equine Assisted Therapy Center and is an Approved Advanced Instructor with Eponaquest International. She has facilitated individuals in Equine Assisted Psychotherapy sessions and Equine Assisted Learning workshops for the past 10 years.

Sarah Janosik, LCSW:

Sarah Janosik is a clinical social worker in private practice for more than 20 years. She received her MSSW at The University of Texas at Austin in Social Work and a post-graduate internship at The University of California Medical School, San Francisco, in Human Sexuality. She is the co-founder of Relate Center, Austin.

Sarah is the Program Director for Horselink. She is also the co-founder of Equine Assisted Therapy Center and is an Epona Approved Instructor, trained in an Equine Facilitated Learning Program at Epona International Study Center in, Sonita, AZ. She has facilitated equine-based awareness and growth workshops and equine psychotherapy for the past 10 years. ☺



**SGT ANGELA MELTON
FOOD SERVICE SPECIALIST
949TH BRIGADE SUPPORT BATTALION
TEXAS ARMY NATIONAL GUARD**



Sgt. Angela Melton is a Food Service Specialist with the 949th Brigade Support Battalion, Texas Army National Guard, in Denton. She is also a published children's book author.

"During my deployment I used my art and my writing to help me and fellow soldiers through difficult times experienced during the deployment."

Melton is currently working on a second children's book to be released in January of 2016.

- OUR FORCE

OUR FORCE 

New Key Leadership Positions



COL Daniel J. Quick

- **Role:** Chief of Staff, 36th Infantry Division
- **Experience:** Commissioned an Armor Officer from the Texas Officer Candidate School in 1991 after 8 years of enlisted service. Commanded C/3-112 Armor, 1-112 Cavalry, and the 6th CERFP and served as the Operations Officer on Battalion, Brigade, and Division staffs. Deployed to Kosovo in 2005 as the 36ID Chief of Plans and to Iraq in 2010 as the 72IBCT (Joint Area Support Group) Chief of Staff.
- **Education:** Bachelor of Science in Education from Baylor University, a Masters in Educational Technology from the University of Texas-Brownsville, and a Masters in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.
- **Did you know:** COL Quick served the first 15 years of his military career as a Traditional Guardsman, while teaching high school Chemistry, Physics and Biology.
- **In his words:** "This is a tremendous opportunity to serve the State of Texas and support its citizens."



COL James Nugent Jr.

- **Role:** Chief of Staff, Domestic Operations Task Force
- **Experience:** Commissioned a Lt. of Aviation in 1991, Nugent was initially posted to the Republic of Korea as an AH-1F Cobra Aeronautical Platoon Leader and has served in four Cavalry Squadrons in both the active and reserve components. He deployed as the 36th ID G3 Air to Kosovo prior to commanding the 2-149th GSAB and subsequently served as the 36th Combat Aviation Brigade OIC. After an assignment at the ARNG Aviation and Safety Div., he deployed as the 36th CAB S3 to Kuwait, then served as the 36th ID OIC during 2014-2015.
- **Education:** B.S. in Chinese Studies and Systems Engineering from West Point and a M.B.A. from the University of Texas at Austin.
- **Did you know:** While not related to Ted, he did meet him. Jim Nugent plays lousy guitar that sounds better when accompanied by a loud radio.
- **In his words:** "What a privilege to continue to serve with the selfless patriots who comprise the Texas Military Department. I'm proud to be a part of a team of teams, filled with folks who share a commitment to duty, honor, and country; and lucky to have the support of a wonderful family. The Guard's role at home and abroad grows increasingly important, and I'm grateful for the initiative, work ethic, competence and unique skill sets of our force."

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*Hand model not included