

THE DISPATCH D

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT



VETERANS DAY: HONORING THE SERVICE OF AMERICA'S WARRIORS



NOVEMBER
2016 ISSUE

JOIN US NOVEMBER 12-13 FOR THE 2016 CLOSE ASSAULT



Remember the true meaning of Veteran's Day with this stirring look back at World War II. Close Assault 1944 honors the service and sacrifice of America's veterans by focusing on the history of the 36th Infantry Division of the Texas Army National Guard during World War II. The two-day event will provide guests the opportunity to witness firing demonstrations of famous U.S. and German small arms of World War II. tents and radios, mess kits and operational vehicles such as an M4 Sherman Tank, M3 Halftrack and WWII eraJeeps will be onsite.

You must have your photo ID The event will take place rain or shine and bleachers will be available for seating. Souvenirs and concessions will be available. Show times are at 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. both days. The 45,000 square-foot Texas Military Forces Museum will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the weekend and on Veterans Day as well. Both events are free.



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THE COVER:

Soldier looks into horizon as images from the National Guard heritage collection are superimposed in the sky above. Images include The Rough Riders, On the Border, Tip of the Avalanche and Air Guard in MIG Alley.

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ACCESSING YOUR VETERANS BENEFITS



LTC SCOTT H. KINGSLEY
BRANCH MANAGER FOR FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES
TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

Dear Service members,

As Veterans Day approaches we are doing an outreach campaign to our currently serving veterans. Your service on active duty and receipt of a DD Form 214 has earned you the title "Veteran." This comes with many benefits that you may be eligible for, to include health care, education, employment, home loans, Life Insurance, disability compensation and pensions. Did you know that only 42 percent of eligible Veterans are enrolled with the Department of Veterans Affairs? During the fog of redeployment you were informed of your status and we want to make

sure you know about the resources you are entitled to. It's time to take care of your benefits. It is easy to do and you can enroll online.

First, apply online by using the VA eBenefits portal and click the register link on the right at

Veterans Benefits Site

You may also be eligible for health care. Even if you don't need it now it will be ready for you when you do.

Veterans Health Site

Also, Please help us better serve you by taking our quick online questionnaire.

Family Support Services Survey

Remember, the key to VA and State Veteran benefits is your DD Form 214. Keep it readily available and make sure your family knows where it is.

Happy Veterans Day and thank you for your continued service to our great state and nation!

- FROM THE TOP -

FROM THE TOP



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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The Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award is the highest recognition given by the U.S. Government to employers for their support of their employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve. The award was created to publicly recognize employers who provide exceptional support to their Guard and Reserve employees.



Nominations must come from a Guard or Reserve member who is employed by the organization they are nominating, or from a family member.

GUARDSMEN MARCH TO REMEMBER THE FALLEN



*Staff Sgt. David Mendiola leads his fellow guard members and civilians past the Texas State Capitol on a march to remember service members.
(Army National Guard Photo By Capt. Martha Nigrelle)*

Story by Capt. Martha Nigrelle

Texas Military Department Public Affairs

AUSTIN, Texas - Ten years ago, Texas Army National Guard Staff Sgt. David Mendiola saw a photo of a Tennessee guardsman carrying an American flag and marching in honor of a fallen soldier.

The photo moved Mendiola so much, he insisted on doing the same thing in Texas.

From there he came up with the March for Fallen Heroes, a seven-mile march on Memorial Day weekend, through the heart of Austin, to honor the men and women who gave their lives for their country.

Fast forward 10 years - Mendiola celebrated the 10 year anniversary of his march with a group of soldiers, veterans and civilians, by once again marching from Austin's Zilker Park to the Capitol and back, May 28, 2016.

"This weekend is not about coupons," said Mendiola. "It's about honoring the men and women who gave their lives."

An emotional Mendiola tried to hold back tears as he thanked the participants for joining him on the 10th anniversary of his march.

"This is not a duty requirement; it's not something he has to do," said Texas Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 3 Allen Conigliaro, 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. Conigliaro has joined the march for the past five years. "This is a way he likes to give back."

Despite heat and heavy humidity, Mendiola led the group of more than 30 people to the Capitol carrying the American flag, followed by another service member carrying the Texas state flag.

As the group walked through the streets of Austin, people stopped to take pictures and thank the group for honoring the fallen.

"It's a small sacrifice that has a huge impact," said Lt. Col. Miguel Torres, Texas Army National Guard, about supporting Mendiola and participating in the march. "Then you get to see the people you come across. Most tell you thank you. Some stop and render respect for the colors. Events like this help them remember."

The group stopped briefly at the Capitol where they posted the colors and rendered honors, while a bugler played Taps.

"This is about remembering those who have given their lives for this great country," said Torres. "We carry them here in our hearts and we can show our younger kids it's not just a holiday."

The event had obvious impacts on both the community and the people marching.

"I think it's important that he does this," said Brett Wischnewski, an Austin resident with no military affiliation.

Most of the people who joined Mendiola for the march were service members and their families or friends, except for Wischnewski.

"I got up and decided to go for a walk this morning," said Wischnewski who said he came across Mendiola in the park getting ready for the march and decided to join the event.

"I think this is a holiday that has a lot of misconceptions with a lot of people," said Wischnewski. "Being a part of this event has given me some more meaning to the holiday."

Wischnewski said meeting soldiers who had lost their friends in battle brought their sacrifices to life for him.

"You see it on TV and you read about it in books, but until you meet someone that's been through that, it's hard to relate to," he said. "It kind of hits home when you meet someone that's lost someone and they come out to memorialize them each year."

As the group finished back at Zilker Park, a sense of camaraderie filled the air. And despite the sweat dripping from many of them, they exchanged hugs and said their good-byes – many planning to reunite again in a year.

"We don't die until we're forgotten," said Mendiola. "I'm going to come out here every year regardless. That's good enough for me." -**D**

TEXAS GUARDSMAN FIGHTS RISING FLOOD WATER TO SAVE LIVES

EARNs FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT
CONGRESSIONAL BADGE OF BRAVERY
FOR RISKING LIFE TO SAVE OTHERS
AS A U.S. BORDER PATROL AGENT

Story by Sgt. Elizabeth Peña

Texas Military Department Public Affairs

LAREDO, Texas – Rain was pouring heavily and swift waters were rising fast along the Rio Grande River near Eagle Pass. Del Rio border patrol agents working in that area received a report and had to act fast.

“The days before and the day of the incident, Eagle Pass had received a lot of rain so the levels of the Rio Grande had risen more than normal; it got pretty deep,” said Sgt. Josue Gonzalez, border patrol agent and traditional guardsman with the 836th Engineer Company, Texas National Guard.

Gonzalez and another border patrol agent received a report that a large group of adults and children were crossing the river near the port of entry and several of the people in the group were seen floating uncontrollably downriver.

“When we got on site we saw a young man and woman being swept by the currents,” said Gonzalez. “The young man was able to swim so he was able to get back to the other side, but the girl wasn’t that lucky.”

The young woman grabbed onto a rope that was tied to the port of entry pillar as Gonzalez and his partner unsuccessfully attempted to throw her a rescue rope.

“She was afraid to let go of her rope and grab onto ours,” said Gonzalez. “So Garcia and I realized that if anything else would not be done, the possibilities of her being swept away were really high.”

Gonzalez and his partner tied the rescue ropes onto their waist and entered the water, but the strong current quickly swept them away as well, his determination however, remained strong.

“My adrenaline was pretty high,” he said. “It’s just something that you don’t think about and you do it on the spot as best as you can.”

With the assistance of agents on the riverbank, they were able to maneuver Gonzales and Garcia back to where the young woman was just as the rope she had been holding onto, tore.



After delivering her safely into the hands of local EMT's, the two agents went back out to rescue other women and children stranded in the river.

"We were able to go back into the water chest deep and start pulling the people in," said Gonzales. "The water was still rising but luckily we had each other's back to bring those people in. We lost count at about 45 people."

Gonzalez was awarded the Law Enforcement Congressional Badge of Bravery for his action that day, during a ceremony on Oct. 5, 2016, in Laredo.

"When someone puts on a uniform, whether it's a military uniform or a law enforcement you're doing it because you want to help your community and your country," said Patrol Agent in Charge of Laredo Unit Intelligence Unit, Jesus A. Chan.

"I am honored to have been nominated, and humbled to have received it but this award goes beyond myself," said Gonzalez. "It goes for every border patrol agent and federal law enforcement, state and local officers that put their uniform on, not knowing the dangers they may come across that day."

Gonzalez attributes his fast response skills to his basic combat training with the Texas Army National Guard as well as the Army values that are instilled.

"The stress levels they put us through - allows us to keep composure and think," said Gonzalez.

Texas Army National Guard Maj. Thomas Diaz De Leon III, commander of the border patrol search training and rescue team and 136th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade plans officer in charge, deployed with Gonzalez in 2007.

"He was an outstanding Soldier then, and is an outstanding agent now, he is very professional and very humble," said Diaz De Leon. "What he learned through being a Soldier of the MEB, helping to mitigate human suffering is that we are on call to help local citizens. He brought that understanding to his current job."

The award was created to honor exceptional acts of bravery in the line of duty. In 2014, the U.S. Attorney General cited 16 recipients for the 2014 Law Enforcement Congressional Badge of Bravery.

"This heroic act measures the true character and fortitude of Agents Garcia and Gonzalez in the face of danger," said Mathew J. Hudak, acting Chief Patrol Agent, Del Rio Sector.

"He sacrificed himself, so that somebody else may live. I think that is a very huge selfless service act," said Diaz De Leon. **-D**



Laredo Sector Border Patrol Chief Patrol Agent Mario Martinez presents Sgt. Josue Gonzalez with Federal Law Enforcement Congressional Badge of Bravery (Courtesy Photo Border Patrol)



Laredo Sector Border Patrol agents recently honored during a ceremony at the Vidal M. Treviño School of Communications and Fine Arts on Wednesday, Oct. 5, 2016. (Courtesy Photo Border Patrol)



Federal Law Enforcement Congressional Badge of Bravery (U.S. Army National Guard photo by: Sgt. Elizabeth Peña)

BORN BLUE

AIR GUARD SERVICE BECOME FAMILY TRADITION

Story by Sgt. Elizabeth Peña
Texas Military Department Public Affairs



MARRS Family Poses in Uniform
(Photo Courtesy of MARRS Family)

AUSTIN, Texas – Everyone has their reasons for joining the military, whether it be school benefits, wearing the uniform or continuing the family tradition.

For Texas Air National Guard, Capt. Jennifer R. MARR, her drive was simple. “One day I met a photographer,” said MARR. “I was taking photography in high school, and she was a military combat photographer. The week after I met her, I went out to the unit and joined without my parents even knowing.”

After getting her parents blessing to attend basic training following graduation, MARR was off to start a new chapter in her life.

“I joined when I was 17 years old,” said MARR. “I immediately went off to combat photography school which was six months, while simultaneously going to college.”

A year later, while assigned to the 136th Airlift Wing, MARR experienced the turmoil of 9/11, and was quickly brought on to serve both in Operation Noble Eagle and the Global War on Terrorism.

In 2006, MARR was just finishing up her undergraduate degree at Texas Christian University, and closing out her six-year commitment to Texas Air National Guard.

That was also the time I was in Air Force ROTC at TCU,” said MARR. “So the day of my ETS of the Texas Air National Guard, they took me to lunch. I came back to the office after lunch and said, ‘I can’t do this, I can’t leave.’ So I stopped doing ROTC and decided in that moment after my going away lunch that I was going to re-enlist.”

MARR completed her degree at TCU and commissioned in May of 2006.

“I ended up commissioning in the exact same office that I was enlisted,” said MARR. “So for 17 years of my life I’ve been in the same office, enlisted and now an officer.”

Being in the military was nothing new to MARR, being the daughter or two Air Force veterans.

“My dad was a fighter pilot and my mom was an air traffic controller so I was raised in the Air Force,” she said. “I kind of followed in my mom’s footsteps in my career and my brother who had nothing to do with aviation, is now an Active Duty special operations pilot in the Air Force.”

Her mother was the first female wing commander for the 386th Air Expeditionary Wing “She is absolutely the person I look up to the most, just being a strong woman leader,” said. “I’ll never be as nice as her, or as caring as her, I try but I never will.”

MARR works in Domestic Operations as the plans officer and forward support officer of her unit in Fort Worth. As part of the J-1 her focus is primarily on personnel planning and administration.

“I’m in the J-1 so we do a lot of cradle to the grave stuff. Without us, the rest of the unit can’t function,” said added, “I love helping people and so I feel like I have the coolest job.”

Looking back after almost 20 years in the Texas Air National Guard, MARR realizes that she wouldn’t have chosen any other path.

“My whole career has been these crazy little situations that set me up for something else,” said MARR. “The Texas Air National Guard has absolutely been the center stone for my life. The trajectory of my life definitely changed because the Guard. It’s kind of crazy to actually think about it. I’ve been in almost 20 years.”

“This is my life every single day and I love what I do. “ **-D**

VETERAN FINDS A NEW WAY TO SERVE

Texas State Guard provides way to reconnect with military

Story by Sgt. Elizabeth Peña

Texas Military Department Public Affairs



The fact that I could do something for the people of Texas using my civilian skills in the State Guard, really appealed to me.

AUSTIN, Texas – After eight years serving his country and with a deployment under his belt, Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Garthe, an information security analyst with the Texas State Guard, felt he had done his time and had no thoughts of looking back.

“I got out of the Army back in 2005 and didn’t have any ambition to go back in the military at all,” said Garthe. “After getting deployed it kind of loses its fun, missing family and home life.”

But like some veterans, Garthe began to miss his military life.

“I really missed the comradery, putting on the uniform; once you’ve done it for a long time you kind of miss it. So I guess I wasn’t ready to hang up the uniform,” said Garthe.

Garthe looked into his options, keeping in his family in mind. That’s when he found the Texas State Guard.

“I have a very stable home life and I didn’t want to disrupt that too much,” said Garthe. “The fact that I could do something for the people of Texas using my civilian skills in the State Guard, really appealed to me.”

As a third generation service member, Garthe found a an organization to continue on the tradition as a citizen soldier.

“My grandfather served in the 36th Infantry Division during World War II, back when it was an active-duty unit and my dad served in the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam,” said Garthe.

He added, “When I got promoted to Sgt. 1st Class in the State Guard I sent my dad some photos of me and I just remember him telling me how proud he was of me and that he know I was going to do great things, so that was pretty special.”

When not in uniform, Garthe works full-time as the Senior Information Security Analyst in the Cyber Threat Operations Center at USAA and is finishing his last semester of graduate school.

“For me it’s really contributing to help the people of Texas,” said Garthe. “I love this state and I feel like it’s my responsibility as a citizen to help other people. Being a member of the Texas State Guard gives me that opportunity.” **-D**

“MAP GUY” HELPS TMD PLOT COURSE

Story by Michelle McBride

Texas Military Department Public Affairs

AUSTIN, Texas – Sitting behind his desk with a big smile and a neatly groomed beard, almost as thick as his accent, he’s already on the phone discussing his next big project.

Burhan N. Girgin, deputy branch manager, has worked in the Texas Military Department’s Geographic Information Systems office at Camp Mabry, in Austin, for more than 18 years. Around Camp Mabry, he is known as “The map guy.”

“They call me the map guy because my name is hard to pronounce and hard to remember for a lot of people,” said Girgin. His colleagues see it differently, however. From the government affairs office to the joint operations center, Girgin is well known.

“Burhan’s contributions go well beyond just the Construction and Facilities Management Office,” said Texas Army National Guard Lt. Col. John L. Davis, director, construction and facilities management office. “He has provided maps, data and countless other GIS products to the command during floods and other emergent situations over the years, often with no notice and very tight deadlines.”

With a bachelor’s degree in agricultural engineering and a master’s degree in biosystems engineering, Girgin moved to the U.S. from Turkey in 1989 to pursue his doctorate degree and became a proud U.S. citizen in 1997.

“Today, I still get a kick out of saying ‘I am from Spokane, Washington’ with my heavy accent when asked where I am from,” said Girgin.

Although he loved Washington and considered it home, his education plans were derailed when he came across a job announcement from the Adjutant General’s Department of Texas.

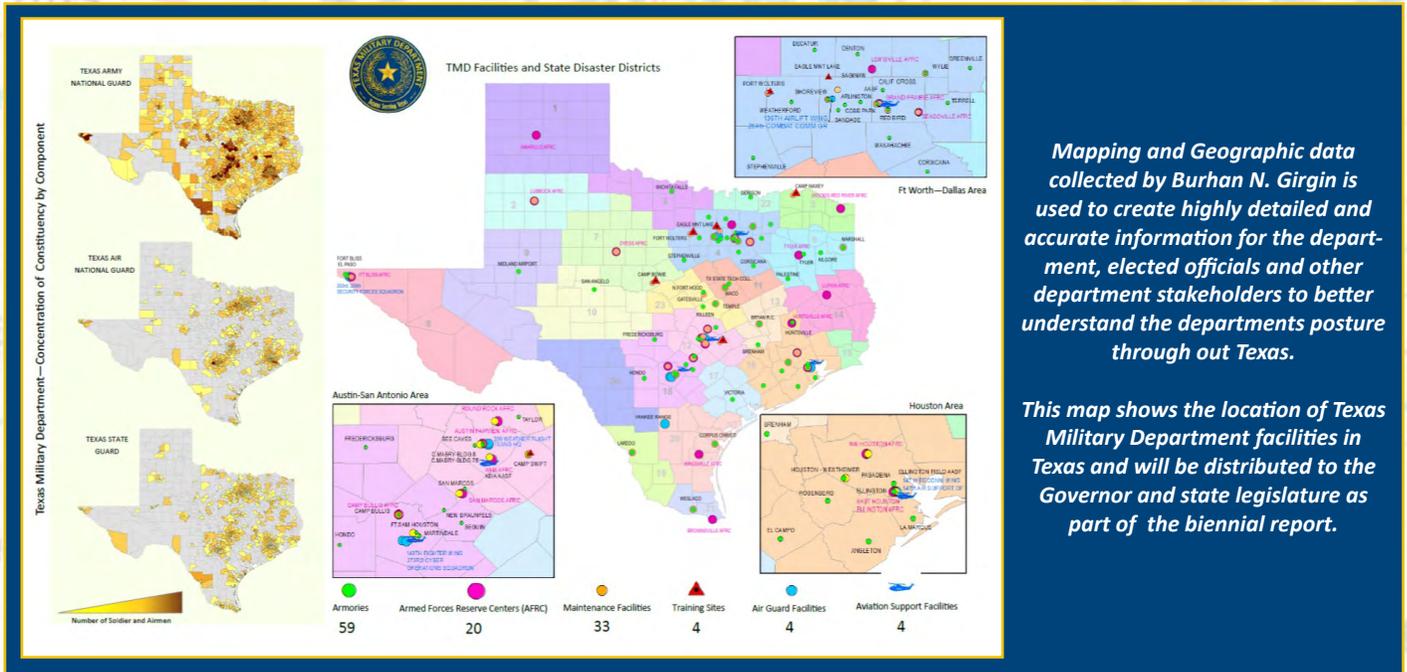


Burhan N. Girgin, Deputy GIS Manager, Texas Military Department, is known around Camp Mabry as “The Map Guy.” Girgin has been part of the organization for over 18 years and continues to support the overall mission of the Texas Military Department. (Texas Military Department photo by Michelle McBride)

I still remember being at the library and rushing to the closest dictionary to see what adjutant meant,” said Girgin. “Those were the pre-Google days.”

After speaking with the department head, Girgin was excited for an opportunity to make a difference in the management of military training lands in Texas and decided to make the move to Austin.

“I moved to Austin in February of 1998 and immediately fell in love with the city,” said Girgin. “The first summer was brutal, but I survived.”



Mapping and Geographic data collected by Burhan N. Girgin is used to create highly detailed and accurate information for the department, elected officials and other department stakeholders to better understand the departments posture through out Texas.

This map shows the location of Texas Military Department facilities in Texas and will be distributed to the Governor and state legislature as part of the biennial report.

Over the years his job has evolved greatly. Initially, Girgin would go to training sites and collect field data to create accurate maps of training areas, ranges and cultural and natural resources. Now however, the agency is more involved with technology, and training and user support has become a big part of his job.

“The most demanding times have always been during emergencies when the National Guard is called for duty,” said Girgin. “I remember working in the Joint Operations Center during hurricanes Katrina and Rita. It was stressful, but I was actively involved in decision making with command. We were looking at GIS data, accessing terrain and flood conditions and determining troop movements.”

During the past 18 years, Girgin developed many professional and social relationships with the people around him and enjoys sharing his knowledge and culture.

“In 1998, when I first moved to Austin, I didn’t know anyone,” said Girgin. “My father passed after I moved here as well and I was unable to travel home for the funeral. It was a tough time, but it also really made me realize how many of our relationships we take for granted.”

While not at work, Girgin enjoys the local Austin culture and can be found at either a live music venue or the local indie movie theaters. He also cooks his own versions of traditional Turkish meals.

“It’s my way of sharing my culture with the people who are important to me,” said Girgin. “It may not be exactly like my mom made but I think it pays respect to those who raised me.”

Girgin’s work supports Guardsmen agency-wide.

“I think my biggest contribution to the guard has been educating and supporting every single member who comes in asking for help, whether they’re a specialist or a general,” said Girgin. “When a soldier gets deployed there is always a civilian staying behind helping to cover the workload left behind.”

According to his supervisor, Girgin has been a long-standing contributor to the success of the organization.

“His institutional knowledge has been nothing short of invaluable,” said Davis. “It’s a privilege to have him on our team.”

Although Girgin now has to apply for a visa to travel back home, he has no regrets about moving to Austin and joining the Texas Military Department.

“This agency offered me a job that changed my life, helped my family and made me a proud, productive contributing member of this great state and I will always be appreciative of that,” said Girgin. “It’s not easy being ‘the map guy’ of Camp Mabry!” -D



STRATEGIC PLANNING SYSTEM CONNECTS STATES WITH ANG DIRECTOR

Story by 1st Lt. Phil Fountain

149th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

NAVAL AIR STATION FORT WORTH JOINT RESERVE BASE, Texas – The Texas Air National Guard hosted members of the Air National Guard’s Strategic Planning System Central Region for a workshop earlier this year at the 136th Airlift Wing, in Fort Worth, Texas.

The Strategic Planning System is composed of general officers who provide input on potential missions and personnel considerations to higher headquarters at the state and federal level.

“It’s a go-between between the two-stars, all the [adjutants general], and the three-star, being the director of the Air National Guard,” said Brig. Gen. Matthew P. Jamison, South Dakota’s assistant adjutant general for air and the immediate past chairman of the central region.

“This is state representatives, it’s field-driven, it’s the ability to gain the pulse of what the issues are and to bring that into a strategic format where we can say, ‘in the future, we would like to fix or resolve some of the issues that are out there,’” Jamison said. “We take off our state hat and look at what’s best for the nation.”

During the workshop, the attendees heard from Maj. Gen. John F. Nichols, who serves as The Adjutant General of Texas and is also the chairman of the national Air Reserve Forces Policy Committee.

He encouraged the attendees to continue to look at long-term modernization and recapitalization issues, but to also build partnerships wherever they can.

(Above) Maj. Gen. John F. Nichols, The Adjutant General of Texas, addresses members of the Air National Guard Strategic Planning System Central Region during a meeting at Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base, Texas, April 4, 2016.

(U.S. Air National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Phil Fountain)

Disaster preparation and relationship-building is critical to develop early and maintain in advance of the potential emergency, Nichols said. This is something the National Guard is adept at doing.

“We have 254 counties (in Texas), and each county has a judge,” Nichols said. “He or she has to deal with the mayors within the county.”

“We have the Texas Division of Emergency Management, that’s not over them, but they’re resource holders,” Nichols said. “All disasters are local. They make their requests – there’s a lot of interchange and planning before things happen – and then we come in as an advisor or as part of a team. We’re not in charge of disaster response.”

Additionally, Nichols said some states may not be maximizing their international partnerships through the National Guard Bureau’s State Partnership Program.

“I’m on the steering committee for partnerships,” Nichols said. “I think it’s the golden treasure of the National Guard.”

“We go to a lot of SPP events – we have two countries, Czech Republic and Chile – everything we do is nested (with the combatant command’s security agreements).”

Nichols discussed a recent SPP trip to Chile and the importance of building those partnerships.

“The Secretary of the Air Force was there, (and) the 12th Air Force Commander was there,” Nichols said. “Of course, the ambassador was there and he supports the partnership program.”

“They realize that the trust that we (National Guard) built up in our partnership is important to international security and cooperation,” Nichols said. “My tidbit to you is to go back to your state and go to your partner and determine what they might need and work with the combatant commands and NGB’s Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate (J5).”

While service on the system is an additional duty for the general officers, there is a full-time field grade officer designated to support the system’s activities and be a conduit of information.

Maj. Terri Prosperie, an air battle manager with the Georgia Air National Guard, serves as the SPS’ liaison officer between the director and the regional committees.

“There’s a steady stream of communication that goes between leadership and the SPS members and all of this information is to inform the Air National Guard decision-making process,” Prosperie said. “Everything that happens on the SPS steering committee shapes the future of the Air National Guard.”

The steering committee is composed of the chairs and vice chairs from each of the six regions, Prosperie said.

“We’re a community of 54 – 50 states, four territories – everybody’s got different needs and requirements,” Prosperie said. “Not everything can be the same, so things just really have to be vetted through everybody to make sure that it’s not affecting anybody the wrong way.”

There steering committee has a direct-line to the director of the Air National Guard, Prosperie said. Their inputs are used to inform his decision-making.

Jamison said this meeting was a success.

“This workshop was a great one, in terms of getting a lot of inputs from the field,” Jamison said. “We got exactly what we would like to have at one of these regional meetings.”

Jamison also said SPS is a great way for airmen to get involved in the future of the Air National Guard.

“What we look for in many cases is field inputs on a sub-group or sub-committee that is going to work on an effort and it might be in the A1 (Personnel) area, for instance, and we go back to states and ask for experts,” Jamison said.

“It’s a force development plan, if you will,” Jamison said. “It’s a way for states to develop their officers and enlisted in areas that are strategic in nature, but will give them a great perspective, and help them develop for the future.” **-D**



Brig. Gen. David M. McMinn (second from right), commander of the Texas Air National Guard, addresses members of the Air National Guard Strategic Planning System Central Region during a meeting at Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base, Texas, April 5, 2016. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 1st. Lt. Phil Fountain)



TEXAS GUARDSMEN WHIP UP COOKING COMPETITION VICTORY

Story and Photos by Capt. Maria Mengrone
176th Engineer Brigade Public Affairs

SAN ANTONIO, Texas – The Texas Army National Guard assembled its best culinary specialists to compete and subsequently win the Region VI, Philip A. Connelly Competition, August 6, 2016.

The guardsmen from Echo Company, 536th Brigade Support Battalion, 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat competed against guard units from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Louisiana and Kansas.

“We want to challenge our Soldiers within their MOS skills so that they can get and share the knowledge from our subject matter experts that are here to evaluate our

performance,” said Capt. Rita C. Miller, company commander. “I’m really proud of the work my Soldiers have put into this competition,” said Miller.

The unit prepared seasoned pork chops, grilled potatoes, black-eyed peas, cornbread and a variety of other menu items from a mobile kitchen designed to function in field environments. However, the competition is not just a measure of the preparation and quality.

“The competition is a timed event that rates the unit on 10 major categories, which include field food safety, attitude of staff, kitchen site and set up, headcount operations and cash collection, just to name a few,” said Mr. Robert K. Gary, evaluator and team leader.

“We evaluate but we are also here to coach, teach and

mentor along the way. We want the unit to know what right looks like when it comes to food service,” said Gary. The unit prepared for more than a year and the training has paid off.

“The evaluators are looking for the standard that corresponds to field operations, and that’s how we train,” said 1st Sgt. Derry L. Hodo.

“Everything we do has to be done to a certain time and standard.” said Hodo. “For example, our Soldiers need to know when to start cooking the pork chops and potatoes to meet specific requirements.”

While the competition was in full swing Soldiers received a moral boost from their division leadership.

“It’s great to see our 92 golf Soldiers get out in the field and provide nutritious meals,” said Sgt. Maj. Sharon R. Fultz, logistic sergeant major, 36th Infantry Division.

“I think the greatest thing that defines a 92 golf soldier is their attitude because they have to be up before everyone to prepare the meal and stay up to clean. I wasn’t going to miss them compete today.”

Despite the pressure of the competition some soldiers took the whole experience in stride.

“I enjoy cooking,” said Laredo native Pvt. Luis A. Garcia, culinary specialist, “Everybody got their job done within the timeframe and it’s always fun.”

The unit is scheduled to compete and represent the Texas guard and Region VI at the Department of the Army level of the competition in early 2017. Here they will compete against other top finishers from the respective four regions across the country. **-D**

(RIGHT) Texas Army National Guard Capt. Rita C. Miller, commander, Echo Company, 536th Brigade Support Battalion, 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat joins her Soldiers in preparing and cutting vegetables during the Region VI, Philip A. Connolly Competition, held on August 6, 2016.

(BELOW) The Texas Army National Guard assembled its best culinary specialists to compete and subsequently win the Region VI, Philip A. Connolly Competition. The guardsmen from Echo Company, 536th Brigade Support Battalion, 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat competed and won against guard units from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Louisiana and Kansas.



PILOT PROGRAM PARTNERS GUARD ENGINEERS WITH THEIR ACTIVE DUTY COUNTERPARTS

Story by Sgt. Elizabeth Peña
Texas Military Department Public Affairs



Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald G. Patterson greets 1st Sgt. Jared Nelson during a patch-over ceremony for members of the 840th Mobility Augmentation Company as part of the Associated Units Pilot Program. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Elizabeth Peña)



Col. Mark Quander, commander of the 36th Engineer Brigade, based in Fort Hood, Texas, conducts a patch-over during a ceremony at Cherry Park in Weatherford, Texas, Oct. 15, 2016. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by: Sgt. Elizabeth Pena)

WEATHERFORD, Texas – Guardsmen from Texas Army National Guard’s 840th Mobility Augmentation Company, based in Grand Prairie joined efforts with the 36th Engineer Brigade, out of Fort Hood, during a patch-over ceremony at Cherry Park in Weatherford, Oct. 15, 2016.

“Today should be one of both quiet reflections but also great anticipation, looking back where our Army has been partnering the reserve and active component, but also where our Army is going as we try to find ways to improve and increase readiness in some different, innovative ways,” said Col. Mark Quander, commander of the 36th Eng. Brig.

During the ceremony, service members of the 840th MAC removed their unit patch and put on the 36th Eng. Brig. patch.

“While it’s a simple action, changing the patches in the Army is a symbol of who you are, what you are a part of and what your mission is,” said Texas Army National Guard Lt. Col. Paul Cerniaskas, brigade commander (rear) of the 176th Eng. Brig. “Changing patches is significant and necessary to make the Associated Unit Pilot program a success and it is the right thing to do.”

The partnering of forces is the result of the Associated Unit Pilot Program, which is designed to increase the readiness and responsiveness of the Army as a total force.

“It’s an honor and privilege to be here as we chart a new course toward the integrations of our total force,” said Quander. “After significant downsizing in our forces over the past five or six years, the demands for our forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and across the world continue to remain elevated.”

This multi-year pilot program pairs Active-Duty units with those in the Army Reserve and Army National Guard so they can train together as well as includes an exchange of assigned personnel.

“For the engineer regiment, this close integration between the 36th and the 176th is nothing new,” said Quander. “The associated unit takes that partnership a little bit farther establishing a more formal relationship between the active component and the reserve component.”

A total of 27 units have been selected to undergo the pilot; four of those units come from the Texas Army National Guard. These units will train, build readiness and ultimately fight as one Army. “What mobility augmentation company does is breach a bypass,” said Texas Army National Guard Capt. Aaron McConnell, commander of the 840th MAC.

Last year, the 840th MAC trained with an active duty unit at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California and a guardsman from the engineer unit was able to perform mechanical operations on a broken down vehicle during a mission.

“The sergeant major of the active duty unit was with us, and his Humvee deadlined,” said McConnell. Sgt. Keith, who is our mechanic, we call him our “MacGyver” we told him run back there and fix it and he did, because that’s what he does on the day side.”

There are many benefits that come from training alongside the active components as well.

“They’ve got real estate,” said McConnell. “Our highly motivated soldiers have the opportunity to train more. Which is what a lot of them want to do, it’s why they are here. They like training and blowing things up and reducing obstacles.”

Association enables integration of formations from units of different components prior to mobilization through collective training.

“From my personal experience while deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, that’s how we as an organization normally operate. A unit’s component didn’t matter in a deployed environment, what mattered is how ready you were to do the mission and the team building that occurred,” said Cerniaskas. “That’s what the AUP program is all about; maximizing readiness and building teams in advance of a mission. So we are making partnership the norm and it will make us stronger as an Army and better prepared when our nation calls.” **-D**

[Click here for a video about additional Texas units selected for the Associated Units Pilot Program](#)

REAL GUIDANCE

by Jessie Trofe, MA, LPC

THANKSGIVING EVERY DAY

It is rare when something positive makes news headlines, causing people to mill about with nervous energy, hanging onto each syllable uttered by reporters. No, instead we are bombarded with negativity and information that inspires fear, and we begin to paint a bleak view of what may come. It can be downright depressing. And it's easy to get swept up in it all, adding to the negativity with thoughts of defeat. In the face of despair, how do we pick ourselves up and shift the way we view our current situation and the world? If we approach each day coming from a place of hope and excitement, how might that impact the way we feel and our subsequent actions?

Cultivating positive thoughts is not the easiest thing to do when you have been thinking a certain way for a long time. Maybe your thoughts begin to cycle through "what if's" and before you know it, you have your whole next five years figured out without even a shred of evidence that

the thing you think might happen is even slightly likely to happen. I admit I am guilty of this. I draw conclusions; I create my own story that most likely has no validity. But here is the scary thing- now that I have created this elaborate story in my mind, I am highly likely to believe it and actually end up... living it out! But, on the flip-side, this ability is actually pretty awesome. It means that I am the product of my thoughts, and I have the incredible ability to create the life that I desire- for better or worse.

Putting positive thoughts consistently out into the universe may not come natural at first, but like almost anything, it gets easier with practice. There is no reason why we can't practice "Thanksgiving" daily, rather than just once a year. So how do we practice seeing the world through rose-colored shades when we are so familiar with the gray? How do we give thanks when we struggle with finding something to be thankful for?



Tips For Cultivating Gratitude:

KEEP IT SIMPLE- Often when I work with Service Members struggling with depression, they share with me how difficult it is to find something positive in their lives. My advice is to keep it simple. Can you find three things you are thankful for? Do you have food in your belly and a roof over your head? Do you have a pet that you care for or a supportive family member or friend you could call? I am guessing there are blessings in your life, but you may just be out of practice in identifying them.

WRITE IT DOWN- Words truly do have power and seeing what we are grateful for outlined on paper can be eye-opening. We can also tape our list to a mirror or keep it in a pocket to pick us up when we are feeling down or need a boost.

MAKE IT A DAILY PRACTICE- Making gratitude a daily practice is just that- a practice. With time it gets easier to do, especially if it becomes part of your daily routine. I personally like to practice gratitude in the morning because it instantly lifts my mood and sets a positive tone for the day.

FIND GRATITUDE IN THE PRESENT- When we are present our mind is focused on the here and now. It isn't ruminating over the past with "should have, could have's" and it isn't fretting over the future. Instead, we have the ability to just "be" and to notice the little blessings that surround us that often get overlooked when our mind is focused elsewhere. As you sip your morning tea or coffee, can you describe the scent and the flavors present in each sip?

LOOK FOR "AWE" MOMENTS- "Awe" moments are moments that take your breath away. In that moment, nothing else exists, and we are "awe-struck" by the beauty that lies before this. How did you feel the last time you witnessed a brilliant sunset, encountered a deer at dawn, or listened to the rhythm of waves meeting the shore? In these moments we are thrown into the present, and we can't help but feel more at peace with the world. When we make an effort to pay attention, we are less likely to miss these awe-inspiring moments. What moments fill you with awe?

SHARE YOUR GRATITUDE- Though there is immense power in cultivating gratitude individually, this power is multiplied when we share our gratitude practice with others. If you are grateful for the love and support of somebody in your life, why not tell them? Wouldn't it feel nice to hear how you positively impact someone you care for? Sharing gratitude tends to have a ripple effect- positivity breeds positivity. And before you know it, the person you thanked is spreading the love as well.

I invite you to join me in keeping the spirit of Thanksgiving alive and well all year long. We have the unique ability to not only improve our moods, but also the course of our lives and the lives of others this way. I challenge you to commit to finding three things you are grateful for each day, no matter how small and insignificant they might seem. It is often noticing these little things that inspire us to pay attention to the beauty unfolding around us. Whether it be a smile from a five-year old, a lone rose blooming in our neighbor's yard, or the scent of a freshly baked pumpkin pie, these seemingly small gifts truly color our lives. Today I am thankful for the ability to share this message with you, and for you for your willingness to receive it. **-D**



OUR FORCE

1ST LT. LEONOR O. MILTON

Cyber infrastructure specialist with the 272nd Engineering Installation Squadron, based out of Ellington Field, in Houston, Texas.

"I like the Cyber mission. I get to learn all the facets of cyber in the military and there's not a lot of women represented in that field so it's attractive to me."





New Key Leadership Positions

Col. Brian J. Hammer

Inspector General, Texas Military Department

EXPERIENCE:

Hammer is an Army ROTC Distinguished Military Graduate of Texas A&M University and commissioned as a Field Artillery Officer in 1990. He received his regular Army commission in 1991, and has served in active duty command and leadership positions from platoon through battalion. His last troop command was as commander of 2nd Battalion, 20th Field Artillery Regiment at Fort Hood, Texas. Additionally, Hammer has served in numerous overseas tours, to include Germany and two operational tours to Iraq. His most recent assignment after completing the U.S. Army War College in 2013, was with the U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) where he helped shape Department of Defense and Army policy related to stability operations.

EDUCATION:

Hammer earned a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Technology from Texas A&M University in College Station, and a Masters of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

DID YOU KNOW:

He enjoys time with his four children and spouse, Jennifer, and is working to improve his bass guitar skills while in Austin.

IN HIS WORDS:

"After being away from Soldiers these past few years, it is nice to be back around Soldiers and Airmen again. Although many people view the IG as somebody to be careful of, the IG is really here to assist the commander in improving readiness and war fighting capability. I look forward to helping resolve issues and allow commanders to focus on readiness. With a dedicated staff of trained IGs, we strive to inform, educate, train and assist Soldiers, Airmen and commanders as they focus on improving their war fighting capabilities."

Lt. Col. Miguel A. Torres

Texas Joint Counterdrug Task Force Commander

EXPERIENCE:

Torres began his military career in December 1984 and attended Basic Training at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri followed by Advanced Individual Training as a Combat Medic at Ft Sam Houston, Texas. In 1986, he transferred into the Texas Army National Guard. He received his commission from the ROTC program at the University of Texas El Paso in May 1990. He has served in various leadership positions with the 3-133rd Field Artillery and 1-133rd Field Artillery. Other roles include Commander Region IV Airport Security (Noble Eagle), Rear Detachment Commander 3-133rd Field Artillery in Support of OIF III, Region IV Commander and Executive Officer for the Recruiting and Retention Command, Installations Director 72nd Joint Area Support Group in support of OIF 09-10, Director of Family Support Services. Additionally, Torres currently serves as the Battalion Commander for 3-133rd Field Artillery Battalion in El Paso, Texas.

EDUCATION:

Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from the University of Texas-El Paso and a Master of Arts in Business Management from Webster University.

DID YOU KNOW:

LTC Torres enjoys cooking and dancing.

IN HIS WORDS:

"It's a tremendous blessing, honor and privilege to be selected as the TXJCDTF Commander. My family and I are most grateful and thankful for the trust, confidence and opportunity to serve our great Soldiers, Airmen and our law enforcement community throughout the great State of Texas. We come hungry, humbled and we are surrounded with a lot of star people to continue to grow this awesome Task Force. A debt of gratitude to an endless litany of friends, colleagues, and family members for their support, mentorship, coaching and teaching throughout my military career, especially those behind the scenes THANK YOU."

YOUNG HEROES OF THE GUARD 2016 CHRISTMAS TOY ROUNDUP



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