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# TAG Update

September 2007

COMMAND INFORMATION FOR THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

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## *From The Adjutant General*

As we commemorate the sixth anniversary of 9/11, the nation is a safer place, thanks in part to the Pennsylvania National Guard. To date, we have had more than 16,000 deployments in the Global War on Terror and, sadly, 39 of our warriors have made the ultimate sacrifice. The pain of our two recent losses in Afghanistan, Master Sgt. Scott Ball and Sgt. Jan Argonish, is still fresh in our hearts and minds.

And though our grief is not easily abated, nor is our resolve easily diminished. We remain on duty and at-the-ready both at home and abroad and accept our nation's call to play a lead role in America's efforts to combat terrorism and promote democracy and freedom for all. The efforts and sacrifices of Pennsylvania National Guard members and their families have not gone unnoticed.

As we mark this solemn anniversary, I want to thank each of you for your vigilance and steadfast resolve to protect commonwealth and country. God bless all of you.



JESSICA L. WRIGHT  
MG, PAARNG  
The Adjutant General

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### **Guard members lend expertise to multinational exercise in Lithuania**

Five members of the Pennsylvania National Guard participated in "Amber Hope," a multinational Baltic exercise, as part of the Guard's 13-year partnership with Lithuania. The exercise, aimed at improving operations between various countries in the event of a crisis, was held in Klaipeda from June 14 through July 1. The training included classes in riot control, site inspection, conducting patrols, mine awareness, first aid, convoy operations and weapons familiarization.

"The exercise allowed us to work side by side with our military counterparts from around the world," said Maj. Ian Ranberg, who served as chief of the mobile civil-military

cooperation team for the Lithuanian battalion. "Although we are part of a team that speaks little English, we definitely have been able to lend the expertise we have gained from our training as Pennsylvania National Guard members to this multinational training exercise. It's an experience we will never forget."

In addition to Ranberg, other Guard members who participated in "Amber Hope" were: Maj. Chris Ferrara of Jonestown, Maj. Mike Levitsky of Havertown, First Lt. Jay Ostrich of Cornwall, and Pfc. Matt Jones of Philadelphia.

In addition to America and Lithuania, participants in this year's exercise included troops from Armenia, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Poland and United Kingdom.

### **Pennsylvania Air National Guard marks 60 years**

In celebration of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard's 60th anniversary, all three wings played major roles in "Operation Shining Diamond," a community outreach and awareness program centered around Pennsylvania's professional baseball stadiums.

More than 100,000 people were educated in person about the Pennsylvania Air National Guard, while more than 500,000 saw activities on television.

Kicking off the celebration, the 193rd Special Operations Wing had Senior Master Sgt. Don Koch and Tech. Sgt. Jeff Myers (the first PA ANG Purple Heart recipients) throw out the ceremonial first pitch for the Pittsburgh Pirates opening day celebration. The 111th Fighter Wing also provided an exciting three-ship flyover capping off the national anthem and celebration.

The 193rd SOW celebrated their Wing's 60th anniversary with the Harrisburg Senators on June 9, with more than 2,000 Airmen, family and retirees in attendance. The Senators wore specialized 193rd desert BDU-style jerseys for the game, which also featured Tech. Sgt. Elliot Langston singing the national anthem alongside the 193rd Honor Guard. Other highlights included Col. Eric Weller throwing out the ceremonial first pitch; a flyover from Commando Solo; and "God Bless America" sung by Airman 1st Class Tierra Washington.

The 171st Air Refueling Wing was given the honor of singing the national anthem and taking the field to form a 60-Airman diamond around the Pittsburgh Pirates infield on July 4 during Independence Day celebrations there. Another unit member threw out the first pitch. Later, an Airman sang "God Bless America" during the seventh inning stretch.

Capping off the finale of Operation Shining Diamond, Maj. Gen. Stephen M. Sischo delivered a strike with ceremonials first pitch duties at the Philadelphia Phillies on July 14. Members of the 111th FW also interacted with the crowd and delivered recruiting materials.

### **Ground broken for new armory at Cambridge Springs**

A \$19.5 million construction project tied to the Guard's transformation to a Stryker Brigade was celebrated during a groundbreaking event in April. The new readiness center and a field maintenance shop are being built at the Crawford County site, located about 20 miles south of Erie.

More than 400 Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry will relocate when the facility opens next spring. The readiness center will have 64,000 square feet and will cost approximately \$14 million. The maintenance facility will cost \$5.5 million and be used to maintain and repair approximately 150 military vehicles, including Strykers.

“This project hails the beginning of many exciting building projects that will be taking place across the commonwealth as a result of the transformation of our 56th Brigade,” said Gen. Wright, noting that 10 new readiness centers will be built and 11 others renovated during the next two years.

Also offering comments during the ceremony were state Sen. Robert D. Robbins, whose 50th senatorial district includes Cambridge Springs; state Rep. Brad Roae of the 6th legislative district; and Lt. Col. Jerome P. Miller, unit commander. Miller also acted as master of ceremonies.

### **111th Fighter Wing leads the way on G-RAP**

In April 2006, Staff Sgt. Kevin Watson made a decision that would change his life forever. After serving three combat tours in Iraq as a Marine, Watson decided to join the 111th Fighter Wing’s Civil Engineering Squadron as a firefighter.

“In the beginning I was hesitant about joining,” said Watson. “ I can admit now that the Air National Guard exceeded my expectations.”

Watson decided to return the favor by becoming a recruiting assistant through the Air National Guard Recruiting Assistance Program (G-RAP). The program pays \$2,000 per enlistment (prior service and non-prior service).

He used his experience as a Marine Corps recruiter assistant to become the leading “G-RAPer” to date in not only his wing, but the entire Air National Guard as well. From September 2006 through December 2006, Watson recruited seven individuals. Since then, he’s picked up speed, recruiting another 14 members in the last seven months, which gives him a running total of 21, with two more in the works. He reaches out to non-prior enlistees by developing a rapport with parents and school counselors. He’s even developed an electronic presentation for school counselors.

“You have to involve the parents and address general questions regarding war and deployments,” Watson said.

He deals with apprehensive individuals by discussing his personal experiences. Moreover, when he explains to potential recruits that he would not sell them something he would not sell to a member of his own family, he means it. He points to the example of his brother, Airman 1st Class Steven Watson, a member of the 111th Fighter Wing currently in basic training.

Tech. Sgt. Steven Leibig, aircraft fuels operator for the 111th Logistics Readiness Squadron, cites providing detailed, accurate information to potential recruits as essential to the success of any G-RAPer. Leibig has brought 10 enlistees to the wing, making him the No. 2 “G-RAPer” in the nation.

Leibig said he feels the wing has benefited greatly by having current members actively seek out potential recruits. He believes that the G-RAP program is a reason the wing has been able to maintain such a high caliber in the quality of his members.

With a respectable eight enlistees to his credit, Master Sgt. Mark Armstrong is holding strong at No. 4 in the nation. A 111th Civil Engineering Squadron plumber, Armstrong said he is interested in educating people about the “phenomenal” benefits of the Guard.

“It basically sells itself,” he said.

Armstrong enjoys helping people to continue their careers when they feel there is nowhere else for them to go. The highlight of his experience so far, he said, has been learning the reasons people want to support their country.

Col. Paul Comtois, wing commander, enthusiastically commends the top performers and their exceptional work in sharing the wing’s story. He was not surprised to learn that the 111th held three of the top five recruiting assistants in the nation.

“We really have the perfect situation here at the 111th,” the colonel said. “Not only does Philadelphia offer a fertile recruiting ground, more importantly, we have a great recruiting team and highly industrious unit members. I am very proud of our Airmen and how they continue to show their mettle.”

You can learn more about the G-RAP program by visiting [www.guardrecruitingassistant.com](http://www.guardrecruitingassistant.com)

## Air Guard Updates

### 111th Fighter Wing

#### **111th FW women interviewed for television program**

A team from the television program “Moms on the Move,” which profiles mothers who are making a difference in their homes and their communities, visited the 111th on May 19 and interviewed several women from both the 111th and the 171st Air Refueling Wing. Numerous members of both wings took place in a filmed segment concerning refueling. The segment is set to air in the fall.

#### **Deployments**

- In June, a 111th FW chaplain deployed for 32 days to Guam to support flight line ministry with the 36th Expeditionary Rations and Maintenance personnel.
- Personnel were also deployed from the 522nd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., the 20th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron from Barksdale Air Force Base in La.; the 168th Air Refueling Wing, Alaska Air National Guard; and the 155th Air Refueling Wing, Nebraska Air National Guard.
- Two members of the 111th Medical Group deployed to Latin America and are currently aboard the USNS Comfort, providing much-needed medical support. They will remain onboard until October.
- Approximately 140 Guard members departed for Iraq on July 8. The departing Airmen were the third and final wave of 111th FW members deploying in support of Air

Expeditionary Force 7/8. The wing teamed up with a sister A-10 unit, the 124th Fighter Wing, Idaho Air National Guard, to volunteer support for this off-cycle AEF deployment.

- Although the wing has participated in ongoing operations and deployments all over the world, including their last AEF deployment to Afghanistan in 2003, this time around is different. The unit's A-10 aircraft were recently upgraded with enhanced technology that increases their capabilities to provide critical close air support and convoy escort missions. The 111th FW is one of the first ANG units to deploy with this technology, leading the A-10 community.

### **111th Medical Group gains expeditionary medical support mission**

In September, the 111th Medical Group will become one of three Air National Guard units in the country with the capability and equipment to support an expeditionary medical support mission. This is a modular, scalable, rapid response medical package that can be deployed to provide emergency medical care to large populations for humanitarian relief, wartime contingencies and disaster response operations. This type of support for civilian elements has gained increased significance in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina.

The unit will initially gain equipment for an EMEDS+25 package, which has nine tents and maintains a staff of 84, allowing for the medical care of approximately 3,000 to 5,000 patients. Ancillary services include laboratory, radiology, pharmacy, dental and physical therapy.

The medical group expects to receive two additional EMEDS+25 packages in the near future and will work closely with sister units; the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency; and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to train for and support regional operations.

### **171st Air Refueling Wing**

#### **Deployments**

- Nearly 400 members deployed to Incirlik, Turkey, from March 11 to May 4. During the deployment, nine KC-135's offloaded 3.3 million pounds of fuel to 128 receivers, totaling 331 flying hours.
- In April, 32 members from the 171st Medical Group deployed to Panama. They deployed along with Army, Navy and Marine personnel as part of the humanitarian effort. The service members provided medical care to more than 5,800 people in Panama.
- In June, 24 members from the group's triage team and 14 from the Civil Engineering Squadron's decontamination team participated in Operation Steel Rose. The exercise was held at the Westmoreland County Community College Training Center in Smithton, Pa.

#### **Air shows/Orientation Flights**

- The wing provided airlift support to two units in the form of orientation flights this spring. The 174th Fighter Wing in Syracuse, N.Y., and the 111th FW in Philadelphia provided civic leader flights to influential members of the community and media on board our KC-135s.

- There were three orientation flights held this quarter. Members of the unit had the opportunity to invite people they know from the local community to gain firsthand knowledge of the mission supported by the wing. In May, the “Employer Flight” was held and 27 civilian employers of our traditional guard members participated. In June, the “Educator Flight” hosted 42 educators from local educational institutions. A second flight for educators was held in July, with 46 educators participating.
- In celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Air Force, the 171st participated in the National Air and Space Museum’s “Become a Pilot” family day on June 16 at Dulles Airport, Virginia. In addition to our KC-135 on display, the air crew was available to answer questions. Also, 23 retirees, including two former wing commanders of the 171st, enjoyed the 70 static displays on the ramp, as well as the 141 aircraft on display inside the museum. Approximately 15,000 spectators showed up.
- The wing participated in the 2007 Wings Over Pittsburgh Air Show held at the 911th Airlift Wing on June 16-17. The 171st provided air ground equipment as well as security and fire department personnel for the event. A recruiting display was set up at the event, including a KC-135 static display for the 250,000 people in attendance.
- Two 171st orientation flights were conducted during the week of the air show. One flight included media from various local print, radio, and television stations. As a result, the wing’s mission was highlighted to the local area. The other was a flight for civic leaders, allowing them to become oriented with the mission of the 171st.

## **Events**

- The recruiters held their annual JROTC day in April. Junior ROTC students from local high schools participated in games called the *Recruiters Challenge*. More than 300 students participated in the day’s events. Students in their senior year of high school were able to participate in a refueling flight as the culminating event in their JROTC career.
- Various unit members participated in Memorial Day and Flag Day celebrations throughout western Pennsylvania. Chief Master Sgt. Shawn Haugh was the guest speaker at the Rotary Club of Pittsburgh’s luncheon as part of the Secretary of Defense program “Share the Story.” He took the opportunity to share his experiences from his time spent in Iraq.

## **Milestones**

- Through the continued support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, the current 171st aircraft fleet reached the milestone of 300,000 flying hours on July 11. This flight was crewed by pilots Lt. Col. Jeff McKee and Capt. John McCullough. The boom operator was Tech. Sgt. Robert “Bo” Winovich, and Master Sgt. Joe Ferrara and Senior Airman Erik Larson were crew chiefs.

## **193rd Special Operations Wing**

### **Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) off to a great start**

Because of the unit's high operations tempo, coupled with limited airframe availability, the wing has had to think "outside the box" in order to support real-world taskings, exercise requirements and home station training. The solution to our dilemma is an inspection schedule that executes the ORI in three parts. The first part evaluated initial response for the wing aviation package from April 24 to May 5. The inspection was conducted in conjunction with a real world CENTCOM deployment. Although no grade will be awarded until the entire inspection is complete, only three minor discrepancies were noted and the inspector general team chief said they were very impressed, especially with the positive attitude of all unit members.

The second part of the evaluation will be conducted November 2-8. Evaluation of employment of the aviation package will take place with aircraft deployed to Navy Key West while flying real world missions in support of SOUTHCOM taskings. During the same mission, support personnel will be evaluated on initial response. In May 2008, Ability to Survive and Operate (ATSO) will be evaluated and the inspection will be complete.

### **Wing deploys mission aircraft to CENTCOM to support new mission application**

Sixty-eight Airmen and one EC-130J Commando Solo aircraft departed Harrisburg International Airport for CENTCOM on May 1 to support a classified mission. To date, the deployment has been judged highly successful. The aircraft and Airmen are expected to redeploy again in September.

### **Wing member receives prestigious award**

Capt. Kristian B. Post earned the prestigious Air Force Special Operations Command Officer Tactician of the Year Award. Capt. Post displayed the most desired qualities - dedication to duty, technical knowledge and leadership. He is an outstanding member of the 193rd and has earned the accolades of this award.

### **193rd Medical Group participates in defense exercises**

The 193rd Medical Group continues to provide excellence in a high operations tempo throughout the wing, commonwealth, homeland and across the globe. Members participated in two CERFP/Homeland Defense mass casualty exercises, Steel Rose in Pittsburgh and Red Rose in Lancaster.

In the homeland, the 193rd SOW provided Operation Jump Start support, including pre and post-deployment medical screening and line-of-duty injury follow-up care. Moreover, individual members deployed as eyes and ears for the U.S. Border Patrol. In the Global War on Terror, Lt. Col. Paul Bisio, flight surgeon, is currently deployed in Iraq, while the Group continues to provide CENTCOM specific immunizations and force health protection services to all deployers.

## **Army Guard Updates**

### **Two Guard members killed in action in Afghanistan**

Master Sgt. Scott R. Ball, 38, Carlisle, and Sgt. Jan M. Argonish, 26, Scranton, were killed on Aug. 27 in an ambush in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, while on a re-supply mission as part of a six-vehicle convoy.

An active duty Army officer and two Afghan National Army Soldiers were also killed in the attack. Three U.S. service members and seven Afghan Soldiers were reported injured.

“We mourn the loss of these dedicated Soldiers and our thoughts and prayers are with the families of Master Sgt. Ball and Sgt. Argonish during this difficult time,” said Maj. Gen. Jessica L. Wright. “These brave warriors proudly represented their commonwealth and country and, sadly, made the ultimate sacrifice.”

Ball and Argonish are the first Pennsylvania National Guard combat losses in Afghanistan. Twenty-seven Pennsylvania National Guard Soldiers have been killed in Iraq. The Soldiers were part of an embedded training team assisting the Afghan National Army. They had been in Afghanistan since February. Their deployed unit was the Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 55th Brigade Forward.

As a civilian, Ball was an eight-year veteran of the Pennsylvania State Police, assigned to Troop H in Carlisle. He was a former active duty Soldier and enlisted in the Pennsylvania National Guard in 1992. He is survived by his wife, Leslie; a 10-year-old son, a 6-year-old daughter and his mother.

Argonish was a correctional officer at the U.S. Penitentiary Canaan, Waymart, Wayne County. He was an Operation Iraqi Freedom combat veteran and volunteered for the embedded training team mission. He is survived by an 8-year-old son, his parents and two sisters.

Both Soldiers will be posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and Combat Action Badge.

### **French tapped to run Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency**

Maj. Gen. Robert P. French, deputy adjutant general – Army since Feb. 2004, was appointed by Gov. Edward G. Rendell to serve as the new director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. Gen. French recently began his new duties in Harrisburg. The Mount Pleasant Native, who began his career with the Pennsylvania National Guard in 1972, will continue as a traditional Guardsman, serving as a deputy adjutant general at Joint Force Headquarters.

“The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency is our commonwealth’s first responder in times of crisis and I am confident that Rob French will continue to enhance the agency’s outstanding ability to protect and serve our 12 million citizens,” said Gov. Rendell.

Prior to becoming deputy adjutant general, French served as chief of staff at Headquarters State Area Command. In this position, he coordinated staff and command actions at the state headquarters and served as liaison between the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the Governor’s office and other state and federal agencies.

### **DePaul and Joseph named to new leadership posts**

Col. Joseph DePaul and Brig. Gen. James Joseph are bringing their combined 73 years of military experience to new leadership positions with the Pennsylvania National Guard.

DePaul has assumed the full-time state duties of deputy adjutant general – Army. A 37-year veteran of the Pennsylvania National Guard, DePaul has served in the 28th Infantry Division and the 213th Area Support Group. He has been assigned to Joint Force Headquarters in the areas of military personnel and human resources, and as director of operations.

Gen. Joseph, who had been the state's emergency management director since 2004, will return to full-time duty with the Guard as deputy commanding general for the 28th Infantry Division. A 36-year veteran whose service includes a combat deployment, Joseph will play a key role as the division continues to mobilize units for the Global War on Terror while transforming to the modular division structure.

### **Guard members leave for service in Iraq**

Thirty Pennsylvania Army National Guard Soldiers with the Lebanon County-based 283rd Personnel Services Detachment were recognized during a departure ceremony held on June 26 inside the Recreation Center. Family and friends came to say goodbye and to wish their loved ones well as they prepared for two months of training at Fort Bragg, N.C., to be followed by a yearlong deployment to the Middle East. The Soldiers will be performing a variety of personnel and human resource-related duties.

On July 9, a departure ceremony was held in Philadelphia for 80 members of the 128th Chemical Company. The Soldiers left for approximately 100 days of training at Camp Shelby, Miss., before deploying to Iraq. They will perform security operations and force protection.

### **Members of 28th Joint Area Support Group return from Iraq**

Sixty-eight Soldiers with the 28th Joint Area Support Group, part of the 28th Division DISCOM, were treated to a welcome home ceremony on July 15 at Division headquarters in Harrisburg. The Soldiers left for Iraq on May 29, 2006. The ceremony turned somber as Maj. Gen. Jessica L. Wright and all in attendance took time to remember Master Sgt. Sean Thomas. Thomas was killed during a rocket attack inside central Baghdad's Green Zone on March 29. Members of Thomas' family were present at the ceremony.

## **Directorate of Information Management**

The deputy chief of staff for information management is facilitating the second phase of the rural access to broadband technology (RABT) project. During this phase, a wireless network with direct access to the internet is being installed. The goal is to provide wireless internet access to outdoor locations, conference rooms and other areas that do not presently have internet access. The prime contractor began installing the required hardware in June. Wireless network access points are currently installed in Areas 0, 5, 8, 9, 12 and 13. Wireless internet services should be available in early fall.

### **Command Logistics Review Team Inspection**

The Pennsylvania Army National Guard is scheduled to receive a National Guard Bureau Command Logistics Review Team (CLRT) inspection on Nov. 5-9. In May 2006, in order to properly prepare for the inspection, we established a preparation committee to determine logistical posture of the PAARNG and how to overcome logistical challenges facing our units. The committee has been meeting on a monthly basis in order to prevent any repeat findings and to properly prepare units for the planned inspection. The discussions that have occurred within the meetings have been very productive and have inspired brigade and battalion logisticians. The final meeting will be meeting held in October.

### **Operation Total Recall**

Realizing that a significant amount of property has been moved or transferred as a result of the war effort, the Army decided it was time for a complete accounting of all Army property. In August 2006, the Army laid plans for a complete inventory of all Army-owned property worldwide. Designated as Operation Total Recall, the objective was to have all property accounted for in three priorities. The first priority phase, which included sensitive items such as weapons, ammunition, explosives and night vision devices, was completed in December 2006. In February, the second phase, which included communications equipment and other remaining sensitive items, was completed. Units were required to complete all phase three items by Aug. 15. The Directorate of Logistics will be reporting all inventories to NGB.

### **Supply Sergeants Training**

A training program for supply sergeants will be given on post in September. The purpose is to provide an overview of basic duties and responsibilities to new AGR supply sergeants. The program will include training in the command supply discipline program; property book officer responsibilities; hand receipts; physical security; food service and environmental issues. Much of the training will be conducted in a hands-on manner. Brigade and battalion supply sergeants will assist instructors with the training, allowing them to continue to mentor their junior supply sergeants at home station.

### **Northeast Regional Calibration Laboratory**

The Combined Surface Maintenance Shop-East (CSMS-E) was recently awarded the Northeast Regional Calibration Lab by National Guard Bureau (NGB). Under transformation and the Army's Two Level of Maintenance Doctrine, the shop's future will increasingly rely on sustainment-level work as its core mission. It is estimated that the proposed workload growth to the PAARNG for calibration will be approximately 6,800 pieces/ work orders. The CSMS-E was selected by NGB due to the proven capability and quality reputation of the current calibration lab and personnel. The new lab will be operational in the fall. National Guard Bureau will provide the new lab with an annual operating budget of \$500,000; four additional personnel; new shipping and receiving equipment; and a state-of-the-art calibration tool set (to include new equipment training). Once the lab reaches full operational capability, additional personnel and calibration tools will be added.

### **PAARNG Hosts National Guard Bureau's (NGB) 2007 CMU Conference**

The PAARNG will host National Guard Bureau's 2007 CSMS-MATES-UTES (CMU) Conference from Sept. 24-28 at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center. The conference is NGB's premier national maintenance conference for the larger maintenance facilities of the Army National Guard. It is expected to draw between 300-350 participants from NGB, state surface maintenance offices, and maintenance facilities from the 50 states and four territories.

This year the conference will also include participants from the states' field maintenance shops. In the past, they were not included due to their relatively small size. However, due to the consolidation of small field maintenance shops into larger, regional facilities, they are now major players in the national surface maintenance program. Among its many purposes, the conference provides a forum for NGB to receive feedback from the field on issues and challenges affecting the state maintenance programs.

Conference participants will visit the Gap on the afternoon of Sept. 27 for a tour of the post. The tour will include a visit to our new state-of-the-art UTES, and will highlight the innovative technologies that have been designed into it.

### **UTES M113A2 TACOM-Iraqi Army Project**

The Unit Training Equipment Site (UTES) at Fort Indiantown Gap is preparing 50 M113A2 personnel carriers for the Iraq Army. UTES personnel are configuring some of these vehicles for recovery operations, ammunition re-supply, ambulances and battalion and company-level command posts. UTES mechanics are repairing every vehicle to like-new condition, and will provide patient litters, tow bars and other equipment needed to operate and maintain these vehicles in a combat environment. The fielding of these vehicles and equipment will provide additional tactical capability for the emerging Iraqi Army and demonstrate the Pennsylvania Army National Guard's continued strong support in the Global War on Terror. The UTES is employing 15 additional Soldiers in an ADSW status in order to complete the project.

### **Heavy Equipment Transfer (HET) Mission at Aberdeen Proving Grounds**

Personnel from Field Maintenance Shop (FMS) 15 at Fort Indiantown Gap travel to Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland to perform a heavy equipment transporter mission in support of the Ordnance Center and School. Approximately 15 museum showpiece tanks were moved to new locations on the post.

### **Combat Service Support Automation Management Office (CSSAMO)**

The CSSAMO is currently establishing a second support facility in Washington at the 2nd Brigade Armory. Three technicians will staff the facility and provide support to all entities from Johnstown and areas to the west. This will save countless hours of travel for the eastern facility and will decrease down time of all standard Army management information systems.

## **Directorate of Operations**

### **Training**

Significant progress was made in manning the Pre-mobilization Training Assistance Element (PTAE). Their mission is to advise the adjutant general on certification of mobilization tasks accomplished prior to the unit reporting to their designated

mobilization station. The PTAE will accomplish this in concert with the deploying unit and its chain of command as well as First Army and the mobilization station.

The efforts of the PTAE will insure that quality training conducted prior to mobilization will count towards the unit's and the individual's certification for mobilization. This will result in a reduction in post-mobilization training. The nationwide initiative to establish PTAEs was in response to a Department of Defense mandate that all reserve component units be mobilized for a maximum of one year. Reduction of post-mobilization time will result in more time on mission in the designated theatre of operations.

### **Military Support to Civil Authorities**

Over the last quarter, Military Support to Civil Authorities (MSCA) has continued to operate at a very high tempo. The University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) Strategic Bio-Defense Emergency Operations and Communications System (SBEOCS) reports have been completed and are awaiting state approval.

Exercise Steel Rose I was conducted at the Westmoreland County Safety Training Center in June. The initial purpose of this exercise was to test and evaluate the capabilities of the Pennsylvania National Guard Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High Yield Explosives Enhanced Response Force Package (NGCERFP). MSCA developed the overall scenario and was the executive agency for this exercise. More than 60 agencies with approximately 300 individuals were either active participants or observers.

The Continuity of Operations (COOP) and Continuity of Government (COG) distribution plan meeting was completed and we are developing a plan for an IPR. We are currently working to establish points of distribution sites across the commonwealth. These sites will be divided into the three PEMA regions and aligned with the Guard response. The Guard is looking at setting up two sites in each PEMA region to facilitate the ease of access and distribution to Guard forces. Each site will contain meals-ready-to-eat, water and other sundry items in the event they are needed for a quick response. The Guard committee is currently selecting sites and conducting site visits.

MSCA continues to work on pandemic plans for the statewide plan. This multi-agency, civilian and business coalition develops plans and processes concerning how the commonwealth will address, react and respond to a PI event. The primary focus is governance structure and the coordinated and synchronized execution of plans relating to Prevent, Protect, Respond and Recover Operations.

MSCA completed the final draft of the All Hazards Homeland Security Plan (AHHSP). This plan provides direction for the Guard in planning and providing emergency assistance to civil authorities within the three PEMA regions of the commonwealth.

All coordinating meetings were completed for Exercise Red Rose II. The exercise was conducted at the Lancaster County Safety Training Center in July. The Guard, specifically MSCA, was the executive agency for this exercise. More than 300 participants from 60 agencies attended or actively participated.

We met with the FBI on the classified Render Safe program and addressed the Guard's support of selected emergency support functions. This is a classified program in which we employ selected assets from the Guard in order to assist a highly specialized FBI / Department of Defense team in responding to nuclear incidents and threats. Within the U.S. government, the FBI has been assigned responsibility for Render Safe operations involving all weapons of mass destruction in the national capital region.

We continued to attend planning meetings for the evacuation of special populations. The meetings, held with the Department of Homeland Security, address the needs of various groups (the elderly, prisoners, the disabled, hospital patients, non-English speaking people) during an evacuation.

We completed the coordination of the 800 megahertz radio distribution plans. This was a coordinated effort between MSCA, the 28th Infantry Division units and the state Information Technology office.

### **National Security Agency**

Col. Xavier Stewart attended a classified briefing from the National Security Agency (NSA) concerning the threat to the homeland. After the briefing, he was involved with discussions concerning the agency's Centers of Excellence, which provide support to the combatant commanders worldwide. This program may open up opportunities for Soldiers and Airmen within the Guard to train with the combatant commanders and learn about the various threats to the military worldwide.

### **Physical Security/Anti-Terrorism Force Protection**

The security branch of the J2/3 continues to monitor the evolving landscape in terms of threats to the PNG. In association with personnel from NGB, the Pennsylvania Office of Homeland Security and the Pennsylvania State Police, we continue to provide timely and accurate analyses of threats and disseminate them throughout the command.

### **Intelligence Oversight**

The Intelligence Oversight program is a comprehensive enterprise aimed at protecting both the civil rights of the United States citizenry and the judicial rights of the members of the Department of Defense, ensuring that no person has their privacy violated by a member of the Pennsylvania National Guard. The policy published by the J2/3 was reviewed at the state and national levels and was found to be one of the most viable products among the 50 states and four territories.

We continued to participate in nuclear power plant exercises and comprehensive plan reviews. During the past quarter, we participated in a Three Mile Island exercise and a Beaver Valley Power Station Nuclear Plant comprehensive plan review.

### **166th Regiment**

The 166th Regiment (Combat Arms) provides training to Army National Guard, Army Reserve and active Army Soldiers. The changes occurring through the Total Army School System Transformation program are enhancing the manner in which the school supports Soldiers. Through additional courses and multiple classes, the 166th continues to support the needs of the Army and the National Guard.

Since the last update, the 166th Regiment has awarded a contract to begin upgrading the classrooms. We have also begun the construction of urban operations training facilities within the new Regiment/Medical Company Training Site Forward Operations Base. The facilities will allow the two schoolhouses to implement a contemporary operating environment into the training scenarios that reflect the operations in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan in all the courses.

The first quarter of FY 2008 will bring a significant increase in military occupation specialty courses for both the first and fourth Battalions. As a result of the Army's conversion to modular forces, the three cavalry scout courses and our new transportation course will increase more than four times their throughput to meet the Army's demands.

A new dining facility contract, coupled with the plans to upgrade the facility itself, has improved the quality of food provided to our students. In addition, our new contract allows for a unique partnership with disabled and handicapped citizens in our local community.

The student throughput of Soldiers and other agency personnel continues to rise. Use of the facilities during the third quarter of FY 07 reflected a 21 percent increase.

### **Medical Company Training Site**

Over the last quarter, the Medical Company Training Site (MCTS) has continued to remain busy. In April, representatives from the Puerto Rico ARNG Medical Command, along with two sub-units, the 1065th Area Support Medical Company and the 1165th Area Support Medical Detachment, took advantage of the newly constructed Medical Simulation Training Center (MSTC) in order to execute their annual training. The units utilized the simulation center to conduct a collapsed structure course, and worked on confined space rescue techniques.

June saw the arrival of Company C / 111th Area Support Medical Battalion from the Arizona Army National Guard, which executed the collective training program developed by MCTS for their annual training period. Soldiers were trained on individual, squad, platoon and company-level collective skills during the two weeks they were in Pennsylvania. In addition, MCTS trained 540 combat medics and combat lifesavers during the quarter.

The simulation center, which was opened in December 2006, continues to evolve and improve its capabilities. The MCTS has been field-testing the new TC3 (Tactical Combat Casualty Care) video game that was designed and distributed to the field by RDECOM. Medics now have the opportunity to test their medical knowledge and Soldier skills in a computer-generated video game that simulates multiple casualties in an Operation Iraqi Freedom-like environment prior to actually performing the tasks "live" on the simulation lanes here at the medical training site.

Also new to the training program here, both combat life savers and combat medic advanced skills training (CMAST) students is the introduction of the internal and external simulation training lanes, and the opportunity to practice their newly acquired medical skills in a simulated combat stress-induced environment. Initial feedback from the

students has been extremely positive to date.

## Fort Indiantown Gap National Training Site

The summer of 2007 will go down as one of the busiest at Fort Indiantown Gap since training began here during WWII. The construction and training activity on post is unprecedented as we transform Fort Indiantown Gap and the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team. In fact, the Army range officer stated that we are the most intensely managed 17,000 acres in the U.S. Army. At this juncture, we are projecting in excess of 640,000 maydays for our throughput in FY07.

### **Stryker Training**

Stryker Operational New Equipment Training (OPNET) Phase III is well under way. To set the stage for this part of the training, we have completed construction of a new range. As part of this phase, we are familiarizing with firing off of the Stryker vehicle. Many of the vehicles use a remote weapon station where the gunner fires the weapon from inside the vehicle using a television and joystick.

Simultaneously, we prepared training areas for the 56th Brigade to conduct squad/platoon level situational training exercises. Small villages were constructed out of connexes to simulate the conditions in which our Soldiers currently fight. To further immerse the Soldiers in the current operating environment, a forward operating base was constructed in Area 16 to replicate the conditions in which the Soldiers live and work.

### **FTIG Map**

The new map for Fort Indiantown Gap is posted on the public folders for our customers to use for reference and for scheduling of training events for FY08. We are working with the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, formerly the Defense Mapping Agency, to provide the means to order the new maps as we have done in the past. We expect that units will be able to order the new maps sometime in the next year. In conjunction with the new map, our new training area signs are currently being placed in an effort to make the transition seamless. This sign project will include the 10 ranges/facilities under construction within the limits of our boundary.

### **Digital Training**

We are continuing to improve on our virtual and constructive capabilities at FTIG in our continued support of digital training. We recently received a new full motion simulator for the Stryker Brigade. It is similar to a helicopter simulator. The driver sits in a replica of the Stryker driver compartment, which can replicate all types of conditions for the driver. This saves time and money before the Driver actually gets in the real vehicle.

The Battle Command Training Center (BCTC) is in full swing and is supporting battalion command training through collective battle staff exercises. It is quickly becoming a digital center of excellence in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. In addition to training the 56th Brigade, we are training the remainder of the Pennsylvania Army Guard and Army Guards from the states of Maryland, Virginia, Arkansas, Louisiana and New York.

### **Logistics Division**

The Logistics Division continues to be heavily engaged in customer support of units from

the Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Active Army, Army Reserves, Marine Corps and civilian organizations. The ammunition supply point has issued approximately 90.5 short tons of Class V and supported approximately 1,240 unit issues/turn-ins thus far this summer. Supply point personnel continue to demonstrate a high level of competence and professionalism as exhibited by the recent successful completion of the Department of the Army's World Wide Ammunition Review inspection.

The FTIG Billeting Office continues to operate chargeable transient quarters (CTQs) at FTIG and the Joint Aviation Support Facility, Johnstown. Over 20,500 individual rooms were provided to Soldiers so far this summer. The FTIG warehouse issued over 7,800 barracks, dining facilities, supply buildings and classrooms to units this past summer. Furthermore, the FTIG warehouse operation successfully opened and is now managing the forward operating base, our newest training resource on post. The Class III section has supported customer units with approximately 98,085 gallons of fuel this summer. The Class III section planned and executed an equipment upgrade to the Area 6 fuel point, resulting in new, more efficient and more environmentally friendly fuel dispensing equipment for customer use.

**Military Construction**

The FTIG Training Site engineers have been working 13 military construction projects on post. The following table indicates the status and projected completion dates for the projects:

Project	Construction Status	Estimated Completion Date
UTES	92%	August 2007
Battalion Training Complex	51%	March 2008
Infantry Squad Battle Course	91%	November 2007
Modified Record Fire Range	91%	November 2007
Sniper Field Fire Range	50%	December 2007
Unit Storage Site	89%	September 2007
TUAV Training Facility	89%	September 2007
MK-19 Qualification Range	75%	December 2007
Multi-purpose Machine Gun Range	73%	December 2007
Urban Assault Course	73%	October 2007
Live Fire Shoot House	73%	October 2007
Combined Arms Collective Training Facility	50%	March 2008
Mission Support Training Facility	86%	September 2007

The following table indicates the projects currently under design:

Project	Design Status	Remarks
Ammo Supply Point Upgrade	35%	2008 Construction
Brigade Training Complex	10%	Charrette scheduled for 16-19 October 2007

EAATS Technical Trainer Building	10%	Design Charrette Complete
EAATS Lodging Facility	10%	Design Charrette Complete
FTIG Master Plan	N/A	Charrette scheduled for 5-9 November 2007
Interim Fuel Point	100%	Bid Opening - 24 August 2007 (pending availability of funds)
Area 14 Lift Station	100%	Bid Opening – August (pending availability of funds)

Construction on the following projects was completed and the facilities were turned over to the user:

Building 9-100, Telecom (J-6) Building  
 Building 5-100, Simulations Building  
 Building 9-120, AAFES Complex

In addition to the project listed above, the M-Day section continues to work on the Area 16 FOB and renovations to mess halls in Areas 12 and 13.

### Eastern ARNG Aviation Training Site

The Eastern Army National Guard Aviation Training Site continues to receive additional aviation training to help meet the Army's training requirements. The largest new program of instruction at EAATS is the Blackhawk Maintenance Reclassification (15T10(R)) Course. The first course taught on post was in January 2007. We are currently running our third course and are on target to graduate 47 students by the end of the fiscal year.

The EAATS Interim Maintenance Training Building is developing well. Our goal is to break ground on this project by the end of September 2007, then move all of our maintenance training devices into the new building in early 2008. This facility will house all three Blackhawk devices and both Chinook devices. This will allow the AASF#1 to regain the space in Building No. 19-115 (Aux Hangar) for maintenance operations.

### Facilities and Engineering

A groundbreaking ceremony for the first of 10 new readiness centers scheduled to be built in FY 2007 and FY 2008 under the Stryker Brigade Transformation Program was held on April 20 in Cambridge Springs, Crawford County. The project is approximately 35 percent complete and is on schedule to be completed in the spring of 2008. This new facility will house Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), 28th Infantry Division (Mechanized). It consists of the battalion's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Company B, and Detachment 1/Company C.

The bureau is currently working on awarding other FY 2007 projects, including new readiness centers in Bradford, Elizabethtown and Easton. There will also be additions and alterations to existing readiness centers in Lewistown, Chambersburg, Punxsutawney, Butler and Reading.

We continue to work on the FY 2008 Stryker construction projects and will start issuing the projects for bid once the President's 2008 budget is approved. The 2008 project list includes five new readiness centers, four additions and alterations to existing centers, and the construction of one new field maintenance shop.

The bureau is planning several non-Stryker construction projects. These include a combined support maintenance shop at the Pittsburgh International Airport; two new maintenance shops at New Castle and Harrisburg; and new readiness centers in Waynesburg, Hermitage, York, and Tobyhanna.

Also, in coordination with the U.S. Army Reserves, four additional facilities are proposed under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Program. They include a new readiness center (Armed Forces Reserve Center) and a new field maintenance shop in Williamsport, and new readiness centers in Scranton and Lycoming or Montour counties.

## Policy and Legislative Liaison

Maj. Gen. Jessica L. Wright recently established the Office of Policy and Legislative Liaison under the directorship of Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Stanley Jaworski. This office will serve as the Guard's liaison to the Pennsylvania Congressional delegation in Washington, D.C., and our state legislature in Harrisburg. The new office will support legislative inquiries and the coordination of VIP visits to Fort Indiantown Gap. The staff includes the following personnel: Maj. Lauren Muglia; Ms. Tammy Weaver; and Chief Warrant Officer Patricia Ravegum. Telephone numbers are (717) 861-8719 or DSN 491-8719. The fax number is (717) 861-9457.

## Military Personnel Office

### **Suicide Prevention**

Suicide prevention must be a top priority for every leader. Statistics illustrate that almost 50 percent more National Guard members have committed suicide this year than at the same time last year. Every suicide is a preventable tragedy for Soldiers, Airmen, family members and communities. All commanders are encouraged to return to leadership basics and engage in face-to-face interaction with your personnel.

First-line leaders are our first line of defense in preventing suicide. It is incumbent upon leaders to know and understand their personnel so they can detect troubled Soldiers and Airmen and take appropriate action. The result will be relationships that encourage everyone to seek assistance when they need it, and one where leaders are able to identify those who may be at risk.

It is important that we stress to our Soldiers, Airmen and family members that leadership supports those who request mental health services and that obtaining help is viewed as a sign of personal courage. Together, we can turn the tide on this senseless loss of life

and ensure that all of our members understand how valuable they are to their families, their communities and to the Pennsylvania National Guard. The point of contact is Capt. James Joppy, suicide prevention manager. He can be reached at 717-861-2769.

### **SharePoint Web Site**

We are proud to announce the debut of a new SharePoint Web Site designed to provide domain users with access to information regarding personnel policy, publications and administrative guidance. The site address is <http://55.191.253.79/SiteDirectory/milpo/>. The site is Intranet-based and restricted to computers that reside on the "PA" domain/. Public computers cannot access this site. Among the information placed on the site you will find: Pennsylvania military regulations, policy memorandums, publications, forms, scheduled events, links and MILPO-specific contact information. Questions and suggested improvements concerning the web site can be directed to Capt. Frank W. Brown at (717) 861-8440.

### **Release of Health Information to the Department of Veterans Affairs**

The Pennsylvania Army National Guard is not a covered entity under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. The release of protected health information by the Pennsylvania National Guard is governed by the Privacy Act. The Army National Guard has established privacy act system of record notices that permit the disclosure of health information to the VA to adjudicate veterans' claims and provide medical care to Soldiers. Any use outside of these two areas will require a signed release by the member.

Soldiers, however, cannot provide their original service medical record to the VA because they are still assigned as active members of the Army National Guard. In order to make certain the veteran's claim is properly developed and rated, the unit full-time representative(s) will ensure that a certified copy of the Soldier's entire medical record is submitted to the VA so they can continue processing a claim. Upon a request for a service medical record from the VA, units that are not in the possession of the original service record for the Soldier in question must begin the process of tracking down the record. If the service medical record cannot be found, written notification to the VA is required.

Only when the individual Soldier is being currently processed for discharge will the original service medical record be sent to the VA in support of their claim. The current custodian for the service medical record will be responsible to the VA, providing all requested information that is available.

The Bureau of Veterans Affairs is ready to assist full-time representatives in clarification of the VA request and to coordinate with the VA regional offices as necessary. Acceptable processing time for units to respond to the VA with the required service and medical information will be 10 working days upon receipt of the determination letter from the VA. Second letter requests from the VA will no longer be an acceptable standard.

The points of contact are Maj. James Davis, deputy state surgeon (717) 861-9682, and Jim Butler, Bureau of Veterans Affairs (717) 861-8905.

### **Interim Guidance on TRICARE**

In anticipation of receiving definitive instructions from TRICARE, this interim guidance

should be utilized relative to the conversion to the enhanced TRS program. TRS is a premium-based health plan available to eligible Army National Guard Soldiers at 28 percent of the total premium cost or the previous Tier 1 rate of \$81 per month for single coverage and \$253 a month for family coverage. The plan offers comprehensive health coverage similar to TRICARE Standard and TRICARE extra.

The complicated three-tier system will be eliminated on Oct. 1. As part of the enhanced TRS conversion, all enrollments in the current TRS program will be terminated on Sept. 30. The open enrollment period for the new TRS program is Aug. 11 through Sept. 30. Soldiers can enroll on line through the DMDC TRICARE Reserve Select Application (TRSA) located at: <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appi/tsa/index.jsp>. Soldiers without internet capability can coordinate enrollment with the state TRS verifying official to obtain an enrollment form.

The following Soldiers are not eligible to enroll in TRS: Military technicians and federal employees who are enrolled or eligible to enroll in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program; Soldiers serving in T10 or T32 AGR status; and inactive National Guard Soldiers and gray area retirees.

For more information, the point of contact is Staff Sgt. Robert Whipple, TRICARE representative. His phone number is (717) 861-8173.

### **Pennsylvania National Guard Counterdrug Program**

The Northeast Counterdrug Training Center continues to expand its efforts to rid communities of illegal drugs, as well as to encourage youth to make better choices and to train law enforcement and emergency responders. Counterdrug Soldiers and Airmen used the ion scan, a device that detects particles of illegal drugs on money and objects, to help police seize over \$6 million from drug dealers and manufacturers during FY 07.

Many of our personnel have been deployed in the Global War on Terror and are applying the skills they have learned to assist in the war on drugs. Their efforts in intelligence analysis, surveillance and overall case support helped law enforcement take more than \$1 million in cocaine off the streets and make approximately 700 arrests in FY 07.

The Drug Demand Reduction Section launched the National Guard-sponsored drug prevention program Stay on Track as a state pilot during the 2006 school year. Stay on Track is a community-based program at the middle school level that promotes healthy living and provides alternate activities aimed at keeping youth drug-free. During this pilot period, 24 schools and three after-school programs participated, reaching some 3,500 youth. This summer, the Demand Reduction Section assisted 14 community-based organizations in hosting summer programs on post. More than 800 youth got to experience military and team-building activities in which Guardsmen provided positive role models.

### **Public Affairs Office**

#### **Biographies**

Commanders and senior leaders are reminded to keep a biography on file in the Public

Affairs Office. In the past, short-notice requests for senior officer and commander biographies could not be fulfilled due to the lack of a biography on file. Contact the Public Affairs Office at 717-861-8352 for a biography format. You may also visit [www.dmva.state.pa.us](http://www.dmva.state.pa.us) to view biographies of senior leaders.

### **PAO Speakers Bureau**

Interested in speaking at public functions? The Public Affairs Office receives numerous requests for speakers and would like to include you on the list of available participants. If you would like to participate, the Public Affairs Office will assist you with speaking points for the event. If interested, contact the Public Affairs Office at 717-861-8468.

### **Media Communiqué**

If you are currently deployed or deploying soon and would like to establish a communiqué with news reporters please let the Public Affairs Office know. There is a growing need for Soldiers and Airmen to share daily experiences with the public. These updates have been well received by those who have participated and have led to many feature stories on National Guard personnel. These stories usually include interviews with family members and friends. If interested, call 717-861-8829.

### **Official DA Photo Schedule**

Please visit [www.dmva.state.pa.us](http://www.dmva.state.pa.us) for an updated 2007 Official Department of the Army Photo Schedule. Click on the "FIG Official Photo" link under 'Site Navigator' on the left-hand side of the page. To schedule an appointment, please contact the Public Affairs Office at 717-861-8612 or 8330. Please schedule photos at least a week in advance.

## **State Army Aviation Office**

### **Kosovo Service**

Detachment 1, Company C 1-169th Air Ambulance, continues to serve in Kosovo with 3 UH-60 medical aircraft and 21 personnel. The current deployment will continue through the fall of 2007 until relieved by KFOR 9 personnel.

### **Brigade Training Exercise**

The Combat Aviation Brigade 28th Infantry Division conducted the first-ever brigade training exercise for an aviation brigade not en route to deployment. The training exercise was held at the U.S. Army Aviation War Fighting Center in Fort Rucker, Ala., from April 9-20. The exercise was conducted as part of the training validation and readiness preparations, a requirement for ground combat brigades. The brigade set exceptional standards and, to date, has been the best aviation brigade to pass through the aviation virtual battle lab and training exercise.

### **State Army Aviation Officer**

Col. Latchford, the current state army aviation officer, is retiring this fall and will assume the position of director of the Northeast Counterdrug Training Center. The position will be filled by Col. Larie Wilson, current commander of the Eastern Army National Guard Aviation Training Site. Col. Wilson brings a vast amount of experience to his new position, which he will officially assume in early-to-mid September.

### **Deployments**

Deployments continue to impact aviation assets in Pennsylvania. Parts of Detachment 1

of the 1 / 126th Aviation Company (C-23 Sherpa) will be deploying this fall. This deployment comes on the heels of the units' most recent deployment in November 2006. The critical need of C-23 units in theater has put a significant strain on C-23 units and reduced dwell time to as little as one year in some instances.

## Veterans' Affairs Updates

Pennsylvania is home to the nation's fifth largest veteran population. As a result, it should come as no surprise that the Bureau for Veterans Affairs is a dynamic and fast paced environment in which to work. For example, the World War II Merchant Marine Bonus, which gave more than 1,200 qualified Merchant Mariners a \$500 bonus, just closed. Before the mandated closing date, however, bureau staff members were already hard at work on the new Persian Gulf Conflict Veterans' Benefit Program. This benefit program will provide qualified personnel a monetary bonus for their service in Operations Desert Shield and/or Desert Storm. Applications will begin to be accepted in the last quarter of 2007. Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs, Brig. Gen. (PA) Cecil Hengeveld, stated, "This is just one more example of the way Pennsylvania cares for its veterans. I am proud of what we do for vets."

In addition to these bonus programs, the bureau has been busy with numerous other programs and projects. Numerous construction projects are underway at both the Scotland School for Veterans Children and at the six state veterans' homes; our cooperative work with members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly and various veterans' service organizations remains a high priority; and our web page ([www.paveterans.state.pa.us](http://www.paveterans.state.pa.us)) is updated regularly.

Also, we are proud to report that the entire 43-member senior class of Scotland School graduated in 2007, and a recent survey found that 92 percent of the residents of our veterans homes reported satisfaction with the homes and the care they administer. Nevertheless, we will not rest on these achievements. We will continue to offer our veterans and their families our very best in the days ahead.

### **Oath of Office**

Brig. Gen. (PA) Hengeveld administered the oath of office to the following newly elected members of the State Veterans Commission:

- Gerry Hawk, commander, American Veterans
- Jerry Polonsky, commander, Jewish War Veterans, Department of Pennsylvania
- John Getz, commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Pennsylvania
- Robert Harris, president, Pennsylvania Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs
- George Mullen, adjutant, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Pennsylvania
- Lawrence Kelly, commander, Disabled American Veterans
- Tim Dunn, adjutant, Disabled American Veterans

### **Veterans Programs**

- During FY 06/07, 1,525 veterans received emergency assistance totaling \$1,096,755. Two hundred and thirty-one veterans received paralyzed veterans pension totaling \$401, 250; one hundred and fourteen veterans received blinded veterans pension totaling \$205,000; and 99 children of veterans received

educational gratuities totaling \$103,074.

- With the passage of Act 161 of 2006, the Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption review period increased from two to five years. It also provided applicants with a rebuttable presumption for the exemption, with an annual income of \$75,000 or less for the Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption. This precipitated an increase in enrollees by 271 to a total of 2,223.
- The WWII Merchant Marine Veterans Bonus, Act 22 of 2006, expired June 30, 2007, after 1,168 applications were approved, totaling \$584,000.
- By realigning positions within Veterans Affairs, the department was able to support two additional service officers at both the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh regional offices. Previously, each office had only one service officer and one secretary. In addition, each location has a minority and female service officer who has the additional duty to reach out to those groups.

## **Veterans Homes**

### **Delaware Valley Veterans' Home (DVVH) – Philadelphia**

All of our dining rooms have been refurbished and look beautiful. Additionally, a modular office was installed in the garage for our maintenance staff.

We held Easter and Passover dinners for our residents and their guests. Memorial Day celebrations for residents were held on May 28 and another on July 3 sponsored by the Friends of DVVH.

Our residents continue to go on many outside activities. Some of our residents recently went on a trip to see the Trenton Thunder baseball game – they look forward to this trip every year. On June 29, we held Hawaiian Day. Residents and staff dressed in their Hawaiian finery and had a visual tour of Hawaii in the Community Room along with fresh fruit and refreshments.

The stained glass windows over the Altar in the Chapel were completed. The dedication ceremony was held on June 13 and was attended by several VFW posts and organizations that generously donated monies for these windows.

### **Gino J. Merli Veterans' Center (GMVC) – Scranton**

Residents attended the annual Armed Forces Week luncheon at St. Mary Center in Scranton, along with 500 supporters of the military. The keynote speaker was Rear Adm. Cecil D. Haney, commander of Submarine Group 2 of the U.S. Navy. After the luncheon, the admiral toured the center and visited with residents.

The Armed Forces Veterans' Parade was held in Scranton. Many residents participated in the parade while others watched it from Penn Avenue.

The annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon was held on the patio. Certificates of appreciation, ink pens and door prizes were presented to volunteers in recognition of their continued support. Commandant Weinschenk addressed the volunteers and thanked them for their service.

The Lackawanna County Council of Veterans conducted the Flag Day program. The Honorable Ken Smith, Pennsylvania House of Representative and Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness committee member, was the keynote speaker. Members of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard presented the colors and the American Association of Retired Persons' chorus provided patriotic musical selections.

### **Hollidaysburg Veterans' Home (HVH) – Hollidaysburg**

U.S. Marine Sgt. Michael Strank, who helped raise the American flag on the Japanese island of Iwo Jima in 1949 and was killed in action a short time later, was inducted into the hall of fame during a ceremony on July 6.

Strank, who grew up in Conemaugh, is a recipient of the following decorations and medals: the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, the Presidential Unit Citation with one star, the American Defense Service Medal, the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with four stars, and the World War II Victory Medal.

Our carnival was held on June 15 and was a great success. This event continues to get bigger each year and is very popular with residents. Don Stephens, an employee in our maintenance department, and members of the Pennsylvania National Guard's Stryker Brigade volunteered their time, visiting and assisting residents.

On June 27, five couples residing in Hap Arnold Hall reaffirmed their marriage vows. The ceremony took place outside in the garden area and was followed by a small reception.

### **Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home (PSSH) – Erie**

PSSH held its hall of fame induction ceremony on June 14 and inducted the following individuals: Daniel Barry, Raymond Chambers, Andrew Kistler, Leonard Pallis, Elmer Smith, the late James Richardson, and former Governor Tom Ridge.

- Barry, of Pittsburgh, served in Vietnam from 1969 to 1971. A land mine left him with partially amputated legs and blinded him in one eye. He was named the Disabled American Veterans' Amputee of the Year for 1987-1988.
- Chambers, of Erie, served as a sergeant in the Marines from 1970 to 1978. He earned the bronze and silver Distinguished Service awards and the Distinguished Service Award/Meritorious Individual Commendation.
- Kistler, of Franklin, was an Army sergeant during the Korean War. He was severely wounded by a land mine in 1952 and both legs were amputated below the knee. He helped found the Disabled American Veterans Chapter in Franklin. He was named the state's Disabled Veteran of the Year for 1993-1994.
- Pallis, a native of Wilkes-Barre, served as a Navy officer in WW II. After his naval career, he worked for the Department of Veteran Affairs in Wilkes-Barre for 20 years.
- Smith, of Erie, served in the Navy in Vietnam. He earned the Purple Heart and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, to name a few of his awards.

- Richardson, a native of Monongahela, had a military career of 37 years. He served in WWII and in the Korean War.
- Ridge, who also served as the nation's first secretary of Homeland Security, was an infantry staff sergeant during the Vietnam War. He earned the Bronze Star for Valor and was the first enlisted Vietnam combat veteran elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

### **Southeastern Veterans' Center (SEVC) – Spring City**

The Memorial Day services featured Lt. Col. Douglas Etter as the keynote speaker. He provided a moving portrayal of life in Iraq as an American Soldier. His sensitivity and understanding of the true meaning of Memorial Day painted a touching realistic portrait of military life and the sacrifices made by those men and women currently serving our country as well as the debt owed to those past generations who served with honor, commitment and dedication.

The annual volunteer recognition luncheon was held April 28. The Honorable Andrew E. Dinniman, a Pennsylvania state senator and Democratic chair of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, was the keynote speaker. He provided an upbeat speech that was warmly received by everyone.

The Therapeutic Activities Department continues to provide excellent activities for residents. April, May and June were highlighted by the return of softball, fishing trips, attendance at Reading Phillies games, gardening and an outdoor walking program. Veterans' Home Week in June included Flag Day celebrations, a band concert, a strawberry social, a Father's Day music program and an ice cream social.

The social services director continues to work with graduate and undergraduate schools for social work. The students bring a fresh perspective to the services provided to residents and their families.

### **Southwestern Veterans' Center (SWVC) – Pittsburgh**

The center celebrated its 10th annual State Veterans Home Week in grand style by sponsoring its first full-scale carnival. This festive afternoon featured gaming booths, food booths, a petting zoo, pony rides, entertainment and even a dunk tank that our managers graciously volunteered to staff. Costs for this event were underwritten by donations.

As the warm weather days increased, so did our annual post visits to service organizations. Residents observed the Memorial Day holiday as guests of Veterans' of Foreign Wars Post 709. They were treated to front row seating at the local parade, and a luncheon afterwards. Flag Day was celebrated with a ceremony sponsored by the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Elks. A performance by the highly acclaimed U.S Army Field Band was a highlight during the month of June.

### **Scotland School for Veterans' Children (SSVC)**

Scotland School for Veterans' Children held its 112th commencement June 2. The address was delivered by Angelo Adams, a 1996 SSVC graduate and a U.S. Military Academy graduate majoring in mechanical engineering. Lt. Gov. Catherine Baker Knoll and Maj. Gen. Robert P. French, representing the adjutant general, were among the dignitaries attending. SSVC had 43 graduates receive a high school diploma. Thirty-three of the seniors plan on attending a four-year university; four have enrolled in a two-

year university; four others have enrolled in a trade or technical school; and one graduate was undecided about future plans.

The school is happy to welcome two new members to the SSVV Board of Trustees: Brig. Gen. Jerry Beck, commanding general of the 28th Infantry Division, and Paul Semmell, a former member of the state legislature.

Capital construction is continuing with the renovation of the junior high gymnasium and 10 cottages. Work is progressing a little slower than anticipated, but it is hoped that everything will be finished in December. In June 2008, construction is expected to begin on the recreation center, administration/health center and three cottages.

## Miscellaneous

### **Patriot Express Pilot Loan Initiative**

The U.S. Small Business Administration has announced the SBA's Patriot Express Pilot Loan Initiative for veterans and members of the military community wanting to establish or expand small businesses.

Eligible military community members include: Veterans, service-disabled veterans, active-duty service members eligible for the military's Transition Assistance Program, Reservists and National Guard members, current spouses of any of the aforementioned, and the widow spouse of a service member or veteran who died during service or of a service-connected disability.

Nearly 375 banks and lending institutions nationwide already have been approved to participate in Patriot Express. This loan program can be used for most business purposes. Details on the initiative can be found at [www.sba.gov/patriotexpress](http://www.sba.gov/patriotexpress).

### **Army National Guard Tuition Assistance and Online Training**

Army National Guard (ARNG) Soldiers are now sent on longer and more frequent deployments, and the stress these tours put on a Soldier's civilian career and educational plans is often considerable. Army National Guard Soldiers serving repeated tours in Iraq, for example, might give up on the thought of further schooling until they separate from the ARNG or receive assurances that the frequency of foreign deployments will begin to slow down.

Two important resources work hand-in-hand to help ARNG Soldiers pursue civilian career training while they continue to serve their country. The first resource, made possible by the Internet, is distance (online) education. For Guard Soldiers, this shouldn't be confused with the National Guard's distance learning network, which allows Soldiers to complete military occupation skills qualification (MOSQ) training in their home states. Instead, distance education means that ARNG Soldiers can take a 100 percent online civilian education course in something like real estate appraisal or home inspection, even while they're serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. All that is required is a computer and an Internet connection.

This option is proving popular with many Guard Soldiers who are trying to serve their country and also ensure they will have the enhanced skills to compete in the civilian job market when their deployment ends. A 2005 Department of the Army demographic study

reported that 52 percent of ARNG Soldiers were married and 42 percent had children. Assuming these figures to be similar for 2007, it means that many ARNG Soldiers have families to care for, and no cost career-training is something that will give them a leg up in the competitive civilian job market.

And how are enlisted Guard Soldiers supposed to find money for civilian job training? The good news is that they don't have to, because federal tuition assistance will pay up to 100 percent of a Soldier's tuition and fees for distance education. Soldiers are advised, however, to apply as early in the fiscal year as they can; applications for FTA are processed on a first-come, first-serve basis and funds may run out.

Guard Soldiers are in an enviable position because the ARNG is the only service branch that normally allows Soldiers to draw from both the GI Bill and FTA simultaneously. This may allow Guard Soldiers to cover their education costs and obtain funding for expenses while taking courses. It is not uncommon for ARNG Soldiers to use it in conjunction with the GI Bill and Kicker programs for maximum coverage.

Sadly, despite federal efforts to promote FTA benefits to ARNG Soldiers, many Guard Soldiers are either not aware of this benefit, or they choose not to enroll. To take advantage of FTA, an ARNG Soldier should contact an accredited online school, enroll in a course, fill out an ARNG Tuition Assistance form and then authorize it through his servicing education center or by his school's representative.

Army National Guard Soldiers benefit from online courses because there is usually no set time schedule for finishing a course. This is an extremely important consideration, because the operational tempo of many Guard units is at a fever pitch these days. With online education, the completion of readings, assignments and tests are entirely up to the individual Soldier. Many online schools also feature live student support so Soldiers can email or call education support representatives. Soldiers can learn more about Federal Tuition Assistance at the National Guard's Virtual Armory site [www.virtualarmory.com/education/](http://www.virtualarmory.com/education/).