

Alabama Guardsman

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A publication for the citizen-Soldiers & Airmen of Alabama



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Deployed Guardmembers receive visit from TAG and new State CSM

by Katrina Timmons
Contributing Editor

Some 500 Soldiers with the 217th Military Police Company, Prattville, Ala.; the 129th Area Support Medical Company, Centreville, Ala.; the 441st Ordnance Battalion, Huntsville, Ala.; the 203rd Military Police Battalion, Athens, Ala.; the 151st Chemical Battalion, Gadsden, Ala.; and the 1343rd Chemical Company, Fort Payne, Ala., received a visit from State Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. A.C. Blalock and State Command Sgt. Maj. Bill Jones in early February.

This was Jones' first trip overseas to visit with troops since his selection as State Command Sergeant Major in mid January. "I am extremely proud and honored to be able to visit with our deployed Soldiers," said Jones. "The next trip cannot come too soon."

As State Command Sergeant Major, Jones will periodically accompany the State Adjutant General to visit deployed Alabama National Guard Soldiers.

"These trips allow me and the State Command Sergeant Major to get a perspective of the challenges and progress of not only our warriors serving in uniform, but also the progress of the coalition efforts and how our warriors are helping in the progress," explained Blalock.



Contributed/photo

Alabama Adjutant General Abner C. Blalock and State Command Sgt. Maj. Bill Jones visit with Soldiers from the 129th Area Support Medical Company while visiting with deployed Alabama Guardsmen. The 129th, out of Centreville, Ala., is currently deployed to Baghdad where they are providing medical support to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

1st Lt. Johnnie Scott Jr., executive officer for the 1343rd Chemical Company, said the Soldiers of the 1343rd were pleased to meet with the Adjutant General and the newly appointed State Command Sergeant Major. "I gained solace in knowing that they took time to have breakfast with the junior non-commissioned officers and enlisted Soldiers," said Scott. "This time was set aside for the Joes and as I understand it, they took full advantage of the opportunity to see their leaders."

Along with updating the Soldiers on news from back home and reinforcing their missions, Blalock and Jones took the time to ask for feedback. "We gathered feedback on the latest issues our warriors are facing on deployment and feedback on what their families are saying about the support they are receiving from the Family

Support and Readiness processes," said Blalock.

Blalock said that he also speaks to the warriors openly and frankly about the stresses they will participate in upon their release from active duty and reintegration with their families, including suicide prevention assistance that is available if required.

"It is imperative to ensure our Soldiers maintain a high morale," said Jones. "These visits give us the opportunity to find and fix problems or issues, improve moral and reinforce the state's commitment to the welfare of our deployed Soldiers."

Jones said the Soldiers' morale was overall fantastic. "They are working hard and getting results," said Jones. "Each unit has achieved success beyond expectations."

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On the Cover

First Lt. Michael Johnson, second from left, of the Alabama Army National Guard's 203rd Military Police Battalion, uses a measurement wheel to determine the size of the perimeter of one of the critical polling sites in southern Iraqi city of Basrah. The Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment of the Athens-based 203rd helped set up protection at polling sites in and around Basrah for the Iraq national elections (contributed photo).

Adjutant General

Strategic plan aims to improve Guard



**Maj. Gen.
Abner C. Blalock**

We live in changing times with businesses and organizations fighting to become leaner and more efficient every day. The Alabama National Guard is no differ-

ent in this. We are trying to use our resources wisely to provide trained, ready forces to support any state or federal mission. In this endeavor, we have adopted a new strategic plan with Col. Danny Speigner at the helm of the

planning.

This is a very important process and shift for the Alabama National Guard, so I am giving Col. Speigner my column in this month's Guardsman to update each of you on our plans and procedures. It is important that each Soldier and Airman understand this shift and its importance in order for us to be a premier organization of Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen who are ready, in war and peace, to support our communities, state, and nation in time of need.

Business Transformation is a Department of Defense Initiative to remove wasteful and

non-value added activities, and focus efforts on customer and stakeholder needs and expectations. This program of change is energized and operating in the Alabama National Guard under our Strategic Plan, and involves key leaders from across all parts of our organization. This work will allow us to continue to operate effectively as resources draw down, and empower all employees with responsibilities that are meaningful and relevant to our organization.

Maj. Gen. Blalock's guidance is to develop our already good organization into an even **(Please see *Plan*, page 6)**

State Chaplain

Resiliency: a key component in suicide prevention

by **Robert Hicks**
Full Time Support Chaplain

"Resiliency" is the new watchword for the military. Though the word may be new to some, its' meaning has been around for some time. One of our African-American chaplains told me in his culture it was called "pressing through". When asked how someone was doing, the answer would come back "I'm pressing through". What was meant by the phrase was, "things are not good, but I'm pressing through!"

That's resiliency...the ability to bounce back when things are bad. The Apostle Paul described the same concept when he said, "we are afflicted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, perplexed but not despairing." (II Cor. 4:8)

My wife and I have suffered the loss of an adult child, lost jobs, been disillusioned by people and events, had marriage problems and watched our children go through ugly divorces along with multiple military separations. When people ask me how we have survived these things there are times I really don't know how to answer. That's why I like the chaplain's answer above about "pressing through." Somehow, we were able to press through.

If I have a formula as to why I have never seriously thought of taking my own life it gets back to four critical "F"s. These are like the legs of a chair: if one is missing or broken, the chair is unstable and on the verge of collapse. The F's are Faith, Family, Friends and Funds. Over the years,

my pressing through is due to my faith in God and His goodness, the support of my family even extended family, my friends I can share my troubles with, and yes, people in our lives that step in with cash in hand when we are not able to pay our bills. When these legs are not in place, a person does not have the resources to bounce back.

In the Alabama National Guard we have many programs in place where help can be obtained, but in the final analysis, it is not a program that prevents suicide, it is people: Soldiers and family members who care enough to check on each other to see if they are still "pressing through".

Snap Shots

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



Contributed/photo

From left to right: 1st Lt. McCreery, Sgt. Rogers, Capt. Horning and Sgt. Wisener, all of the 441st EOD Bn., recover in front of the Al Faw palace in Iraq after completing a 3.63 mile run.



Neil W. McCabe/photo

Iraqi Police Lt. Col. Awooda Abdal Hafael Manaa, the election day shift commander at Basra's Provincial Joint Communications Center, reviews a map of the city March 7 with Lt. Col. Charles Buxton, commander of the 203rd Military Police Battalion.



Contributed/photo

Sgt. 1st Class James Lee of Prattville, Ala., performs door gunner duties from the back of a CH-47 over Afghanistan during a combat resupply mission. Lee is a member of Company B, 1-169th Aviation. The unit has been deployed since September 2009.



The Alabama Legislature observed Women's History Month in March by honoring all women who are currently serving in the military and those who have served in the past. On March 23, several military women were honored at the Alabama State House: (left to right): Air Force Maj. Kathryn Brown; Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Shelia Knox; Marine Sgt. Royneka Hood; Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom; Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer Teresa Reeves; Army National Guard Lt. Col. Lea Compton; Marine Sgt. Cindia Fernandez; Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Kristina Hatch.

Contributed/photo

During a recent visit with deployed Alabama Guardsmen State Command Sgt. Maj. Bill Jones (left) and Alabama Adjutant General Abner C. Blalock struck a pose with a painting of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.



Contributedphoto

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Lt. Col. Mathew J. Burinskas receives a plaque of the 731st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion guide-on in appreciation of his service as the out-going commander at a change of command ceremony in Tallahassee, Alabama on March 6. Burinskas will be a support operation staff member for Theatre Sustainment Command. Burinskas is replaced by Lt. Col. John F. Taylor, Jr.



Bethany Brown/photo

(Plan continued from page 3)

more relevant organization where our local programs are linked to higher in terms of strategy, performance metrics, budget, and accountability. His guidance is derived from General Mckinley's directive to improve performance in organizations, reduce the time it takes to accomplish tasks, and create and maintain objective metrics that are aligned with our strategic goals, drive improvement and accountability and focus on the right processes and values.

The Strategic Management System for the Alabama National Guard is almost ready for full deployment as the individual components reach a more mature state. The first step is to get it institution-

alized at the JFHQ level with subsequent deployment to the MACOMS. The Strategic Management System has four distinct components that include the Strategic Plan, the Balanced Score Card, Formal Internal Performance Assessment using the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Excellence, and the Continuous Process Improvement program utilizing Lean Six Sigma Process Improvement and Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st Century (AFSO21) principles.

The Strategic Plan and the Balanced Score Card are in final edit and review, and will be deployed in the next 30 days or so. The Strategic Plan consists of priority issues, goals, objectives, and action plans that define how the objectives will be

met. The Balanced Score Card is a report card. Key metrics are tracked on a monthly basis in order to assess progress toward objectives and goals. Accountability is placed on those entities not meeting standard and the responsible parties will be required to develop a plan for improvement of performance.

Assessment, strategic planning and continual process improvement are all tools to help us function better at our core and supporting tasks. Once we implement these methods into JFHQ, it can be pushed down to the MACOMS and subordinate units to make the Alabama National Guard a premier organization.

Guard fitness guru visits Marion cadets

by **Katrina Timmons**
Staff Writer

The cadets at Marion Military Institute, Marion, Ala., received a motivating and rigorous physical training workout on Wednesday, February 18, from Master Fitness Trainer Staff Sgt. Ken Weichert of the Tennessee Army National Guard. Weichert's enthusiastic persona inspired the young cadets to push through the stimulating 60 minute routine.

"It is my intention to lead a highly effective tactical fitness and nutrition program that will dramatically increase fitness levels, ready Warriors for the physical demands of combat, and to reduce training pipeline losses caused by APFT failures and health-related injuries. Called Operation Fit to Fight, each tactical fitness session includes intense aerobic conditioning and muscle targeting drills uniquely arranged to amplify strength and endurance through progression, variety and precision," explained Weichert.

Weichert believes in making fitness fun in order to achieve long-term results. "If fitness is not fun, people will lose interest and end short of their goals. Many of my participants will burn over 600 calories in 60 minutes through a series of heart-pounding military fitness exercises, cadence calls and muscle targeting drills, all to upbeat music."

During his senior year of high school, Weichert broke his back leaving him partially paralyzed for four weeks. Using military exercises to restore his back, Weichert joined the United States Army in 1988 and never looked back.

During his tenure in the Army, Weichert has placed six times in the annual Army Soldier of the Year contest,



Katrina Timmons/

GX® Magazine's Staff Sgt. Ken Weichert leads Marion Military Institute Cadets through a grueling one hour physical training session.

has deployed in support of Operation Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom, and has become an Army Master Fitness Trainer.

Today, Weichert is the state fitness director for the Tennessee Army National Guard and writes a fitness column for GX® magazine. He is also the founder of STARTfitness.com, a physical fitness program for civilians that he and his wife, Stephanie, run in San Francisco, Calif.

Weichert told the cadets that they must learn how to turn obstacles into opportunities.

"Not all obstacles are physical," explained Weichert. "To be a truly resilient Soldier is not just about being well trained and physically fit; it's about being mentally fit as well."

Weichert recently completed the Army's Master Resiliency Trainers course held at the University of Pennsylvania. "The course teaches comprehensive soldier fitness," explained Weichert. "The Army has broken down comprehensive soldier fitness into five dimensions of strength: social, emotional, spiritual, family and physical."

Weichert expressed to the young cadets the importance of being comprehensively fit.

"While we do an adequate job of physical fitness training, we often fall short on our mental fitness and focus.

We must learn to strengthen our focus on being a resilient, healthy and self-confident Soldier."

Quilt pays tribute to those who gave all

by **Bethany Brown**
Staff Writer

Take away the rank and branch of the military a servicemember is in and all that remains is a daughter, son, mother, father, sister or brother. These individuals give the ultimate sacrifice in service of their country and through the means of a quilt, servicemembers are humanized through the eyes of others.

Julie Feingold, who has no family ties to the military, made a quilt in remembrance of servicemembers who gave their lives while protecting American freedoms. The quilt, which was displayed at the Alabama State Capitol in January, has a picture of a servicemember to represent each state who made the ultimate sacrifice of giving their lives while serving their country. A twist to the story is the pictures of the servicemembers are them as children – years before they joined the military.

“These are our babies and they grew up to be heroes,” said Cheryl Chris of Huntsville, mother of Spc. Andrew F. Chris who was the soldier chosen to represent the state of Alabama on the quilt. “It adds such a real personal reality to the people who see the quilt that these were somebody’s babies, brothers, sisters, children and grandchildren.”

Using the photos of the soldiers as children helps to aid others to realize that soldiers are more than statistics, said Nancy Hecker of Colorado Springs, Colo., mother of Maj. William F. “Bill” Hecker III who represents the state of Missouri.

“They were real people with hopes and dreams,” said Hecker. Hecker said Feingold took key words from the stories mothers submitted about the servicemembers and used them on the quilt by silk screening them onto

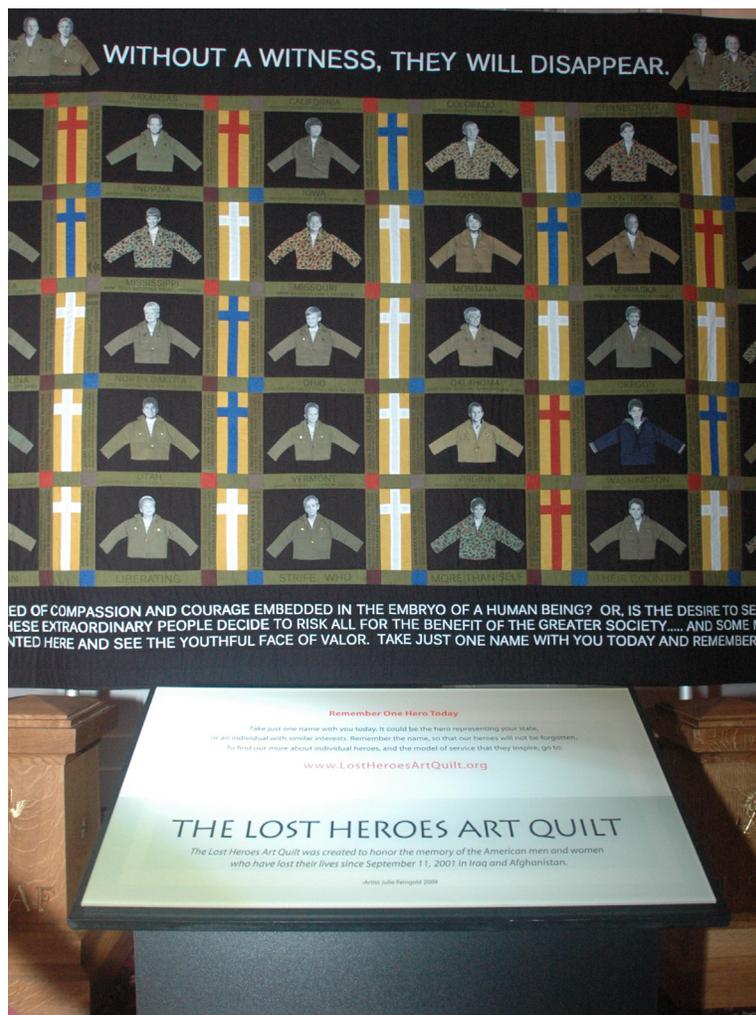
the fabric. She hoped that people viewing the quilt would take a few minutes and learn at least one hero’s story. She added that by reading those few words about the soldier, they would not be forgotten.

The quilt design is full of hidden messages that are intended to add meaning and sentiment, said Hecker. Feingold had heard a story about African-American slave quilters who made quilts with hidden messages in order to notify run-away slaves where to go next for safety, said Hecker.

“There are red and blue colored crosses,” said Hecker. “The letter of the alphabet where the red crosses are spell out ‘for destiny’ and the blue crosses spell out ‘for valor.’” In addition to those crosses, the white crosses symbolize the veterans from WW1 and WW2, and the G.I. Joe jackets the children wear symbolize the Vietnam veterans.

“We don’t want our children to ever be forgotten,” said Hecker.

Through use of this quilt, the soldiers lost are not forgotten and put on



Bethany Brown/photo

A quilt in honor of fallen servicemembers was displayed at the Alabama State Capitol in January 2010. Julie Feingold made the quilt which has pictures of servicemembers as children representing all 50 states. By using children’s pictures, it takes away the rank and branch of military and shows that servicemembers are someone’s child, parent, and sibling

a level where anyone should be able to relate.

“It is important to honor and remember those who have given their last full measure of devotion in the cause of freedom,” said retired Rear Adm. Clyde Marsh, Alabama Director of veteran’s affairs.

“As President Lincoln said in his second inaugural address, ‘A nation that does not honor its heroes will not long endure as a nation.’”

Alabama Guard reinforces strong bonds through marriage enrichment

by **Katrina Timmons**
Staff Writer

The Alabama National Guard is committed to enriching the marriages of its returning Soldiers through marriage enrichment seminars. The seminars, referred to as Strong Bonds, are part of a chaplain's program designed to assist married Soldiers and their spouses with the reunion process.

During the seminars, couples are brought together in a relaxing and comfortable setting where they are given straightforward instruction with enjoyable, non-threatening practical exercises. The curriculum, Prevention Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), is based on 30 years of research. It teaches couples how to communicate effectively, how to solve problems and how to manage conflict without damaging intimacy.

The Alabama National Guard's Joint Family Support Assistance Program (JFSAP) has incorporated marriage enrichment into its Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP). While the YRRP focuses on helping servicemembers and their families through the reintegration process, marriage enrichment focuses on a husband and wife reintegrating as a couple.

Capt. Scotty Riggs, a marriage enrichment counselor for the Alabama National Guard, says that the stresses on a marriage before, during and after a deployment can negatively affect the way a couple communicates.

"Soldiers returning home from a deployment must relearn how to communicate with their spouse. When communication breaks down in a marriage, you go from a couple or family living in a home to two people living in a house," said Riggs.

Servicemembers in the Alabama National Guard and all over the nation



Katrina Timmons/photo

Couples from the Alabama National Guard participate in a Truly Wed Game during a Marriage Enrichment Seminar held in Orange Beach, Ala., during mid-March.

have continued to answer the nation's call to duty since the onset of 9/11. Today, more than 16,000 Alabama Soldiers and Airmen have deployed in the war on terrorism.

"A strong marriage is vital to our married servicemembers' overall health and wellness," said Alabama Family Program Director, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Steve Missildine. "It is our hope that through marriage enrichment we can strengthen the bonds of marriage and offset any negative factors that may have culminated during deployment."

The Alabama National Guard has conducted 12 marriage enrichment seminars since its implementation in 2005. Alabama's latest marriage enrichment retreat was held in Orange Beach, Ala., in mid-March. Thirty-four couples attended the retreat where they received instruction on topics such as the meaning of forgiveness, reconciliation, communication, problem solving and trust.

"We want to encourage more positive communication between our couples than negative communica-

tion," said Riggs. According to Riggs, research has found that it takes five to 20 positive statements to make up for one negative statement. "It goes to show how big a thing it is when someone says something negative about you."

Maj. Ken Arnold, 279th Army Field Support Brigade, and his wife, Joy, attended the March retreat and said the course highlighted the need to stay connected. "It's too easy to miscommunicate," said the Arnolds. "Especially when deployed, it's essential to make an effort to stay connected and to keep the lines of communication flowing."

"That's what marriage enrichment is all about," said Riggs, "to teach couples how to communicate again. We are not here to fix your marriage. This is simply an opportunity for our couples to gain awareness of the importance of a healthy marriage and the resources available to assist with any concerns they have or might develop."

Exercise prepares Guard for possible maritime attacks

by Katrina Timmons
Staff Writer

Since the deadly terrorist attacks of 9/11, the US has been in a heightened state of alert. Each day brings with it a new headline with the latest plots and attacks against the U.S., its citizens and their way of life. The Alabama National Guard and the Department of Homeland Security have placed significant efforts on mitigating such attacks.

Each year the Alabama National Guard and the Department of Homeland Security conduct Operation Dragon Slayer, a multiagency training exercise conducted to augment current emergency response plans, policies and procedures and to train for a possible weapons of mass destruction (WMD) attack. New scenarios are written each year in a continuous effort to better prepare the Alabama National Guard and first responding agencies for similar attacks as well as circumvent any potential hiccups that hinder their efforts.

This year's exercise took place in Mobile, Ala., where a supposed group of eco-terrorists with the Mobile River Earth Resistance took a group of tourists from the local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and several employees of Carnival Cruise Lines hostage at the Mobile Cruise Terminal. The terrorist group accused Carnival Cruise Lines of helping to destroy the Earth through the pollution of the Gulf of Mexico. Shortly after seizing control of the terminal, the terrorist group contacted 911-dispatch announcing their acquisition of the hostages at the terminal and their preparedness to release chemical weapons if law enforcement attempted to enter the building.

When the Mobile County Emergency Management Agency (EMA)



Douglas Howard/photo

An Alabama National Guard Soldier from the 46th Civil Support Team assesses a "victim" during a weapons of mass destruction joint training exercise at the cruise terminal in Mobile, Ala. March 24, 2010. The Alabama National Guard, Department of Homeland Security, Mobile County EMA and the Mobile Police Department were some of the agencies training during this event.

received word of possible chemical weapons at the hostage site they alerted the Alabama Army National Guard's 46th Civil Support Team (weapons of mass destruction). During a real-world event, the 46th CST responds to all nuclear, biological and chemical threats within the state of Alabama.

This was the scenario for the 2010 Dragon Slayer exercise. The exercise was conducted to promote integration between the 46th and local response agencies within the city, county and state of Alabama to coordinate and train for possible weapons of mass destruction event.

According to Maj. Stephen Messer, the Disaster Response Operations and Plans Director with the Alabama National Guard, the exercise is not designed around a scenario. "The exercise is designed around a list of objectives that were created through a planning group by the Alabama National Guard and all other participating

agencies," said Messer. "The objectives have problems written into them requiring responders to ramp-up their training."

Messer said that this exercise has brought significant benefits. Once the training was complete, an after action review was done that allows players and evaluators the opportunity to glean all lessons learned throughout the training. Then an improvement plan is developed. The plan consists of a list of objectives along with a mandated timeline to meet said objectives.

This was a good learning experience for cruise terminal employees as well. Sheila Gurganus, a general manager with the Alabama Cruise Terminal, said the exercise has opened her eyes to the possibility of such attacks. "You never know what can happen in this day and age," said Gurganus. "Preparing for the worst keeps us ready for the unthinkable."