

Alabama Guardsman

Vol. V 2009

A publication for the citizen-Soldiers & Airmen of Alabama



In this issue:

Memorial service held for Guard hero Pg. 2

The Adjutant General Pg.3

State Command Sgt. Maj. Pg. 3

SnapShots Pg. 4

Shave tails, Stetsons and Order of the Spur Pg. 7

Air Guard chaplain holds torch for deploying Army chaplain Pg. 6

Guard medic delivers baby Pg. 7

Memorial service held for 115th Soldier

Matthew H. Oda
115th Fires Brigade

Soldiers throughout the 115th Fires Brigade, friends, coworkers, and even those that didn't know him gathered for a memorial service to honor the dedication, commitment, and ultimate sacrifice of Spc. Adrian L. Avila, Nov. 2nd at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

Nineteen-year-old Avila joined the Alabama Army National Guard at the age of 17, in July 2007. He completed his basic and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Benning, Ga. where he was trained as an infantryman. After AIT, he was assigned to Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry. He transferred to the 1343rd Chemical Company, 151st Chemical Battalion in March 2009 to deploy with them in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and arrived in Kuwait July 4th, 2009.

Avila died as a result of injuries sustained in an accident at Khabari Crossing, Kuwait October 29.

"Spc. Avila loved being a Soldier. He always had a smile on his face and would lift up everyone that was around him. He was always on time and in the correct uniform ready to do his part of the mission. Every day

he tried to learn something that would make him a better Soldier," said Lt. Col. Alan B. Naugher, commander of the 151st. "He was a model Soldier and will be greatly missed. He will leave a void in the 151st CBRN Battalion, the 167th Infantry Battalion, and the Alabama Army National Guard," he added.

Wanting to have a tight-knit group, his platoon leader, 1st Lt. Landon Maroney, knew he was heading in the right direction when he realized what kind of Soldier Avila was.

"Adrian was all I could ask for in a Soldier, he bled red, white, and blue," said Maroney. "He always volunteered to help out, worked hard and always had a smile on his face. I came to know him not only as one of my Soldiers, but also as a friend. Even though our time together was short, he will always hold a spot in my heart," he said.

His company commander, Capt. Jesse Howard, reminisced about watching Avila grow from a teenager into a man right before his eyes by the tenacity he showed in all of his actions.

"Spc. Avila was a Soldier who wanted to take on any hard challenge," said Howard. "He was small in stature, but had a giant will to accomplish anything asked of him. He would take on the biggest guys and the hardest objectives without a second thought. There was no mission that was above who he was. He would always tease his bigger friends when they didn't want to do the task because they were a little older and maybe a little wiser. The company will sorely



Contributed/photo

Spc. Adrian L. Avila

miss this Soldier and his positive go get'em attitude. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all of his friends and family," he added.

As a young man in the Army Guard, Avila impacted everyone he met; reminding them of how the youth can have a positive outlook on life and be so full of energy.

"I met Avila while training for this deployment," said 1st. Lt. Benjamin G. Abbott of the 151st. "He was a great kid who I would always joke with every time I saw him. He always had a smile on his face and the energy that reminded us of what being a young man was all about. I took the news of his loss hard. He will be missed but never forgotten,"

Alabama Guardsman

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

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On the Cover

Sergeant First Class Lance Woodfin (right) dons Sergeant Kevin Tarpley's (left) boot with a silver spur during a spur ceremony held at Fort Rucker, Ala. in early October. The spur represents Tarpley's successful completion of the 1st Squadron 131st Cavalry's Spur Program. Tarpley also recently won the NCO of the Year program for Alabama Army National Guard's 62nd Troop Command. The 62nd is Alabama's largest command housing more than half of the entire Alabama Guard (Photo by Katrina Timmons) .

Adjutant General

A special Christmas message



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

During this special season, I am honored to pay tribute to the brave and courageous men and women of the Alabama National Guard who are serving around the

the uniformed services.

During the 2009 Holiday Season there are more than 1,650 Alabama Guard members away in foreign countries. There is another special group of warriors right here at home that deserves special recognition. That group is the family members of our deployed Soldiers and Airmen. We must not forget either group during this special season.

It is my desire that this year's spirit of Christmas nourishes hope for the future. Christmas is a time when we all unite for peace, not just for the present, but throughout the New Year. Recently, I was fortunate to be able to visit with many

of our Guard members in Afghanistan. While there, I found a group of Alabama Guard Soldiers working tirelessly for mission success in that war torn country.

To all Alabama National Guard Soldiers and Airmen who have deployed, to the family members who stayed behind and to everyone who has worked back here at home to prepare our units for mobilization, I extend my sincere best wishes for a safe and blessed Holy Season. Let us all unite for Peace on Earth, Good Will to All Men.

In the true spirit of the season, I am Proud to Serve.

world at this time. Christmas and New Years bring visions of happy families gathered around the fire place in the safety of their home. We must always remember the freedom and safety we enjoy in our great Nation is due in large part to the sacrifices of our men and women in

State Command Sergeant Major

Words of thank you and goodbye



**Command Sgt. Maj.
Danny Ashley**

By the time you read this article MG Blalock will have selected my replacement as your state CSM. I want to take this opportunity to tell each member of

rewarding job than working for the Soldiers of a great organization like ours. I will end my military career on January 30, 2010, having served as an Alabama Guardsman for 37 years and 4 months. The time has sure flown by and it seems like only a few years ago that I was a SPC driving a jeep for the commander of the 151st Engineer Battalion and pulling KP in Camp Shelby, MS.

I will miss each and every one of you and will cherish the friendships that have been made over the last 37 years. As I near my retirement date, and reality sets in, I am beginning to realize just how much I will miss putting on the uniform and working for the Guard. I will reflect on the weekend drills, AT, field training

exercises and the many units and individuals that I have met and visited with over the years.

I will retire from the active side of the Alabama National Guard but I hope to stay involved with Soldiers through the ENGAA, ESGR, AUSA and other service organizations. I have had a great career and have been blessed to serve in such a great organization. It is my wish that each and every one of you have a safe Christmas and New Year. I want to wish you success in your military career. Thank you for your service and for allowing me to be a part of it.

the Alabama Army National Guard what an honor it has been to serve in this capacity for the past 5 years. I cannot think of a more

Snap Shots

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



Maj. Gen. Joe Harkey (3rd from right) uses oversized scissors to cut the ribbon symbolizing the opening of the new 167th Theater Support Command armory at Fort McClellan. Alabama Adjutant General Maj. Gen. A.C. Blalock (3rd from left) and U.S. Congressman Mike Rogers (2nd from right) assisted Harkey. Sgt. Brandon Henson (left), Sherri Summers, (2nd from left) Calhoun Chamber of Commerce and Spc. Patrick Sullivan (right) also took part in the ceremony.

Contributed/photo

Members of the 151st Chemical Battalion out of Gadsden watch the Iron Bowl at Camp Beuhring, Kuwait. Pictured are: Sgt. Thomas Adams, Sgt. Matthew Agee, SPC Daniel Abbott, Lt. Col. Brian Naugher, Capt. David Hennigan, Spc. Joshua Bryson, Sgt. Scott Blansit, 1Lt. Benji Abbott, Staff Sgt. Terry Hancock, Maj. Andre Burke, Sgt. 1st Class Rodney Nation, Spc. Michael Hester, Spc. Pamela Bradshaw, Sgt. Jeremy Thompson, Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Mason, Sgt. Russell Davis, 1Lt. Bradley Keef



Contributed/photo



Katrina Timmons/photo

Alabama Army National Guard's 2009 Soldier and NCO of the Year, Spc. Michael Blake Orso (left), Citronelle, Ala., and Sgt. Kevin Tarpley (right), Enterprise, Ala., are pictured with State Command Sgt. Maj. Danny Ashley (center) during the AL ARNG's 2009 Soldier of the Year awards ceremony held at Fort McClellan, Ala., on December 5th. Orso of the 1165th Military Police Company out of Fairhope and Tarpley of Company C, Long Range Surveillance, 1st Squadron, 131st Cavalry out of Auburn, Ala., will now compete in the Regional Board in April 2010.

Ltc. Terry Grisham commander of the 877th Engineer Battalion poses with singer Billy Ray Cyrus in Afghanistan. The singer was there as part of a USO tour.



Contributed/photo

Shave tails, Stetsons and the Order of the Spur

by Katrina Timmons
Staff Writer

Still bathed in the dust of a foreign land, the heels of Sgt. Kevin Tarpley's war tattered boots were adorned with chrome plated "badges of honor," U.S. Cavalry Spurs. The spurs weren't just given to Tarpley, he had to earn them. Like all Soldiers who have ever draped their boots with this distinguished accolade, a price had to be paid.

Since the Civil War, American Cavalry units have been identified by their Stetsons and Spurs. Cavalry units are no longer horse-mounted, but the cunning, skill, and daring of cavalry troopers are still required of the modern-day cavalry scout. The Squadron's Spur Program is designed to instill these characteristics in each and every trooper. The Alabama Army National Guard's 1st Squadron, 131st Cavalry, nicknamed "Darkhorse," has taken its place in the ranks of the U.S. Cavalry and is adopting its unique heritage and traditions.

According to Command Sgt. Maj. Jay Stallings, all assigned Squadron personnel are authorized to wear the distinctive black Stetsons to indicate that every trooper is a cavalryman, and every cavalryman is a scout. However, only Squadron personnel who successfully complete the 1st Squadron, 131st Cavalry Spur Program are authorized to wear the U.S. Cavalry Spurs. Spurs must be earned.

The 131st developed the Spur Program shortly after the unit's transformation from Armor to Cavalry in September 2008. The 131st is laden in tradition with a lineage that can be traced back to World War I. Adopting the traditions of the U.S. Cavalry was an honor for the Soldiers of the 131st.

"The program is very demanding and can be compared with the U.S. Army's Expert Infantry Badge Competition," said Stallings.

The mental and physical challenges associated with the program test each scout's leadership skills, tactical and technical proficiencies and problem solving strategies during high levels of stress and fatigue.



Katrina Timmons photo

Master Sergeant Bill Green, 131 Squadron Spur Master, encourages 2nd Lieutenant Michael Merring to not miss a drop of dirt as he fills his sandbag to rim. Once the sandbag is full, Merring must add the weight to his 50 pound load and continue the Spur Ride. Sandbags are added to a Scouts load if they are unable to successfully navigate a tasking on the first try. Failed second attempts results in termination from the program. Merring successfully completed the task and the Spur Ride.

"Until a trooper earns his spurs, he is considered a 'Shave-Tail,'" Maj. Tim Alexander, executive officer. "The nickname originated when shaved tail horses were issued to new troops assigned to cavalry units. The shaved tail helped to identify an inexperienced troop so he would be given a wide berth during mounted training." These troops were not allowed to wear their spurs until they had proven they could perform with their horse and saber.

Developed by Stallings, the 131st Spur Program consists of four phases. Phase one is a set of individual prerequisites, phase two is a performance board, phase three is a Spur Ride and phase four is a formal award ceremony. It takes one full training year to complete all four phases of the program.

During phase one each Shave-Tail must qualify as either a Sharpshooter or Expert with his rifle, pass the Army Physical Fitness Test with a minimum score of 80 in each event, and be in compliance with Army Height and Weight

Screening or body fat composition. He must also coordinate and conduct a squad/platoon level class on an assigned subject, plan and execute a training event to include an after action review, demonstrate weapons proficiency with the M16A2/M4 rifle and M9 pistol and recite from memory the poem "Fiddler's Green."

"Fiddler's Green" is a poem adopted by the U.S. Cavalry. According to legend, Fiddler's Green is the final resting place for all cavalrymen. The first verse of the poem reads, "Halfway down the trail to Hell, In a shady meadow green, Are the Souls of all dead troopers camped, Near an old-time canteen. And this eternal resting place Is known as Fiddler's Green."

Hopeful Shaved-Tails must appear before a board of Spur Committee members during the second phase of the program. Each Shaved-Tail is asked 30 questions about 131st Cavalry Regimental History, reconnaissance, surveillance tactics and Army values. Shaved-Tails must **(Please see Spur, page 7)**

Alabama Guard aids 877th efforts in Afghanistan

Contributed
877th Engineer Battalion

The 877th Engineer Battalion is over half way through its deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The battalion is comprised of seven companies, five from Sweet Home Alabama, the 920th Engineer Company from New Mexico and the 1613th Engineer Company from Indiana. There have been more than 200 missions completed in Regional Command East since our arrival into theater. In excess of 100 convoys and ground movements have been successfully completed with no loss to life or equipment.

The 877th Battalion's missions have included tearing down a damaged bridge and emplacing bridges, building airstrips, expanding forward operating bases, area clearance, building living quarters for Soldiers, building showers and improving living conditions for the upcoming winters for U.S. Soldiers, coalition forces and Afghan forces.

The families, friends, churches and organizations back home have supported their Soldiers throughout, but we have definitely seen an increase in mail arriving to cover the holiday season. The battalion has also been able to participate in school drops, which provided basic

(Spur continued from page 6)

achieve a score of 70% or better or they are terminated from the program.

Phase three is the Spur Ride. The Spur Ride is a grueling field training exercise that tests the Shaved-Tails mental and physical endurance. The 131 conducted their inaugural Spur Ride as a Cavalry unit at Fort Rucker, Ala., this past September.

During the ride, six testing stations were sprinkled throughout a Fort Rucker training area. Paired in two or three man teams, the Shaved-Tails had to use their land navigation skills to find each station on a map then maneuver through the woods with 50 pounds of gear on their backs in full combat uniform.



contributed/photo

A surveyor from the 1305th Engineer Detachment poses for a picture with Afghani children. The 1305th is one of five Alabama units in the 877th Engineer Bn. which is currently deployed in Afghanistan.

school supplies to local Afghanistan schools, and in handing out warmer winter clothes to needy Afghan children. The 877th looks forward to the winter months with the melting of the snow symbolizing that the end of this deployment will be

near. The morale continues to remain high within our Soldiers, all in part to the tremendous amount of thoughts, prayers and support that continue to flood in from back home. Thank you for that continued support.

Each Shave-Tail was given two opportunities to successfully complete each station. If a Shave-Tail failed a task on the first try, he was instructed to fill a sandbag and add it to his 50 pound load. If a Shave-Tail failed on the second try, he was terminated from the program. All Shave-Tails rallied at the last station for a Leadership Reaction Course followed by an eight mile ruck-march.

"You have to remember that you are part of a team," explained Tarpley. "You must compensate for each other's strengths and weaknesses in order to be successful." Tarpley said it was a very difficult and exhausting experience.

Phase four is a Spur Ceremony. During the

ceremony, the Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Mike Mitchell, and Stallings presided over the spurring of all Shave-Tails that successfully completed all previous phases. Once they have earned their spurs, they are considered Spur Holders and their names are entered into the Squadron "Order of the Spur". Only seven of the 50 who entered the 2009 program earned their spurs. More than 100 troops have already begun the 2010 Spur Program.

Specialist Adam Kelley was one of the seven to complete the 2009 program. "There is a sense of pride and honor that comes with being able to wear the spurs," said Kelley. It's just a question of how far are you willing to go to get them."

Alabama National Guard wins drug awareness award

by Norman Arnold
Staff Writer

The Alabama National Guard has been selected as National Guard Bureau's winning nominee for the 19th Annual Secretary of Defense Community Drug Awareness Award. This marks the second consecutive year the Alabama Guard Drug Demand Reduction Program (DDRP) has won the prestigious award.

Col. Roy Houlton, coordinator of the Alabama Drug Demand Reduction office, and Senior Master Sgt. David Peterson, DDRP administrator, accepted the award for the Alabama DDRP in a recent ceremony at the Pentagon.

Rear Adm. C. S. Hunter, deputy director of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, called the Alabama DDRP "a model for other Department of Defense agencies to follow." "The Alabama National Guard Counterdrug Program demonstrates how innovation and hard work can achieve an effective community drug awareness program," Hunter said.

The award was established in 1990 in an effort to promote a community drug awareness effort in the DoD community. It is given in recognition of base activity or agency programs and is not awarded to specific individuals.

The winning Alabama DDRP actively promoted the message "Drug Free Starts With Me" to youth in Alabama. It also emphasized that the choice to be drug free is the key to a hopeful and promising future. The main target audience for the program is 6th to 8th grade students, but it can also extend to younger and older students, parents and others in a community.

Red Ribbon Week is an exciting time for schools in Alabama. The Alabama DDRP sets the stage by purchasing and distributing 900,000 red ribbon stickers for



contributed/photo

Col. Roy Houlton, coordinator of the Alabama Drug Demand Reduction office (left), and Senior Master Sgt. David Peterson, DDR administrator, hold the Secretary of Defense Community Drug Awareness Award. The Alabama DDR Program received the prestigious award in a recent ceremony at the Pentagon.

public and private school students across the state. A special character, "Reddy Ribbon," appeared at programs across the state.

In one of the largest Red Ribbon events, "Reddy" danced and mingled with more than 1,200 elementary students that gathered at Garrett Coliseum in Montgomery for a Red Ribbon Week kick-off program. During the remainder of the week, DDRP members visited six other Montgomery area schools and delivered the drug-free message to 1,200 more elementary and middle school students.

Thirty Alabama school teachers were trained to present another DDRP program, Stay on Track. Alabama Army Guard recruiters trained in the DDRP program to implement the High School Drug Awareness and Prevention Program (HIDAP). The teachers and recruiters then became force multipliers for the small DDRP cadre.

The Stay on Track program was presented to 5,880 students in 20 schools. The HIDAP program went into 29 schools and reached 4,043 students during the school year. Another drug-free presentation, "Behind the Faces," was shown to more than 8,120 students at 20 schools.

After one HIDAP lesson, a 9th grade girl asked the instructor if she could speak to the whole class. She tearfully told the story of drugs destroying other members of her family and how it was affecting her. She encouraged other students to think twice before making bad decisions about drugs.

The Alabama Guard's DDRP works closely with a number of drug task forces, agencies and coalitions across the state. They all emphasize that drug-free living opens doors of opportunity that enable individuals to experience positive victories in life.

Air Guard chaplain holds torch for deploying Army chaplain

by Katrina Timmons
Staff Writer

On January 4th, 2010, Alabama National Guard full-time support Chaplain Maj. Wyly Collins will graciously hand over his government BlackBerry to Air Guard Chaplain Col. Robert M. Hicks. This informal passing of the “torch” will symbolize Hicks taking over the reins as the Alabama Guard’s full-time support chaplain while Collins prepares for deployment with the 111th Ordnance Group in January 2010.

Hicks’ civilian career compliments his military career and gives him extensive experience in counseling and ministering to the needs of others. He is known nationally and internationally as an author, professor, counselor, speaker and disaster consultant.

With more than 30 years of military service, Hicks has served in several military operations including Operation Desert Storm. More recently, he ministered to combat injured servicemembers from Iraq and Afghanistan at Landstuhl Medical Center in Germany and deployed to the Gulf Coast for Operation Cajun Comfort for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

“Everything I’ve done with the military is such a privilege and an honor,” said Hicks. “Being able to be a chaplain in the military allows me the special privilege of serving both my God and my country.”

As the full-time support chaplain, Hicks will be responsible for administering the religious support plan for more than 14,000 Airmen and Soldiers and their families under the direction of the state chaplain, Col. Coy Hallmark. He will also assist all Army and Air Guard chaplains, chaplain assistants and chaplain candidates.

“We function as first responders for the helping profession,” explained Collins. “We handle Red Cross messages, hospital situations and casualty notifications. We check on and follow up with wounded Soldiers and their families and our door is always open to those seeking counseling and guidance.”



Katrina Timmonsphoto

Chaplain Maj. Wyly Collins (left) graciously hands Chaplain Col. William Hicks his government BlackBerry, a gesture that quantifies the passing of the torch from Collins to Hicks. Hicks will be taking Collins’ place as state full-time support chaplain for the Alabama National Guard while Collins prepares for deployment with the 111th Ordnance Group in late January 2010.

During his tenure as full-time support chaplain, Hicks will continue to hold his current position as Senior Air National Guard Chaplain for Alabama. Chaplain Collins, an Army Guard chaplain, is excited to have an Air Guard chaplain assume the full-time position. “It’s a great thing to have an Air Guard chaplain in this slot,” said Collins. “This is a joint slot and Chaplain Hicks will bring a lot of Air assets and knowledge to the position.”

Chaplain Hicks and Chaplain Collins have been working together since August 2005, during Hurricane Katrina. “It was God’s providence that brought us together,” said Hicks. “We were at the Alabama Guard’s chaplain’s conference at Maxwell Air Force Base when Katrina hit the coast. It was during that time when we realized we needed to understand the Army and the Air better, to work closer together.”

Hicks hopes to better interface the ties between the Army and Air Guard in his

newly appointed position. He also hopes to enhance recruiting efforts for the Army Chaplain Corps.

“We really need to take recruiting more seriously,” said Hicks. “To me, the Army’s presence represents any conflict. When there are boots on the ground, there is a larger potential for casualties. To have any kind of vacancy in Army chaplains is putting some people at spiritual risk.”

Hicks is enthusiastic about his new role in the Alabama Guard. “I am proud to serve and be a part of this organization,” said Hicks. “I hope to make a difference in someone’s life.

“During Katrina we had a saying, we can’t give them their house back, but we can give them one more day. We can’t fix the big things, but through the grace of God we can get them to the next step.”

441st prepares for Iraq deployment

by Katrina Timmons
Staff Writer

Huntsville, Ala. – A deployment ceremony was held for the Alabama Army National Guard's 441st Ordnance Battalion (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) on December 2nd, at the Jaycee Building in Huntsville. Friends and family poured in to say farewell to their local heroes. For many, this is their second or third deployment.

For the 441st, this marks the second deployment in the global war on terrorism. In 2003-2004, the 441st deployed to Afghanistan and to other military installations in the United States to perform their EOD mission. This time, they are traveling to Iraq to help protect other Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines.

"First to Afghanistan and now to Iraq," said State Adjutant General Abner C. Blalock. "I know you are well trained and I know you will do a great job."

During the ceremony, Blalock presented 441st battalion commander, Lt. Col. Roger D. Yearwood, with a state flag to fly while in country.

"I expect you to fly this flag with respect," Blalock said to Yearwood. "Let it be a reminder that the city of Huntsville and the state of Alabama are behind you – they understand that you are protecting their freedom."

Huntsville mayor Tommy



Katrina Timmonsphoto

State Adjutant General Abner C. Blalock (left) presents 441st OD BN Commander Lt. Col. Roger D. Yearwood (right) with a state flag during a deployment ceremony held for the 441st in Huntsville, Ala., on December 2nd. Blalock instructed Yearwood to fly the flag with pride as a reminder of support back home.

Battle echoed Blalock's remarks. "Thank you for protecting our freedom. You are the pride of the Tennessee Valley."

With a signed proclamation in hand, Battle proudly announced to the crowd that the 2nd of December has been proclaimed 441st OD BN day in the city of Huntsville. "We are proud of you," stated Battle. "You present us with pride."

Col. Jose R. Atencio III, group commander of the 111th Ordnance Group, told the Soldiers of the 441st that this mission will be a challenge. "Our mission is to protect the lives of our peers. Your path will be

hard, but this is what we live to do – to serve our nation and our state."

The 111th is higher headquarters to the 441st and is slated to deploy to Iraq in late January 2010. The group will assume command of the 441st once in country.

Yearwood reassured Atencio that the 441st is the best of the best. "We have exceeded all Army standards and I want to assure you that these Soldiers are well trained, the best at their skill and have the best equipment."

Children: the unsung deployment heroes

by Katrina Timmons
Staff Writer

The deployment of a Soldier affects no one more than a child. Children of the brave men and women who protect the liberties and freedoms of the United States of America often suffer and sacrifice in silence. They try to be brave for their mommies and daddies and their brothers and sisters, but it's hard for them to understand the emotional, mental and physiological characteristics associated with the burdens of a deployment.

"When a Soldier is mobilized or deployed, a large portion of time is spent on preparing the soldier and the family for what to expect," said Kelli Hill, child and youth coordinator for the Alabama National Guard's Child & Youth program. "A lot of times the children are overlooked during that preparation process, even though their lives are literally turned upside down.

"Deployment never affects every child or teen the same way," said Hill. Some of the youth may show signs of depression or anger while others might be more mature or grow closer to siblings and other family members, Hill says.

"One of the goals of the ALNG Child & Youth program is to provide support and education to children and teens during deployment," said Hill. Yellow Ribbon events provide the ALNG Child & Youth program with an opportunity to educate them on what to expect during the deployment.

"We educate them on stress management, time management, an-



Katrina Timmonsphoto

(From left to right) Anita Goston and Alexis Goston, 5, of Montgomery and Ruby Fairchild, 19, and Kaye Miller, 18, of Prattville create cards to send to military children in Alabama thanking them for their service and sacrifice. These young ladies took time to make the cards while visiting an Autauga County Supporting Military Families booth at this year's Autauga County Fair held in Prattville, Ala. earlier this fall. The cards are placed in Hero Packs and given to military children and youth at Yellow Ribbon programs.

ger management, and several other topics in a fun and educational environment," said Hill. It also offers the children an opportunity to connect with other kids and teens their same age that are going through the same kind of experiences.

Another way the ALNG Child & Youth program offers support to the children is by providing Hero Packs. With the help of Operation Military Kids (OMK), each deploying Soldier's child receives a Hero Pack at a Yellow Ribbon event. Put together by non-military youth, Hero Packs are a tangible expression of support from the communities and OMK partners. The backpacks are filled with mementos

and items designed to help connect kids with their deployed parent.

Included in each Hero Pack is a collection of family support materials, communication tools, and fun items such as a cameras, stuffed animals or Frisbees. Also included are handwritten letters and cards from non-military youth thanking the children for their service and sacrifices they make for our country.

"It is important that our children not be overlooked during a deployment," said Hill. "They need the support of their schools, educators, churches and communities."

Guard medic delivers baby after traffic accident

by Norman Arnold
Staff Writer

Pvt. Bridgette Bennett of Grand Bay, Ala. completed Army combat medic training at Fort Sam Houston, Texas recently. Less than a week after returning home, she put her Army medical training to use in two different “real world” situations.

A member of the Alabama Army National Guard’s 127th Medical Company in Mobile, she was traveling on I-10 near Mobile and came upon a one-vehicle accident. There were no police and emergency medical personnel on the scene yet, so she stopped to assist.

An older man had blown a tire and lost control of his vehicle. It flipped three times before coming to rest in the median. She got to the man and checked his airway, breathing and circulation. Two other persons who were nurses soon stopped to help.

They determined the man had no life threatening injuries, but remained with him until paramedics arrived and the patient was transported. The nurses and other emergency personnel left as Bennett went back to her vehicle where she found traffic still at a virtual standstill.

As she sat in her car, the driver of



Bennett

another car ran up to her telling her that a woman’s water had broken and that she was having a baby. Bennett got out of her vehicle and

raced across the median to the vehicle and opened the passenger door.

In her words, Bennett said, “I observed a middle-aged female in immense pain. I found out she was 38 weeks pregnant with her seventh



Contributed/photo

A newborn baby just moments after being delivered following a traffic accident. Army National Guard medic, Pvt. Bridgette Bennett helped deliver the baby.

child. Being a mother and having two children of my own, I knew this delivery was approaching soon.”

Bennett had received OB-GYN training in the combat medic course, but was still apprehensive about delivering a baby in the field for the first time. Knowing birth was imminent, she positioned the lady as best she could in the passenger seat of the car.

Two male members from another volunteer fire and rescue squad had arrived by that time, but quickly decided Bennett was the best one to deliver the child. After only a couple of pushes by the mother, a beautiful baby boy was delivered.

“After several bulb suction and other stimulation, the baby began to cry. That was the happiest sound I have ever heard,” Bennett said. She dried the baby while maintaining and clearing the airway. While doing this, she held the baby lower than the mother to try and slow the bleed-

ing.

After about five minutes, which Bennett said “seemed like an eternity,” another ambulance arrived on the scene and a paramedic cut the cord. The mother was loaded in the ambulance. “After a short time and with a heavy heart, I gave them the baby to transport to the Mobile Infirmary with the mother,” Bennett said.

An Alabama State Trooper directing traffic at the scene said of Bennett, “She was awesome, she did more than the firemen.”

When she finally arrived at home later that day with blood on her shoes, shorts and under her finger nails, her children, Logan, 8, and Elise, 5, listened in awe as she told them about her day.

Bennett summed up her feelings with two short phrases, “I love the Guard and I love being a member.”