

Prairie Soldier

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Nebraska Guard honors late adjutant general in January

■Retired Lt. Gen. (Neb.) Stanley M. Heng dies in January after lengthy illness; served as Nebraska's adjutant general from 1987-2000

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor



Retired Lt. Gen. (Neb.) Stanley M. Heng
Nebraska Adjutant General
(1987-2000)

Nebraska's fourth-longest serving adjutant general, retired Lt. Gen. (Neb.) Stanley M. Heng, died after a lengthy illness Jan. 12. He was 71.

Heng served as the adjutant general for Nebraska for 13 years, beginning in 1987 when he was appointed to the post by then-Gov. Kay Orr.

Along with leading the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard, Heng also served as the director of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. He retired in December 2000 after having served as adjutant general for three separate governors.

Heng is survived by his wife, Sharon, three grown children, Mark, Nick and Lisa, and 10 grandchildren.

According to Brig. Gen. Tim Kadavy, current adjutant general for Nebraska, the state owes much of its recent success

to the late general who helped put the Nebraska Guard into position to effectively serve in the current Global War on Terrorism.

"Lt. Gen. Stan Heng spent nearly 14 years faithfully serving his state and country as the adjutant general for Nebraska," said Kadavy. "The Nebraska National Guard has performed superbly during the past seven years in support of the Global War on Terrorism and owes its success to the vision, leadership and action of General Heng. We owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude for his service to the Nebraska National

See HENG on 10.

Flying High



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

Heading Out: Members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing process out of their alternate work location before returning to their primary work center during the 155th ARW's operational readiness inspection in Gulfport, Miss., in January. The Airmen's primary building had received simulated damage earlier in the day.

Air Guardsmen pass major inspections with flying colors

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

After nearly two years of planning, preparing and exercising, the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing conducted a pair of major inspections in late January designed to test the organization's ability to support two major missions.

"I'm very pleased with the results," said Col. Rick Evans, commander of the

Lincoln-based 155th ARW, after an Air Mobility Command inspector general team gave the unit its official grades during a debrief on Feb. 12.

The wing received an overall "Excellent" rating from the nuclear operational readiness inspection (NORI) and an overall "Satisfactory" rating from its operational readiness inspection (ORI).

"Clearly we are one of the top KC-135 units in the nation when it comes to the nuclear business, so those results prove

See INSPECTIONS on 7.

Army celebrating noncommissioned officers in 2009

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

For those Nebraska Army Guard Soldiers wearing stripes, listen up. 2009 is your year.

Beginning in January 2009 has been designated by the U.S. Army as the "Year of the Non-commissioned Officer."

According to Gen. George W.

Casey Jr., Army chief of staff, the year-long observation is designed to build public aware-

ness of the important roles that Army sergeants of all ranks play in today's Army while also focusing on enhancements to such areas as NCO education, fitness and leader-

ship.

"We're taking this year and making it the Year of the Non-commissioned Officer so we can recognize their courage, their commitment, their compe-

tence and their contribution to this war," said Casey during a Jan. 5 kick-off event at Fort



Bliss, Texas.

"There is no doubt in my mind that our noncommissioned officer corps is the glue that holds this Army together and allows us to accomplish the impossible," said Casey. "We wouldn't be the Army we are today without our noncommissioned officer corps and I would not be the officer I am today without

See NCOS on 9.

State's top Army Guard recruiting assistant says honesty key to her continued success

By Sgt. Michael Coleman
Staff Writer

Most Soldiers know that GRAP - the Guard Recruiting Assistance Program - is a great way to help enlist Soldiers and earn extra cash.

But Staff Sgt. Christina L. Green has taken the program to a new level.

Green, a member of the Lincoln-based 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance,) has helped nine Soldiers enlist into the Nebraska Army National Guard and has another 11 candidates in the process of enlisting. That makes her the most

See GREEN on 14.

'Team Dragon' Soldiers welcomed home after tough year-long training mission in Afghanistan

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Staff Photojournalist

As a distant "thump, thump, thump," sound gradually echoed through the air around the Nebraska Army National Guard Aviation Support Facility, Dec. 11, the crowd of children, wives, husbands, parents, friends and others began to get excited.

After all, members of the Afghan National Army Embedded Training Team were scheduled to arrive soon aboard a CH-47 "Chinook" helicopter after a year-long deployment to Afghanistan.

Guests began running outside to meet the helicopter and welcome their loved ones home, only to hear an announcement over the loud speakers:

See TEAM DRAGON on 5.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

Welcome Home: Maj. Vernon Chandler is greeted after a year-long deployment to Afghanistan by his wife, Lisa, and their daughter, Katie. Chandler was part of "Team Dragon," made up of 16 Nebraska Guard Soldiers that assisted with the Afghan National Army Embedded Training Team.

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Young girl sings special song to welcome father, Soldiers home

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Staff Photojournalist

“First to fight for the right and to build the Nation’s might” is definitely not a part of any normal lullaby.

But when you’re the daughter of a Soldier, lullabies are a bit different.

Six-year-old Katie Chandler has often drifted off to sleep to the lyrics of the Army Song sung by her father, Maj. Vernon Chandler, who is the executive officer for the state Recruiting and Retention Command. By the time Katie was three years old, she knew the song by heart.

“Proud of all we have done, fighting till the battle’s won,” is a definitely poignant line of the song considering the year the Chandlers recently endured.

Major Chandler was one of 16 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers who made up “Team Dragon,” which deployed to Afghanistan in December 2007 to assist in the on-going Afghan National Army Embedded Training Team (ANA-ETT) effort.



Photo by David Nore

Lifting Her Voice: Six-year-old Katie Chandler sings the Army Song while her father, Maj. Veron Chandler, watches.

During a December 2007 send-off for her father and his fellow Soldiers, Katie, then only five years old, volunteered to sing the Army Song. Katie said she wanted to sing “for my daddy and all the Soldiers.”

During Chandler’s deployment Katie continued to practice, mostly by singing along with her favorite country singer, Taylor Swift. “She has her Taylor Swift CD in the truck and she bellows it out in the back seat,” said Chandler. “She knows all the words to every song.”

Although she had Taylor Swift to keep her busy during the day, Katie missed her father’s lullabies at night.

“When he was gone, sometimes she would ask me to sing the Army Song, the National Anthem and any other patriotic song I could think of before she went to bed,” said Lisa Chandler, Katie’s mother.

After a long year, Chandler’s deployment was near its end and Katie was asked if she would once again sing the Army Song to welcome the Soldiers home during a ceremony in Lincoln. She quickly said yes.

As the Dec. 11 welcome home ceremony drew to a close, Col. Kevin Neumann, commander of Team Dragon, called on Katie to sing the Army Song as she had done prior to their deployment. Katie stood in front of the Soldiers, their families and other distinguished guests and belted out the Army Song, with her father at her side.

“I’m extremely proud of her,” said Chandler. “She wanted to do it. She’s always been patriotic without any spurring from either one of us. She’s always been very supportive, even at such a young age...she loves Soldiers.”

Katie’s version of the Army Song has gained her quite a bit of notoriety. Other Soldiers have expressed their appreciation to Chandler. Katie can even be seen on the internet.

“Part of it is on YouTube,” said Chandler. It turns out one of the Patriot Guard riders put a video on YouTube that includes a little snippet of Katie singing, he said.

With her father home from his deployment, the patriotic lullabies are sure to resume.

“And the Army Goes Rolling Along.”



Photo by David Nore

Let The Celebration Begin: A crowd of friends and family members break into loud cheers as a Nebraska Army National Guard CH-47 “Chinook” helicopter carrying members of “Team Dragon” lands at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., Dec. 11. The Soldiers carried by the helicopter were returning to Nebraska and a reunion with their families and friends after serving for a year in Afghanistan.

TEAM DRAGON

continued from page 1.

“The first helicopter is only carrying the bags. The Soldiers are about 10 minutes behind.”

Loved ones - especially children - were not deterred, however, and continued to file outside to ensure they were the first to welcome their Soldier home.

Marge Payer, the wife of Command Sgt. Maj. John Payer, and her daughter Jill, 13, were among those who were waiting anxiously for their Soldiers’ return.

“It’s a reunion back with your husband and it’s a beautiful thing,” she said. “Just happy to be back together again.”

“We’ll be able to see him every day,” added Jill. “He’ll be home for Christmas.”

According to Payer, her family marked the days of the deployment by creating a construction paper chain with each link signifying a day that their Soldier was gone. Payer said she had the honor of adding the last link to the chain to mark the last day of separation.

Sixteen members of the Nebraska Army National Guard, code named “Team Dragon,” were mobilized for duty in December 2007 under the command of Col. Kevin Neumann. The Soldiers came from a variety of units from across Nebraska to create the Afghan National Army Embedded Training Team (ANA-ETT) and were responsible for providing training mentorship to members of the newly forming Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police Force.

Among those who gathered at the Nebraska Guard air base to welcome Team Dragon home was Janelle Marr, whose husband is Capt. Drew Marr. Janelle, who stood with her two children, C.J., eight, and Kenzie, five, likened her husband’s return to starting anew.

“I hate to sound hokey, but it’s like the first day of the rest of our lives,” said Janelle. “It’s like a new beginning.”

C.J., who sported a shirt proclaiming, “Warning! My Dad is home and I will run you over to get to him,” was ready to have another male in the family again. Without his father there, in public, “I have to go in the girl’s bathroom,” said C.J.

Kenzie quickly ticked off the things that she missed doing with her dad the most: “Going to the water park with him in the summer and jumping on the trampoline.” She added that as soon as she saw her dad she was going to go at him like a “flying monkey” and give him a tight, tight hug.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

A Year In The Making: Five-year-old Kenzie Marr gets a welcome home kiss from her father Capt. Drew Marr after he returned home Dec. 11 from a year-long deployment to Afghanistan where he helped train the new Afghan National Army and police force.

Moments passed until once again the “thump, thump, thump” sounds of an approaching helicopter were heard. This time there was no doubt it was the Soldiers.

The lumbering Chinook landed and rolled to its parking spot, nearly blowing over some of the smaller guests with its rotor wash. With the rear cargo door facing the crowd, it slowly lowered to the delighted cheers of family, friends and guests.

After what must have felt like an eternity to family and friends, the 16 Soldiers filed out of the Chinook, shook the hands of distinguished guests and then quickly found their families and friends for a long overdue welcome home.

After Command Sgt. Maj. John Payer reunited with his family, the excitement of what this day meant was palpable. “It’s real important,” said Payer. “The families all out here to see us...that’s what makes us tick when we’re over there.”

“Coming home to them is a truly special moment for all of us,” Payer added.

Capt. Drew Marr echoed Payer’s comments, adding: “This day means everything. We all came home...that’s the important part. We’re all here.”

Kenzie Marr had said she was going to give her father a “monkey hug” and she was able to accomplish her mission.

“I got a huge ‘monkey hug,’” said Marr. “It was wonderful. You just can’t beat it.”

Following the family reunions, a formal ceremony was held to officially welcome the members of Team Dragon home. Among those who spoke was Brig. Gen. Timothy Kadavy, Nebraska adjutant general, who thanked the Soldiers for their service.

While working with the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police Forces, “you made a tremendous impact on their professionalism and their ability to lead their country into the future,” said Kadavy.

Neumann, commander of “Team Dragon,” addressed the crowd with words of thanks to the Soldiers and hope for the future in Afghanistan.

“Words can’t express how thankful we are that we all made it back together and in one piece,” said Neumann. “Our mission is complete and I am confident we have left Afghanistan a more secure and better place than it was when we arrived.”

As Neumann’s last order of business, he called upon six-year-old Katie Chandler, daughter of Maj. Vernon and Lisa Chandler, to sing the Army Song, just as she had a year earlier when “Team Dragon” deployed.

Then, with the year-long deployment behind them, “Team Dragon” stood at attention as Command Sgt. Maj. John Payer took charge and belted the words that they and their families had so longed to hear: “Team Dragon, dismissed.”