



THE DISPATCH

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OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT



MAY 2019

TEXAS WAR FIGHTERS

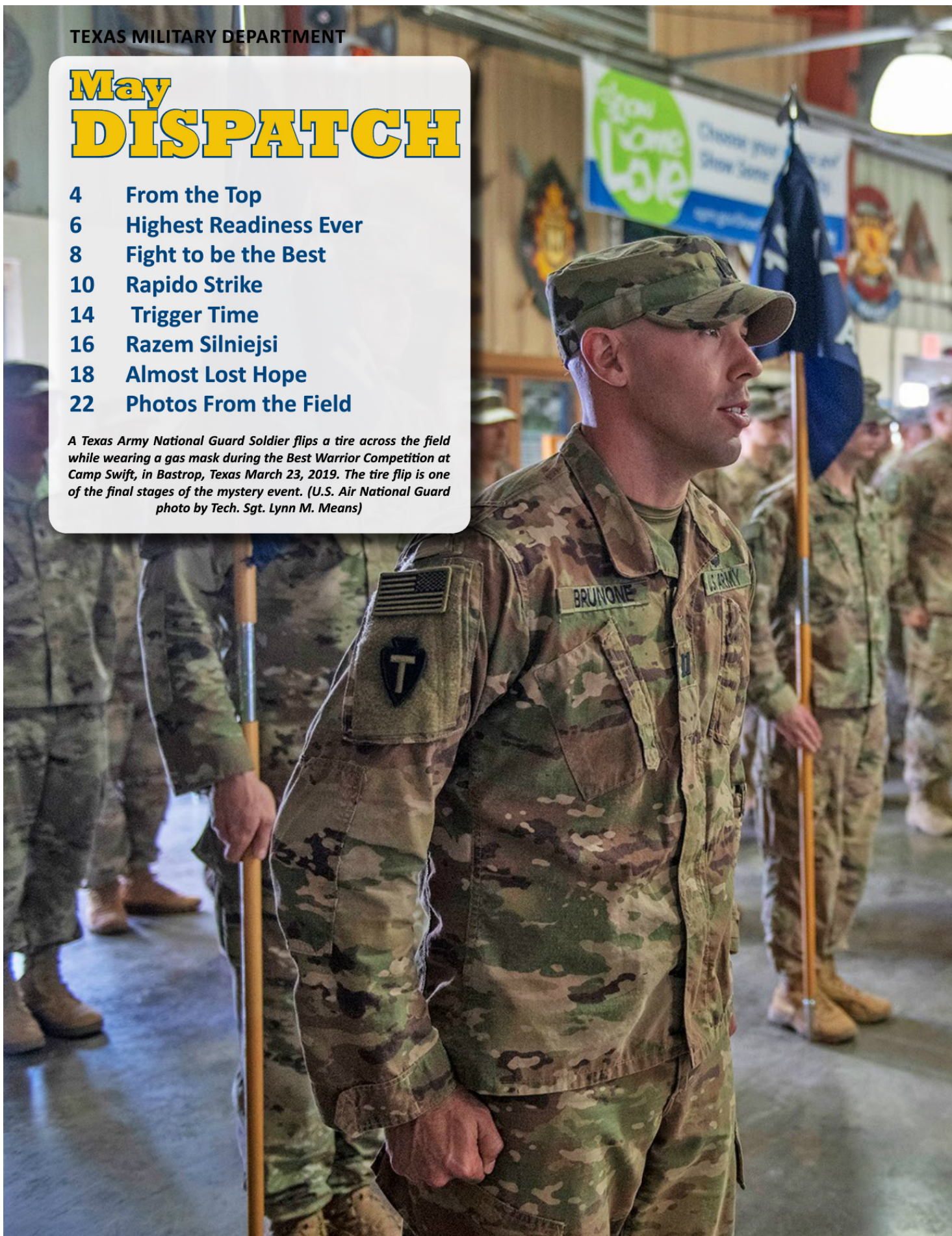
GUARDSMEN PREPARE FOR BATTLE WITH TRAINING, PARTNERSHIPS AND COMPETITION

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

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A Texas Army National Guard Soldier flips a tire across the field while wearing a gas mask during the Best Warrior Competition at Camp Swift, in Bastrop, Texas March 23, 2019. The tire flip is one of the final stages of the mystery event. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Lynn M. Means)





U.S. Army Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment, Task Force Alamo, Texas National Guard, stand at attention during a transfer of authority ceremony at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, March 15, 2019. The 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Warrior, New Jersey National Guard, assumed responsibility as the security forces battalion for Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Tech. Sgt. Shawn Nickel)



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TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

FROM THE TOP

COMMENTARIES FROM TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT LEADERS



LETHALITY FOCUS KEY TO CONTEND WITH NEAR-PEER THREATS

COL. MAX KRUPP
TEXAS ARMY NATIONAL GUARD G3

The contemporary operating environment has shifted from population-centric counterinsurgency operations to competition with near-peer adversaries. The Joint Force's technological overmatch has eroded after nearly two decades of sustained conflict. Great power competitors have closed the gap as our focus has been on combating violent extremist organizations (VEOs). Every domain – air, land, sea, space and cyberspace is now contested.

Large-scale ground combat operations are now more likely than at any time since 1991. Near-peer adversaries can exploit friendly capability gaps more lethally than current opponents in Afghanistan or Iraq. The Total Army, consisting of all three components, must build readiness mindful of large-scale ground combat requirements. The Army National Guard (ARNG) has experienced four phases of development becoming an operational reserve and the Total Army's combat reserve. The fourth evolutionary shift, ARNG 4.0, requires enhanced readiness to meet increased operational demands and reduce post-mobilization time lines. The TXARNG will remain at the forefront of building ready units to support the ARNG 4.0 philosophy. At the heart of this drive for readiness is lethality.

Lethality begins with mastering the fundamentals: honing individual warrior skills into muscle memory through sustained repetition. At the individual level, our Soldiers must be physically fit, proficient in their assigned weapons systems and masters of their military occupational specialty. Leaders at echelon must develop systems to build the physical, mental and emotional toughness in our individual Soldiers. Lethality is a capability but also a mindset that enables Soldiers to compete, fight and win in a decisive action environment. Lethal units must strive for Mission Essential Task (MET) proficiency. MET proficiency allows a commander to employ his/her unit in accordance with its designed purpose. Com-

manders and their formations must be able to operate, sustain themselves and communicate in expeditionary environments to compete against near-peer competitors.

Lethality is a key consideration in the future employment of forces. At the strategic level, the "Global Operating Model" for the Joint Force consists of four complementary layers: contact, blunt, surge and homeland forces. The ARNG and by extension the TXARNG has roles to play in each one of these layers. 'Contact' forces apply pressure against an adversary to deter potential conflict. 'Blunt' forces are used if deterrence fails and there is a need to delay, degrade, or deny adversary objectives. 'Surge' forces are deployed to exploit success and manage conflict escalation. Lastly, every TXARNG unit has a vested interest in defense of the homeland; whether it's disaster response or protecting the Southwest border.

Army values are the bedrock of our profession. Agile and lethal forces are required to defend and advance American interests at home and abroad. These values underpin all we do, particularly the building of holistic combat readiness and lethality. The ARNG will continue to build the discipline and skill sets to win our nation's wars and protect our state in times of crisis. Improvements to our weapons and vehicles, distributed mission command systems, and increasing Soldier lethality propel us forward into the future as a fighting force.

As Former Secretary of Defense, General Mattis said, "We Americans have no God-given right to victory on the battlefield. We need you, my fine young National Guardsmen, at the top of your game. Lethality begins when we are physically, mentally and spiritually fit to be evaluated by the most exacting auditor on Earth – and that auditor is war."

- DUTY HONOR TEXAS -

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Is your unit conducting the coolest AT this summer? Let us know so we can cover the awesome work your doing to prepare Texas Guardsmen.

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

*Gen. Joseph Lengyel, chief of the National Guard Bureau, testifies to members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., March 26, 2019.
(U.S. Army National Guard Photo By: Sgt. 1st Class Jim Greenhill)*



NGB CHIEF BRIEFS LAWMAKERS THAT NATIONAL GUARD AT HIGHEST READINESS LEVELS IN HISTORY

*Story By: Sgt. 1st Class Jim Greenhill
National Guard Bureau Courtesy Feature*

WASHINGTON – Readiness is the National Guard’s number one priority, the chief of the National Guard Bureau told lawmakers Tuesday.

The Guard’s focus on readiness supports the National Defense Strategy, Air Force Gen. Joseph Lengyel told members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense.

“Your National Guard’s three core missions of fighting America’s wars, protecting the homeland, and building partnerships directly support the [strategy’s] three lines of effort: building a more lethal force; strengthening alliances and attracting new partners; and reforming the Defense Department for greater performance and affordability,” said Lengyel, who provided written and spoken testimony to lawmakers who are studying budget appropriations for the 2020 fiscal year.

The Guard’s most senior officer, who is also a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, noted that while counterinsurgency operations remain a core competency the 2018 National Defense Strategy refocused the Defense Department, including the National Guard, on “great power competition” with China and Russia, and on the security threats presented by Iran, North Korea and non-state actors.

“It is imperative the National Guard remains an operational force, as part of our Army and Air Force, that helps protect and secure our interests at home and abroad,” Lengyel said.

The National Guard is the principal combat reserve of the Army and the Air Force, providing 20 percent of the entire Joint Force.

“There is only one standard of readiness in fighting America’s wars,” Lengyel said. “This readiness requires the National Guard to be deployable, sustainable, and interoperable with our active components.”

As an example of the Guard's success in emphasizing readiness, Lengyel said the Army National Guard's 89 percent individual medical readiness is the highest achieved by the three components that comprise the Army – Active, Guard and Reserve.

“Readiness and lethality for the National Defense Strategy is the Army's number one priority, [and] it's the National Guard's number one priority,” Lengyel told lawmakers.

Weapons systems, high profile areas such as the space and cyber domains and missile defense, and interoperability with the services were among topics discussed during the hearing at the U.S. Capitol.

According to Lengyel the National Guard must increase operability across all platforms, Lengyel said. Parity in equipping the Guard through concurrent and balanced modernization and recapitalization is necessary for the Guard to deliver the lethality required by the Joint Force. The old model of cascading older equipment from the active duty side to the reserve side -- used when the Guard was a strategic reserve rather than operational force – no longer applies, he said.

Lengyel also said increased full-time support is needed in the Army National Guard and reversing recruiting shortfalls caused in part by the strong economy is a priority.

“We will look to reposture under-recruited force structure from a state that simply can't recruit to it anymore into states [that can],” Lengyel said.

Almost 450,000 Soldiers and airmen comprise the National Guard, and on any given day about 30,000 are on duty across every overseas combatant command, with another 10,000 typically conducting domestic operations. **-D**



*Gen. Joseph Lengyel, chief of the National Guard Bureau, talks to Texas Guardsmen at a staging facility in Beaumont, Texas, during the Hurricane Harvey relief effort Sept. 1, 2017.
(U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Mindy Bloem)*

NATIONAL GUARD MISSION FOCUS

DOMESTIC RESPONSE:

Last year, the National Guard responded 195 times to domestic incidents such as wildfires, hurricanes or floods.

STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM:

The State Partnership Program has developed partnerships between 83 nations and the 54 state and territorial National Guards throughout the United States. The international outreach program is executed by the National Guard in coordination with geographic combatant commanders, the State Department and host nations. More than 950 joint events were conducted across every geographic combatant command in the 2018 fiscal year. The National Guard has co-deployed 80 different times with partner nations.

SPACE:

The National Guard continues to contribute critical capabilities in space standing ready to support the development, and manning of the U.S. Space Force.”

MISSILE DEFENSE:

With the increase in near peer threats the need for strategic missile defense continues to grow.

AIR DEFENSE:

All but one of the nations alert sites safeguarding our national airspace are operated by the Air National Guard.

CYBER PROTECTION:

Guard cyber units protect DOD networks and support gubernatorial needs in the states. To mitigate this emerging threat the National Guard has fielded 23 cyber protection teams, and is exploring the development of Cyber Mission Assurance Teams in three states to protect non-military infrastructure essential to Defense Department operations.

CBRN RESPONSE:

More than half of the nations Chemical, Biological Radiological and nuclear response effort resides within the National Guard Structure.

YOUTH CHALLENGE PROGRAM:

More than 170,000 at-risk teenagers have graduated from the National Guard's Youth Challenge Program, earning high school diploma's or their high school equivalence certificate.

COUNTER DRUG:

The National Guard supports law enforcement efforts to detect, interdict, disrupt and reduce illicit drug trafficking.

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

FIGHT TO BE THE BEST

**Story By: Senior Airman Bryan Swink
136th Airlift Wing Public Affairs**

BASTROP – Cold pounding rain continued to make conditions worse. Tech Sgt. Joshua Porter had been briefed to expect a long day of grueling military exercises but now as he forced himself to crawl arm over arm under razor-sharp wire, the wet sand clinging to his face and squishing between his fingers made the added another obstacle to the low crawl.

Hearing his support team’s motivation from the sidelines, Porter pushed himself to continue through mud and move to the next event in the Texas Military Department’s 2019 Best Warrior Competition.

The Best Warrior Competition is designed to put the competitors through demanding physical and mental tests which include a modified Army Physical Fitness Test, an obstacle course, marksmanship drills, land navigation, formal board interviews, written exams and a mystery event.

Porter, a 136th Logistics Readiness Squadron vehicle maintainer, joined the wing in May 2018 after separating from active duty Air Force. Now the noncommissioned officer representing the 136th Airlift Wing against the best warriors in Texas National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

“When people decide to separate from active-duty service, they usually don’t expect to be competing a year later in marksmanship challenges, conducting nighttime land navigation in total darkness, running miles in combat boots with 35-pound ruck sack and racing through obstacle courses,” said Porter.

After 10 years of active-duty, Porter moved closer to his hometown, Mineral Wells, Texas but he still had a need to serve. After meeting a member of the 136th Airlift Wing Porter was introduced to Chief Master Sgt. Mike Lowe, 136th Airlift Wing logistics and readiness squadron superintendent.

“I knew after speaking with Porter the first time, I wanted him on board and to be a part of the LRS,” said Lowe. “Little did I know what type of impact he would have on our shop. He’s the one who sets the example as the standard of physical fitness in our squadron. He’s an incredible motivator who inspires our Airmen to constantly work out and stay physically fit.”

Porter says he has always loved competition, especially when it comes to endurance-based sports like running. While on active duty he participated in three consecutive Air Force Marathons representing Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri.



**Tech. Sgt. Joshua Porter, 136th Logistics Readiness Squadron vehicle maintainer, leaps over one of the final obstacle course events during the Texas Military Department’s 2019 Best Warrior Competition at Camp Swift, in Bastrop Texas, February 28, 2019.
(U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Bryan Swink)**

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Tech. Sgt. Joshua Porter, carries a simulated battlefield casualty to safety during the Texas Military Department's Best Warrior Competition at Camp Swift, in Bastrop, Texas, February 28, 2019. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Bryan Swink)

"Realizing what type of athlete and competitor he was, it was a no-brainer we thought he would excel at our wing's Best Warrior Competition ... which he did," said Lowe.

One week after winning the wing-level competition Porter lost one of his biggest supporters when his father died.

"He was one of the reasons we decided to move back to be closer to home," he said. "We wanted to spend whatever time he had left with him. He was so incredibly proud of me when I told him I'd be representing the 136th at the state level."

The inspiration and encouragement Porter received from his father throughout his life has motivated him during the competition.

"He was a man who was a strong motivator but would do it with love and encouragement," Porter said. "He always looked for way to build up a person with positivity and he would always get the best out of people."

This four-day event not only features some of the state's top service members, but also features competitors from Chile and the Czech Republic, both partners of the Texas military under the State Partnership Program.

"Many of the events were some of the most challenging things I've ever done," Porter said. "But the group of people who came from the wing to support the event and cheer me on have been so inspirational and motivating. The really awesome thing is they were supporting all the competitors with that same level of energy ... Soldiers, Airmen and our international partners."

Even though Porter didn't win the Texas NCO division of the state's Best Warrior Competition, he isn't ready to call it quits. The airmen said he would love to represent the wing again next year either as a competitor or the wing's support sponsor.

"I want to get the word out about this event and I want to see who in our wing can compete at this level," Porter said. "I know our wing has some amazing athletes and I would love it if someone out there beat me next year. I would want to be their sponsor and help guide and advise them through every step of this unbelievably fun and demanding competition."

This year's Texas competition winners will be honored at a May banquet and become eligible to compete in the Best Warrior Competition at nation and international levels.

-D



Photo Essay By:

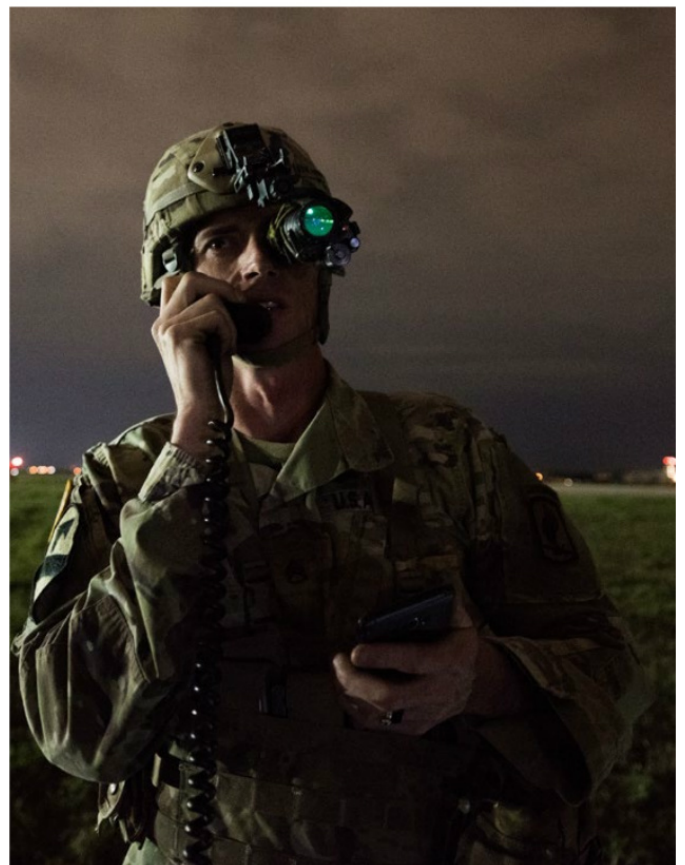
*Sgt 1st Class Sean A. Foley (U.S. Army Reserve) and
Sarayuth Pinthong (U.S. Air Force)*

For hours Kelly Field had been dark, but the airfield located in San Antonio, Texas was anything but quiet. Guardsmen with the 143rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne) had been in constant communication with fellow Soldiers hundreds of feet in the air aboard a C-17 Globe Master. As the plane's four jet engines pushed through the night sky, Soldiers inside were bathed in red light to preserve their night vision, undergoing last minute equipment checks and safety briefs. In a moment those Soldiers would step from a plane and parachute toward a drop zone.

Confident in their training and fellow Guardsmen, each Soldier moved toward an open door and took a leap of faith that they would arrive safely. Upon landing, was when the hard work would begin. Weapons at the ready, Soldiers moved to take a landing strip and secure key facilities. Weapon fire rang through the night as simulated munitions added more realism to the exercise. Realism that was needed as these sky Soldiers may one day face this exact circumstance, not in Texas but in a hostile region where Texas Guardsmen will battle back near-peer military powers.



(Top) U.S. Army National Guard 1st Lt. Charleston Fagle, Platoon Leader for 2nd Platoon, co. A 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne) (1st Bn, 143 Inf. (A)), calls up a situation report during an airfield seizure, as part of a joint force entry exercise, at Kelly Field, Lackland Air Force Base, near San Antonio, Texas, March 23, 2019. (U.S. Army Reserve Sgt 1st Class Sean A. Foley)



TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

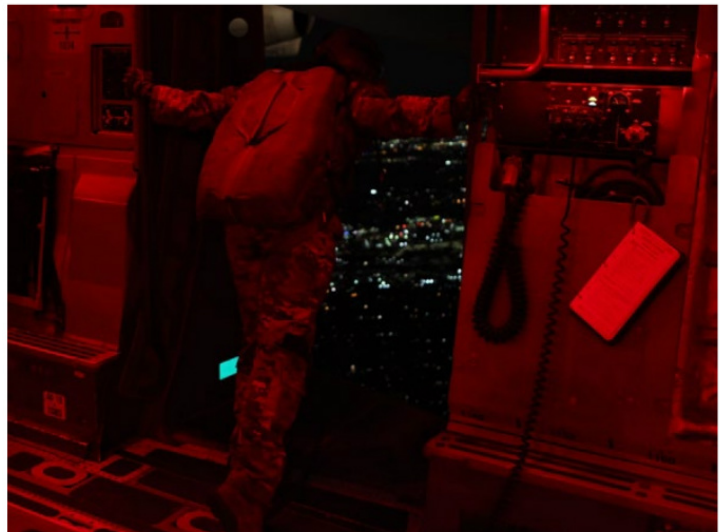


(Top) U.S. Army National Guard Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne) (1st Bn, 143 Inf. (A)) don their parachutes and equipment on the tarmac, prior to an airborne insertion during a joint force entry exercise, at Naval Air Station-Joint Reserve Base, Fort Worth, Fort Worth Texas, March 23, 2019. 1st Bn, 143 Inf. (A) is conducting joint forcible entry exercise in order to test their ability to jump, assemble and conduct follow-on combat operations. (U.S. Army Reserve Sgt. 1st Class Sean A. Foley)



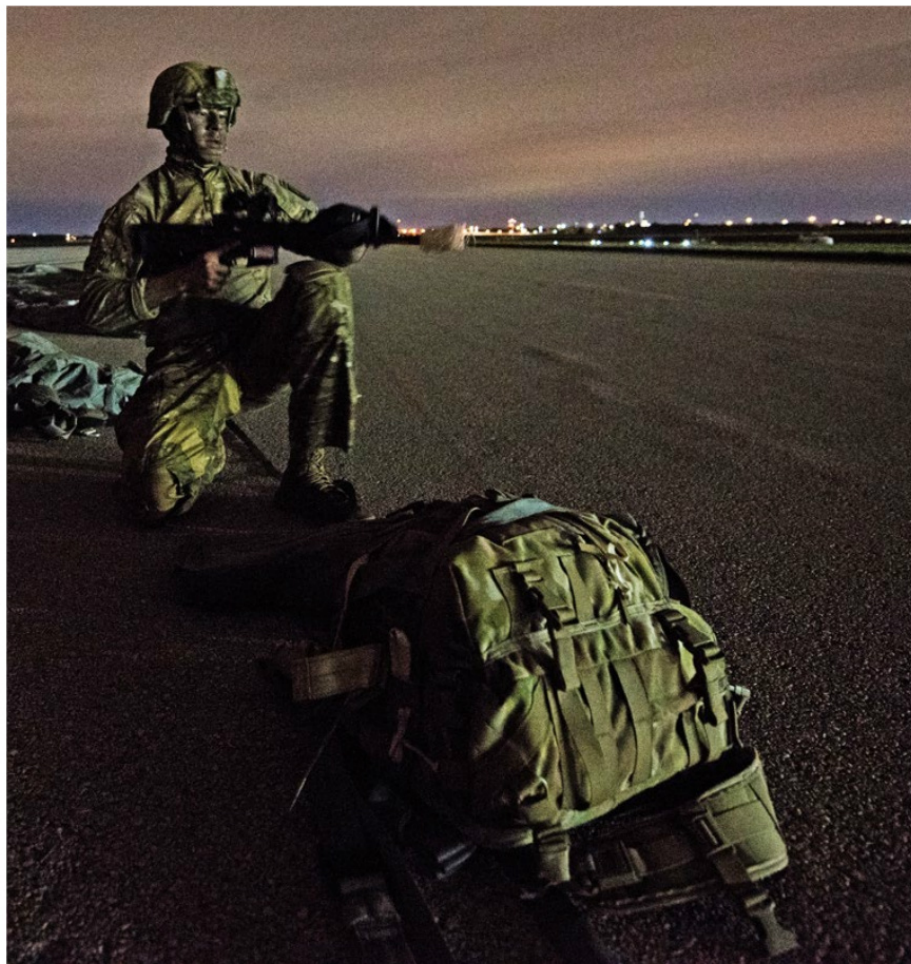
(Left) U.S. Army National Guard Paratroopers with Scout Platoon, 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne) (1st Bn, 143 Inf. (A)), receive instructions from their jumpmaster, aboard a U.S. Air Force C-17, during an airborne insertion for a joint force entry exercise, into Camp Bullis, near San Antonio, Texas, March 23, 2019. 1st Bn, 143 Inf. (A) is conducting joint forcible entry exercise in order to test their ability to jump, assemble and conduct follow-on combat operations. (U.S. Army Reserve Sgt. 1st Class Sean A. Foley)

(Right) U.S. Air National Guard Loadmaster performs door checks aboard a U.S. Air Force C-17, prior to handing control of the door to Army National Guard Jumpmasters, during an airborne insertion for a joint force entry exercise, into Camp Bullis, near San Antonio, Texas, March 23, 2019. 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne) is conducting a joint forcible entry exercise in order to test their ability to jump, assemble and conduct follow-on combat operations. (U.S. Army Reserve Sgt. 1st Class Sean A. Foley)



(Page 8 bottom) Texas Army National Guardsmen, Staff Sgt. Jonathon Andersen, master jump master, communicates with inbound C-17 Globe Master III during a troop jump by the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 143rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade in support of exercise Operation Rapido Strike, March. 23, 2019, at Kelly Field, Texas. Operation Rapido Strike is a joint forcible entry exercise consisting of Soldiers parachuting into an airfield in order to command and control the area for follow on support. (U.S. Air Force photo by Sarayuth Pinthong)

VIDEO



CLICK PHOTO FOR VIDEO (Top) Texas Army National Guardsmen from the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 143rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade jump out of a C-17 Globe Master III in support of exercise Operation Rapido Strike, March 23, 2019, at Kelly Field, Texas. Operation Rapido Strike is a joint forcible entry exercise consisting of Soldiers parachuting into an airfield in order to command and control the area for follow on support. (U.S. Air Force photo by Sarayuth Pinthong)



(Left) Texas Army National Guardsmen from the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 143rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade participate with exercise Operation Rapido Strike, March 23, 2019, at Kelly Field, Texas. Operation Rapido Strike is a joint forcible entry exercise consisting of Soldiers parachuting into an airfield in order to command and control the area for follow on support. (U.S. Air Force photo by Sarayuth Pinthong)

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TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

VIDEO

TRIGGER TIME FOR TEXAS AIRMEN

*Story and Video By Staff Sgt. Augustin Salazar
149th Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

EL PASO - As gun fire rings through the desert the rhythmic plink, plink, plink of 9mm bullets hitting their target signals success for the Air National Guard's 203rd Ground Combat Training Squadron. The 30 person team is charged with teaching firearm tactics to Air National Guardsmen and their active duty and reserve counterparts.

To carry out this mission, the instruction staff must stay proficient with fundamental combat shooting, a task that Lt. Col. Jason Westmeyer, Commander of the 203rd Ground Combat Training Squadron knows his staff can succeed in.

"We're working on threat discrimination, speed and accuracy, their ability to engage targets in confidence and building their moral" said Westmeyer.

As a geographically separated unit of the 149th Fighter Wing the 203rd may be far from home but that dis-

tance provides them with an extensive training facility in El Paso. Fort Bliss, home to the 203rd hosts the second largest training site in the Army and comes with tools not normally available to Airmen.

Instructors use steel and reactionary targets to facilitate the training, an upgrade according to Westmeyer

"At most Air Force ranges you can't shoot steel targets, you can't shoot targets that fall down when you hit them" said Westmeyer. "on Air Force installations you shoot paper targets, punch holes in them from behind barricades and that's the extent of the training."

With an eye to future combat the members of the 203rd are poised to add to the mission of keeping the Texas National Guard a force of proficient and lethal Airmen. **-D**

(Above) A Texas Air National Guard Instructor with the 203rd Ground Combat Training Squadron fires a 9mm pistol during a training exercise in firearm utilization for Airmen from the National Guard, Active Air Force and Air Force Reserve at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas March 23, 2019 (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Augustin Salazar)



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TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT



RAZEM SILNIEJSI

WINGS OVER POLAND PROVES WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER

*Story by: Tech. Sgt. Kristina Overton
136th Airlift Wing Public Affairs*

The last aircraft touched down on the runway ramp, as pilots from the 136th Airlift Wing, Texas Air National Guard and Polish Air Force concluded training for Aviation Rotation 19.1, in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve. During the exercise, Airmen strengthened capabilities between U.S. and NATO allies through participation in strategic joint force operations and training to enhance partner interoperability and maintain combined readiness.

These rotations have proven vital in maintaining theater security by increasing overall presence and further enhancing the United State's commitment to NATO partners such as Poland.

"The exercise was very successful," said Lt. Col. Jeffrey Mull, 136th Airlift Wing deployed squadron commander. "You have two countries that are very interested in bilateral training, and though the 136th Airlift Wing has never flown with the Polish Air Force before, their expertise merged seamlessly with ours as far as the execution of the tactical airlift mission goes. Typical to any of our operations, we overcame weather and maintenance, and were able to accomplish some excellent training together."

Throughout the Aviation Rotation, the two air forces were able to engage in a number of combined training events: formation flights in C-130 Hercules aircraft, fighter engage-

ments with Polish F-16 Fighting Falcons, combat offloads, and high velocity container delivery system drops. Training together facilitated a platform to build relationships, and formed a conduit for the exchange information and skills useful in future operations.

"We are happy that Airmen from the 136th Airlift Wing were here with us," said Col. Grzegorz Kołodziejczyk, Powidz Air Base commander. "We are always happy to work with Texas. You have been flying the C-130 longer than us, and you gave us your knowledge. Thank you again for your visit, you are always welcome here at Powidz."

During a ceremony, the Polish Air Force hosted a celebratory dinner for the entire team. Both air forces expressed their gratitude for the experience and presented each other with parting mementos.

"One of the Polish flight patches they gave us says 'Razem Silniejsi,' which translates to 'Stronger Together,'" Mull said. "The saying is 100 years old, and American Airmen have been flying alongside the Polish Air Force since 1919. We understand the importance of our mission here for both of our countries, and we look forward to continuing our work together in the future." **-D**

(Top) 1st Lt. Chad Douglass, 181st Airlift Squadron C-130H2 Hercules co-pilot, mans the controls above the Polish countryside during a formation flight with the Polish Air Force on March 13, 2019. (U.S. Air National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Sean Kornegay)

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TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT



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ALMOST LOST HOPE:

THE JOURNEY FROM IRAQI TRANSLATOR TO TEXAS GUARDSMAN

*Story by Capt. Nadine Wiley De Moura
Texas Joint Counter Drug Task Force*

AUSTIN, Texas— An old pot filled with water boils on an electric stove to be used for taking a warm shower, drinking or cooking. The government-run electric supply is limited to five hours a day leaving people reliant on generators. The streets are littered with trash and sewage and sometimes it's unsafe to go outside due to chaos surrounding the regime.

Centuries of war and corruption had led to failing infrastructure, and a people controlled by Saddam Hussein's reign of terror, the daily reality for the people of Iraq was economic and emotional despair.

For Baghdad native, Spc. Hussein Khairi, the poorly managed resources and living in a corrupt government were interwoven into his daily routine. Despite this, he studied passionately, under his father's instruction, learning English, not knowing that another war was ahead and his diligence in learning English would provide him the opportunity to help change his country for the better.

In 2003 the United States Military invaded Iraq. In need of interpreters Soldiers turned to local civilians that were willing to assist in the mission to topple Saddam. Khairi's father was one of the first translators hired. After seeing the positive impact his father made, Khairi applied to be a translator as well.

"Helping translate for U.S. troops was something I really had a passion in doing and I believed in what I did, which was helping both countries, Iraq and the United States," Khairi, 36, said. "Our convoys had been hit many times by improvised explosive devices and sniper but I really didn't care if something happened to me because that was the only way we would be able to stop terrorism."

For five years, Khairi worked as an Iraqi translator for U.S. troops, traveling with them on dangerous convoys and joining them on missions where came to understand American beliefs and values. He was prompted after this to work toward becoming not only a U.S. Citizen, but an American Soldier.



Spc. Hussein Khairi, then a private first class, sprints through the finish line of the eight-mile ruck march event during the unit level tryouts in order to qualify for the 2019 Best Warrior Competition for the Texas Military Department, at Camp Swift, in Bastrop Texas, Dec. 14, 2018. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by: Capt. Nadine Wiley De Moura)

For translators like Khairi, who speak five different dialects of the Arabic language, Egyptian, Levantine, Yemeni and Saudi, assisting U.S. troops had put himself and his family in harm's way.

"Translators were under threat 24-7 because regardless of where you are, the enemy is always hunting for you," said Khairi. "The translator would be with the troops and they actually would try to target you among the U.S. troops. My family and I were targeted on my days off and in my civilian life because they view translators as traitors."

Khairi, who had been translating for U.S. troops including the Navy, Army and Marines since he was 18 years-old, sought a more secure future for his family. He applied for a special immigrant visa that would allow his family to relocate to the U.S. and lead to eventual American Citizenship.

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"After five years of living in the United States, I had the opportunity to become a U.S. citizen," Khairi said. "In 2014, I was offered a job to work with the Department of Defense as a contractor. Because of the mission, I had to renounce my Iraqi citizenship. I was sent over on a deployment to Iraq and Kuwait as a contractor."

While overseas on his deployment, the Department of Defense offered him a three-year contract. Khairi declined. His dream was to serve as an U.S. Soldier.

"With all of the years that I served alongside the U.S. troops, I was a fully uniformed contractor and translator," Khairi said.

"I was carrying a weapon, because I worked with a Military Transition Team. To be honest, I thought that I'd be better being enlisted versus being a contractor."

Upon his return from Iraq and one year shy of the Army age cut off, Spc. Khairi enlisted in the Texas Army National Guard in March of 2017.

"I always wanted to do something for my country, so joining the U.S. troops to assist in the Iraqi freedom operation was one of the first things that I've done," said Khairi,

Khairi's path to completing Army basic training was not without obstacles. Enlisting as an older Soldier meant that he would have to keep up with his 18-year-old basic trainees.

"It was hard to be treated as an 18-year-old kid when I was three years older than my drill sergeant," Khairi said. "On an individual basis I was treated differently because they knew that I've been deployed and have been through to a lot of things while I was serving the U.S."

Despite the challenges he faced as an older enlistee, he was the fastest among his class with a 2-mile run time of 11 minutes and 10 seconds.

"It was very difficult," Khairi said. "But I am one of those people that doesn't like to give up."

After graduating basic training, Khairi joined the Texas National Guard Joint Counter Drug Task Force and now works as an analyst in support of law enforcement agencies. His job involves monitoring cameras across the border for illegal activities and reporting the illicit activity to the proper agency.

"Specialist Khairi has been instrumental in capturing a large number of drug seizures in camera images along the border," 1st Sgt. Demetrice Gonzales, Khairi's Counter drug



Spc. Hussein Khairi poses for a picture in uniform during his days of translating for U.S. troops. (Courtesy Photo)

team leader, said. "His professional and keen attitude has improved how Soldiers and Airmen are assigned to the Border Security Operation Center located in Austin, Texas."

After a year of being on the task force, it wasn't long before Khairi sought out the opportunity to represent his unit in the 2019 Texas Military Department Best Warrior Competition.

Capt. Cecilia Magana, Commander of the 101st Information Battalion, said that Khairi was the first to volunteer to compete.

"For any volunteer opportunities, he is the first to raise his hand," Magana said. "He is one of those top guys that you love and want them to be a part of your team. If he stays in, he could go all the way up. He would be an amazing first sergeant one day."

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Spc. Hussein Khairi stands with his wife, Otoor, in their living room, Feb. 25, 2019. Khairi accredits much of his success to Otoor and the sacrifices that she has made for their family. Before becoming a citizen and enlisting in the Texas (Courtesy Photo)

For Khairi, his participation in the event is just another challenge and opportunity to test his limits.

"I always like to get out of my comfort zone, try new things and test my ability of reaching a new goal," Khairi said. "It's not necessary for me to win the best warrior-- completion will be a win for me."

At the competition, Khairi, once again was competing against and working with Soldiers and Airmen half his age. , But he would not be alone as he struggled to be named the best warrior in Texas. Sgt. Kristopher Celaya, would serve as his sponsor.

"One thing that I kept reminding him of, was that he was physically out there competing with people who were 15 years younger than he was," said Celaya, "I think it says a lot about an individual to be able to physically outperform or match people who should be in better shape than you."

Celaya learned a lot about Khairi and the Muslim culture during their monthly trainings for the state competition.

"He would take me to different Middle Eastern restaurants in the Austin area and to the San Antonio area and I learned about his background and history," Celaya said. "It was eye-opening to know that he had a very extensive background even before enlisting."

Meeting Khairi left an impact on Celaya, who said that he now feels more appreciative of the freedoms that he has

as an American, and an understanding of what the allies in the countries that the U.S. is at war with have to sacrifice for a better life.

"I think Khairi's story brings to the Texas National Guard a sense of understanding of the other side of the conflicts that are happening in the Middle East," Celaya said. "We are born here understanding that you are free and have these rights but you don't know what it is like to fight for and appreciate them. For someone to live there, put himself in harm's way, fight for us, then come back, enlist and fight for America, it gives you a better sense of respect and that these freedoms should not be taken lightly at all."

The freedoms that Khairi has fought for are the reason he never passes up an opportunity.

"A couple of reasons give me this drive," Khairi said. "Coming from a country that doesn't offer that many opportunities and you have to fight really hard to get into something that you like. In fact, sometimes you have to fight really hard to get into something that you don't even like, but you just want to get a job and to be able to feed your family. Then I came to a country that is full of opportunities. All you have to do is keep on trying."

Khairi had to make time for training while maintaining his full-time job on the Counter Drug Task Force, fulfilling his monthly drills with his unit, maintaining a family of six and studying for his criminal justice degree at Austin Community College.

"Finding the time is the most difficult thing, especially when you have a house of my size, two adults and four kids," Khairi said. "Regardless of how many things that you have on your plate, you can still manage if you do time management well."

Khairi accredits much of his success to his wife, Otoor, and her unwavering support and sacrifice for him and his family.

Khairi and Otoor both graduated college and received degrees in Iraq that do not transfer to the United States. When the couple made the decision to move to the U.S., Otoor had to leave behind her family and her job.

"It was her who lost everything and sacrificed everything for me," Khairi said. "I had always worked with U.S. troops and was familiar with the language and culture. For her it was all new, so she did not speak English as well as now. She left a really good job with the Ministry of Oil, and was going after a bachelor's degree. She left all of that for me so I appreciate it."

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Spc. Khairi Hussein from the 71st Theater Information Operations Group prepares for the land navigation portion of a competition at Camp Swift near Bastrop, Texas on Dec. 15th, 2018 (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Melissa Washington)

While juggling Khairi's hectic schedule and tag-teaming with Khairi to take care of the kids, Otoor is also studying for a pharmaceutical degree at Austin Community College. Despite the sacrifices and challenges, Otoor remains positive.

"What he does means a lot because he is perfect in his work in whatever he does," Otoor said. "Whether it be the military or Counter drug-- in everything he does, he is the best. I like what he does and I like to see him be number one for everything-- his job, his family, his imagination. We work together."

With the Best Warrior Competition out of the way, Khairi has his eyes set on his next endeavor.

In a few short months Khairi will join the U.S. Customs and Border Protection as a Border Patrol Officer.

"We want to take full advantage of all of the skills that I have," Khairi said. "In the customs program, because of my language skills, I will be an asset and they will assign me to a port of entry where there is a large Middle Eastern community."

The Border Patrol training will require six months in Georgia and an additional 10 weeks of Spanish classes.

Upon learning that Khairi is also striving to challenge himself again by taking on a new career, Khairi's sponsor wasn't surprised.

"Specialist Khairi teaches younger, older and all Soldiers that the only limits we have are the ones we put on ourselves," said Celaya. "He is a great Soldier, he is a great husband, father, he is an all-around a good role model to have for lower enlisted Soldiers. I believe he will go far, and the kind of person who can be the leader to raise morale and people to look up to."

By becoming a border patrol officer, Khairi will be fulfilling his other dream of becoming a law enforcement officer.

"I think that is one of the keys also having lived in a period of time in a country that has almost lost hope, to coming to a country that is full of hope and opportunities," said Khairi. "I definitely strive to take advantage of every single opportunity that we have." **-D**

PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD:



1Lt. Micheal Byers
Texas State Guard Engineer Group

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1st Battalion, B Dive Team

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Texas Army National Guard
Bravo Company 636 EMIB

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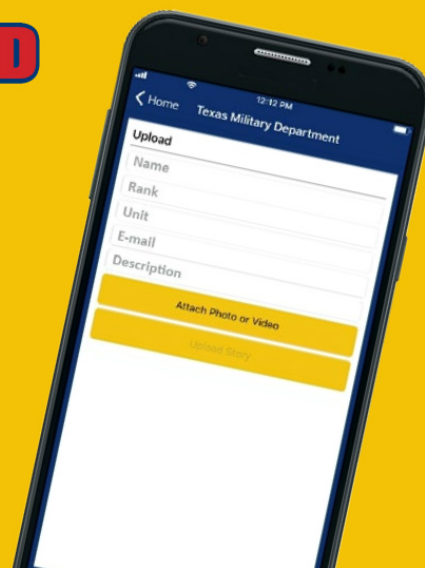


Pvt. David Neet
Texas State Guard
Group photo of new training unit after completing land navigation exercise

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