



NORTH DAKOTA GUARDIAN

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March 2010

The Door is Open

219th Security Forces
Squadron Looking for
Soldiers and Airmen
to Fill Ranks

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Airman's Incredible Journey



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A Dynamic, Relevant Force

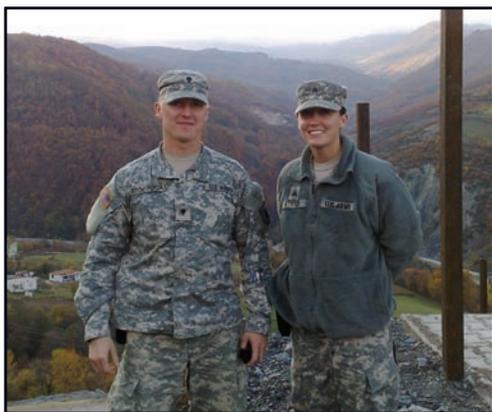
March is Women's History Month. Women in the N.D. National Guard play important and vital roles as Soldiers and Airman. Profiled here are just a few of the many prominent female leaders within the organization. They have answered the call to serve and are an inspiration to future leaders



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A Story of Strength

Senior Airmen Theta Olson has had one eventful year. She deployed to Kuwait and while there was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Olson, always upbeat and optimistic, never gave up and comes out of her battle with the disease stronger than ever.



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Spc. Ivan Nychporuk, of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) 12, knows five different languages and his linguistic skills are used regularly as he serves with the N.D. National Guard on a yearlong mobilization to the Balkans.

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Digital photos should be at least 300 dpi.

On the Cover



Why Not Minot?: Airmen from the 219th Security Forces Squadron enter the glass house building of the military operations in urban terrain (MOUT) village during a training exercise at Camp Grafton Training Center Aug. 2. Soldiers and Airmen who transfer into the Minot-based unit may qualify for significant signing bonuses. To read more about these incentives, turn to page seven. (Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp, 119th Wing)

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Recognition of Excellence Goes a Long Way

In March, we will celebrate an annual tradition with the Happy Hooligans. We will gather together and honor the accomplishments of several outstanding Airmen during the 2010 Outstanding Airman of the Year banquet.

This banquet is more than just an evening to join with co-workers, family and friends to honor the best of the best in our organization. It's a demonstration of what the personnel in our unit are capable of as well as a show of the importance of instilling a hard work ethic and sincere dedication to each of our tasks, day in and day out.

Change is inevitable. The fact that I am now the base commander is proof of that. With change can come chaos if we don't recognize the importance of it and embrace it with open arms. An organization that is not ready or prepared for change will fail.

As Airmen and Soldiers of the N.D. National Guard, we need to be able to accept that change will constantly occur within our careers and our personal lives. As we manage the obstacles that come with change, we need to be able to differentiate between the ordinary performers and the outstanding performers while this

change is taking place. We need to set those outstanding performers aside and recognize them.

Throughout March, we will be recognizing our military members — past and present. As I mentioned, we will honor our Airmen during

the Outstanding Airman of the Year banquet on March 6. On March 9, Maj. Gen. (Ret.) A.P. MacDonald will be recognized for his numerous achievements as a prominent figure in the N.D. National Guard when he is in-

ducted into the North Dakota Aviation Hall of Fame. We also will recognize our exceptional Soldiers during the Soldier of the Year presentation during the National Guard Association of the United States banquet the following weekend, March 13. Additionally, we will announce the officers of the year in both the Army and Air National Guard at this banquet.

That's a lot of recognition, and that is exactly what we need to do.

These events demonstrate the inspirational achievements of all of our military members and although these formal events are a vital part of our organization, we also must take the time to recognize our members each and every day. Thanking a Soldier or

“Thanking a Soldier or Airman for their work can make all the difference when it comes to their job satisfaction.”



Col. Rick Gibney

119th Wing Commander
North Dakota National Guard

Airman for their work can make all the difference when it comes to their job satisfaction.

I challenge everyone out there, whatever your rank or position, to recognize our personnel. Take the time and say, “good job” when warranted. Acknowledge and praise that outstanding Soldier or Airman during a commanders’ call. Take a moment and make sure that those individuals you supervise know that you notice their efforts.

Times are constantly changing, and the only way we can conquer these changes is by depending on the incredible military members with whom we work. Exceptional people are the key to success in any organization and recognizing these Airmen and Soldiers should be one of the most important tasks for any supervisor at any level in our organization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Gibney".

Col. Rick Gibney

KFOR Soldiers Pay Tribute to Memory of Fallen Comrade

By Sgt. Jill Fischer
116th Public Affairs Detachment

N.D. National Guard Sgt. Terry L. Rishling was remembered Feb. 15 by those who he served with as a role model and a father figure in a platoon of relatively young Soldiers.

Fellow KFOR Soldiers in Multi-National Battle Group-East, including Lt. Col. Lee Nordin, of Grand Forks, battalion commander of the 231st Maneuver Task Force (MTF), lined up during a ceremony in Camp Bondsteel to memorialize their fallen friend who died suddenly of natural causes Feb. 11 while deployed on a NATO peacekeeping mission.

The ceremony opened with Nordin, who called Rishling, a committed father, a dedicated husband to his wife, Nancy, a friend to everyone he met and a warrior willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for a grateful nation.

"When you met Terry, you never forgot who he was," Nordin said.

The ceremony also was attended by Brig. Gen. Al Dohrmann, of Bismarck, MNBG-E commander; and Command Sgt. Maj. Jack W. Cripe, of Dickinson, senior enlisted Soldier in MNBG-E.

But it was the words of those Soldiers who looked up to Rishling as a quiet leader that carried special meaning during the ceremony.

"He touched so many of our lives," said



Sgt. Terry L. Rishling

Sgt. Samuel Hemphill, of Bismarck, Rishling's squad leader. "He brought a mature outlook to a fairly young platoon. After meeting Terry and getting to know him, you knew you had changed; you were better for knowing him; I was better for knowing him.

"His work ethic was outstanding. He would supervise and pitch in at the same time, often doing twice the work of his troops and taking half of the breaks. He was a fine example of an NCO and I'm sure I learned more from him than he had learned from me."

Sgt. Ashley Timian, of Fargo, said that Rishling left an indelible mark on the lives of each of his platoon mates.

"He was a guy who could make anyone laugh, and when he laughed, he made everyone around him laugh," Timian said. "No matter how awful a day you could be having, he could always make you feel better.

Timian said Rishling was a great mentor for the young Soldiers with whom he served.

"He saw things in life so differently than we see them," she said. "I learned so much from Terry and will carry them with me always. Our squad will never be the same, but we will be better in life and what we do because of Sgt. Rishling."

Sgt. 1st Class Gabriel Gietzen, of Glen Ullin, Rishling's platoon sergeant, said Rishling was an outstanding team leader and Soldier, and his service was marked

with excellence.

Final tributes also were given by 1st Lt. Anthony Bryant, Leonard, N.D., Alpha Company, 231st MTF commander; and Chaplain (1st Lt.) Brock Sailer, Cando, N.D., 231st MTF battalion chaplain.

The ceremony concluded with a "final role call" sounded by Sgt. 1st Class Kendall Struxness, of Jamestown, followed by the firing of volleys and the solemn playing of Taps.

A memorial was set up in the auditorium, giving Soldiers the opportunity to honor Rishling with a final salute as they filed out.

"He is definitely irreplaceable and will be forever missed and never forgotten," Timian said.

Rishling, 38, was a team leader for Third Squad, Third Platoon of the 231st MTF, based in Valley City.

He enlisted with Charlie Company, 141st Engineer Combat Battalion, Bismarck, of the N.D. Army National Guard, on July 13, 2001. On Sept. 1, 2005, he joined Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 141st Engineer Combat Battalion in Valley City, and then transferred to Alpha Company, 231st Brigade Support Battalion (BSB) on Sept. 26, 2006.

Rishling is survived by his wife, Nancy A. (Gailfus) Rishling; daughters, Sophie E. Rishling, 8, and Courtney M. Rishling, 20, Fargo; his parents, John and Gloria Rishling, Belcourt, N.D.; and siblings Collette Nadeau, John Jr. and Mindy Rishling, Kathy and Lee Delong, Dixie Rishling, Tracy and JD Nables, and Roni and Stacy Rishling.

N.D. National Guard Hosts Clergy Day

Area clergy and church staff members met with local military chaplains to learn about resources that are available to help them meet the needs of military families in their congregations at the Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Bismarck Feb. 18. as part of the annual Clergy Day sponsored by the N.D. National Guard.

"For some of our military members, their church is their bedrock and faith plays an instrumental role in their lives. It is essential that area clergy understand some of the unique challenges and stresses

placed on today's military members and their families," said Chaplain Maj. David Johnson, staff chaplain, N.D. National Guard.

In 2009 alone, more than 900 North Dakota Soldiers and Airmen deployed overseas.

"Many of these military members and their families are members of church congregations all over the state," Johnson added.

Topics presented at the event included: special needs of military families and how local churches can connect with and serve these families, deployment and reintegra-

tion issues faced by military members, referral resources available to military families and opportunities for clergy in the military ministry.

Detachment 42 Soldiers Return

Soldiers of the Bismarck-based Detachment 42 (Det. 42), Operational Support Airlift (OSA) returned to North Dakota Feb. 18 after a yearlong deployment to the Horn of Africa.

"These Soldiers have been performing an invaluable mission with marked professionalism and skill," Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, N.D. National Guard

adjutant general, said. “Their dedication to duty and noted North Dakota work ethic is something of which we can all be proud. I’m also grateful to the Families and employers of these Soldiers. Their sacrifices have not gone unnoticed during the past year.

This small but highly specialized aviation unit operates one C-12 Huron aircraft while stateside but operated two C-12 aircraft during this deployment. Their mission is to provide short-notice fixed-wing transportation for personnel and cargo within their area of operations. Detachment 42 is one of 42 C-12 detachments nationwide assigned to various state National Guard units.

Det. 42 was mobilized in March 2009 and served in the Djibouti Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa. The detachment consists of eight Soldiers, and is commanded by Chief Warrant Officer Four Travis Bridwell. Sgt. 1st Class John Zacher is the unit’s senior enlisted Soldier.

Guard Participates in Training Exercise for Response to Potential Flooding

The N.D. National Guard spent three days responding to a simulated flood Feb. 5-7. It was a comprehensive training exercise for a scenario that could potentially become a reality this spring.

“This is another example of the National Guard’s commitment to preparedness,” said Gov. John Hoeven. “Whether home or abroad, the dedicated men and women of our Guard are always ready, willing and able when duty calls.”

The training exercise involved nearly 50 people and took place at Fraine Barracks Joint Operations Center (JOC), which would be the coordinating center in case of an actual emergency. The entire weekend was dedicated to further preparing the N.D. National Guard for potential flooding scenarios this spring.

The N.D. National Guard has nearly 2,700 Guard members available to respond in the event of flooding or other possible threats, as well as equipment such as bulldozers, loaders, dump trucks, helicopters, water purification equipment, pumps and generators. The Guard also has a partnership with surrounding states called an Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). The EMAC is a pre-coordinated partnership with Minn., Mont. and S.D. to provide assistance to N.D. within 72 hours if needed.

Exercises are regularly conducted to



Spc. Joshua Dods

From left to right, Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, N.D. National Guard adjutant general, N.D. Gov. John Hoeven and Brig. Gen. Al Dohrmann, commander of Multi-National Task Force-East in Kosovo, participate in a press conference in Kosovo Feb. 5.

enhance and maintain emergency preparedness for state emergencies. The Guard serves as a support element, and when called upon would respond with equipment and personnel to the needed areas of the state. The Guard works with local, state and federal emergency responders in collaboration with the N.D. Department of Emergency Services to assist the state and communities with any emergencies.

N.D. Governor, N.D. Adjutant General Visit Soldiers in Kosovo

North Dakota Governor, the Honorable John Hoeven, and Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, adjutant general of the N.D. National Guard, wrapped up a visit to Kosovo Feb. 6, where state Soldiers are deployed on NATO peacekeeping missions at the Camp Bondsteel base and in Pristina/Prishtina.

The Governor and Sprynczynatyk made the trip to show their support and thanks for their work and the sacrifices made by all North Dakota Soldiers in the Balkans region and around the world.

“In my short time on the ground here, interacting with our State’s Soldiers I’ve seen firsthand the outstanding difference they are making on the streets in Kosovo and how much they are appreciated by the people who live here,” Hoeven said. “This mission is a challenging one but it is also a very important and rewarding mission. They truly are tremendous people,

Citizen-Soldiers, and we appreciate all of their efforts.”

Free Motorcycle Safety Classes Available to N.D. Guardsmen Through ABATE

The 2010 N.D. Motorcycle Safety Program (NDMSP) classes are being offered by the American Bikers Aiming Toward Education (ABATE). Riders can register at www.ndmsp.com. For the 2010 code which allows N.D. National Guardsmen to take the course, contact the N.D. National Guard State Safety Office at 701-333-2281 or e-mail bradley.hoines@us.army.mil or 701-333-2280 or e-mail monte.ohlhauser@us.army.mil. Ensure you do not share the code with fellow personnel. Each person must contact the Safety Office to ensure the name list for ABATE matches the name list with the N.D. National Guard State Safety Office.

Classes take place between April and September and are offered at various days and times to accommodate most riders. Numerous cities host the classes, including Bismarck, Bowman, Devils Lake, Dickinson, Grand Forks, Fargo, Hazen, Jamestown, Minot, Wahpeton and Williston.

The NDMSP is committed to reducing motorcycle crashes, injuries and fatalities. Riding a motorcycle requires training and skill that many riders — even those who have been riding for years — may lack. Safety courses can help riders sharpen their skills and, in turn, prevent accidents. ■

Covenant Affirms Commitment to Families

By Kathryn Benson
North Dakota Community Support Coordinator

The Army Family Covenant was originally signed on October 7, 2007 and two years later re-signed to emphasize the Army's commitment to Soldiers' and Families' quality of life.

The covenant focused on five key areas:

- Standardizing and funding existing family programs and services
- Increasing accessibility and quality of healthcare
- Improving Soldier and Family housing
- Ensuring excellence in school, youth services and child care
- Expanding education and employment opportunities for Family members.

Just six months after the original signing, the N.D. National Guard signed a Family Covenant on April 13, 2008 at the annual Family/Volunteer workshop in Bismarck. The Family Covenant is our leadership's promise to take care of Soldiers, Airmen and their Families by recognizing the commitment and increasing sacrifices that our Families make every day. It is also to recognize that the strength of our Guardsmen comes from the strength of their Families.

Although the language may appear the same as the Army's covenant, and the focus areas are identical, the promise is huge. The covenant is inclusive of all North Dakota service members and military Families. By standardizing and funding existing family programs, we are able to equip our Families and volunteers with tools and resources to be resilient. Funding in the National Guard comes from state and federal sources and by standardizing programs we can use those funds efficiently.

The focus on healthcare has brought us Tricare Reserve Select for those traditional Soldiers and Airmen that may not have carried medical coverage. It has also provided education at community medical providers on accepting Tricare as a healthcare plan as well as educating those providers on military health issues.

You may also wonder how we have been able to resolve housing issues. This focus area has led to the production of modernized barracks and quarters on installations



Kathryn Benson, right, is presented a "thank you" plaque by Suzanne Richards, yellow ribbon support specialist for the N.D. National Guard. Benson was a guest speaker at a Hearts for Heroes event in Bismarck Feb.5, which is designed to support Family members who have military members deployed.

Sgt. Ann Knudson

where our Soldiers and Airmen train as well as here at home (does anyone else miss those tin-huts at Camp Grafton?).

By expanding our Youth, Children, School Service program, we have involved our public schools and educated the educators of our children on stresses of deployment and the nature of military Families.

Childcare continues to be an issue for Guardsmen and we have made great strides in accommodating that need. The YMCA now offers respite childcare for Families of deployed service members of the Guard and Reserve.

Expanding education and employment opportunities for Family members has also been addressed by offering eligible service

members the ability to transfer their G.I. Bill benefits to an immediate Family member. Master's degrees and other programs are available to spouses and Family members as well as non-credit courses. These benefits are offered through various military Web sites and programs and are valuable educational opportunities and are available to Families at the volunteer academies held around the state.

To find out more about changes and upgrades to current benefits, join us at the Adjutant General's Symposium for Families March 19 – 21 at the Radisson in Bismarck. The N.D. National Guard Family Covenant will be re-signed. For more information, contact the Military Service Center at 701-333-4800. ■

Chaplain's Corner: The Challenge of Temptation

By Chaplain (Maj.) James Cheney
119th Wing

"There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him ... What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts."
(Mark 7:14-15, 20-21).



Maj. James Cheney

During Lent, Pope Benedict XVI is asking us to examine the interior struggle all of us have in order to bring justice to the world. Traditionally, our struggles fall into seven basic categories: pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth. This Lent, a challenge for us would be to suffer through a temptation in any one of these areas. When we suffer through a temptation we find out what it's like to get on the other side of a temptation. This will also help us begin the process of building virtue in our lives. Virtue develops the habit of belief and belief in God is the first critical step toward trust in our God relationship that allows the possibility of love.

Signing on the Dotted Line

219th Security Forces Squadron Offers Enlistees Bonuses

By Capt. Penny Ripperger
119th Wing

Brian Olson had no idea that he would be making Hooligan history when he decided to enlist into the N.D. Air National Guard on Feb. 5.

At the age of 37, Olson is the oldest non-prior service enlistee to join the Happy Hooligans. As a very active man, an avid triathlon competitor and two-time Iron Man athlete to be exact, Olson is used to being mistaken for being younger than he looks. The good-spirited attention he received about being the oldest enlistee was a new experience for him.

"I never thought of myself as old, but now...I'm not so sure," laughed Olson during the enlistment ceremony.

Olson is the first enlistee to take advantage of the new incentives for the 219th Security Forces Squadron (SFS) in Minot, N.D. He heard about the opportunities from his future recruiter, Tech. Sgt. Tina Sly, at a career fair as a career services advisor at Rasmussen Business College in Fargo.

Rasmussen is a newly approved college eligible for tuition assistance at the N.D. Air National Guard.

"I wanted more information about the benefits of joining the Air Guard for my students. But as I talked to Tina, my questions went from inquiring on behalf of my students and more for myself," Olson said.

A college graduate with a degree in criminal justice from the University of North Dakota, Olson is back in school at North Dakota State University working on a degree in elementary education.

"I've always wanted to work with kids. I hope to get into coaching someday," he said.

He described how a close family friend, retired Happy Hooligan Tech. Sgt. Scott Breidenbach, talked to him about joining the Air Guard.

"Scott described his time with the Happy Hooligans as one of the best



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

Maj. Nathan Brenneman, commander of the 119th Force Support Squadron, right, witnesses the enlistment signature of Brian Olson at the N.D. Air National Guard, Fargo, Feb. 5. Olson is 37 years old and is the first non-prior service unit member over the age of 35 to enlist since the maximum enlistment age for Air Guard members was raised from 35 to 40.

experiences of his life," Olson said. "That says a lot about this place and it helped my wife and I make my decision about joining."

Olson will leave for Basic Military Training in August. He's looking forward to the physical and mental challenge of the training.

"I'm definitely not going into this thinking it will be easy. I just want to get as much out of this experience as I can," Olson said.

Following Basic Military Training, Olson will complete 13 weeks of security forces technical training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas and 95 days of follow-on training at Minot Air Force Base (AFB).

Unlike Brian, Airman or Soldiers who decide to transfer into the 219th SFS may not have to attend technical training based on their previous military training; however, they would still be required for the training at Minot AFB since it is specific to that unit.

Maj.Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, N.D. adjutant general, sent a letter to all N.D. National Guard members in February that

explained the benefits for Soldiers and Airmen who decide to transfer into the 219th SFS.

"Brian is a great example of someone taking advantage of the incredible opportunities available at the 219th," said Master Sgt. Tanya Augdahl, 219th SFS recruiter.

"Prior Service members can earn a \$20,000 bonus with a six-year commitment or a \$12,500 bonus with a three-year commitment if they transfer to the Air Guard. Current members of the 119th Wing can earn a \$5,000 bonus. Non-prior members, like Brian, can earn a bonus up to \$25,000," Augdahl added.

With his optimistic attitude, Olson is looking at his enlistment as his next new adventure. His current passion involves triathlons and he is already looking at ways to mold his interests into the next phase of his life.

"When I would run in marathons, I always admired the athletes who wore the military jerseys. I'm excited that pretty soon I will get to wear one too," Olson said. "I already checked out the Air Force jerseys the last time I was at Scheels." ■

TODAY'S GUARD MEMBERS CONTINUE TO BLAZE TRAILS FOR FUTURE LEADERS

By Sgt. Eric W. Jensen
Joint Force Headquarters

Women today represent nearly 15 percent of the National Guard, but their contributions to the U.S. Armed Forces reach far back into our Nation's history. For proof of the remarkable attributions of this small but necessary group, one need only take a brief look at some of the iconic female fighters from battlefields past.

Take Deborah Sampson, for instance. A Revolutionary War-era New Englander, Sampson disguised herself as a male Soldier in order to gain membership into the Continental Army. Enlisting under the pseudonym of Robert Shurtleff, she was routinely teased by fellow Soldiers for not being able to grow facial hair. Sampson, however, showed unusual toughness and Ramboesque durability in keeping her identity concealed. At one point, she removed a musket ball embedded in her thigh without medical assistance to preserve her secret persona and later returned to combat.

Fast forward 200-plus years and you have Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester, a National Guardsman from Kentucky, who became the first Army female since World War II to be awarded the Silver Star for valor. Hester, along with two members of her unit, decimated a group of insurgent fighters during a convoy ambush in Iraq. American Forces Press Service wrote about her extraordinary immunity to fear, reporting how "Hester led her team through the 'kill zone' and into a flanking position, where she assaulted a trench line with grenades and M203 grenade-launcher rounds. She and Staff Sgt. Timothy Nein, her squad leader, then cleared two trenches, at which time she killed three insurgents with her rifle."

Hester later brushed off accolades of being a female Silver Star recipient by saying, "It really doesn't have anything to do with being a female. It's about the duties I performed that day as a Soldier."

And let's not forget Air Force Maj. Kim Campbell who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism in 2003 after landing an A-10 Thunderbolt II hit by Iraqi



Tech. Sgt. Bradley A. Schneider

Chief Master Sgt. Paula Johnson, right, congratulates Master Sgt. Tanya Augdahl and her husband, Master Sgt. Jason Augdahl, at the 2008 Outstanding Airman of the Year banquet, held Jan. 17, 2009, after the couple received the N.D. Air National Guard Family of the Year award.

Republican Guard rockets. The unflappable pilot, who fellow Airmen nicknamed "KC" for "Killer Chick," landed the aircraft without hydraulics, brakes or steering and narrowly avoided having to parachute into Baghdad. All of this was done after Campbell successfully aided ground forces that had requested the A-10 for close-air support.

This lineage of women leaders continues to grow in all branches of the U.S. military, including members of the N.D. National Guard. Females in uniform continue to break down barriers, proving that they are as vital to mission success as their male counterparts while setting the stage for future women leaders.

★ Command Chief Master Sgt. Paula Johnson ★

Command Chief Master Sgt. Paula Johnson has risen to the top of the enlisted ranks and is frequently sought for advice from those both above and below her in the rank hierarchy. That's a pretty significant characteristic, especially when one of those leaders is N.D. National Guard Adjutant General Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk.

"He knows when I bring things to him that it's important," she said.

Johnson is the first woman to be a member of the adjutant general's Joint Executive Council, senior leaders that work as an executive management team and provide strategic leadership, philosophy and corporate direction for the organization. As State Command Chief (the first female in the N.D. Air National Guard to hold the senior enlisted position), she is



Women

an advocate for Air Guard enlisted issues, including welfare and readiness.

Although she didn't enlist into the Air Guard until she was 31, Johnson had worked with the Happy Hooligans 10 years prior when she performed administrative duties for Chief Master Sgt. (Ret.) J.C. "Jack" Tietgens and later, five different Wing commanders. Since then, she has worked in a number of capacities from multimedia manager to information systems branch chief.

"Life is a learning process, and you are never too old to learn," she said.

Johnson attributes her success to having respect for her peers and being able to work well with others in the organization.

"I am so proud of all the women who volunteer to serve in the military, and especially those who go above and beyond to mentor, train and lead others," she said. "It is not about being proud or selfish, it is about sharing the knowledge and heritage we possess."

★ Col. Giselle "Gigi" Wilz ★

The N.D. Army National Guard is not without its "firsts," as well. Col. Giselle "Gigi" Wilz's achievements have been

monumental. She is among the first women in the organization to climb through the officer ranks to become a "full-bird" colonel. The military life is something she grew up with as one of six children of a N.D. National Guard officer. Three of her siblings have also served in the N.D. National Guard, bringing the family tradition of service to more than 144 years combined, including participation in three wars.

Her father, Charles, served in the Korean War, Giselle in Desert Storm and now a peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, and brother, Grant, deployed in December 2003 as a platoon leader with the 141st Engineer Combat Battalion in support of



Col. Giselle Wilz

Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Wilz's career as an officer quickly ignited as she became one of the youngest officers ever commissioned in the N.D. Army National Guard in 1986 at age 19. Almost 24 years later, she continues her remarkable ascension as a leader, serving as the operations officer with Kosovo Force (KFOR) 12.

"It is important for females in the military that we look beyond those firsts, and appreciate women's commitment to being the best at what they do, no matter what their roles are, and making a difference," Wilz said.

She cites women of the 957th Engineer Company as an example of women leaders coming to the forefront and proving their mettle as Soldiers in the N.D. Army National Guard. Wilz said that the female Soldiers persevered through many stereotypes while deployed to Iraq in 2003 and is glad to see the younger Soldiers, who were privates and specialists at that time, are now mid-grade noncommissioned officers and newly commissioned officers. Some of these women continue to serve with

her in Kosovo. Wilz says Soldiers like these will encourage Guard women of the future.

"Now the next generation of women coming in will not have as tough of time proving themselves," she said.

Wilz said that she has been fortunate

because of the opportunities that were opened up to her. She has been able to secure jobs that were previously closed to women, taking advantage of what came her way, and never passing up a chance to advance.

★ Capt. Amber Monette ★

The expectations of tomorrow's Guard have risen significantly as its global reach

expands and new technologies require more civilian and military education. Capt. Amber Monette can easily be considered part of this new breed of Guardsman. Commissioned in 2005, the full-time training officer for the 188th Air De-



Capt. Amber Monette

fense Artillery (ADA) Headquarters Battalion recently returned from a successful deployment to Afghanistan as the commander of the 188th ADA's RAID III (Rapid Aerostat Initial Deployment). The unit assumed high-tech monitoring responsibilities in Afghanistan using RAID equipment, which incorporates a tower system with sensor technology

to protect forward operating bases.

The nearly 40 Soldiers on the mission were comprised entirely of volunteers, including Monette who had been waiting for her opportunity to mobilize since the 188th ADA Security Forces left for Afghanistan in 2006. Col. Brian Trender called Monette to let her know that she would be commanding RAID III.

"He knew I'd be so excited about it, and when he called he asked, 'Is your door-closed?'" she said.

Monette said the deployment was rewarding and credits the Guardsmen who served with her.

"I had a great unit," she said. "I've had really great Soldiers and noncommissioned officers and a great first sergeant that made the deployment better than I could have possibly asked for."

With the elevated demand for officers nationwide, Monette encourages young Soldiers and Airmen to take the steps to become leaders in their organizations.

"Don't be scared," she said. "Just go for it."

As women in the military continue to assume leadership roles, there is no doubt that many will answer that call. ■

n's HISTORY Month ★

From Deployment to Chemo ...

Her Incredible Journey

By Capt. Penny Ripperger
119th Wing

Not many people would consider themselves lucky when they get cancer. Fewer would look at their experience as an inspirational journey filled with an array of vivid memories and life lessons. And only the exceptional few would find humor in their illness.

Senior Airman Theta Olson is the exception.

She won her battle with cancer, but that's not the story here. Our story is how this 21-year-old woman overcame a life-threatening illness with spunk and dignity, never missing a moment to laugh.

The Diagnosis

"I deployed to Kuwait in May. It was about my second or third week there, and I rubbed my shoulder and felt a large lump. At first I thought it must be from my gear, but it didn't hurt like a normal muscle knot, so I thought I better get it checked out," Olson said.

She went to the medical unit there. The physician assumed it was some sort of bug bite and gave her a week's worth of antibiotics.

"I thought the antibiotics were overkill. I'm thinking, 'I'm fine, it's just some lump. I don't need to take this,' but I took the antibiotics anyway and the lump never went away," Olson said.

Next, the medical unit sent her to a nearby Navy hospital to get an ultrasound.

"After the ultrasound the doctor told me he thought it might be lymphoma. I said 'lymp-what?' I had no idea what that even was. I thought it was some type of cold or something," Olson said.

The doctor encouraged her to be medevaced to Germany for more tests. Olson was hesitant to go.

"I was excited about being in Kuwait and I didn't want to go back. I had just finished my training and unpacking. I had worked hard to get to where I was and it was my time to shine," Olson said. "I think I was also in denial. I wanted to be ignorant and play it off like nothing is happening, that these people don't know me, they're just exaggerating."

She requested a second opinion, and to her dismay, the second doctor agreed that she should go to Germany for more tests. Still not completely sold on the idea of leaving Kuwait for Germany, Olson recalls a conversation that

"(Mom) was ready for me to come home missing a limb or even worse, but she wasn't ready for me to come home with cancer."



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

Senior Airman Theta Olson, left, visits with Dr. Nathan Kobrinsky, Oncologist at MeritCare Roger Maris Cancer Center, Fargo, Feb. 10. Dr. Kobrinsky was Olson's primary physician during her battle against cancer, which is now in remission.

helped her make her decision.

"I remember sitting with Col. Griffin, the Civil Engineer commander there, eating Girl Scout Thin Mint cookies and talking about what I should do. I didn't want to go, but he convinced me. He told me that I wouldn't be letting down the mission and that I needed to take care of myself. That maybe this is nothing and I would just get a fun trip to Germany. Thank God I listened to him."

Olson was medevaced to Landstuhl, a military hospital near Ramstein Air Base in Germany. She described her experience there as "insanely awesome." Tests were performed with no lines, no waiting. It felt like VIP treatment.

She was feeling optimistic. No one thought she had cancer. She was too young, too healthy. With the exception of the lump, she had none of the signs that typical patients have. Even the medical professionals who were giving her

tests expressed doubts, but soon her optimism would face its first real test.

"I was walking back from chow and I saw my doctor waiting for me by my barracks. As soon as I saw him, my heart sank. I knew he wouldn't be meeting me like this if it wasn't bad news. I was with some friends and he asked to see me alone, but I wanted him to tell me the news with my friends near me, so he did. He told me I had and that I was about to begin an incredible journey," Olson said.

The Trip Home

Olson boarded the rotator to take her back to the United States on June 28, 2009. It would be on this flight that she would meet military members of all branches with varying degrees of injuries.

One person she remembers fondly is a Marine who sat by her.

"This Marine had his leg amputated. He was in a lot of pain, but

the whole time he was joking with the nurse that he wanted his prosthetic leg to be turned into a 'machinegun leg' so he could go back to the fight," Olson said.

She also remembers holding the Marine's Purple Heart. It was the first time she had seen the medal up close. It especially struck home for her when she found out that he was her age.

"You don't realize the impact of those who are injured until you actually see it first-hand. The nurses on those planes were incredible. They would go above and beyond to help their patients and make us as comfortable as possible throughout the flights. They weren't helping us just because we were patients; it was because we were their brothers and sisters in arms. I will never forget that," Olson said.

The stories of the patients on the plane ranged from tragic to funny, Olson said. She chuckled as she described her interaction with a Soldier: "When I asked him why his leg was in a cast, he said, 'you know, Humvees ... well, they shouldn't be taken off-roading.'"

After several days of flight, Olson finally landed at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Her parents, (retired Master Sgt.) Gordy Olson and Sheila Olson, were at the base to greet her.

"Once my mom saw me she was able to deal with it a lot better," Olson said. Living in a military family, her mom was accustomed to the risks of deployments. "She was ready for me to come home missing a limb or even worse, but she wasn't ready for me to come home with cancer. She wasn't prepared for me to have to fight for my life in the U.S."

The Cancer Lottery

Hodgkin's Lymphoma has a 95 percent recovery rate and typically affects people in their early 20s to early 40s. Olson describes that acquiring this type of cancer is like winning the "cancer lottery" because of its high success rate.

"It affects the lymph nodes all over your body. Unlike other cancers, like breast cancer, you can't just cut out the abnormal cells because the lymph nodes are all connected together. If you take out one cancerous lymph node, it will just come back. The only way to treat it is through chemo," Olson said.

The normal military procedure was for Olson to be treated at Lackland AFB over a six-month time-period. Olson wanted to come back to North Dakota for her



Tech Sgt. Bradley A. Schneider

The N.D. Air National Guard Auger Inn presents symbolic checks to unit members battling cancer Oct. 3, 2009, Fargo. Pictured, from left to right, are Tech. Sgt. Dan Anderson, Senior Master Sgt. Keith Krogen, Senior Master Sgt. Rod Draeger and Senior Airman Theta Olson. The money was raised through a variety of fundraising activities sponsored by the Auger Inn all-ranks club in an effort to assist the Airmen with the cost of treatment for their illnesses.

treatment, and her Happy Hooligan family fought to get her home.

"I went to high school in Virginia, but my dad who spent most of his military career with the Happy Hooligans, talked me into moving to North Dakota and joining the Air Guard. Now, I'm so glad I did because it was unprecedented what the Wing did for me. They fought to get me here, to get me home for treatment," she said.

Olson explained that Airmen like Senior Master Sgt. Mike Anders, of the 119th Wing Medical Group, pleaded her case by explaining that much of her treatment depends on her attitude and how she can handle the stress. Anders and others said that she would recover faster if she could come home and work at the base among her fellow Hooligans between chemo treatments.

The diligence paid off. Olson was approved to come home. She began her chemo treatments on July 9, 2009 at the Roger Maris Cancer Center in Fargo.

Treatment

Hodgkin's Lymphoma spreads very fast. Often people who have this type of cancer do not display any physical signs until it has progressed to stage three or four, meaning that it is in multiple areas of the body.

"I was lucky because I had the noticeable lump on my shoulder. I also had a cancer spot in my chest that I was

completely unaware of. Even though we caught my cancer right away, I was still already at stage two," Olson said.

Although each case is treated uniquely based on the individual, typically patients up to 20 years old, which was Olson's age at the time, are placed in the pediatric ward for treatment. That's where she met her doctor, the man who would help her through the next several months with laughter and support.

"One of the first things Dr. Kobrinski told me was, 'The object of the game is to kill the cancer before the poison (chemo treatment) kills you. But I'm really good at this, so don't worry.' He was funny from the start," Olson said.

Olson described how the actual day she received the chemo treatments she felt fine. It was about a week later that she would start to feel the effects because that was when her body would begin fighting it.

"The drugs are literally fighting cell regeneration and that is why your hair falls out and your fingernails stop growing," Olson said. "But on the plus side, I didn't have to shave my legs for months and it cleared up my complexion," she joked.

At one point, Olson was on 19 different medications and going in for chemo treatments several days a week. She explained that she learned a great deal about herself throughout the entire process — how a person reacts to the different drugs and situations, physically and emotionally. She



Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp

Airman Theta Olson performs tests and maintenance on emergency management equipment at the 119th Wing Feb. 4.

also appreciated the support from her friends, family and coworkers at the Wing.

“There were days when I was so tired that I would sleep 20 hours a day. It took everything I had to pull myself out of bed to eat,” Olson said. “I wanted to work to keep myself busy, but knowing that on the rough days that I didn’t have to go into work if I didn’t feel up to it was a huge relief.”

Through it all, she did her best to keep her sense of humor and positive outlook during the entire ordeal. She knew that being negative would not get her very far in the process.

“Sure, there were sad moments. At first I was really angry at the cancer, at my situation. But it’s hard to stay mad when you’re sitting in pediatrics next to a happy, bald 3-year-old who is getting chemo with you,” she said.

Olson continued the treatment and she was shocked by the outstanding support she received. Within her own squadron, she found comfort in the fact that two Airmen she works with recently overcame their own battles with cancer.

“By the time I was getting treatment, both of my coworkers were in remission. Knowing that they had fought this battle and won was a constant reminder that I would be okay too,” Olson said.

She also described the Comfort Shawl and Burden Bear that she received from the Enlisted Association. Rosie Clemenson, wife of Chief Master Sgt. Jim Clemenson and mother to Master

Sgt. Erik E. Clemenson and Capt. Justin J. Clemenson, both of the 119th Wing, nominated her for the items.

“I didn’t think I would at first, but I did use the Comfort Shawl and every time I looked at that bear it would remind me of all the people who were thinking and praying for me. When you have that much support, you know you’re not going to fall,” she said.

Another supporter, Olson’s boyfriend, Senior Airman Adam Morine, a fellow Happy Hooligan, who deployed to Iraq in January of 2009, kept in contact with her throughout her treatment. She knew he was a keeper when after he saw her for the first time without any hair via video feed, he said, ‘Wow, you look *hot* bald!’ Olson laughed, “I told him he had been in Iraq too long.”

Shortly after her boyfriend’s return home in August of 2009, Olson was asked to come to the center to see Dr. Kobrinski. She didn’t know what to expect, she only knew that he wanted to see her right away. She brought her boyfriend along for moral support.

“I was nervous. I didn’t know why he wanted to see me. I’m an optimistic person, but I also work in emergency management so I’m envisioning and trying to prepare myself for the worst-case scenario,” Olson said.

Dr. Kobrinski soon calmed her fears and told her and Morine the wonderful news that her cancer was in remission. She was cancer-free after just two cycles, two months sooner than expected.

Olson laughed. “Adam came home on a Tuesday and I was in remission by Friday, now that’s a good week!”

At Morine’s return home celebration the following week, people would say to Olson, “Oh you have cancer and Adam would quickly correct them and say, ‘No, she HAD cancer. It’s gone!’ It was a good day,” Olson said.

Timing is Everything

After Olson went into remission, she went through two more rounds of chemo as a safety precaution, which is typical treatment. Through it all, her thoughts often drifted back to the desert where she was first diagnosed with cancer.

“Half your heart is in the desert and half your heart is here. So when the Airmen I served with came home in October, about the time I finished my last round of chemo, it was good closure for me,” Olson said.

Life is getting back to normal. Her spunk and humor are still in check. She’s back at North Dakota State University, finishing her double major in emergency management and sociology.

“I tried to get a note from Dr. Kobrinski for no homework, but he refused,” Olson chuckled. “But I still think he’s an amazing doctor.”

And in her usual humorous way, she used her shaved head to her advantage on Halloween.

“I dressed up as ‘crazy Britney Spears,’ of course. And my boyfriend was my bodyguard,” Olson said.

It seems that the doctor who stood outside Olson’s barracks that unforgettable day in Germany and confirmed that she had cancer was also correct that she would begin an incredible journey. Without a doubt, Senior Airman Theta Olson had the journey of a lifetime in 2009, a year she will never forget.

“On New Year’s Eve I was thinking about everything that has happened throughout the year. Winning Airman of the Year, my Kuwait deployment and I beat cancer ... yeah; it’s been quite a year. *It’s been a really good year,*” Olson said. ■



Master Sgt. Vincent Larson, of the 119th Communications Flight, uses a snow blower to clear the sidewalk Feb. 16, at the N.D. Air National Guard, Fargo. Snow depths and moisture content around the state of North Dakota are being watched closely and are being compared to last winter in an effort to prepare for possible spring flooding.

Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp



Left, Samantha and Alyssa Reich make Valentine's Day cards for their father, Sgt. Aaron Reich, of Company C, 2-285th Aviation Battalion, at Raymond J. Bohn Armory. Also pictured is Lexee Knopp (in pink). Her father, Chief Warrant Officer Jay Knopp, is also a member of the 2-285th which is currently deployed to Iraq..



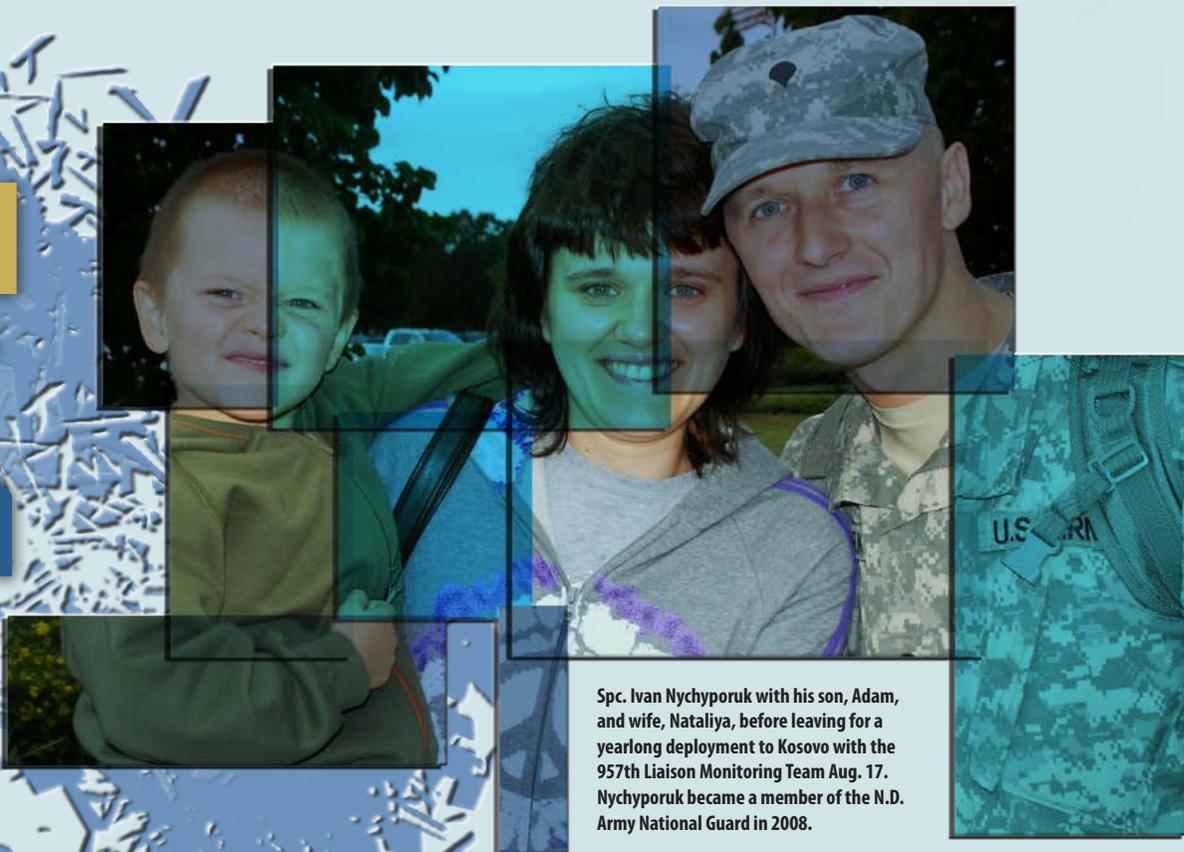
Staff Sgt. Billie Jo Lorus

A Soldier with the N.D. National Guard marksmanship team practices his skills at the pistol range at Raymond J. Bohn Armory, Bismarck. The team moved on to the national Small Arms Championship held at Fort Benning, Ga., Feb. 19. The four-man team placed fifth in the Winston P. Wilson Marksmanship Sustainment Exercise held in Little Rock, Ark., in October earning them spots to compete in the national competition.

GUARDIAN Snapshots

Word of Mouth

N.D. KFOR Soldier Finds 'Nych' for Language



Spc. Ivan Nychporuk with his son, Adam, and wife, Nataliya, before leaving for a yearlong deployment to Kosovo with the 957th Liaison Monitoring Team Aug. 17. Nychporuk became a member of the N.D. Army National Guard in 2008.

By Sgt. 1st Class David Dodds
116th Public Affairs Detachment

Spc. Ivan Nychporuk (Nitch-ip-or-uk) has told his story more times than he can count in at least four different languages. He speaks five.

You see, locals around here aren't accustomed to KFOR (Kosovo Forces) Soldiers, who wear the American Flag over their right shoulder, speaking their language. The Americans have always used interpreters for that.

And everyone around here knows the official NATO language is English, so, even KFOR Soldiers from other nations automatically assume the proper speech when addressing an American.

That's why Nychporuk, a N.D. National Guard Soldier from Bismarck, is such a novelty here. The quizzical looks, the raised eye brows, the slack-jawed wonderment he gets the moment he opens his mouth is his cue to rehash his life.

The path that led Nychporuk to Kosovo, as a U.S. KFOR Soldier, began 31 years ago in Poromiv, a village two miles from the Polish border, in the former Soviet republic of Ukraine.

Nychporuk's boyhood Ukraine was the powerhouse of the Post World War II Soviet machine, leading much of Europe in industrial production, arms manufacturing and high-tech research. It was also the motherland of many members of the Soviet leadership as well as world-class athletes, scientists and artists.

But, for Nychporuk, it also was a place of turmoil, political unrest and religious persecution for friends and loved ones. He

was only 8 when a reactor at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded, raining cancer-causing radiation on 2.2 million of his fellow countrymen.

He was 12 when he saw Ukraine step out from behind the Iron Curtain and declare its independence as a sovereign state. And he was 13 when family friend, Peter Peterchuk, an Evangelic Christian, fled religious strife for a new life in Bismarck, North Dakota, a place at the time that could have been as far away as the moon to Nychporuk.

He was 25 years old when the so-called "Orange Revolution" ignited over a corrupt run-off election for the Ukrainian presidency. The massive nationwide protests proved successful; it should have been a new day, again, for Ukraine, but Nychporuk quickly became disillusioned with the direction of his country.

"Huge hope and bigger disappointment" is how he describes the aftermath of the revolution.

In August 2006, at the age of 27, Nychporuk, with a master's degree in physics from Volyn University in Ukraine; his wife, Nataliya, and one-year-old son, Adam, in tow; took a risk and headed for America. Destination? Where else? Bismarck.

They spent their first three months on U.S. soil living with their old family friends, the Peterchuks, who, after immigrating through a local refugee program, had established themselves in the Bismarck area. Mr. Peterchuk is a pastor of Evangelic Christian church in Bismarck and had a good job with Bobcat.

"You needed to have a place to stay before you could move to the United States and before you could get a Social Security number and then a job," Nychporuk said.

Right away, Nychporuk started taking English as a Second Language classes at the Bismarck Adult Learning Center.

**"He's definitely
been a huge asset
for us to have him
on our team when
our interpreters
aren't available."**

— Sgt. Kylie Kytlor



Sgt. Kylie Ktytor

“It took a couple of months before I could start to speak fairly well; I pretty much spent two straight months every day trying to learn the language,” he said.

Once he got comfortable with English, Nychporuk took a job as a cashier with the local Kohl’s department store. The physics scholar did not view the work as beneath him.

“There’s not much I could do with a physics degree in America without knowing very much English,” he says, with a smile.

Another door, in the form of the North Dakota National Guard, opened for Nychporuk about a year after arriving in Bismarck. He enlisted with the 957th Multi-role Bridge Company as a mechanic and shipped for basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., in the summer of 2008.

Two months before KFOR 12 mobilization, Nychporuk became a citizen of the United States.

“Things really start to open up once that happened,” he said. “You’re just like everyone else.”

Not more than a month back from basic, in fact, when he was still transitioning out of the Recruit Holding Company, Nychporuk made another momentous life decision to volunteer as part of the KFOR 12 mission and a yearlong deployment in Kosovo.

Nychporuk said his family took the news in stride.

“(My wife) has become used to it after not seeing me much when I was going from one job to the next trying to make a living,” he said.

Nychporuk walked into the KFOR deployment without much of a clue to what

he would be doing.

His unit had been tasked to be a Liaison and Monitoring Team in Kosovo – the face, eyes and ears of the entire task force. Its job is to engage and interact with the people in Kosovo, from citizens on the streets to the civic leaders, to learn about issues they’re facing and to see if solutions can be facilitated.

But, early on, Nychporuk, or “Nych,” as his fellow Soldiers nicknamed him, was assigned to a headquarters slot where he would have little if any interaction with the people in Kosovo. It wasn’t until halfway into post-mobilization training that Nych’s unit leaders matched his unique language skills with the right job.

Liaison Monitoring Team 7 (LMT) knew before they even got to Kosovo that they would be working in Strpce/Shtpce (most towns here have both Albanian and Serbian spellings), a Serbian dominated municipality in the heart of the KFOR sector controlled by Polish and Ukrainian Soldiers.

“We tried for a long time, and finally when we were training in Germany, we got him onto the right team,” said Sgt. Kylie Ktytor, Bismarck, N.D., assistant squad leader for LMT 7, “We asked, ‘why, with his skill sets, would we want him working anywhere else?’”

Equipped with his mother tongues, Ukrainian and Russian, and by virtue of growing up on the border with Poland speaking Polish, and because of his hard work learning English, Nych was uniquely overqualified to work in the LMT area of responsibility around Strpce/Shtpce.

Only one thing stood in the way of him being ridiculously overqualified for the

job: he didn’t know a lick of Serbian. No problem. Nych had an inherit knack for Slavic languages, and Serbian being one, in just a few months, he picked up enough to converse with citizens in the Strpce/Shtpce sector.

“He’s definitely been a huge asset for us to have him on our team when our interpreters aren’t available,” Ktytor said. “It would definitely be more difficult for us when it comes to trading information with the Ukrainian and Polish Soldiers in our sector and it’s nice when you talk to someone on the street who speaks Serbian, you can always call over to Nych, and ask, ‘hey, what is this lady saying.’”

Nych says he enjoys his job with LMT 7 and the fact that it allows him to interact with people. He said it helps that he can speak to people directly instead of through the filter of an interpreter.

He adds that his gift for linguistics and his personal story of how a Ukrainian ended up serving in the U.S. Army sparks a lot of conversations.

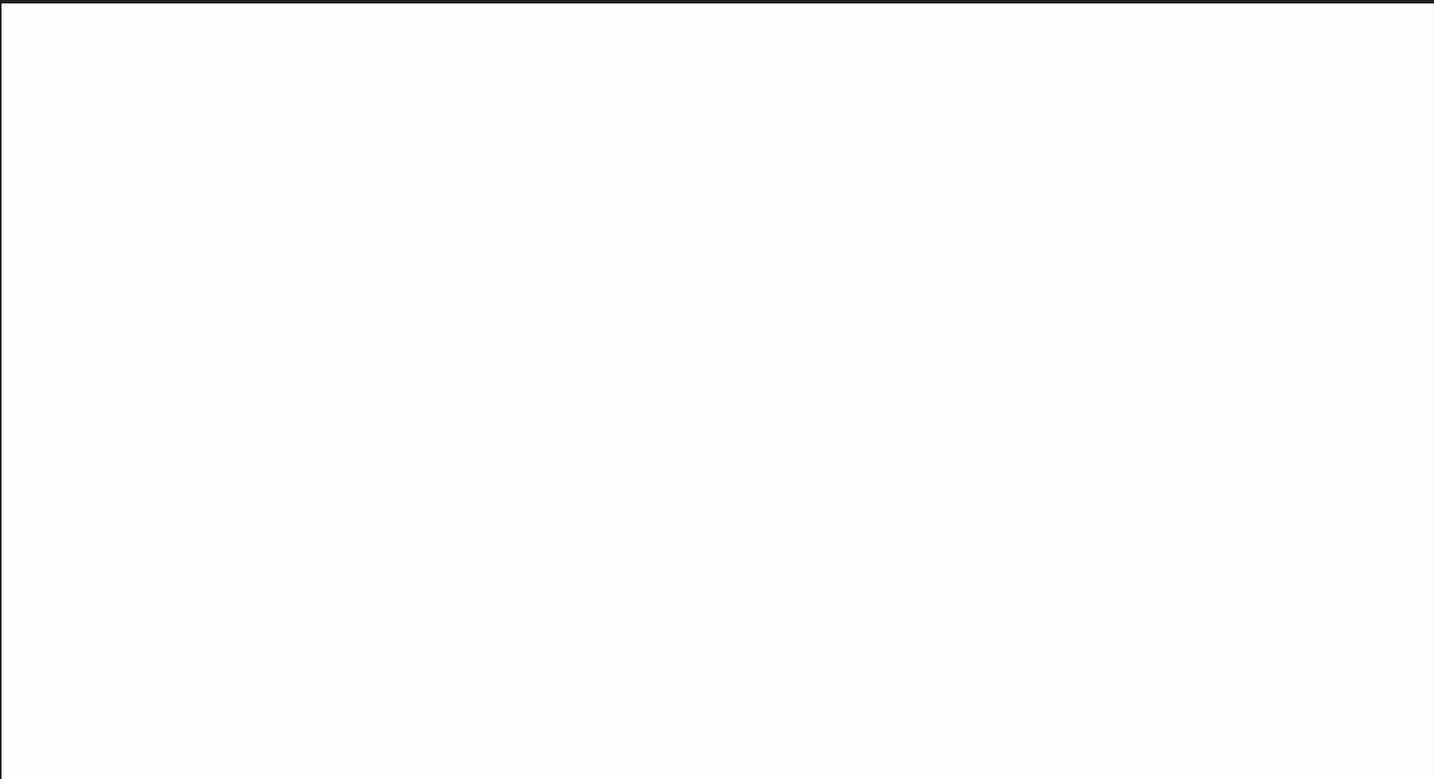
Even though he’s back in Eastern Europe, in relatively familiar territory, Nych does not consider his deployment here a sort-of homecoming or a home away from home. He longs for his return to family and friends in North Dakota, in the United States, a place that has provided so much in a short time.

“It gave me a chance to start over,” Nych says of his new homeland. “Leaving Ukraine and how things were there was actually good luck for my family. We have so many more opportunities now.” ■



Courtesy Photo

Left, Nychporuk records information from Lt. Col. Konyk of the Ukrainian Army during a recent patrol through the Kosovo municipality of Shtpce/Strpce. Nychporuk immigrated to the United States from Ukraine, with his wife and son, in 2006. Above, Sgt. Kylie Ktytor, right, of Bismarck, and Spc. Ivan Nychporuk, also of Bismarck, pose for a photo on a beautiful day in the municipality of Shtpce/Strpce, Kosovo.



Bill Prokopyk

Chief Warrant Officer Travis Bridwell is welcomed home by his sons Holter, left, and Hauser. Bridwell's unit, Detachment 42, Operational Support Airlift, returned to North Dakota after a yearlong mobilization to the Horn of Africa Feb. 18.