


State Spotlight – Texas Army National Guard



TEXAS



The versatility and resiliency of Texas Army National Guard Soldiers enable the rapid and efficient response to domestic emergencies, combat missions, counterdrug efforts and reconstruction missions. Whether the call is coming from the State governor or directly from the President of the United States, Texas Army National Guard Soldiers are Always Ready and Always There.

A Soldier with the 36th Infantry Division, Texas Army National Guard participates in the 2018 Best Warrior competition at Camp Swift, Bastrop, Texas.

Texas Army National Guard Photo by
SSG Mark Scovell



A Texas Army National Guard Soldier helps residents evacuate with their pets after flooding in the Rio Grande Valley this past May.

Photo courtesy Texas Military Department

Texas Guardsmen Task Force Members Respond to South Texas Floods

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
SPC MIGUEL RUIZ

Texas Army National Guard Soldiers and members of Texas Task Force 1 (TTF1) were deployed to South Texas this past May.

In response to recent flooding in the Texas Rio Grande Valley, Texas Army National Guard helicopter pilots were jointly mobilized with Texas' urban search and rescue team TTF1.

Both organizations, which normally work independently of each other, routinely combine their assets and expertise when

flood disasters occur, said Anthony Di Marco, a rescue swimmer with TTF1.

"There are not water-rescue components in the National Guard. That's where we come in," said Di Marco. "They fly us to where we need to be and help get us in the water or to where the people are who need rescue. It's a great working relationship."

The working relationships between the pilots and swimmers are not developed overnight, but rather are orchestrated and fine-tuned regularly.

Di Marco said he sets aside his full-time civilian career being a firefighter in Plano, Texas, once a month to train with Texas Army National Guard helicopter pilots and TTF1 swimmers.

"We rehearse daytime and nighttime rescue missions with Lakota and Black Hawk pilots," said Di Marco. "The back and forth dialogue is great; we work closely together to determine the most efficient and safest ways of conducting the missions."

Thanks to consistent training and set-in-place contingency plans, mission readiness is very high when disasters occur, said Texas Army National Guard CW4 Brandon Briggs,

a Standardization Instructor Pilot of Bravo Company, 1-114th Aviation Regiment – Security and Support.

CW4 Briggs said that at any given time he, his helicopter crew and TTF1 swimmers can be ready to fly to wherever they are needed within three hours of receiving the call to duty.

"We didn't have these same capabilities over five years ago," said CW4 Briggs. "Local governments now have in place very specific mission-ready packages put together by the Texas Military Department. Local officials now know exactly how many of what assets are available to them at any given time of need."

CW4 Briggs said what sets the Texas Army National Guard apart from other components of the military is its ability to work more closely with Texas' local governments and organizations such as TTF1 to establish disaster contingency plans.

"It's our job to be able to respond to events as quickly as possible," said CW4 Briggs. "We are always ready." ●

An Evacuation System with Accountability

BY CW3 JANET SCHMELZER

When a hurricane, flood, chemical spill, wildfire or other catastrophe strikes Texas, people may have to evacuate the affected area, often with little or no time to prepare. Their lives have been turned upside down; they do not know where they are going; they do not know when they will return; and sometimes families and loved ones get separated. They need someone to show them the way out of the danger zone to safety and comfort.

When support for evacuation operations is needed, the Texas State Guard is trained and ready. Guard members provide a very specialized skill set during an evacuation – operation of the Emergency Tracking Network (ETN). ETN is an electronic system that tracks evacuees from an evacuation hub to designated shelters away from the disaster area.

“One of the big lessons learned during the Katrina and Rita hurricanes was the need to track the location of thousands of people rapidly evacuating the strike zone,” said COL Robert Hastings, commander, Army Component, Texas State Guard. “In some cases, families were separated and ended up in different shelters with no means to communicate or locate each other. ETN was designed to prevent that from happening.”

The Texas State Guard is the principal state agency with the Emergency Tracking Network mission.

“Without a system of accountability, we would not know who we evacuated or which designated mass evacuation transportation they got on. With the ETN system, we have information which tracks the evacuee from an embarkation point to a shelter. Because we are trained on ETN, the Texas State Guard is performing a vital service to Texans who are evacuated during an emergency or disaster,” said SSG Greg Illich, 8th Regiment, Texas State Guard.

At an evacuation hub, one of the first people that an evacuee will encounter is a member of the Texas State Guard. As



TOP: Soldiers of the Texas Army National Guard support relief efforts to residents of Cyprus Creek in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

BOTTOM: A Texas Army National Guard Soldier carries a young resident of the Cyprus Creek community during evacuations in response to Hurricane Harvey.

Texas Army National Guard photos by CPT Martha Nigrelle



TOP: Texas National Guard Soldiers come to the aid of citizens in Houston, Texas stuck in heavily flooded areas during the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

Texas Army National Guard photo by 1LT Zachary West

INSET: A Texas Army National Guard Soldier brings a resident's pets on board a military vehicle during evacuation efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

Texas Army National Guard photo by CPT Martha Nigrelle

evacuees enter the hub, Guard members can answer their questions about what happens at the hub and show them where to register for transportation to a shelter. At the registration table, Guard members begin the process of registering evacuees into the emergency tracking system. They can explain to evacuees

on each evacuee. Each wristband has a unique identification number, which is recorded into the ETN system along with the evacuee's information. Personal medical equipment, such as a walker or wheelchair, is also banded and registered into the system. And family pets are banded on the collar or travel kennel,

how the system works to ease any concerns that evacuees may have about what will happen when they are registered into the system. Family members at the hub are registered at the same time. This process allows them to travel together and stay together at the same shelter.

"During an evacuation, we want to assist family members in this way. Keeping families together is comforting to them and helps ease their anxiety during this time of uncertainty," stated 1LT Kendra Neuendorff, 4th Regiment, Texas State Guard.

As the registration process continues, Guard members place a wristband

and evacuated to a designated pet shelter. In this way, families know that their pet will not be abandoned, but sheltered and fed until they can be reunited.

"Sometimes pet owners are afraid to leave a pet behind and, as a result, are reluctant to evacuate. If owners know that their pets are going to be evacuated, banded into ETN and sheltered, they feel relief that their pet has not been left behind," commented PFC Sonya Martinez, 39th Regiment, Texas State Guard.

Guard members then direct the evacuees to designated mass evacuation transportation located at the hub. As evacuees board a bus, plane or helicopter, Guard members scan the wristbands again to begin tracking their movement. The system records each individual who boards the transportation headed to a specific shelter. And when evacuees arrive at the shelter, Guard members, for accountability, again scan the wristbands to log their location. ETN now has recorded the evacuee's travel from the evacuation hub to the shelter.

"ETN is a very versatile system," said COL Hastings. "During Hurricane Harvey, ETN was used to manage evacuations, determine population at the shelters and keep track of pets and medical equipment, among other tasks. Keeping track of our evacuating citizens and helping families stay connected is one of the most important missions we train for." ●

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT COUNSELING TEAM

THE TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT (TMD) Counseling Team provides counseling and consultation services to assist Texas Army National Guard Service Members and their Families.

The overall mission of the Counseling Team is to increase individual and unit readiness and wellbeing through the promotion of psychological health and resilience. The team focuses on providing strategic support services to National Guard Service members and their families.

The Counseling Team is comprised of seven independently licensed counselors. Team members are located in
AUSTIN, DALLAS, HOUSTON, WESLACO, TYLER & EL PASO.

To reach a counselor, call the TMD
Counseling Line at **512-782-5069.**





Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment, 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Texas Army National Guard participate in their deployment ceremony held at Joint Base San Antonio - Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in advance of deployment to the Horn of Africa.

Texas Army National Guard photo by MSG Michael Leslie

Texas First Battalion Deploys to Africa

BY MSG MICHAEL LESLIE

This is a historic unit," said BG Patrick Hamilton, assistant division commander – operations, 36th Infantry Division. "Task Force Alamo is aptly named. It traces its lineage back to when Texas was still just a Republic, fighting for its own independence."

The Texas Army National Guard's oldest unit, dating back to 1823 – the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment, 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) – conducted a

deployment ceremony May 16, 2018, at Joint Base San Antonio – Fort Sam Houston. The battalion is preparing to deploy to the Horn of Africa, partnering with more than 10 nations to promote regional stability and prosperity.

"This is a vitally important mission," said BG Hamilton. "All people are created equal, and we are defending that freedom around the world, so it is critical that we do a great job in helping the countries that we're going [to]."

Hundreds of family members were in attendance to see their Soldiers off and show their support.

"Although your Soldiers wear the uniforms," said COL Rodrigo Gonzalez, commander of the 72nd IBCT, "you also serve with them in your capacity as a Family member and you wear the uniform in your heart."

This will be the last time that Soldiers will see their Families for the coming year, and MAJ Sean Ibarguen, commander of the battalion, addressed that hardship.

"For some, the toughest time frame of the deployment is upon us and that is moving toward the final goodbye," said MAJ Ibarguen. "Soon your Soldier will return home and the joy of that return will eclipse the sadness of saying goodbye in the coming days."

The 12-year-old daughter of the battalion commander gave him advice on a painted rock to carry with him on his deployment – advice that he passed along to his Soldiers – that "time flies."

"It may not feel like it right now, but time does fly and it will fly moving forward," said MAJ Ibarguen. "We will be back in the Lone Star State before you know it." ●



Second Lady of the United States, Karen Pence, stands with military spouses at the George W. Bush Presidential Center, Dallas, Texas, during a listening session as part of a national tour bringing awareness to issues facing military families.

Supporting Hidden Warriors: Second Lady Karen Pence Visits Dallas-Fort Worth Military Spouses

BY SSGT KRISTINA OVERTON
TEXAS NATIONAL GUARD PHOTOS BY
TSgt MELISSA HARVEY

When considering the sacrifices of military members across the Armed Forces, many think of the various deployments, relocations and the physical tolls that are consistently associated with the cost of service.

One aspect that is often overlooked are the Families that support service members across the globe. Millions of men, women and children willingly give up their stability, their careers and their homes, among many other things, every few years in order to support the nation by being the anchor for those who fight to protect freedom.

To offer support and gain insight on the



challenges that military Families face, Second Lady Karen Pence, wife of Vice President Mike Pence, arranged a listening session to hear from military spouses during her visit to Dallas, Texas, May 4. During the meeting at the George W. Bush Presidential Center, the Second Lady was introduced to 11 spouses from all branches of the Armed Forces to hear about the benefits and struggles of military life, and improvements that could be made to aid transitions in the future.

"I think frequently the service member is the one in the limelight or there's more attention on our service members when really, behind the scenes, we have these

Karen Pence speaks with spouses of Texas military members as part of a listening session tour to bring awareness to specific needs of military Families.

hidden warriors who are the spouses and the children – and they make a lot of sacrifices as well," said Pence. "So sometimes it's needed – just raising a little bit of awareness and letting them know 'we are grateful and we appreciate you,' and we hope they hear us."

The listening session ran for 45 minutes, allowing for every military spouse present to

emphasize particular challenges and elevate issues that have potential to improve the lives and illuminate the problems of "hidden warriors."

"There are several challenges that have been brought to our attention," Pence said. "[Spouses] having a sense of identity, if they have to change jobs all the time or can't get a job in their chosen career – something they've trained for. It's difficult. [Having] a sense of community is difficult. Anytime they move, making new friends, finding a bank, stores, housing, education. There are a lot of issues they face just because they are such a mobile society."

Two military spouses from the 136th Airlift Wing were selected to attend the

session with the Second Lady: TSgt Dan Ledesma, 136th Airlift Wing production recruiter and Heidi Bearden, 136th Force Support Squadron Airmen and Family Readiness program manager.

"It was a huge opportunity because we had the ability to represent not only our spouses, but also the other members of the 136th Airlift Wing and their Families," said Bearden. "From a spouse standpoint, being able to talk about some of the issues our Airmen face and being able to verbalize the stresses and strain that requirements cost our Families is important. I was also able to bring up some key issues from a programmatic standpoint, and by listening to the spouses, learned ways we can improve our communication to make

sure that information regarding programs and opportunities actually reaches our military Families."

The Second Lady will be continuing to participate in several listening sessions at military installations in the coming months. In the fall, her team aspires to gather the information presented, and focus on one or two issues they may be able to remedy to assist military Families.

"There is something about military spouses, when you sit in a room with them – they are so resilient and so strong," Pence said. "They are amazing people in their own right, and their attitudes are so positive. I'm glad that so many of them are willing to be vulnerable and say if this were fixed, it would help a lot of other issues. They are amazing men and women and we appreciate them taking the time to help us get a better understanding. We don't know it all, and we really want to hear from them about what they want us to bring awareness to." ●



LEFT: Texas military spouse Vanessa Barnes shares her experiences with Second Lady Karen Pence during a round table meeting at the George W. Bush Presidential Center, Dallas, Texas.

BELOW: Spouses of Texas military members meet with the Second Lady Karen Pence to discuss concerns facing military Families.



TEXAS NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Funded by the State of Texas, the State Tuition Assistance Program is an **EDUCATION BENEFIT** that **PROVIDES MONEY FOR COLLEGE** to eligible members of the Texas Military Department (TMD) pursuing their educational and career goals.

This benefit is available to active drilling members (not AGR) of any of the 3 following Texas components:

- › Texas Army National Guard
- › Texas Air National Guard
- › Texas State Guard

Applicants interested in requesting assistance must:

- › Have completed Basic Training (or its equivalent)
- › Be attending an accredited Texas college or university
- › Have a degree plan on file with the TMD
- › Be pursuing:
 - » an academic certificate
 - » their first undergraduate degree
 - » their first graduate degree

FOR MORE INFORMATION and a full list of qualifications, go to ***TMD.Texas.gov/how-do-i-qualify-more-information*** or talk to your readiness NCO.



Texas Green Berets Mentor U.S., Albanian and Lithuanian Forces During Allied Spirit VIII

BY SGT KAREN SAMPSON

Allied Spirit was a multinational exercise involving approximately 4,100 participants from 10 nations at 7th Army Training Command's Hohenfels Training Area, in Hohenfels, Germany. The U.S. Army Europe-directed multinational exercise series Allied Spirit is designed to develop and enhance NATO and key partners' interoperability and readiness.

The Texas Army National Guard Soldiers from 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne) (SFG(A)) augmented the Observer-

Controller-Trainer (OCT) team from U.S. Special Operations Command Europe and the Joint Multinational Readiness Center Special Operations Forces (SOFs) Cell. OCTs acted as on-the-ground trainers supporting SOF and conventional forces during training exercise Allied Spirit VIII, conducted Jan. 15 through Feb. 5.

The 19th SFG(A) team mentored a diverse group, including U.S. SOFs assigned to 1st SFG(A), Albanian SOF, and the Lithuanian National Defence Force Volunteers (KASP).

"Being an OCT assisting in unit tactical development, bridging the units together and integrating them into action, was a great experience," said a 19th SFG(A) team sergeant. "Everyone gained from completing the exercise."

The Texas-based Green Berets were particularly impressed by the performance of their Lithuanian allies.

"Lithuania's KASP trained smart, were decisive and their tactics were sound," said the team sergeant.

The opportunity to observe and train other U.S. Special Forces Soldiers provided a training opportunity for the 19th SFG(A) OCTs, challenging them to remain experts in their doctrine.

"We drew upon their knowledge of Unconventional Warfare from the Special Forces Qualification Course and combined it with the training and deployment experience to provide training feedback to [Operational Detachment Alpha, or ODA] from 1st SFG(A)," said the 19th SFG(A) officer in charge (OIC) of operations.

Texas Army National Guard OCTs reinforced the concept of "free play" during Allied Spirit VIII to the greatest extent possible to meet the rotational training unit's training objectives.

"This experience was worthwhile as a guest OCT because you get to evaluate another unit's tactical training and standard operations, and witness what works for them," said the operations OIC. "As a Special Forces Soldier, observing a [team] from another group gives you the perspective they have from their area of responsibility and strengthens your unit's repertoire." ●

A Texas Army National Guard Special Forces Soldier discusses a radio setup with a soldier of the Lithuanian National Defence Volunteer Forces during Allied Spirit VIII held at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany.

Texas Army National Guard photo by
1LT Benjamin Haulenbeek



The Heroes Next Door

BY SGT AMBERLEE BOUVERHUIS
TEXAS NATIONAL GUARD PHOTOS BY
SSG TIMOTHY PRUITT

Camp Mabry opened its doors to the public during its annual Texas Military Department Open House and American Heroes Air Show April 21-22, 2018. During the event, the organization's State Active Duty mission was highlighted.

"For a State Active Duty mission, we respond to a multiple of things, whether it be forest fires, flooding, winter events – whenever we have ice or snow – and, of course, hurricanes," said CMSgt Michael Cornitius, Command Senior Enlisted Leader for the Texas Military Department. "It's a State support piece so we can help Texans, which is what we are here for."



The Texas National Guard and State Guard are composed of service members that the State Governor can activate to State Active Duty status in response to natural or man-made disasters or Homeland Defense missions.

Recently, the Texas Military Department responded to the Governor's call for Hurricane Harvey relief efforts, assisting local services in rescue and aid to those affected by the disaster. Two Soldiers with 551st Multi-Role Bridge Co., 386th Engineer Battalion,

TOP: Members of the community look inside a Black Hawk helicopter during the Texas Military Department's Open House and American Heroes Air Show at Camp Mabry in Austin, Texas this past April.

INSET: A Texas Army National Guard paratrooper glides onto the parade field during the opening ceremony of the American Heroes Air show held on Camp Mabry, Texas, this past April.



176th Engineer Brigade out of El Campo, Texas, were present at the Open House to share their stories about their role in the relief effort.

“We went out on the first day after Harvey hit to the nearby [community] of Katy, Texas,” said SGT Robert Matthews.

“It was a challenge to see the loss, but we saved a lot of people and the lives are what matters,” said SGT Willie Wallace.

Opportunities for service members to share their stories with the public is why CMSgt Cornitius says the Open House is important.

“It’s a chance for us to showcase the tools, equipment, and the Soldiers and Airmen available to help the State and our citizens” said CMSgt Cornitius. “The citizens of Austin get to come out and look at what we have and how we are supporting them.”

This two-day event hosted over 5,000 guests, who were able to see and interact with Texas military service members and learn about their State Active Duty capabilities. ●



TOP: A Texas National Guard Soldier helps a young civilian put on a helmet aboard an Army helicopter while attending the Texas Military Department’s 2018 Open House and American Heroes Air Show.

BOTTOM: A young civilian waves an American flag while standing amidst the crowd during the 2018 American Heroes Air Show at Camp Mabry in Austin, Texas.



TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

While Texas Guard Soldiers are fully prepared to accomplish all State and Federal mission requirements, it is equally critical that their Families likewise be properly prepared and resourced to function during the spouse's absence.

It is the intent of Family Support Services to prepare and empower Texas Military Department Service Members and Families to be resilient during current and future mission requirements.

Through the various programs within Family Support Services and Community Partnerships, we are prepared to execute Resilience, Prevention, Family Readiness and Reintegration activities to enhance the capabilities and resilience of our TMD Service Members and Families.

**If you are in need of family support assistance, call:
1-800-252-8032.**



Operation Crackdown Makes Texas Neighborhoods Safer

BY CPT MARIA MENGRONE

Knock it down, knock it down!" chanted a group of Rose Shaw Elementary School students who assembled this past May to witness the demolition of a known drug house located directly across from their school. The gathering of students occurred during Operation Crackdown, a joint operation that partners municipalities and Texas Guard Soldiers in an effort to rid neighborhoods of gangs, drugs and associated violent activity.

"We are the last piece of the operation," said COL Miguel Torres, Texas Joint

Counterdrug Task Force commander. "We provide the engineer assets that assist communities to reclaim known trafficking locations by knocking down structures allowing for community revitalization."

Operation Crackdown was scheduled to demolish 20 structures throughout several Corpus Christi neighborhoods.

"This is being able to take your neighborhood back" said Corpus Christi Mayor Joe McComb. "We appreciate the Texas Guard's help. It saves taxpayers' money and improves quality of life."



TOP: COL Miguel Torres (left), Texas Joint Task Force Counterdrug commander encourages students of Rose Shaw Elementary School in Corpus Christi, Texas, to chant "knock it down, knock it down" to signal the demolishing of a known drug house located across from the school as part of Operation Crackdown held in May.

INSET: BG Tracy Norris, deputy adjutant general of the Texas National Guard, stands with Rose Shaw Elementary School students gathered to witness the demolition of a known drug house located in front of their school as part of Operation Crackdown 2018.

Texas Army National Guard photos by CPT Maria Mengrone



MAJ Travis Urbanek, officer in charge of Operation Crackdown 2017, coordinates the demolition of an abandoned house in Robstown, Texas.

Texas Army National Guard photo by SSG Yuliana Patterson



BOTTOM LEFT: SPC Jeremiah M. Thompson, a heavy equipment operator with the 822nd Horizontal Engineering Unit, Texas Army National Guard waves to community members after demolishing an abandoned house as part of Operation Crackdown 2017.

Texas Army National Guard photo by SSG Yuliana Patterson

BOTTOM RIGHT: Members of the Texas Joint Counterdrug Task Force stand with City of Laredo police officers and an officer of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection during the 2018 Operation Crackdown event.

Texas Army National Guard photo by MSG Ken Walker

Before moving into Corpus Christi, Operation Crackdown demolished 17 drug houses in nearby Robstown.

Municipalities wanting to be included in Operation Crackdown were required to submit a written request with several supporting documents in order to receive support.

"The request included a description of the drug nexus, completion of the appropriate memorandum of understanding and 'hold harmless' agreements for each site to be demolished and historical reviews of the sites," said COL Torres.

Additionally, the request included validation that utilities had been turned off, and that no hazardous materials were present at the site. Local police departments, and other appropriate city personnel, also partnered in the events – ensuring the pickup and removal of debris was properly coordinated.

"This is amazing to see for my community," said one nine-year-old Rose Shaw Elementary student as she excitedly clapped for and cheered on the hydraulic excavator during the demolition. "I think this will be good for us all." ●



Texas Guard Soldiers may qualify for the **HAZLEWOOD ACT**

THE HAZLEWOOD ACT is a State of Texas benefit that provides qualified Veterans an education benefit of up to 150 hours of tuition and fee exemption at Texas State-supported colleges or universities.

The program is also transferable to
Texas Guard member children (one child at a time).



To learn more about the HAZLEWOOD ACT,
call **1-877-898-3833**
or visit ***TVC.Texas.gov/education/hazlewood-act***