

# Prairie Minuteman

National Guard Association of Illinois

## Shoulder-to-shoulder motto reflects mission goal

By Lt. Col. Joe Schweickert  
NGAI President Elect

Shoulder to Shoulder, or 'Shona a Shona' in Dari, is one of the mottos of our mission here in Afghanistan. It reflects the goal of US and Coalition forces working side by side with the Afghan Security Forces (Army and Police) in providing security and governance for the people of Afghanistan. That concept is doubly important when working with other coalition forces. That's the case with our mission here at FOB Ghazni, in support of TF White Eagle, a Polish brigade that is responsible for security and development of Ghazni Province. Ghazni is a critically important province, nearly the size of Texas, and running astride Highway 1, the stretch of the 'Ring Road' that connects Kabul with Kandahar and western Afghanistan.

The Illinois National Guard has a long history of cooperation with Poland, dating back to 1993. Under the State Partnership Program, Illinois is partnered with Poland and assists their Land Forces and Air Force in training, officer exchanges, and joint exercises. The most visible element of this partnership is the ISAF Bilateral Embedded Staff Team (BEST) mission, which I am currently serving on. This mission, currently on our 6th rotation, involves a small team (18 IL ARNG Soldiers) who deploy with the Polish contingent to Afghanistan, not merely as liaisons, but actually embedded within their staff as part of their brigade.

One of the unique features of this mission is the fact that we deployed



**WORKING TOGETHER:** Lt. Col. Joe Schweickert, NGAI President Elect, (second from right) meets with his Polish Army counterparts. Schweickert is currently serving with fellow members of the Illinois Army National Guard on a Bilateral Embedded Staff Team (BEST) in support of Task Force White Eagle, which is responsible for security and development of Ghazni Province in eastern Afghanistan.

to Poland two months prior to their deployment, and worked and trained with the Polish task force (10th Armored Cavalry Brigade, in our case), becoming part of the team during their pre-mobilization exercise, and then deployed from Poland to Afghanistan with them. This allowed opportunities for strong teamwork and rapport with our Polish counterparts, as well as a good immersion in

Polish culture and language.

Now that we are here in Afghanistan, our mission is challenging, and there are always new twists. Task Force White Eagle is the 'Battle Space Owner' for Ghazni province, coordinating the efforts not only of their 2,500 Polish Soldiers, but numerous US 'enabler' forces such as an Agricultural Development Team (ADT, from the Texas National

Guard), EOD and engineering assets, and a joint US-Polish Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). They also currently have a US infantry battalion from the 101<sup>st</sup> Air Assault division attached.

As the US embeds, a significant part of our team's role is facilitating coordination with all these US elements for our

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## President Elect: Joe Schweickert

### Shoulder-to-Shoulder Continued from page 1

Polish counterparts. I have been impressed with the level of English proficiency among many of the Polish staff (as a NATO member, their officers are required to study English), but there are still challenges in dealing with US units with our doctrine, concepts, and slang that we can help to decipher. And, along the way, I am picking up quite a bit of Polish!

In support of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission, part of TF White Eagle's focus is on developing the capabilities of the ANSF (Afghan National Security Forces, their Army and Police). This takes many forms, from resupply missions and mentor/liaison teams, to true partnering where their platoons go on missions with our Polish forces. This naturally takes significant coordination, as we are dealing with three or four languages (Afghan National Army officers primarily speak Dari, but many local police use Pashto), multiple chains of command, and different Rules of Engagement. TF White Eagle has a few interpreters specifically trained in Polish and Dari, and I recently had an 'enlightening' experience sitting through a meeting between an ANA Commander and our Polish battle group commander. It was like watching a tennis match, as they went back and forth from



Dari to Polish, with no English interpreter available! I have learned a few Dari phrases as well, and our local Afghan commander, LTC Wakil, has even picked up a few Polish and English phrases himself. It always brings a smile when the interpreter explains part of the plan, and LTC Wakil smiles, nods, and says 'Dobra!' (Polish for 'good'),

and we reply with 'Khoob as', the same in Dari.

In between all the meetings, briefings, and shifts in the TOC, life here on FOB Ghazni is pretty decent. We are a medium-sized FOB (Forward Operating Base), with about 2,000 Soldiers and various contractors on base, about 3/4s of those Polish. I have a 'CHU' to stay in (Container Housing Unit), and the DFAC always has plenty of food (mostly US-style cuisine, with some Polish-style food also available). They recently put on a real feast for Thanksgiving. We have a gym, MWR building, and some small shops run by local nationals. They also have a bazaar a couple days a week, so I was able to buy some Afghan souvenirs to send home to my family for Christmas!

Of course, I am doing my best to fulfill my responsibilities as President-Elect while I am here. Internet access is good, so I have been able to read minutes of all the board meetings, and even vote by email on a recent motion. Our president, Col Reid, has done a great job of keeping me in contact via email as the board is working on our priorities. Our current team's rotation is scheduled for their Transfer of Authority sometime in April, so I am hoping to be back to Illinois in time to attend our next Annual Conference in Chicago on April 30<sup>th</sup>! I look forward to seeing many of you there!

## NGAI AWARDS PROGRAM

NOMINATIONS DUE BY 15 MARCH

### CATEGORIES

The Distinguished Service Award  
Outstanding Guardsman Plaque  
Meritorious Service Award  
Outstanding Unit Award (Army and Air)  
NGAI Citation

Go to the web at [www.ngai.com/service](http://www.ngai.com/service), click on Awards Program to download the nomination form.

## **NGAI 2011 MEMBERSHIP**

### **DRIVE KICKS OFF!**

RENEW YOUR ANNUAL  
MEMBERSHIP OR JOIN FOR  
LIFE NOW!

Go to the web:

[www.ngai.com/membership](http://www.ngai.com/membership).

Download the Member  
application.

Send to NGAI office or give it to  
your director.

**42<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL NGAI CONFERENCE**  
**IN CONJUNCTION WITH**  
**ARMY/AIR JOINT SENIOR LEADER CONFERENCE**  
**FAMILY READINESS CONFERENCE**  
**RETIREE DINNER**  
**29 APRIL – 1 MAY 2011**  
**HILTON CHICAGO**  
**HOSTED BY 108 SUSTAINMENT BRIGADE**

FRIDAY – GOLF

FRIDAY EVENING – RETIREE DINNER AT THE HILTON

SATURDAY – NGAI BUSINESS SESSION 0830 TO 1230

JOINT SLC CONFERENCE

FAMILY READINESS CONFERENCE

SATURDAY EVENING – COMBINED BANQUET AT THE HILTON

SUNDAY – SLC AND FAMILY READINESS CONFERENCE

**HOTEL RESERVATION INFORMATION**

Hilton Chicago, 720 S Michigan Ave, Chicago, Il, ph: (312)922-4400, Group Name: National Guard Association of Illinois. Rates: Single - \$166.00; double - \$166.00; triple - \$191.00; Quad - \$216.00; all rates plus applicable taxes. Golf, retiree dinner, and banquet registration information available online at [www.ngai.com](http://www.ngai.com) in February or in the next Prairie Minuteman.

# DECEMBER NGAI BOARD MEETING FEATURES INSURANCE PRESENTATION

Austin Jenkins, administrator of the Militia Insurance Trust, made a special presentation to the NGAI Board and military leaders from around the state in conjunction with the November/December Board meeting held on 1 December in the Illinois State Military Museum on Camp Lincoln. He addressed the group about State Sponsored Life Insurance (SSLI) and especially our NGAI SSLI program.

SSLI came about in the 1970's to fill gaps in the SGLI life insurance program as a benefit to members of the National Guard of the various states. NGAI began sponsoring our program in 1982. The Militia Insurance Trust became our insurance administrator in 1984 under the leadership of Mr Jenkins. From then until 1997 we offered basically one life insurance plan for members and a plan also for dependents. From 1997 to just recently, MIT offered an expanded number and variety of plans to accommodate various life circumstances. The main stay of our benefit program has been and will continue to be our Guardian Plan, a basic term program that can be continued after the member leaves the National Guard, which feature has always been the BIGGEST advantage of SSLI.

Many thousands of you, our NGAI members, carry what is often called National Guard insurance. And many of you are personally acquainted with Brig Gen (Ret) Bill Goddard, who has been since 1990 our state SSLI representative. Bill is gradually turning the program over to LTC (Ret) Jim Brusek. Jim and Col (Ret) Dan Fleming have and will continue to provide benefit briefings to any and all wings, squadrons, brigades, battalions, companies, and flights.

These briefings provide our soldiers and airmen with very valuable updated information about the many benefits which are available specifically to guardsmen and women – and their families.

IF YOU DID NOT KNOW: NGAI provides, through the SSLI program, a \$1000 life insurance policy for **every single active member of the Illinois National Guard**. Yes, everyone. In addition, each and every new enlistee, officer or enlisted, of the ILNG is eligible for a one year free \$10,000 life insurance policy. All you have to do is fill out the form – and SIGN IT. We cannot give you the free \$10,000 policy unless you want it.

Schedule a benefit briefing:  
Call Jim Brusek, (773) 262-8655.

Question about NGAI Insurance?  
Call Jim Brusek, (773) 262-8655.

You can also reach Jim at cell  
(773) 262-8663, or email him at [jmbrusek@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jmbrusek@sbcglobal.net).

THANK YOU TO BILL GODDARD for his over 21 years of service to the National Guard Association of Illinois while serving as our NGAI SSLI state insurance program manager. Bill has done an UNBELIEVABLE job. No one could have done better. And we know you will stay involved. So, it is certainly not goodbye. **We'll see you around!**

## *FROM THE 126TH ARW DIRECTOR*

The past three months have been both busy and exciting for the 126th Air Refueling Wing. October 2010 was filled with events that honored the past, present and future as the Wing celebrated its 60th Anniversary. Colonel Peter Nezamis, 126th Air Refueling Wing commander, hosted a night of dining, dancing, and reminiscing to commemorate the milestone. The evening was a fitting tribute to the 126th and was attended by many distinguished guests including U.S. Congressman Jerry Evans, Illinois, 12th District; Air Force Gen. Craig R. McKinley, Chief, National Guard Bureau; Army Maj. Gen. William L. Hines, The Adjutant General, Illinois National Guard; and Army Maj. Gen. Dennis L. Celletti, Assistant Adjutant General, Illinois National Guard. Over 530 Airmen and family members were in attendance to celebrate the historic occasion of the 126th Air Refueling Wing; which holds the distinction of being the first air refueling unit in the Air National Guard.

Despite the hearty 60th anniversary celebration, the 126th remained focused on the mission and participated in the Strategic Command-led exercise, GLOBAL THUNDER. Members from across the Wing pulled together to successfully support aircraft generation demonstrating continuity of operational capability and the ability to provide critical airlift capabilities.

The Wing is also preparing for an Operational Readiness Exercise (ORE) planned for March 2011 at the Combat Readiness Training Center in Volk Field, Wis. The 126th Air Refueling Wing will be teaming up with the 108th Air Refueling Wing, another Air National Guard wing from New Jersey. During the ORE, participants will be presented with, and evaluated on, Ability To Survive and Operate (ATSO) scenarios in the event of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, or Nuclear threats. Both the 126th ARW and the 108th ARW are scheduled for an Air Mobility Command Inspector General, Nuclear Operations Readiness Inspection, Initial Response, and Operational Readiness Inspection for June 2011.

SMSgt John Pietrusinski

## ***NGAUS MEMBERSHIP***

Special thanks to CPT Stuart Zeigler, 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and Capt Keith Benko, 126<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing, for their attendance at the NGAUS Midwest Regional Membership Outreach Workshop in St Louis. These fine Illinois Guardsmen are trying to make a difference in the future of NGAI and NGAUS.

NGAUS – stronger force – stronger voice.

The strength of NGAUS has been its united membership. As the voice of the National Guard on Capitol Hill, NGAUS provides a path for National Guard men and women, Air and Army, to elevate their concerns to a national and influential audience in Washington DC.

NGAUS members provide the backbone and guidance necessary to ensure the National Guard receives the best and latest equipment. Maintains readiness through comprehensive personnel initiatives; receives proper missions as part of the total force; and fights for benefit programs that provide Guard members the support they have earned.

Commissioned officers and warrant officers of the Army and Air National Guard are eligible for NGAUS membership. Historically, nearly all eligible Guard officers have paid their dues and belonged to NGAUS.

NGAUS – YOUR voice in Washington DC since 1878. Join NOW !

# **1244<sup>TH</sup> HITS THE GROUND... RUNNING . . . LITERALLY.**

In the great history of the Illinois National Guard, yet another unit of outstanding Soldiers has answered the call to deploy to the Middle East. On September 24, 2010 the 1244<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company (1244<sup>th</sup> TC) followed their battle cry - "ROADKILL!" - holding a Deployment Ceremony as they prepared to depart for a year-long tour in support of Operation New Dawn.

The 1244<sup>th</sup> is headquartered in North Riverside, with the deploying Soldiers drawn from units throughout Illinois - the 1344<sup>th</sup> TC from East Saint Louis, the 1544<sup>th</sup> TC from Paris, the 3637<sup>th</sup> SMC from Springfield, and the 1844<sup>th</sup> TC from Quincy. The 1244<sup>th</sup> TC has a long standing tradition of service to the nation and excellence in its performance. One of the 1244<sup>th</sup> TC's significant distinctions is its service as one of the first units from Illinois to deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in February of 2003. This tour, which extended for a total of eighteen months, showed the unit's mettle and proved very successful while forging both a strong sense of camaraderie for the Soldiers who have been with the Unit for a long time and a mark of pride for those who recently joined. The 1244<sup>th</sup> TC completed missions totaling over 3.4 million miles without any combat-related casualties, which is further proof of the skill and dedication these Soldiers display in ensuring proper training and getting the job done.

The 1244<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company (1244<sup>th</sup> TC) arrived to take up its mission in support of Operation New Dawn and as a part of Joint Logistics Task Force 7 (JLTF 7) in late October. From the first moment their boots hit ground, the 1244<sup>th</sup> has been running day and night, literally.

With the beginning stages of their deployment behind them and their focus on completing the mission, the 1244<sup>th</sup> TC looks forward to continuing to run during their time in Kuwait and Iraq by leading the way and setting the standard. . . on the road. The battle cry of the 1244<sup>th</sup> TC will be heard far and wide – ROADKILL!

**-By: 1LT Rene Bernal and 1LT Dave Tanner**



# NGAI's Legislative Strategy

The NGAI Legislative Committee has developed a new strategy for our association over the next 3 to 5 years. The purpose of this legislative plan is to identify our association customers and stakeholders who have the most interest in our legislative agenda. Second specific goals and objectives are identified in this legislative plan. Every association member should become familiar with this plan. A copy should be available through your respective director or by contacting our Executive Director. This legislative strategy is a "living" document that will need to be fine tuned and constantly updated as we work toward our legislative goals.

With all of this said, just what is our legislative plan and strategy? Our seven goals are simple and straightforward as listed below:

- Develop a legislative plan that outlines our goals and objectives.
- Support the national defense legislative initiatives of NGAUS & EANGUS
- Provide the Illinois Congressional delegation with recommendations on issues that affect the members of our association.
- Provide the Illinois General Assembly with recommendations on actions that affect our association membership.

- Establish the association insurance as a State Sponsored Insurance program so that our membership is better served.

- Insure that long-time National Guard benefit programs are preserved by monitoring legislative actions.

Work with the Illinois legislature over the next three years to promote programs that will enhance future capability of the National Guard. Who are the "customers" and "stakeholders" in this plan? Our legislative agenda is built first and foremost around our customers-YOU. The soldiers, airmen, families and retirees who make up our association are those who will directly benefit from our legislative actions. Our stakeholders are those who have a direct interest in the success of our National Guard family. They include everyone from the Department of Defense to the Adjutant General to your commander.

The NGAI constitution defines our association's commitment to working with our Adjutant General and his staff as well as commanders at every level of our organization. For this very reason, General Enyart and his entire staff were briefed and involved in the development of our legislative initiatives. Our goals and objectives are good for the National Guard as well as our association membership.

Our major focus for this year will be to establish our insurance program as a State Sponsored Insurance program. Other state

legislatures have passed similar measures and this initiative is critical to our association's future solvency and vitality. NGAI is the association that represents YOU, but to continue this work we need to remain financially sound. A successful insurance program is critical to the future of NGAI. It is our goal to begin working with the Illinois General Assembly early in 2011 to achieve this goal.

What can YOU do? NGAI is a "grass roots" organization that needs the help of every member to achieve its legislative goals. Contact the executive board, your director, the association executive director, Brig Gen (ret) Hal Keistler or the legislative committee chair Brig Gen (ret) Jay Sheedy if you are willing to serve on our legislative committee or become a part of grass roots effort. This can be as little as simply contacting your local state legislator on a particular initiative. But every member of the association is critical to this effort. All of our past successes have been directly attributed to our membership getting involved.

This is a brief outline of our legislative strategy for the future. Our strategy will only become a plan on the shelf unless all of us make it work. Take the time to read your legislative plan and then take few moments to become involved with NGAI so we can achieve our legislative goals.

—Brig Gen (ret) Jay Sheedy, Chair of the NGAI Legislative Committee

## DO YOU HAVE A PLAN?

Do you have your Family Readiness Plan ready to execute in a nanosecond? I recently attended a presentation at the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 805 in O'Fallon, IL, given by Lt Col, USA (Ret) Brian Birdwell, who was a survivor of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack on the Pentagon. When hijacked American Flight 77 was used to attack the Pentagon, Lt Col Birdwell was 15 to 20 yards away from the point of impact. Lt Col Birdwell was immediately engulfed by flames in a nanosecond. Lt Col Birdwell sustained life-threatening burns over 60 percent of his body, 40 percent were third degree. As he lay in the burn unit of the Washington Hospital Center, his wife Mel had only seconds to determine if she would sign forms to medically retire Brian and receive 75 percent of his base pay for the rest of her life, or not sign the forms and receive only a one-time survivor's benefit payment if Brian were to die. The staff presenting the forms did not really know that Lt Col Birdwell was given a slight chance to survive by his doctor. Many of us would probably not face this type of decision, however Lt Col Birdwell survived and his wife Mel had made the right financial decision most beneficial to her family because they had an executable Family Readiness Plan. The National Guard Association of Illinois offers benefits to enhance an executable Family Readiness Plan to include additional insurance beyond your government benefits. For an NGAI member to determine the proper amount of insurance to strengthen his or her Family Readiness Plan through State Sponsored Life Insurance; visit [www.NGSSLI.com](http://www.NGSSLI.com) for more information including eligibility, benefits, rates, exclusions, limitations and renewal provisions. Enrollment forms are also available online. Brigade, wing, group, company, and squadron commanders may schedule a unit Benefit Briefing by calling Col (Ret) Dan Fleming at 1-847-769-5242 for his or her next commander's call and remember...Do you have all of the necessary pieces secured to execute your Family Readiness Plan in a nanosecond?

—SMSgt John Pietrusinski