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## Special Forces unit assess readiness of potential members

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Chasity Johnson  
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

*Editor's note: Some names and specific training events have been omitted for unit and individual security.*

MARSEILLES -- It's 26 degrees Fahrenheit. A team of 10 Special Forces candidates are navigating through a dark, tree-filled terrain on a gravel path with 55-pound rucksacks attached to their bodies while toting an object of an unknown weight.

Their dirt-smudged faces grimaced as a member of the cadre yelled "You're on a convoy and you have no security at the rear?! Drop the pole, drop your rucksacks, get on your backs and start counting-off flutter kicks!"

The team members searched for the energy to carry out the command and hustled to adhere to the instructions as a cadre member lectured them on the importance of security in the field.

Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne) invited active and reserve service members from units throughout the country to a Special Forces readiness assessment, March 26 and 27 at Marseilles Training Center. Nineteen service members attended.

"This is a readiness assessment, not a selection," explained a sergeant first class in the unit.

"We are assessing their readiness. We



Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Scott Thompson, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Staff Sgt. Albert Parr performs flutter kicks while being "smoked" by the cadre during a team exercise at Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group's readiness assessment March 26 at Marseilles Training Center in Illinois.

want to see if they can stand the rigors that they will face if they go to selection."

The assessment is just one step in the multi-step process of earning a green beret. First, a Special Forces candidate must

attend a readiness assessment.

The purpose is to assess the probability of a service member's success during the

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## Air Guard supports UN in Libya

By Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SCOTT AFB -- Aircraft and crews from the Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Air Refueling Wing deployed to Libya late March 22 night and more are expected to be deployed. The unit was notified that they would deploy to a forward operating location in support of Operation Odyssey Dawn.

"In the Air National Guard we mirror our active duty components," said Col. Peter Nezamis of Belleville, commander of the 126th Air Refueling Wing. "So we are ready to go. We have to be deployed and in theater and ready to fly the missions within 72 hours of notification."

The 126th has supported operations in nearly every American conflict since World War II.

The 126th flies the KC-135R Stratotanker. The aircraft is a military version of the Boeing 707, and is capable of offloading approximately 200,000 pounds of fuel to receiver aircraft. The offload takes place in mid-air at air speeds in excess of 500 miles per hour. The tanker is only 20 feet above the nose of the receiver aircraft during fuel transfer.

"We control the boom from the back of the plane," said Tech Sgt. Mark Buzenski of Sugar Grove, a member of the 126th who

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## Guard answers Governor's call for emergency aid



Photo by U.S. Army 1st Lt. Dutch Grove, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers with the 13637th Maintenance Company based in Springfield load their humvees before moving out to provide road-side assistance to stranded motorists on Illinois interstate highways. More than 500 members of the Illinois National Guard were activated on Feb. 1 to assist stranded motorists on Illinois roadways. Troops stationed along the road carried supplies such as water, snack bars and roadside safety kits.

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Chasity Johnson  
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

CHICAGO -- Gov. Pat Quinn thanked Illinois National Guardsmen and first responders who assisted more than 4,000 motorists during this week's major snowstorm in Illinois at an Illinois Department of Transportation facility during a press conference Feb. 4 in Chicago.

"We have the best National Guard in the United States of America," said Quinn.

Feb. 1, Quinn activated more than 500 troops to assist stranded motorists during the storm from the 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment based in Kewanee, with subordinate units from Galva, Dixon and Pontiac, the 766th Engineer Battalion based in Decatur, the 1844th Transportation Company based in Quincy; the 3637th Field Support Maintenance Company based in Springfield; the 634th Brigade Support Battalion based in Sullivan; and the 233rd Military Police Company based in Springfield; and a Joint Task Force command from the 65th Troop

Command Brigade and 183rd Fighter Wing, both from Springfield.

"Even though we have 450 Soldiers currently deployed in the (Sinai Peninsula), Soldiers serving with the Polish battery in the Ghazni Province in Afghanistan, as well as Soldiers and Airmen serving in Iraq, the National Guard was able to stand up and serve the state in this crisis," said Maj. Gen. William Enyart of Belleville, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard during the press conference.

The storm, which affected the majority of the state, resulted in 20.2 inches of snow in Chicago, shut down schools throughout the state, knocked out power to hundreds of households and left hundreds stranded on highways.

It was the third biggest snowstorm on record in the Chicago area, behind blizzards in 1967 (23 inches of snow) and 1999 (21.6 inches of snow).

The servicemembers, who were stationed at rest areas along Illinois Interstates 80, 57, 55 and 290, provided food, water and

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second step of the process, Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS). Doing this not only allows the unit to save the National Guard money by identifying unprepared service members before they attend SFAS, it allows the servicemembers to take a realistic look at their physical fitness and their ability to perform in an extremely stressful environment.

"The training that they will receive over the two days of the assessment is a replica of what they will experience over the three weeks they attend [SFAS] if they are chosen to go," said the sergeant first class.

The readiness assessment began with an Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT), but instead of scoring the minimal 180 necessary for the average Soldier, they are expected to score no less than 240. Unlike other APFTs, during this test graders refrained from counting the repetitions of the trainees' pushups and sit-ups aloud, leaving the trainees in the dark about how well or poor they were doing.

After the APFT, the candidates were given minutes to change into their Army Combat Uniforms, fill their rucksacks with 55 pounds of equipment – not including food and water, then head over to the obstacle course to do various physical tests.

Immediately following was a ruck march was conducted. Carrying gear that weighed more than a quarter of their body weight, the trainees embarked on a journey of unknown distance.

Two candidates sustained injuries that prevented them from completing the assessment, four voluntarily withdrew and three were removed by the cadre after taking too long to complete the ruck march.

One of the service members pulled from the ruck march was Spc. Clifton Washington of Algonquin, a mechanic with the 1144th Transportation Motor Transport Battalion in Delevan.

"It was pretty rough," said Washington. "Rougher than I thought it was going to be. I thought I was physically prepared for this, but honestly I wasn't. For the next one, I will definitely prepare by training with my ruck. I think everyone puts a lot into their [APFT], but training with the rucksack is where it's at. It's the event that takes the most out of you."

On the other end of the spectrum, a second lieutenant impressed the cadre from the start. He completed the run portion of the APFT in 13 minutes and 40 seconds, the fastest in the group, and was the third to complete the ruck march.

"I'm a professional athlete," said the second lieutenant. "I do a lot of jiu jitsu and mixed martial arts. I trained pretty much every day. This is a life-long dream of mine that I've always wanted to fulfill."

The second lieutenant said he would have enlisted in the Army and joined the Infantry straight out of high school if it wasn't for a college scholarship he earned. Instead of enlisting, he participated in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps at his university and commissioned in the Army National Guard upon graduation six months ago.

Less than an hour after the completion of the ruck march, the 10 remaining candidates formed up and headed off for a team exercise.

Their mission was to transport a "gift" through the wilderness to a tribal leader in Afghanistan in exchange for the leader's favors to the United States.

After the long march and into a night filled with low crawls and physical exercises, the team arrived at a fire-lit campsite. They hugged the tribal leader, held hands with him and engaged in other cultural customs, only to offend him. The leader ceased their business, banned the team from his camp, and the team continued its mission.

Physically exhausted after 13 hours of hard physical and mental work, the candidates traveled back to their barracks only to be met with a land navigation test. The next morning was a run of an unknown distance and then "the smoke session."

The cadre led the group through a multitude of exercises most said they had only seen in the movies. Steam rose from the candidates, sweat rolled down their brows, snot traveled down their lips, and their legs and arms uncontrollably shook as they struggled through the "smoke."

After more than an hour of physical assessment, the training finally came to an end. The candidates were released to their barracks to prepare for the board to determine if the Special Forces unit would provide them with a recommendation to attend SFAS.

During the board, the commander, who observed the weekend's training undetected, along with the cadre, provided the candidates with feedback.

They also discussed the emotional toll joining a unit like this could have on their personal lives. The board asked about their relationships, their families and their financial situations, explaining to them that they and their families must be OK with them leaving home for two to four years for training and accept the possibility of deploying frequently into the future.

Nineteen service members attended the assessment, but only six were chosen. The second lieutenant didn't make the cut. Not because of his performance, but because of his lack of experience as an officer.

"He's only been a second lieutenant for six months," said the commander of the unit. "Think about how different a Soldier is when they graduate from basic than they are a year or two after their



Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Scott Thompson, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

**A second lieutenant and other candidates struggle while carrying a telephone pole during a team exercise at Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group's readiness assessment March 26 at Marseilles Training Center in Illinois.**

graduation. You're a completely different Soldier. I can't put a Soldier with such little experience as a leader in a position to lead a team of [noncommissioned officers] who have been on multiple tours. If he was a specialist or a sergeant, I would take him without a second thought."

During the second lieutenant's time with the board, the commander of the unit commended him for his exceptional performance, but suggested that he get a bit more experience leading a platoon before he goes to SFAS. The commander

gave him his personal telephone number and asked the lieutenant to contact him if he needed any help in the meantime.

A sergeant was one of the six participants chosen to go to SFAS. He said he is optimistic about his upcoming journey and looks forward to the day that he can wear a green beret with pride.

"Green Berets are the most highly skilled and trained Soldiers in the entire world," said the sergeant. "To be part of that and to know that you're one of the top Soldiers in the world is quite an accomplishment."

## Attend a Special Forces readiness assessment

Everyone who meets the minimum requirements is welcome and encouraged to attend the next readiness assessment. Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne) are always looking for the right Soldiers to join their unit. They expect candidates to show the initiative required to prepare themselves. Candidates should show up to the event ready for SFAS, based off the training plan in the information packet provided by Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Those interested in attending the readiness assessment on Sept. 10 and 11 are asked to call (708)824-5817/5823 or e-mail [NGILSpecialForces@ng.army.mil](mailto:NGILSpecialForces@ng.army.mil).

## LIBYA

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operates the refueling boom. "We manipulate it and the fighters or bombers position themselves real steady. We will make contact and offload the fuel they need to accomplish their mission."

Many of the Airmen supporting the mission are excited for the opportunity.

"They gave us the best tools and we will do the best we can," said Maj. Tom

Ratkovich of Houston, Texas, aircraft commander for the 126th. "We're trained for this and happy to do our job."

Nezamis said his Airmen work hard to stay ready for missions like this.

"The 126th Air Refueling Wing always stands ready to respond at a moment's notice," said Nezamis. "We have very highly trained and highly motivated Airmen. I'm proud of their passion, professionalism and willingness to help our country and state."

## STORM

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roadside assistance to motorists in the wake of the storm. Later, Guardsmen from the southern part of the state were shifted to the most severely affected northern communities to relieve the northern troops and to transport the Illinois State Police as they assisted stranded motorists and citizens in need. The mission lasted three days.

"I just want to point out that our National Guard, and all of our military, are volunteers," said Quinn. "These are citizen-Soldiers. They have civilian jobs. They were called to active duty, obviously in a

moment's notice, this week and they did a heroic job. We owe them all a permanent debt of gratitude."

In addition to providing manpower, the Illinois National Guard provided 156 vehicles for this mission, including 114 Humvees that were used in the harsh conditions to reach stranded motorists.

"The Illinois National Guard answered the call when their communities were in need and assisted more than 200 stranded motorists," said Enyart. "The Illinois National Guard continues to demonstrate they are 'Always Ready, Always There' and will keep protecting the citizens of Illinois any way it can."