



*A message from the*

## National Executive Director

Greetings to all of my comrades both here in the United States and abroad who are members and supporters of the 29th Division Association. My name is Frank Armiger and I was appointed National Executive Director (NED) of the Association at the 2021 Convention in Gettysburg in October. I am very honored to be in this position under the leadership of our new National Commander, BG (Ret) Ted Shuey.

Starting with this issue of *The 29er* I will provide a column highlighting Association news and events from the NED perspective. I will summarize our National Executive Committee Meetings and report on current activities of interest to all of our members. I will also be interested in your feedback. You can contact me at [farmiger@gmail.com](mailto:farmiger@gmail.com).

It seems like we just turned the calendar to 2022 yesterday and here we are already in March with spring fever in the air. However, the time has been

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## THE TWENTY-NINER

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*Our mind's made up, don't confuse us with facts & logic!*

## 29th Patch - "A Symbol of Unity"



Our 29th Division monument in the Vierville Draw was visited in January by Commission PAO Stephen Baker, fourth from the left, next to D-Day hero Charles Shay and some of our French supporters

I regret that our fight to save the 29th Division patch is not going well. While the continuing update remains, "the Commission has not made a recommendation," every indication is that they have concluded our historic patch is a "symbol of the Confederacy."

We are particularly appreciative of the efforts of MG Tim Williams, the Adjutant General of Virginia and Post 29 to tell the story of the patch in Virginia as a symbol of unity, not diversity.

Unfortunately, the appeal appears to be falling on deaf ears. It causes one to question, "what are we missing?" Our position is historical and so well supported. Could it be we never really had a chance to influence the Commission's thinking? It's time to begin asking, "How did we get here?"

The Commission went to work almost a year ago, initially researching the names of military bases and ships.

Soon however, they expanded their work, requesting the Department of Army provide a list of military "symbols" that could be considered "honoring the Confederacy," basically anything that had the color gray in it.

This now brought into consideration combat streamers, unit crests, emblems, badges, etc., a very extensive list. After examining these items, the Commission obviously made decisions, which resulted in site visits to determine the cost of removing the targeted bases, monuments, displays, markers, anything in DoD they considered related to the Confederacy.

While our French supporters met with the

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Commission's Public Affairs Officer in Vierville, it appears they were not successful in changing the Commission's decision regarding the 29th Division patch.

While the patch was designed over fifty years after the Civil War as a symbol of unity, the Commission seems to believe that the color gray in the 29th Division patch, "honors the Confederacy." This leaves your Association but one option to prevent the proposed patch revision, an appeal to the Congress of the United States to block the Commission's recommendation. The 117th Congress has the final authority and vote, but before that occurs, we intend to inform each and every member that the patch in no way honors the Confederacy. It was instead designed as a symbol of unity, bringing together units from Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia, and the District of Columbia!

So, you can continue to believe the threat is not real and wait to see what Congress does with the Commission's final report in October, but if you recognize what is happening, please help us before it is too late. We will need to hire professional lobbyists to tell the true foundation of the 29th Division patch to Congress. This appears to be our only remaining option, but it will require funding. We need your **immediate** help! Please go to the 29th Division website, click on the Donate link and then click on the "29th Let's Go Fund." A contribution in any amount will be greatly appreciated. Join the list of existing donors who saw through what was happening months ago. *It is not too late to save the patch!* For all who have served in the 29th Division, our Veterans, families, and friends, I appeal to you, **29 Let's Go!**

Theodore G. Shuey, Jr.  
BG (Ret.)  
National Commander



### Naming Commission visits Omaha Beach

Stephen Baker, Public Affairs Officer for The Naming Commission, D-Day veteran and combat medic Charles Norman Shay, and 29th Division patch advocate Marie Pascale Legrand at the 29th Division Memorial at Omaha Beach on 20 Jan 2022.

Baker also met with French officials from Colleville, St. Laurent and Vierville-su-Mer, visited the 29th Division Wall of Remembrance at St. Jean de Savigny, and the Madeleine Chapel in St. Lo, a memorial to soldiers of the 29th Division who liberated the city.

*Photo: Michael van den Dobbelsteen, Allied Victory Tours.*

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**Past editions of *The Twenty-Niner*  
from 2013 - present are now  
available on our website,  
[29thDivisionAssociation.com](http://29thDivisionAssociation.com),  
in the "For Members" section.**

### New address for National Headquarters

**29th Division Association, Inc.  
42 Norwick Circle  
Timonium, MD 21093-2561**



## Donations to the *Twenty-Niner*

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our membership for their generosity in contributing to the *Twenty-Niner* for this Spring issue. Note our cut-off date. If your contribution did not reach our National Executive Director by 22 March 2022, then it will not be listed until the next issue. Donation checks must be made payable to the **29th Division Association** and mailed to: **42 Norwick Circle, Timonium, MD 21093-2561**.

Cressman, George, Post 94, Associate, Woodbine, GA  
 Crouch, Milton, Post 2, 121/Engr Bn, Greenville, SC  
 Crouch, Paul, Post 2, Son, New Port Richey, FL  
 Gaskin, William, Post 110, HHB/DIVARTY, Montgomery, PA  
 Graves, John H., Post 64, 3/116, Luray, VA  
 Luray Caverns, Luray, VA  
 Nelson, James, Post 1-72, Associate, Minneapolis, MN  
***In memory of my father, Rudolph E. Nelson, E/115***  
 Pulket, Gene, Post 1-72, HHC/175, Belcamp, MD  
 Praski, Ben, Post 94,  
***In memory of John Hooper, 1/115***  
 Stetzel, Mike, Salem VA  
 Sutton, James, Post 2, Son, Bradenton, FL  
 Ungerleider, Neil, Post 93, Son, Boxford, MA  
***In honor of D-Day veteran & Death Camp liberator  
 Morton Waitzman HQ/115***  
 Veteran Corps, 5th Regiment Infantry, Baltimore, MD  
***In memory of Albert Craemer, Post 1-72, C/175***

## Post transfers

The following is the policy for members who wish to transfer to another post:

1. The member(s) must inform their Post, i.e. the losing post, that they wish to transfer to another post;
2. The member(s) must also inform the Assistant National Executive Director, who as the Membership Chairperson is the person responsible for the accountability and maintenance of the database of the 29th Division Association, Inc.

We cannot have reports of members transferring from one post to another on someone else's word. **It must come from the members themselves stating that they wish to be transferred.**

Members who follow the policy listed above will then be transferred immediately.

WILLIAM S. MUND, JR.  
 Assistant National Executive Director  
 Membership Chairperson  
**duster197329@gmail.com**

## TAPS

The following list shows names of known 29ers and their ladies or family members who died and their deaths reported from 1 November 2021 through 22 March 2022. We are indeed saddened and mourn their passing. We extend our deepest sympathy and love to their families and loved ones. We pray that they and all of our earlier deceased 29ers and ladies may rest in peace. *Amen.*

## LAST ROLL CALL

Alexander, John H., Post 1-72, F/116, Baltimore, MD 1/20/22  
 Atkinson, Charles M., Post 116, H/116, Saginaw, MI 3/1/22  
 Bliss, Philip, Post 2, Associate, Bradenton, FL 12/17/21  
 Craemer, Albert, Post 1-72, C/175, Owings Mills, MD 12/17/21  
 Duvall Harry J., Post 5, K/175, Taylors, SC 3/30/19  
 Fowler, Ashley, Post 110, HHS/2/110, Manchester, MD 8/17/21  
 Lane, John F., Post 5, C/1/111, Virginia Beach, VA 3/11/22  
 Lantz, Jr., Walter, 729MB, Sabillasville, MD 11/21/21  
 Morris, Kraig M., Post 78, Associate, Lock Haven, PA 8/19/21  
 Parker, Virginia, Post 85, Daughter, Kennedyville, MD 3/18/22  
 Prosser, James M., Sr., Post 64, D/116, Sumpter, SC 2/19/22  
 Simpson, Howard, Post 85, E/115, Elkton, MD 1/17/22  
 Smith, Crowell, Jr., Post 64, HHC/1/116, Roanoke, VA 11/21/21  
 Sutor, Robert N., Post 64, Associate, Keezeltown, VA 12/29/21  
 Walsh, John, Post 1-72, HHC/1/175, Nottingham, MD 8/23/21  
 Wyant, Avis L., Post 64, M/116, Harrisonburg, VA 12/16/21

## LEST WE FORGET

It was decided long ago, that as long as two 29ers survive, we shall remember and honor our comrades and ladies who have passed to the great beyond.

You have just read a list of our comrades who have died and whose deaths were reported to us since our last publication.

We ask survivors, friends, Post and Region Officers to forward information, as complete as possible, on the deceased to the National Executive Director, so that we can include them in the next issue of "The Twenty-Niner" and in the National Reunion Memorial Service. This will only be possible with your help.

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## Service Members, Families, and Friends of 29th Infantry Division

The 29th Infantry Division served as Task Force Spartan, Operation Spartan Shield from July 20, 2021 to March 20, 2022. As our deployment comes to an end, DCSM Plude and I are extremely grateful to our Task Force Spartan team members for their devoted service in successfully accomplishing all of our assigned missions during this time period. Task Force Spartan has been a major contributor to the U.S. efforts in the Operation Spartan Shield (Arabian Peninsula), Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq & Syria), Operation Freedom's Sentinel (Afghanistan), and Operations Allies Welcome and Allies Refuge (Afghan evacuation and resettlement).

We thank our Task Force Spartan Service Members. We had the privilege of serving with the best that America has to offer. It is truly remarkable what these great Service Members accomplished. They achieved mission success everyday regardless of the conditions. Their efforts and contributions will have a lasting impact on our partner nations and to the security of this region. They proudly performed their duties because of who they are and what they represent. These Service Members have carried on the great traditions of the 29th Infantry Division.

We thank our fine Families. Your efforts are as commendable as those of us who wear the uniform. No one understands the hardships of deployments more than our families. Your lives have been disrupted as you had to shoulder the burden of taking care of your family. You were forced to assume the role of both Mother and Father and provide comfort to your children. You have fought the harder battle, and we are forever grateful for your enduring support.

We thank our Family Support Groups and Family Assistant Coordinators. You were the critical link between our Service Members and their families. We often relied on you to communicate with the families and media back home. You functioned in a major role, and your efforts were essential to our success.

We thank our communities for their great support. We received countless letters, cards, and packages from friends, churches, schools, and organizations. Your generous donations served a critical need and provided comfort to our lives. There was never any doubt that we were in your thoughts and prayers. This constant reminder was a major factor in maintaining our morale throughout our deployment.

We appreciate the Soldiers of the 29th ID rear detachment who were responsible for maintaining operations back in home stations. They took great pride in ensuring that the needs of our Service Members and families were met. We also thank MG Tim Williams and the VANG and MG Tim Gowen and MDNG for their support.

We have made tremendous sacrifices in providing aid and comfort to Afghan evacuees, maintaining regional security, and developing enduring relationships with our partner nations. We take great pride in being a part of this historical deployment. We have proudly represented our Nation, our home States, and our local communities.

Forever Grateful.

"29, Let's Go"

John M. Rhodes  
Major General  
Task Force Spartan  
Commanding General

Daryl J. Plude  
Command Sergeant Major  
Task Force Spartan  
Division Command Sergeant Major

# Lawrence E. “Gene” Meeks of the 116th Infantry Regiment

*Editor's note: This account of Lawrence E. “Gene” Meeks of the 116th Infantry Regiment was written by the father of the D-Day Memorial, John Robert Slaughter. It was published in the November 1992 edition of the “Twenty-Niner”.*

*This account was brought to my attention by COL (Ret) Edward C. “Craig” Norman, an officer whom I served with during the first year of the division's reactivation beginning in November of 1984 when the “provisional” headquarters of the division was established in Building 2247, at Fort Belvoir, VA. I thank COL Norman for bringing it to my attention.*

*William S. Mund, Jr.  
Editor*

COL Lawrence E. “Gene” Meeks, wartime commander of the 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry, 29th Division, is engaged in his final epic battle. In this encounter he will not win. One of the 29th Division's great wartime commanders suffers from Alzheimer's disease in a Richmond, VA, nursing home. His wife, Arvia, has recently died in the same facility. Strapped to a wheel chair, the Colonel comes alive when visitors as about his beloved 3rd Battalion and D Company.

1LT “Gene” Meeks was Executive Officer of D Company, 116th, when I joined the Virginia National Guard in 1940. Captain William Stinnett was Commanding Officer; Walter O. Schilling, Robert Woody and Charles Kidd were 2LT's; George Boyd was 1SG. One immediately recognized ability in all these officers. CPT Schilling became D Company's CO and was killed on D-Day; CPT Boyd led H Company ashore and was wounded; CPT Kidd was M Company's CO on 6 June. Woody because an ace, flying P-51s for the Air Corps.

CPT Stinnett is nearly blind and walks haltingly with a cane. He stayed home during World War II but nevertheless followed his boys' progress from Fort Meade in 1941 to the Elbe River in 1945. His brother, John, was mortar platoon sergeant, losing an eye on D-Day.

COL Meeks distinguished himself as combat commander of four different battalions of the 29th and led the 3rd Battalion, 116th ashore on D-Day. He earned four medals for bravery and merit. He was bloodied by injury and shrapnel three times but refused treatment, consequently he did not receive the Purple Heart. He was proud of this.

I never saw COL Meeks when he wasn't immaculate, even on the battlefield. He had the whitest leggings and web equipment; the shiniest leather shoes, belt and holster; his shirt always creased; hair neatly crew cut; his cap or helmet cocked a bit and brass buttons glistened. He expected his men to look the same, thought they didn't have the build to wear their uni-

form as he could. He stood straight and his gait was as easy and light as a ballet dancer. He could hike with the best and never seemed tired. He was an expert marksman as were most of the officers and noncoms of D Company. He knew weapons, especially the .30 caliber Browning machine gun and the .81mm mortar. He could recite the GI Infantry Training Manual word for word. It was his bible and it had better be yours also.

Sensing the end might be near, I asked his only son, L.E. “Larry,” Jr., to make a tape, spelling out his father's career. Following are excerpts of the 90-minute tape and a 4-page typewritten answer to the questionnaire sent in 1987. I have taken editing liberties.

## The Early Years

[Larry's tape:] Lawrence Eugene Meeks was born in Buena Vista, VA, on 21 September 1907. In 1910, he moved to Roanoke where he and his wife, Arvia, and son Lawrence E. “Larry” Jr., made their home before and after military service.

“Information from mother's bible: My grandfather's name was Leonard Massie Meeks; my grandmother's name was Sara Ida Cross Meeks. Little is known of grandfather because he died of pneumonia in 1909, in his late 20s. I knew my grandmother very well. She was a gifted and incredibly strong woman with a lot of integrity, honesty and determination. I'm sure my father inherited many of my grandmother's good qualities.

“In 1909, grandfather died—my father was two—leaving my family with virtually no income. Grandmother, with her infant child, took a job as housekeeper on a farm, earning \$3 a month. She and Dad lived in a small basement room in the house. She worked extremely hard and was a wizard with a penny. She saved enough money out of her earnings to move, with my father, to Roanoke.

“She found work in an overall factory. With no one to look after the baby, she slipped him into the factory. She did her

work also kept an eye on the baby. During a break, she was giving my father a bath in the ladies' wash room. The soapy baby slipped out of her hands and he fell to the floor, breaking his arm. For this, she was fired.

"Grandmother remarried step-grandfather, John Bracket Kelley; his half-brothers and sisters were, John, who worked with the Chamber of Commerce, Aubrey; Nita Crowder and Claude. Claude was a gunnery sergeant in the Marine Corps during World War II. He was offered a battlefield commission on Iwo Jima but was wounded before it took effect. Claude often teased Dad that he had to make many amphibious landings and father only had to make one.

"My step-grandfather lost his arm at an early age in a saw mill accident. This severely hampered his ability to earn a decent living. He found work at the Norfolk and Western Railway but they soon went on strike. When the strike was settled, step-father was not rehired. Father was a better-than-average 7th grade junior school student. After step-grandfather lost his job, Dad quit school to go to work. He worked odd jobs until he was 18 years old. He worked in a telegraph office and at a pharmacy—any job to keep food on the table. The meager money he brought home probably kept his half-sister and brothers from going to an orphanage. Quitting school was tragic because his report cards show A and B+ grades.

### **Joins National Guard**

"In 1926, Dad, joined the Virginia National Guard. He was assigned to D Company, 116th Infantry, 29th Division, a Roanoke, heavy weapons company. He enjoyed the military, working his civilian job at the American Viscose Corp., and drilling one night a week with the Guard. Every two or three years, he rose in rank until he reached staff sergeant. During this phase of his life he experienced life as an enlisted man and thereafter empathized with them. He said many times that sergeants ran the Army and enlisted men won the battles.

"In 1931 or 1932, he was selected to go to Officers Candidate School at Fort Benning, GA. Upon graduation he became the company's second lieutenant. Back then, the Army was much smaller, having only three officers per company. The captain was commanding officer; the first lieutenant was executive officer; and a second lieutenant. The first sergeant and the other NCO's helped run the company. After the NG was inducted in 1941, Dad was promoted to captain and commanding officer of the company.

[In 1987, I sent COL Meeks a questionnaire asking for his wartime remembrances, especially D-Day. I didn't receive an answer and decided he either forgot or didn't wish to comply. His son, Larry recently found the questionnaire and 4-page reply in his effects. Following are excerpts. Edited by John Robert Slaughter.]

"During my younger days the boys gathered on the 'store porch.' One of my buddies was explaining the advantages of joining the National Guard. When he told of getting paid to go to summer camp at Virginia Beach, we all became interested. I attended the next meeting and was told that D Company was a machine gun infantry company. That sounded good so I put my name on the dotted line. The officer and the company clerk were so nice to me until after I said, 'I do.' Then they let me know that I was to be present every drill night; my uniform was to be neat and clean and altered to fit properly and have my hair cut. By now I wondered if I had made a mistake.

It soon became clear, this was a first-class outfit and I would have to work hard to keep up. The officers and NCOs were hard-working and interested in our progress. Monday was drill night and Wednesdays and Fridays we usually volunteered for night classes in nomenclature and function of the Brown-ing .30 cal. machine gun, all weapons of D Company. This was very exciting for all of us.

### **Federal Service**

"February 3, 1941, we left Roanoke for Fort Meade, MD, and to federal service. The country was not then at war but Hitler and Tojo were flexing their muscles in Europe and Asia. After maneuvering in Carolina, the division was declared fit. On the way back to Meade, the Japs bombed the Naval base at Pearl Harbor and war was declared. We patrolled Eastern Shore, MD, using live ammunition. It was back to Carolina and to Camp Blanding, FL, when we received word to entrain to the port of embarkation, Camp Kilmer, NJ.

[Larry's tape:] "Just before going overseas, Dad and other officers arranged to meet their wives in town for the weekend. COL E.W. Opie, 116th CO, had given strict orders there were to be no weekend passes for anyone. They were at Camp Blanding, FL, and COL Opie had been given secret orders for the regiment to move to the port of embarkation, Camp Kilmer, NJ, and overseas.

"Unable to change plans, Dad met my mother and they spent a quiet weekend together not knowing it would be their last meeting for four years. Mother recalls at about 2 o'clock in the morning she heard what sounded like belt buckles rattling. It was Dad dressing to go back to camp. He said he had to go, kissing her before leaving. He went out into the dark to the highway leading back to camp. There was very little traffic and no one out on the street. A lone car, headlights beaming, stopped. It was COL Opie! Nothing was said, except what a warm night it was. Embarrassed, they both rode back to camp in silence."

[COL Meeks resumes:] "We received word we would cross the Atlantic on the 'Queen Mary.' That evening we boarded her in a downpour and quietly left the New York Harbor. As we

headed to the open sea, our escorts returned to the harbor, and we were alone. The ride was smooth until the fourth day, we famed a British cruiser, 'HMS Curacao,' killing 332 British sailors. On the fifth day we limped into Greencock Scotland, wounded but afloat." [COL Meeks skips training in England; resumes the story just prior to D-Day.]

[Larry's tape reveals COL Meeks' version why COL Canham selected the 1st Battalion to assault the Vierville Draw on Dog Green Beach.] "High command sent the 29th Division two tough-minded career officers. Dad had been promoted to lieutenant colonel and was assigned to command the 3rd Battalion, 116th. MG Charles H. Gerhardt replaced MG Leonard Gerow who left to command V Corps. COL Charles D.W. Canham became Regimental CO. Both were West Point graduates. First Battalion was commander by LTC John Metcalfe, 2nd Battalion, MAJ Sidney Bingham, also West Pointers.

"I believe Dad felt lacking in the company of these West Pointers. Canham drove my father very hard and Dad had a lot to prove. Canham eventually began to respect father's ability. Dad had always been an expert reader of maps. He loved maps. He still has many battle maps that show exactly where he and the battalion operated. This is how he kept track of his units.

### History Altered

"COL Canham was briefing command officer on the D-Day mission. They were looking at a wall map oriented from sea towards land. From left to right, he had marked the code-named sectors where each battalion would go ashore; 1st at Easy Green and Dog Red; 2nd at Dog White; and 3rd at Dog Green. [The 3rd was scheduled to go in at the Vierville Draw where the 1st actually landed.] COL Canham turned to Dad and said, 'COL Meeks, are you and your men ready to die?' Dad looked him square in the eye and replied, 'Hell, no! We're ready to do our jobs, sir!'

"Canham, taken aback, reversed the order, sending the 1st Battalion to the Vierville Draw, 2nd Battalion on the left and the 3rd in reserve behind the 2nd. The 1st Battalion was chewed up pretty well and old friends Walt Schilling was killed and LTC Metcalfe died a few days later. A Co. alone had 91 men killed.

[COL Meeks resumes his story aboard 'USS Charles Carroll' in Weymouth Harbor on June 4th.] "I was given permission to visit other ships of the regiment. I chose to visit my former unit of the 1st Battalion, D Company, who was on 'HMS Empire Javelin.' I found former Roanoker, CPT Walt Schilling, a National Guard and Viscose buddy whom I had known since about 10-years-old. He was in a mood I had never seen before. When we were alone, he said, 'Do you think you will live through this and return home?' Knowing him as I did, he caught me by surprise. I said, 'sure, with our training and fine equipment, we've got it made.' His reply was 'Gene, I don't

believe I'm going to make it.' I assured him he would. (I was wrong. His landing craft was hit by an 88mm before it touched down. He was standing behind the ramp that took a direct hit.) I spoke to and shook hands with many members of D Company and the 1st Battalion. Too many of them didn't make it.

"When I returned to my ship, I noticed the men were unusually quiet and a few were playing cards. There wasn't any of the usual horse play. I remember eating a good evening meal. I checked my clothing and equipment and turned in about 2230 [10:30 p.m.] I was not the least bit nervous and tried to look at tomorrow as just another training exercise. I began wondering what we would be doing this time the next day.

"We were awakened [0200] early the next morning. I got out of bed, checked my gear, and ate a good breakfast. I assembled the battalion officers, reminded them this was the real thing and to keep in mind what we had learned in training and I then wished them all good luck!

We heard COL Canham's and GEN Eisenhower's messages over the ship's intercom. Everyone knew where their station was and how to get there. We loaded into our landing craft by davits; others used cargo nets. By now the water had some fair sized swells and one had to be careful. We were in total darkness. We had about 30 men in our landing craft. A 4.3 chemical mortar detachment and its captain [CPT Gaffney] were assigned to us for support.

### Texas Music

"It became apparent, and understandably so, some of our men were getting nervous about the mission we were expected to perform. We didn't know what to expect on the beach or even if we would make it to the beach. Then the battleship, 'USS Texas' less than a mile to the right, began firing its 14-inch guns against the French coast. All turrets pointing shoreward were belching pure hell toward the area we were heading. This tended to uplift all of our spirits, at least temporarily.

"As we got closer in we soon realized there was resistance and that we were in for a fight. Machine guns began firing across the ramp and into the side of the landing craft. No one was injured by this. I as, at the time, talking to the other officer, CPT Gaffney, when enemy artillery shells landed close by. The Coast Guard coxswain became very nervous and tried to steer our craft behind and close to another boat in our wave. This, of course, created a good target for the shore batteries. I had already cautioned the sailor to keep a distance but to no avail. I then drew my .45, ordered him to disperse. He finally steered away from the others. After trying to calm the sailor's nerves, I returned to the front of the boat.

"I had just gotten settled; I had my hand on CPT Gaffney's shoulders when there was an incredibly loud explosion, blowing the ramp off the landing craft. CPT Gaffney and some of

his men who were up front on the craft were killed. The captain's head landed on my shoulder and I noticed he had blood oozing from his nose and mouth. I could see he was dead. This was our first battle casualty and the first person I saw killed.

"Water gushed into the landing craft, sinking her in shoulder-deep water. We shed our equipment [about 60 pounds] and keeping low in the water, waded ashore. It was probably fate that saved us because if we hadn't sunk we would have touched down in front of a machine gun emplacement and probably would have been killed. We picked our way through the obstacles.

### Get Across Fast

"I tried to warn the men that tracer bullets were grazing the beach about a foot above the ground. I gave the order to get across as fast as possible and not to bunch up. There were two guns firing at us and I and a few of the men began to return the fire, neutralizing them. Those that survived the boat sinking, made it across the beach and to the wall unscathed. We stayed at the wall until afternoon when conditions improved somewhat. We began moving down the beach; getting the company commanders together and organizing. At this time, we hadn't heard the bad news concerning the 1st Battalion.

"There was a road up ahead that led into a ravine [Les Mou-

lins Draw]. Thinking it was covered by enemy fire, we avoided it, going over the higher ground. On top of the hill there was a well-hidden enemy coastal gun. It fired, surprising us, as we were only a few feet away. We lost one of our men from that big gun.

"Battalion S-2, LT Smith, and I returned to the ravine and ran into its defenses, which pinned us down for the night. We met strong resistance throughout the night at the rather large church in the center of town. The next morning (D+1) COL Canham appeared and ordered the battalion to pull back and move up the road that parallels the beach at Vierville.

"D+2, we were ordered to help the Rangers at Pointe du Hoc. We began firing at what we thought were enemy targets. After seeing they were Rangers, we ordered a cease fire. We resume our march to Grandcamp. As we followed the road we began to lose sight of the channel.

"We ran into resistance at Grandcamp. SSG Frank Perego, a member of K Company, 116th moved alone behind one of the gun positions, surprised the crew, killing some of them and capturing the rest. For this he was awarded the Medal of Honor. The battalion captured Grandcamp and went into reserve." [End of COL Meeks' account.]

*By John Robert Slaughter*

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## 116th IBCT HQ completes CTE, begins next phase of KFOR mission

CAMP MCGREGOR, N.M. – The Virginia National Guard's 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team headquarters completed their first step of pre-mobilization training after completing a culminating training exercise, Jan. 24, 2022 at Camp McGregor, New Mexico. Approximately 400 Virginia and Kentucky National Guard Soldiers are mobilized as Task Force Saint Lo and are training to take responsibility for the NATO Kosovo Force, or KFOR, Regional Command - East mission in Kosovo.

"The Soldiers did well here in Texas," said Col. Christopher Samulski, the commander of the 116th IBCT. "It was a great opportunity to work out any kinks before we leave for Germany."

Saint Lo Soldiers were evaluated strategically, tactically and administratively, Samulski said. They conducted independent and joint patrols, key leader engagements, night live-fire exercises and civil disturbance exercises. The task force staff sections were validated in their overall military decision-making process from operation order receipt to mission analysis and the orders production process, Samulski said. The staff was tested in more specific scenarios such as how well they handled receiving Red Cross messages, personnel issues, and what to do if there is a mass casualty situation.

Task Force Saint Lo is now training at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, where they will be evaluated on similar criteria, but this time with the multinational partners they will be serving with in Kosovo.

"Adding multinational integration will be the next challenge we will face and will allow us to better prepare for our mission in Kosovo," Samulski said. "We are a learning organization and any

opportunity for us to grow is critical to success. Serving alongside our partner nations will continue to strengthen our interoperability and capabilities as an organization."

In addition to the 116th IBCT headquarters, Task Force Saint Lo includes Soldiers assigned to the 429th Brigade Support Battalion support operations section, as well as Delta Company, 229th Brigade Engineer Battalion and the Kentucky National Guard's 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment.

The VNG's 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 29th Infantry Division will serve as 116th's aviation task force and will provide medical casualty transportation and air mobility for all KFOR troops.

RC-E also includes a maneuver battalion capable of rapidly deploying throughout the RC-E area of responsibility to guarantee a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement, as well as an effects battalion maintaining situational awareness with local authorities and non-government organizations for monitoring and early identification of security, socio-economic and political situations.

Each unit supports the safety, security and freedom of movement for all the communities in Kosovo in accordance with KFOR's mandate as per United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 of 1999. Troops from the U.S., Poland, Latvia, Romania, Switzerland, Turkey, Slovenia, Greece, Hungary and Italy serve in RC-E.

Task Force Saint Lo's deployment will mark the 30th rotation of U.S. military forces based at Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo.

*By 1LT Catherine M. Bean, 116th IBCT*



# Normandy Diary

## *Part 1*

By Colin H. McLaurin, CO, I/115

### **Farewell England**

It was raining as I stepped into a small boat which was to take me to my assigned LCI. The sun was obscured by millions of fine, closely packed raindrops falling through the air and finally ending their flight on the wet, muddy earth.

Our embarkation point was called a "hard", which is an area built up so small boats may tie up or be pulled onto the shore. This particular hard was located along the Plymouth harbor area.

Along with me in the boat were other officers of my 115th Regiment who would act as advance agents for the personnel who would occupy their boats.

Stepping from the solid earth of England into that landing craft marked an end of my training for war. Ending were four years of preparation and waiting. Starting was an operation which we, along with the rest of the world, had been anticipating for months if not years. Ending also were twenty-two months of living in England, a foreign country.

I was glad to leave, everything considered, for it meant an end to a long weary grind of training, marching, moving to strange places, freezing in winter, sweating in summer, censoring mail, guard duty, and many other trials and tribulations incident to military life in garrison on foreign soil in wartime.

There was no ceremony to mark our little leave taking. There was no one to bid us goodbye and good luck. We simply scrambled into the boat and the coxswain backed out, skillfully swung her around, and headed for the clusters of landing ships and craft anchored together in the harbor.

We had been working for months with the Navy in preparation for the invasion; so we felt pretty much at home on water. Each of us knew the number of our landing craft and as we sighted them, our little boat would pull up alongside and the officer concerned would scramble up. We would wave goodbye to each as he left the group. Finally, my turn came. I clambered up on the side of my LCI and onto the deck. Turning around I waved my little goodbye to the few remaining officers who watched the boat scoot away.

My next problem was to contact the craft's captain, introduce myself, get to my quarters and unload my personal impedimenta of war. The commanding officer proved to be a young lieutenant, possibly a little older than myself, who immediately made me feel at home. He and his men were a little amazed at the amount of equipment that it was to be my sad lot to have to carry into battle. I wore a pack which was bulging with socks, toilet articles, mess kit, extra underclothes, field rations, two handker-

chiefs, hand towel, etc. My gas mask, a special waterproof type, was slung by my left side. Around my waist was a pistol belt with extra ammunition, compass, first aid pouch, fighting knife, flashlight, entrenching tool, wire cutters, canteen, and a little canvas pouch attached to it. Slung over my shoulder were my radio, carbine, field glasses, a waterproof case containing at least twenty-five maps and a light weight gas mask case containing a signal projector and six flares. I was dressed in paratroop boots, heavy wool trousers and shirt (gas protective), steel helmet, combat jacket, and raincoat. In addition to all this I was to be issued a standard Navy life belt which fastened just above the waist.

I was shown to my quarters which proved to be a cubby hole, approximately ten by fifteen feet, with bunks in three tiers and which would also be the quarters for the other eight Army officers assigned to this craft. The boat's medical chest and a chair were the nook's only furniture.

After stripping my equipment off, I was informed that supper was ready; so without a second invitation, I found my way to the tiny officer's ward room which also served as the mess. I had eaten on Naval ships before and had found the food very good as well as pleasingly served; so I was rather looking forward to my meals with the Navy. Nor was I disappointed with this one.

With the meal finished and the dishes removed, I conferred with the boat's officers as to the accommodation of my men, their feeding arrangement, rules and regulations of the ship, and other matters that were necessary.

The boat's officers and crew had one thing in common with my outfit and that was we were well trained but had not as yet seen combat.

By the time I had finished looking over the boat and making my plans for receiving the company, it was dark; so I went to my little cubby hole, lay down on my bunk, lit my pipe, and relaxed both my mind and body.

"This is it," I thought, "the great adventure." It seemed odd that I would travel from this quiet, peaceful spot in a few days to an area where death and destruction would be commonplace. I, with thousands of other soldiers, would come to grips with the enemy and enter into a mortal struggle where defeat would mean disaster and chaos.

In a few days, I would be in combat for the first time. I thought of my training, my many field problems and maneuvers large and small. There had always been an enemy, but it was a simulated enemy or an imaginary enemy. There is nothing to fear there. In training a soldier could fight and die and live to

fight again. In combat a soldier could fight and die and when dead would live no more. "Combat" is a word that I had heard for four years. To a soldier, combat is the end of training, the graduate school of soldiering.

My thoughts went backward in contemplation of my sojourn in England. I remembered my first sight of Scotland as the great liner *Queen Elizabeth*, our transport, steamed slowly into the harbor and dropped anchor. I had been excited over the prospect of setting foot, for the first time in my life, on foreign soil. Then there had been the period of inactivity while we were waiting for our planes. (I had been on duty with the Air Corps at the time as a combat observer.) After that had come my reassignment back to the hard rough life on the infantry which included a six-month tour of duty with a Ranger battalion.

I picked up a book out of the ward room book shelf, read for a couple of hours, and finally drifted off into an untroubled sleep. The next morning, after a hearty breakfast of cereal, toast, coffee, scrambled eggs and bacon. I went out on the deck to await the arrival of my company.

In the harbor around us were anchored dozens of invasion craft, in clusters. LCI's, LCM's, big LST's, cargo ships, destroyers, cruisers of the Navies of both the United States and the United Kingdom. Overhead floated dozens of barrage balloons reflecting great blobs of silver in the sky. Small LCVP's were skimming about all over the harbor. I noticed that many of them were loaded with infantry. They would pull alongside the larger craft and the troops would climb up over the side on cargo nets which had been lowered. We had four such nets lowered over the side of our LCI so that we could unload four LCVP's at once.

Within an hour, a line of boats nosed their way over to our craft. The company had arrived. For the next forty-five minutes I was kept busy directing the different platoons to the different compartments of the craft. Because of the compactness of the craft, the decks became congested with men and care had to be taken to see that every man went to the compartment assigned to his section. Finally, they were all aboard. In addition to the company with its six officers, there was the battalion surgeon and his men, two artillery forward observers, and their crews. There was a total of about two hundred men and officers.

We had to check to see that all the men had been assigned bunks and had stored away all their gear. This included mortars, machine guns, ammunition, big and little radios, medical supplies, prepared pole and pack charges of TNT for demolitions work, with each charge containing fifteen pounds of TNT, flame throwers, and the men's personal weapons and packs. There did not seem to be a square inch of space to spare.

After settling down, there was not very much to do. In spite of our inactivity, time passed swiftly. Now that we had boarded our invasion craft, there were no restrictions against talking over our

plans and, as could be expected, the invasion was the chief topic of conversation. Out talk was not confined solely to this operation however; other subjects received their due attention.

The balance of the day and night passed swiftly and then we were moving out of the harbor. As there happened to be a headquarters ship in the harbor containing one of the Navy's Admirals, they had to have a little ceremony. The ships formed a line and, as they steamed out of the harbor, they passed in review before the Admiral. Since this was purely a Navy show, we Army personnel stayed below.

We were not heading for France yet though, but just to a shipping concentration area. In the next three days we moved a few more times and each time found at our destination bigger concentrations of shipping of everything from battleships to portable docks called Rhino barges which were to be towed. To understand what a gigantic undertaking this was, one had to see it with his own eyes. It would be impossible for one person to see more than a segment of the great mass of ships, men and machine.

The men as a whole were not unduly nervous over the prospect of our imminent operations against an enemy. In fact, most of us did not appear to be much more concerned than we had been during our amphibious exercises. The men were cheerful, talkative and calm. Considerable time was spent in going over our landing plans, participating in practice general alarms, exercising by shifts on the deck, and taking care of the combat equipment. Leisure time was spent in sleeping, eating, reading, bull sessions, and admiring the view from the deck.

Day followed day until it began to appear that we were not going to have an invasion. Twice D-Day had been postponed or rumors to that effect had circulated. On 4 June, we were informed by a reliable authority that the next day would be the big day. 5 June was unfit weather wise to hit the beach, and 6 June became D-Day.

The ships began to move out of our latest harbor in orderly lines. Our little LCI attached itself to a line of other LCI's and we headed out toward the channel. Everything had been organized down to such minute details as issuing seasick pills. As we headed out toward the rougher waters of the Channel again, I took my first one. I did not intend to have to contend with seasickness at such a critical time.

That night of 5 June we went to sleep as usual. The only change in our routine was that we slept with our clothes on. Before retiring, I had carefully repacked all of my equipment and waterproofed my carbine, wallet, tobacco, and radio. As I drifted off to sleep, my mind was occupied with the thought that comparative comfort of the LCI was about to end. I felt a vague excitement and anticipation tinged with apprehension rising within me. There was also a feeling of determination to see it through. I expected the worse but hoped for the best.

### Hello France

The dawn of 6 June was much the same as others had been. The sky was at first rather gray and the air was misty. We had breakfast with the customary K ration served with hot coffee from the galley.

After breakfast, I took my last seasick pill, assembled all my equipment and checked my maps for the hundredth time. I then went down to the craft's magazine with one of the Naval officers to get the caps for our demolition charges. They were then distributed to the assault teams' demolition sections.

By this time, we were within sight of the French coast. Our LCI's were still in column, and other columns could be seen near and far. The mist had cleared and it looked as if we would have a good day.

I went back to my quarters and put on my equipment. After checking the Company with the other officers, we were ready to disembark. There was nothing else to be done but wait until the bottom of the LCI grated against the sloping beach.

Along with a group of others, I went out on the deck and observed the mighty spectacle. We were only a few miles from the coast now, and its outline was clearly etched against the sky. All around and as far as the eye could see the Channel was teeming with ships, boats, and craft of all description. The Naval ships which were to give gunfire support were taking position, and every now and then the flash of their big guns would be seen. I did not notice very much noise which might have been expected from so many engines, explosions, and miscellaneous sources. Every now and then a group of fighter planes, our twin tailed Lightnings, would roar over.

About this time, we changed our course to one roughly parallel with the coast. Evidently the pilot had not hit our beach on the button and was maneuvering around to it. I began checking the silhouette of the coast line with aerial photographs and sketches with which I had been provided. After a few minutes, I decided that we were just a few miles from our beach which was designated as Omaha with a subdivision named Dog Red.

By now, H-hour had come and gone, Five or six miles away I could see clouds of smoke hanging close to the ground where the assault waves were slugging it out with the beach defenders. In the area through which our LCI was proceeding, ships of all descriptions were standing by. We passed a big transport, and I saw little LCVP's bobbing against her steel sides while troops and equipment were being loaded into the smaller boats. Other groups of small craft were circling in their assembly areas while waiting for missing ones to join the group.

Steel helmets with camouflage nets over them projected over the boats sides. I knew how these men must have felt riding around in those open, frail boats, for I had gone through months of training in England for just such a mission. Thirty men in an LCVP fills it up and makes a human being understand how a sardine

must feel in a can. Besides being crowded, other discomforts have to be endured. There are no seats; so you become cramped after a few minutes. In addition, when the craft picks up a little speed, the blunt bow slaps into the swells with a big bump and scatters sheets of cold salt water over the occupants. Fifteen or twenty minutes of riding will cause a poor soldier to be soaked to the skin. There is also the danger of becoming seasick which becomes an actuality in many cases. The cumulative effect of these discomforts is not conducive to the maintenance of enthusiasm and fighting spirit after an hour or so. These men had to put up with these condition for hours and then disembark on a hostile beach which demanded the utmost in courage and strength to neutralize.

As our boat neared our beach, I was surprised that there were no enemy planes attacking this great array of ships and no fire from enemy artillery or coastal guns. I had pictured the situation to be one in which everyone would have to run a gauntlet of fire and shells before touching the beach.

I noticed that we turned in toward the shore a little before we arrived at our assigned beach. I thought the Navy had made a mistake, but I found out later that there was less opposition here. The main reason was that our assigned target had not been taken and the first assault waves were congesting the beach.

It might sound strange to shove in troops on a beach that had already been taken instead of reinforcing a spot where the resistance had not been overcome. However, only so many troops can conveniently occupy an area and after that, additional men simply glut the area and add to the general confusion.

We were now only a few hundred yards from the shore. Other LCI's were coming in to the right and left of us with others already grounded on the beach. At this point, I was subjected to my first enemy fire—my baptism. A shell burst in the water about one hundred and fifty yards dead ahead between our boat and the shore. Approximately ten second later, another did the same thing only it exploded only seventy-five yards away. Seeing two shells exploding that near us and getting closer caused me to gain the impression that some German was trying to hit our boat. A feeling of tenseness and anxiety came over me which no doubt could be called fear. This was a feeling that I was to become very accustomed to from then on.

I was expecting the next shot to land squarely upon us, but on this occasion, fate had other plans for us. The third round did not come. Freed for the time being of that particular fear, I directed my attention elsewhere. Events occur so rapidly that soldiers involved do not have time to let their minds dwell too long on separate incidents. They dare not, for their entire mental and physical strength is necessary to content with the action of the moment.

The keel of the boat grated on the sand of the beach. This was the moment for which we had waited for so long. Men from

the boat slid the narrow walkways down into the shallow water just a few feet from the wet pebbles on the shore. As second in command, it was my duty to leave the boat last and deliver to the captain of the boat a roster of the men who landed with us. In five or ten minutes, everyone was off. I went up to the captain and handed him the list. We both grinned and then shook hands wishing each other luck.

I realized that I was starting off on a great adventure, a life and death struggle with the fate of our country possibly dependent on the outcome. With a last wave of my hand, I made my way down the ramp, jumped into water about waist deep, and waded onto the great, war-torn continent of Europe.

The beach was jammed with men and littered with equipment. LCI's were lined up with smaller boats sandwiched in here and there. A few were damaged. I did not have time to get a detailed picture in my mind; I remember only the impression produced by a glance. My interest and attention was directed at keeping the company together and getting them off the beach. This was easier said than done, for there were men from the First Division mixed in with ours.

The beach was not sandy, but was made of small pebbles. Since the tide was high at the time, the beach itself was only a few yards wide. What appeared to be a small creek ran beyond and parallel to the beach. From the far side of the creek on the ground was ordinary soil which sloped steeply upward for about three hundred yards.

I noticed two columns of men moving slowly up this slope. Our company got organized, and we started forward. As yet, we had received no enemy fire, but our supporting Naval guns were still throwing shells on the top of the slope. After crossing the creek by wading waist deep in muddy water, and starting up the slope, I realized why we were advancing so slowly. We had a mine field in front of us.

This realization put me on guard. Before planting each foot on the ground ahead, I would inspect every square inch of the area. Just ahead, I noticed a man lying down. As I drew near him, I noticed why. He had stepped on a mine and it had blown off half of his right foot. He was arranged fairly comfortably and was smoking a cigarette. He warned almost everyone who came by about a mine that was embedded on the ground about a yard from him. These mines were a new kind, and they were buried with only the detonator, which resembled a small cork protruding out. Back in England, enemy anti-tank and personnel mines had been the subject for hours of instruction, and here, our first combat experience with them, a new model showed up. Such is life.

At this time, I heard a shrill, whistling sound, constantly in-

creasing in volume and clearness and which ended with a big explosion, scattering dirt, gravel and a dense cloud of black smoke high into the air. I, along with everyone else, knew without asking that this was artillery fire. This sound was to become so much a part of my surroundings that it would become noticeable by its absence. Sometimes these shells would come in singly, and at other times they would come screaming in salvos to explode at random in our general area.

I felt fear again and crouched as low as possible to the earth as each deadly missile ended its flight. I would have flung myself flat on the ground, but the danger of setting off a mine more than counterbalanced the urge. To the tune of German artillery, we slowly made our way through that wide belt of mines. Three or four times, I heard explosions ahead of me, and a few minutes later I would pass the scene of the accident.

After a nerve-racking hour and a half, I reached the crest of the slope. The area just ahead of us had been organized into a strong point by the Germans, but they had evacuated it. It consisted of several trenches dug into the ground with barbed wire obstacles thrown around them. I was here that I saw my first enemy, a dead German soldier. As there was no indication that our troops had been fighting on this position, I concluded that our supporting gunfire had been too heavy, and they had withdrawn.

I experienced a slight feeling of relief, for we were now on French soil and off the beach. The great landing which had been on our minds for so long was now behind us. As far as our unit was concerned, the fighting would be strictly land warfare from now on. I felt that the period of greatest danger was over. It was over and we still had not been subjected to small arms fire.

From this point, we struck out on a southwesterly course which led us through a wooded sector. Our advance was extremely slow, due no doubt, to the cautiousness of our advance guard element. We would walk a few steps and then stop; walk a few more steps and the stop again. Artillery was still falling in our general area, and we were constantly forced to take whatever cover that was available in order to lessen the danger of being hit by flying shrapnel. Usually, when we heard the warning whistle of the enemy's artillery, we would hit the ground and lie as flat as possible.

I have a hazy recollection of moving along in this manner until the approach of darkness. We then dug in for the night on the outskirts of a little village. Our battalion had been lucky and our casualties light. Only one man had been killed and one wounded in my Company; both had been hit by shrapnel from the same artillery shell.

*To be continued*

**Past editions of *The Twenty-Niner* from 2013 - present, are now available on our website, [29thDivisionAssociation.com](http://29thDivisionAssociation.com), in the "For Members" section.**



## Executive Director's Message

*(Continued from page 1)*

a very trying one for the Association, the nation and the world. As the Omicron variant started to wane and masking requirements were being lifted, the Russian attack on Ukraine took the spotlight across the world and reminded us of the importance of freedom and the values for which our veterans fought and died in Europe.

In that light, the Association now finds itself in an existential battle to retain the iconic blue and gray yin yang patch worn in battle starting in 1918 in World War I and over 100 years later on an international mission in Kuwait. In 2021, the US Congress established the Naming Commission whose mission is to provide "naming, renaming and removal recommendations to Congress for all Department of Defense items that commemorate the Confederate States of America or any person who served voluntarily for the Confederate States of America."

Consequently, the Commission is including the blue and gray patch of the 29th Division in their review process. The position of your Association is firmly in support of retention of the patch. We have noted that the yin yang symbolizes "unity" as American citizens joined together in World War I, just 52 years after the Civil War, to oppose tyranny in Europe under the US flag of freedom. Again, in World War II the Division was mobilized and participated in the greatest amphibious invasion in world history at Omaha Beach in 1944.

This heritage and linkage to the present day 29er can no better be exemplified than by a recent event that the Association supported. MAJ Nick Rowland of the 1-116th Battalion HQ deployed to Djibouti as part Task Force Red Dragon of the East Africa Response Force requested 25 copies of Joe Balkoski's book, "Omaha Beach." MAJ Rowland indicated that staff and senior NCOs of the 1-116th would read the book as a part of their Professional Development exercise.

Why did he choose this book? It is plainly obvious to anyone who knows the history of the 29th Division. The 116th Infantry Regiment landed on Omaha Beach as a part of the first wave along with elements of the 1st Infantry Division and 2nd Ranger Battalion. The linkage between the soldiers of the 1-116th is inextricably tied to those brave GIs that stormed the beaches in Normandy over 70 years ago. It is through this linkage and heritage that esprit de corps is nurtured, grown and displayed by a military unit in times of peace, as well as war, to effectively and efficiently complete its mission no matter the circumstances.

Therefore, we cannot allow this link to be broken. Please help to save the patch, as Commander Shuey has so effectually described in his message.

### **Zoom NEC II Meeting on 13 January**

MG Tim Williams, TAG VA, was Commander Shuey's guest online to provide an update on the "29th Division Patch" issue with the "Naming Commission." MG Williams shared that while he

wished this was a surprise, it is something that has been working for a while, and every time he talked with members of the Commission, they are quick to say "no decision has been made" and "their job is to gather information." He stated the 29th Division community has done incredible things in a very short time, saturating the Commission with letters and emails.

He has created a central packet under his signature, that includes letters from the Governor of Virginia, TAG of MD, former and current Division Commanders, historians, and a whole gamut of supporters. The packet has been transmitted and was in the hands of the commission on 11 JAN 2022. The packet was also provided to the Chief NGB and the Director of the ARNG. Both have been candid with Williams and articulated their support. He had conversations with the PAO of the commission and all who have received the packet and other correspondence are impressed by the volume of correspondence and especially the passion our veterans have.

MG Williams feels that their ardor and pride will be readily apparent when key individuals who are going to Normandy the following week, starting with the PAO, walk the terrain and get a better feel for why we are so passionate about the Division and its insignia. He counts that as a big success on this issue and to raise the awareness and bring more members to the association.

He stated he is more optimistic today, than at the beginning of December, that we will succeed in this endeavor, and a most of that is due to the efforts of the people involved in the NEC II meeting. He stated, to please remind people not to stop, and now that the Commission has been informed, to shift to writing to their Congressional delegations. He also forwarded the packet to every member of the Virginia Congressional Delegation and MG Gowen, TAG MD, is going to do likewise. In the last 24 hours he has had conversations with four congressmen, all of whom are supportive, and he intends to continue forward with one-on-one conversations with more.

The 115th Regimental flag restoration has restarted at the Maryland Museum of Military History. Work ceased due the pandemic and the Museum Director, Dr. Julie Shively, is in the process of retaining a contractor to perform the work that the Association funded.

The Association is sponsoring a bronze plaque to commemorate the 29th Division at the new National Museum of the US Army at Fort Belvoir, VA. The plaque will be in place by Memorial Day this year and it will be unveiled along with unit plaques in a ceremony on Memorial Day. Association officers and guests will be in attendance for this special event.

Commander Shuey announced that membership dues at the national level would be suspended so that we can increase our ranks as a part of our fight to save the patch. Will Mund stated that since New Years Eve, we had added 457 new members, for a total of 2,055.

The NEC agreed that a brief video highlighting the history of the 29th Division and featuring key 29er veterans would be a valuable

ingredient to share at the Congressional level to help educate out representatives on the significance of the patch. We plan to reach out to Aliceanna Collective, the firm that produced the convention videos, for this project.

Commander Shuey stated that the only way he could see raising significant money to offset the dues was by setting up a foundation. On his own, with the concurrence of the Governance Committee, he has moved forward with setting up a 501(c)3 nonprofit foundation. It will be named the "29 Let's Go Foundation. The legal work is being drawn up now, and within a few weeks we will have a federal ID number, and it will be a legal sub-entity of the 29th Division Association.

In order to accomplish this without the normal delay of establishing it ourselves, he has worked with the Community Foundation of the Blue Ridge (CFBR), in Staunton, VA. The 116th Infantry Regiment Foundation has worked with them successfully for years. CFBR is itself a 501(c)3 that helps other 501(c)3 organizations. CFBR, headed by Dan Layman, has a full professional staff, and does all the legal filings, collecting of funds, IRS filings, yearly tax letters for donors, and other necessary paper work and reports. The charge for everything is only 2% of the funds collected.

In planning for the convention Commander Shuey found that the installations on post (Ft Belvoir) are not cooperative. They are expensive and very controlling as to what we can and cannot do. Therefore, we will have to meet off the installation. The dates are set for 13-16 OCT 2022. The Army Museum has outsourced control of everything to civilian firms. Consequently, he is unable to coordinate with GEN Shultz about our event. He is still focused on having an event at the Army Museum.

We have also talked about a trip to DC to visit many of the monuments there, as well as a wreath laying on that same trip. Commander Shuey established a number of standing committees that will focus on specific areas of the Association's mission. The committees will report at all formal NEC meetings. At NEC II the committees and chairs were introduced.

**Grants and Awards** – Tom Knight, No report.

**Futures** – PNC David Ginsburg, whose committee has been underway for quite a while, reported that they are focusing on how we facilitate posts having hybrid meetings so that they can have more involvement on location and remote. This could include investigating the technology available and possibly developing a package they can implement by simply turning it on.

With the advent of free national membership, and not all posts choosing to go free, we are looking at creative ways posts can grow significantly and stay alive. And finally, the committee plans to find out why people want to join, or why do they not want to join, the Association. We will need to do more investigation to implement effective solutions to gain more interest in attracting new members.

PNC Ginsburg indicated that we need website modernization. We need more on the website related to current soldiers, e.g., telling the history of GWOT and their involvement, providing links

to benefits for currently serving guard members, adding forms to the site where people can ask questions especially about deployments and how family members can be directed to the appropriate family support organizations.

**Finance** – Brian Becker and Tom Knight will develop a budget once we get a fix on charitable contributions, patch fight costs and conference costs.

**Veterans Affairs** – Jimmy Kilbourne sees the committee mission as, 1) Promotion of welfare of our members and their families, and family members whose Division member was killed; 2) To assist disabled and needy war veterans; and 3) Consideration of questions of military policy of the U.S. As a 501(c)4 we are allowed to lobby Congress and not have it affect our tax status. We can offer things to our veteran members and veterans' family members, such as discounts, benefits, financial assistance, financial advice, job boards, business boards, and so many other items we could do.

**Constitution and By Laws** – Houston Matney - We are in need of a complete and wholesale revision of the documents because some of the provisions have been there for many years and do not lend themselves to efficient operation of the Association.

**Governance** - Commander Shuey reported those serving on the committee are: the Senior Vice Cdr Dick Snyder, Junior Vice Cdr Jimmy Kilbourne, Finance Chair Tom Knight, Adjutant Buddy Faulconer, Asst NED Will Mund, NED Frank Armiger. This committee has been meeting on a biweekly basis for the past month and without their efforts we wouldn't be where we are today. Further, we have had occasion to bring in the Regional Vice Cdrs who have done a great job in getting the word out to the posts they are responsible for.

**Monuments at Molleville Farm** We are working on a monument for WWI Molville Farm and the Verdun area. Some of the posts have volunteered support for this undertaking. Commander Shuey does not intend on funding this project from our existing funds, rather he will solicit support from posts, other organizations, individuals, and corporations that would like to see this memorialization happen. Molleville Farm was a key tactical location during the Meuse Argonne Offensive taken by the 29th after a vicious frontal assault.

**1-116th Battalion Request** Joe Balkoski stated that he was contacted by Major Nick Rowland with the 1st Battalion currently deploy on the mission in South Africa. MAJ Rowland told him that the Battalion is running a Professional Development (PD) Exercise for staff and senior NCOs aligned with the D-Day Anniversary this year, and wanted to know if the Battalion could get a shipment of his Omaha Beach books to read ahead of time. The NEC unanimously agreed to fund this effort and send the books to HQ in Djibouti.

**Update** – 23 of the 25 books have been received with the final 2 in transit.

*Frank A. Armiger, National Executive Director*

## 2-224th Aviation Regiment mobilizes to KFOR

FORT HOOD, Texas – Soldiers and aviators of 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 29th Combat Aviation Brigade, Virginia Army National Guard, successfully conducted their mobilization and final readiness checks for their deployment to the Republic of Kosovo.

The unit will serve as the aviation task force for the NATO-led Kosovo Force Regional Command-East, supporting the Staunton-based 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Headquarters. Since the end of the Kosovo War in 1999, NATO KFOR troops conduct peacekeeping operations to support a safe and secure environment for all people in Kosovo, while diplomatic efforts continue between Kosovo and Serbia.

Upon completion of an air operations assessment, Brig. Gen. Joseph A. Edwards, commanding general of First Army Division West, visited the aviation battalion at North Fort Hood to thank them for following through their call to federal active duty service.

“The KFOR mission consists of a historical, multi-national partnership. 2-224th has been called up to not only serve as the next aviation battalion for this mission, but also to represent the United States Army alongside our NATO allies,” said Edwards. “What you do as Soldiers from the Virginia Army National Guard is challenging enough as it is, and our team couldn’t be any prouder of the hard work and readiness you’ve demonstrated during your mobilization here at North Fort Hood. On behalf of Division West and Army aviators, we wish you a successful mission and safe return from your deployment.”

U.S. Army Lt. Col. Matthew C. Lewis, battalion commander of the 2-224th Avn. Reg., discussed about their unit readiness for the year-long mission.

“Our unit was selected based off of our organizational readiness and training. We are both, honored and excited, to be a part of our nation’s continued partnership with KFOR,” said Lewis. “We will be a part of the larger lift component in RC-E, that provides the aerial mobility and CASEVAC capability to the higher command, allowing freedom of maneuver throughout the region. We feel prepared and ready to execute the mission.”

Lewis was pleased with North Fort Hood’s training facilities and support provided by First Army’s Observer, Coach/Trainers (OC/Ts). After looking back at what his battalion went through last year, he shared his thoughts about his young Soldiers deploying to KFOR for their first time.

“Mission success for our Soldiers would be; one, they have gone over there and made a difference for Kosovo; two, they have made a difference for themselves --better physically, spiritually, and professionally; and three, they have made the unit better,” said Lewis. “That’s what I want them to walk



**Fort Hood, Texas - U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Joseph A. Edwards, commanding general of First Army Division West (center-right), accompanied by Lt. Col. Matthew C. Lewis, battalion commander of the 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 29th Expeditionary Combat Aviation Brigade, Virginia Army National Guard (right) meets with Soldiers and Army aviators of the 2-224th Aviation Regiment during their mobilization for the Kosovo Force mission held at North Fort Hood, Texas, Jan. 25, 2022. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Edwin J. Pierce, Division West Public Affairs)**

away with at the end of our mission. And, I think all of that will become a life experience where they can look back 30 years from now and say, ‘I am glad I did that.’”

By the end of the mobilization, when several of the pilots and mechanics of 2-224th were interviewed separately, it was no surprise to see and hear from each of them a shared sense of purpose, readiness, and unit cohesion.

Spc. Paul D. Kelly, a 15T Black Hawk mechanic assigned to 2-224th, joined the KFOR deployment to begin his career in aviation and honor his late father, U.S. Army Col. Paul M. Kelly, a distinguished Army aviator and former battalion commander of 2-224th who was last assigned to Joint Force Headquarters, VAARNG, while serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“I volunteered for this mission because I wanted the experience, and I always wanted to get into aviation eventually,” said Spc. Kelly. “On the civilian side, I actually just finished college, and I plan on pursuing a full-time position with this unit. I figured this would be the best time for me to come in and really learn my job. I am also looking forward to see Kosovo --to see that part of the world. I’ve never travelled outside the U.S., so this will be a cool experience.”

Kelly’s father served in the Army National Guard for 25 years and is a recognized Fallen Hero by the National Guard Bureau and DoD for his honorable service and sacrifice during a flight mission over Baghdad, Iraq, on Jan. 20, 2007. Col. Kelly is also survived by his wife Maria, and his other son John Joseph, who still support the unit’s family readiness group and Gold Star families to this day.

"It's definitely an honor to be a part of the battalion, especially seeing family and friends I grew up with, who are still a part of this unit and are closely tied to it," he added. "I am very proud to be here, and look forward to working and learning from the 2-224th to make myself better every day."

Sgt. Kayla Jackson, a 15P army aviation operations specialist for 2-224th, expressed her appreciation for the mobilization.

"This will be my first ever overseas deployment, so I am very excited, nervous, and all of those things," said Jackson. "It's definitely been a world wind of experience completed with training, COVID protocols, safety checks, and evaluations by the OC/Ts, but so far my team and I have been very resilient. I am definitely feeling ready to go to Kosovo."

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Frost, an Army aviator from Detachment 2, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 169th Aviation Regiment assigned to the 2-224th for the KFOR mission, shared what he expects for his first deployment.

"My mission as a medical evacuation pilot is to be able to get into helicopter flight, along with our assigned flight surgeon in 15 minutes or less, the moment we receive a call to execute from command approval," said Frost. "In Kosovo, our flight operations will be capable of providing 24-hour MEDEVAC support with our assigned NATO forces."

Frost further shared what he looks forward to see in Kosovo, to include an optimistic look at cultural exchanges with KFOR military members from other countries.

"From what I hear, it's gorgeous terrain over there, so lots of great flying --I am looking forward to that. I should be coming up on pilot in command responsibilities, so starting on that progression is something I am looking forward to as well," he said. "As far as working with our assigned contingents, I understand language barriers may pose some challenges in the beginning, but I am confident we will build a shared understanding in how we will train and operate together while we are over there. Our unit morale is very good right now, and I think we are ready to do our mission in real life."

The past month's training support to 2-224th's mobilization was provided by Division West OC/Ts of the 3rd Battalion, 351st Aviation Regiment, 166th Aviation Brigade.

Lt. Col. Curtis J. Unger, battalion commander of the 3-351st TSBN, highlighted several of his unit's responsibilities for the mobilization process.

"Our primary focus with the 2-224th was to develop a strong partnership leading up to this mobilization that ultimately led to a highly trained unit," stated Unger. "We do that by simulating an operational environment, stressing their systems and processes in a manner that allows them to see themselves in terms of strengths and weaknesses."

Bringing several years of OC/T experience to various Army units at both, Fort Hood and the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, Unger related the command team of 2-224th to key values that have made them mission ready.

"The key to any successful organization can easily be summed up in three 'buckets'; the unit is a learning organization, they do routine things routinely, and the unit leader is always engaged and always at the friction point," said Unger. "If units do those three things, they will win in a complex environment. When combined with professionalism, standards, and discipline, ultimately you get an organization that no adversary can match or mission that goes unfinished."

Command Sgt. Maj. Pedro Lopez, command sergeant major of 3-351st TSBN, also commended the 2-224th for their preparation and smooth execution of the mobilization.

"The 2-224th came very prepared, so they have made our jobs a lot easier this year," Lopez remarked. "As the saying goes for any mission planning, 'Always be prepared for the unknown.' The training that we gave them was harder than what they were really expecting, considering the location that they are going to. Yet, they always listened to us and took our advice with no issues."

While serving at Fort Hood since 2020, this was the third KFOR mobilization that Lopez participated in as an OC/T.

"As an Army aviation maintainer myself, I got to spend a lot of time with their maintenance teams, advising and coaching them," Lopez added. "They are very motivated and well-trained Soldiers. I believe they are going to do great in their upcoming KFOR deployment. All I can say for them is to continue to maintain their discipline. Discipline, after all, is what makes us the best Army in the world."

Maj. Robert H. Wells, S-3 operations officer and OC/T from 3-351st TSBN, also observed and coached operations personnel of the 2-224th throughout the mobilization.

"The OC/T experience working with 2-224th was both enjoyable and rewarding. The unit was extremely professional, willing to learn, and motivated to perform at a high level of readiness every day," said Wells. "We partnered with 2-224th earlier on their mobilization process, and observed the unit during their last Annual Training prior to mobilizing at Fort Hood. Since then, we observed tremendous growth in the organization, especially within the junior enlisted Soldiers and those that had recently changed MOS."

Wells concluded with a message to 2-224th Soldiers deploying for their first time.

"Continue to stay engaged and establish goals to better yourself, your section, and the unit as a whole," said Wells. "The unit has proven themselves ready to successfully complete their assigned mission and I wish them the best of luck."

First Army Division West OC/Ts proceeded with supporting the aviation battalion's final after-action review and confirming their flight schedules to the KFOR area of operations. 2-224th Aviation Regiment certainly demonstrated how Virginia Army National Guardsmen can quickly come together as a readied active duty force.

*By CPT Steven Wesoloswski. First Army Division West*



# 29th ID Band troops balance Soldier tasks, and musical performances in a very busy year

RICHMOND, VA – Between departure ceremonies, a gubernatorial inauguration and other public performances, the Virginia National Guard's most publicly-visible Soldiers have been busier than usual this training year. The 29th Infantry Division Band, which averages between 35-40 missions per year, has already performed 25 missions since Oct. 1, 2021, and many more are on the way.

"We have performed the Governor's Inauguration, all four Virginia National Guard unit departure ceremonies, as well as Veterans Day ceremonies in Bassett, Norfolk, Roanoke and Lynchburg," said Sgt. 1st Class Richard Carr, 29th ID Band readiness non-commissioned officer. "We also performed for the 95th Infantry Division Association in Yorktown and the 29th Division Association in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania."

The band also supports the Virginia National Guard Military Funeral Honors program. As a result, it has provided a live bugler at 121 funerals services since Oct. 1.

In total, the band has performed for more than 16,000 people in person so far this training year and nother 28,000 online viewers.

"In the last few months, the band has been embracing the reawakening of live music performances," said Staff Sgt. Erin Casey. "The pandemic hit the live music industry hard. This not only affected the general public, but also the musicians. Sharing our passion for music with our local communities, veterans and fellow Soldiers drives our mission."

"I think the fact that we have had our busiest quarter whilst dealing with a pandemic is a testament to the members of the 29th ID Band," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Don Carlson, commander of the 29th ID Band. "They are the hardest-working Soldiers in the Virginia Army National Guard. They not only rehearse and perform missions during their 39 drill and annual training days but also many more days outside of those."

The band most recently played for the Governor's Inauguration in Richmond in January.

"That is one of our most important missions as we are the 'Governor's Own' and the Governor of Virginia is our 'Commander-in-Chief,'" Carlson said. "We were very lucky that it

was a cold but sunny day with no precipitation and the ceremony went smoothly from our perspective."

Although that performance featured the full band, not all of the performances do.

"If you do the math and notice that we average 35-40 missions a year, you have to notice that it looks like we would not have time to do anything else," Carlson said. "This is where the small ensemble or Musical Performance Teams allows us to cover

those missions all over the state without taking up all of the drill and annual training days of every band member."

"This whole band is full of multi-talented musicians," said Spc. Jessica Tang. "Everyone steps up in different roles on different missions, which is how we can cover everything."

"We are having some of the busiest months we have ever seen in a long time," Casey said. "For our newest Soldiers who joined us during the pandemic, it is a very welcome change. They finally



*Photo by Cotton Puryear*

**The 29th ID Band performs at the 1-111th departure ceremony on December 13, 2021 in Norfolk, Virginia.**

get to experience the true life of being the Soldier-musician they enlisted to be."

Tang cited Staff Sgt. Ahsia Spencer as a prime example. A clarinet section leader in the Ceremonial Band, Spencer also plays keyboard in Easy Green, the 29th ID Band rock band. He also serves as Drum Major during parades.

"That's an insane amount of talent from just one person, but it isn't unusual here, which really speaks volumes about this band's abilities," Tang said. "And depending on who can drive out to each mission, we end up with different assortments of musicians each time. That means we have to adjust to different instrumentation and different conductors, but everybody is great at adapting themselves to the situation so that we can always produce a high-quality performance."

"It's every individual's ability to play different parts that makes us succeed as a band," Tang explained.

While most units plan training 30-90 days out, the band must plan for events one to four years in advance, according to Carlson.

"We need to try to get necessary rehearsals started one year out and with our busy schedule, rehearsals will at least be a

month apart or more," Carlson said. "For some of our concert performances we may have five or six rehearsals. All of our Soldiers must prepare their individual parts on their own at home in between drills. This results in hours of preparation outside of the drill and AT time when we are together as a unit."

The band is resilient and willing to do what is necessary to be mission ready and to get the job done, according to Sgt. 1st Class Jim Bradshaw.

"We understand the importance of always being ready and performing at a high level," he said.

"The band is a unique unit since we are the only one in the state," said Casey, who noted the band includes Soldiers from every corner of the commonwealth. "This not only ensures increased mission success but it showcases the diversity of Virginia's vast communities. Many times, performances will require Soldiers to drive three to four hours. However it's the strong sense of duty and pride in our Soldiers that an obstacle such as that is just part of the job and they are happy to do it to be part of something greater than themselves."

Between musical performances, band members have to find time to manage all of their basic Soldier tasks, such as Individual Weapons Qualification, Crew Served Weapons, driver qualifications for military vehicles and land navigation, as well as complete mandatory yearly briefings, such as Threat Awareness and Reporting Program, Operations Security, Anti-Terrorism Level 1, Global Assessment Tool and Cyber Awareness.

Although they always need to be ready to ready to perform in public, Bradshaw said they realize they must also always be ready as Soldiers.

"As Soldiers, it's imperative that we perform all the necessary Soldier tasks and training," he said.

"The foundation of being a Soldier is rooted in each of our members," Casey said. "Balancing that with the operational tempo of music performance missions can definitely be difficult but it is never forgotten. Many times, this leads to very long drill days with our Soldiers having to change mental gears from music over to marksmanship, land navigation, combat lifesaver, and many other skills. But our NCO instructors hold their standards just as high for these skills as our musical skills. There is no lack of enthusiasm to get out on the rifle qualification range or out onto a practice land navigation course."

Tang said band members treat their non-musical obligations the same way they approach their musical duties.

"We show up, we do well, and we support each other to get it done," she said. "We all come from different backgrounds and bring different skills to the table, so everyone shares their knowledge with each other."

"I can say that the only way we get all of this done is because I am blessed with the best enlisted Soldiers and NCOs in the Virginia Army National Guard," Carlson said. "The amount of work that our Soldier-musicians do outside of drill and AT is equal to or greater than the work we do when we are together."

Carlson credits much of the band's success to the work of his full-time readiness NCO, whom Carlson calls the best in the Virginia Army National Guard.

"Sgt. 1st Class Carr is always 'leaning forward in the foxhole'

and he knows band operations better than anyone," Carlson explained. "He is a most outstanding NCO, logistician, counselor, and by the way did I mention he still has to do his primary MOS job of playing the trumpet? Which he does often without the same benefit of rehearsal and sectional time that the other members of the band enjoy."

Over the years, Carr has earned Carlson's respect through his tireless work for the 29th ID Band and, as a result, he and 1st Sgt. David Helms trust Carr to speak on their behalf.

"He is the heart and soul of the band," Carlson said. "Our Soldiers know that too. They know that any issues they have, military or personal, he is there to provide great counsel and sometimes consolation in our toughest moments."

But Carlson pointed out that Carr isn't the only one he should recognize.

"I do not for one moment take for granted the team that I have in the band," he said. "It is a privilege and an honor to serve with them and to be called their commander."

Band members see themselves as the face of the Virginia National Guard and realize they have to always deliver good performances.

"We cannot afford to have a negative performance," Bradshaw said. "Or it will be a negative reflection on the entire Virginia National Guard."

"For some Virginian civilians, we are their one and only real-life impression of the Virginia National Guard," Tang said. "That isn't lost on us, and so this band always gives its very best on every performance so that we bolster the reputation of the Guard."

"Performing has a large audience interaction component to it both in military and civilian venues," Casey said. "It is extremely humbling the amount of appreciation and positive support we receive from both our military comrades and communities alike. Not only are we performing but we are out talking to the audience members before and after a performance, thanking the veterans and getting to know the communities."

Because their audiences are often filled with military members, band members take their visual elements extremely seriously, according to Tang.

"For example, our Fife and Drum team practices moving with absolute precision, marking time to the exact height, and executing turns in unison down to the degree," she said. "This is all done while performing memorized music and staying alert for drum commands from the lead drummer. This way, we leave a good impression even on viewers who have decades of Drill and Ceremony experience over their military careers."

Although the first quarter of the year was extremely busy, the pace does not look to slow down anytime soon. The band has started preparing for a number of summer missions, according to Carr, including the 78th Anniversary of the D-Day Landing and Yellow Ribbon events for the Virginia National Guard units who will be returning from overseas deployments.

"I look forward to the rest of this training year and know that no matter what the Army or life throws at us, we will handle it and be better Soldiers because we have each other," Carlson said.

*By A.J. Coyne, Virginia National Guard Public Affairs*

# The 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team

This article is the second in our series honoring the history of the current Brigades serving as part of the 29th Division. The 53rd IBCT, like all Florida National Guard units, trace their establishment to the Spanish Florida militia created in 1565. The original Presidio fortress, St. Augustine, still houses artifacts of that period and serves today as the Headquarters of the Florida National Guard. The state's largest unit, the 53rd Brigade has a distinguished history, along with its 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry based in neighboring Alabama.

## The 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team

The 29th Division exercises Training and Readiness oversight over multiple units including the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT). The 53 IBCT began its current existence as part of the 48th Armored Division in 1946. This was a Florida/Georgia National Guard unit that was assigned the number of a phantom division that was created to fool the Nazis during World War II. The Division was disbanded in 1968, and the 53rd became a Brigade (Separate). Today, the Brigade is made up of a total of 32 units from Florida and Alabama, and has roughly 4,166 personnel. They wear a shoulder patch whose central symbolic element is a Spanish Morion "Conquistador" helmet that reflects the Spanish discovery of Florida and the Florida National Guard's long history.

The core of the 53rd IBCT is the 124th Infantry Regiment. Its origins go back to 1884 as the 1st Florida Volunteer Infantry and they served in the Spanish American War. In 1899, it was split in two and the 2nd Florida saw service along the Mexican Border in 1916. In 1917, the two regiments were redesignated the 124th Infantry Regiment as part of the 31st Division. When they arrived in France however, companies were broken up so that the soldiers of the 124th could serve as replacements in the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne Offensives. When the regiment was reformed after the Great War, it was renumbered the 154th Infantry Regiment. Aside from hurricane and strike duties, the 154th was most famous for guarding the would-be presidential assassin Joe Zangara in Miami, who attempted to assassinate President-Elect Franklin D. Roosevelt, before his execution in 1933.

In the run-up to World War II, the again renamed 124th participated as a member of the 31st Division with the 29th Division in Carolina Maneuvers. After Pearl Harbor, the Regiment was sent to Fort Benning, where it served as a training demonstration unit until April of 1944 when the 31st Division was reactivated and sent to the Pacific Theatre. Members of the Florida National Guard saw action in New Guinea with the Australians and in the Philippine Islands. During the Battle for Mindanao Harry R. Harr was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for throwing himself on a Japanese grenade, thereby saving other's lives.

In 2003, a year and a half into the Global War on Terror, 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 124th Infantry were ordered into active

federal service and deployed to Jordan and Kuwait. They were among the first U.S. soldiers to invade Iraq. In March 2005, elements of the 2nd Battalion were again activated and deployed as part of Operation Enduring Freedom to Afghanistan. A year later, D Company, 2nd Battalion of the 124th Infantry, was deployed to Iraq. The Brigade Combat Team was reorganized that same year, and the 3rd Battalion was converted into what is now the 1st Squadron of the 153rd Cavalry Regiment. They are known as the "Dark Horse," and are headquartered in Panama City, Florida.

The 53rd IBCT's third infantry battalion is the 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry Regiment from the Alabama National Guard. Known traditionally as the "4th Alabama," it was formed in 1836. They fought in the Civil War at Seven Pines, Second Manassas, Antietam, Gettysburg, and The Wilderness. In 1916, they asserted that the 4th skirmished with Pancho Villa's forces as part of Mexican border operations.

Part of the 42nd Division in the Great War, they fought at Red Cross Farm. In World War II, the 167th were also assigned to the 31st Division when it was reactivated and took part in the Battle for the Philippines. They deployed to Iraq in 2005 and 2007. In 2012, the 167th supported NATO's training mission in Afghanistan.

The 53rd IBCT's artillery comes from the 2nd Battalion, 116th Field Artillery Regiment. It was organized in 1917 as part of the Florida National Guard. The 116th Field Artillery went to France during World War I, but saw no combat. At the beginning of World War II, the regiment was broken up and then reconstituted along with the 31st Division in 1944. Elements of the 116th fought in New Guinea, earning an arrowhead, and in the Southern Philippines. Made

part of the 51st Division after the war, the 116th was assigned to the 53rd IBCT in 1968. They have made two deployments to Iraq and one to Afghanistan during the Global War on Terror.

In November of 2021, 165 soldiers of the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team deployed to Ukraine for a 9 to 12 months tour as part of Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine (JMTG-U). Task Force Gator, led by Col. Blake Glass and Command Sgt. Major Jasen Pask, was sent to the Armed Forces of Ukraine Observer Control/Training Center in Yavoriv, near the Polish border. 7th Army Training Command oversees the JMTG-U mission, which was created seven years ago. The goal was to develop and implement systems to improve combat training and increase readiness for brigade and below units in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. While there, Sgt 1st. Class Arthur Ledger of the 53d IBCT, 29th Division, organized a joint sports league between the different partner nations that regularly work together at the International Peacekeeping and Security Center. Unfortunately, the Russian military build-up on Ukraine's borders forced all the NATO partners, including these members of the 29th Division, to relocate to east Poland in mid-February 2022.

*Submitted by Edmund D. Potter, National Historian*





## 116th IBCT takes responsibility for Regional Command – East in NATO's Kosovo Force

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo – NATO's Kosovo Force officially welcomed the 30th rotation of U.S. Soldiers taking responsibility for the Regional Command – East mission during a transfer of authority ceremony March 4, 2022, at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. During the ceremony, the Virginia National Guard's 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team took responsibility for peace stability operations from the Vermont National Guard's 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

"Soldiers of the 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, welcome to Kosovo," Hungarian Army Maj. Gen. Ferenc Kajári, commander of KFOR, said during the ceremony. "You are taking over your duties in KFOR in a period when we face numerous challenges inside our area of operations and Europe as well."

KFOR RC-East is comprised of more than 10 contributing NATO partner nations working to ensure a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement for all people in Kosovo. More than 70 NATO VIPs from multiple nations attended the ceremony.

During the ceremony, leaders from the 86th IBCT cased their unit's flag, or colors, officially signifying the culmination of their nine-month mission in the region, followed by leaders from the 116th IBCT uncasing their unit's colors, representing the beginning of their mission in Kosovo.

"Today's ceremony marks much more than the normal nine-month rotational change of command ceremony," said Col. Brey Hopkins, commander of the 86th IBCT and outgoing RC-East commander. "This ceremony is an indication of the United States' commitment and resolve. Commitment and resolve to the NATO alliance and to the Balkans."

Taking the helm as RC-East's new commander was Col. Christopher Samulski, who's been in command of the 116th IBCT since



**Col. Christopher Samulski, commander, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Virginia Army National Guard, and incoming Kosovo Force Regional Command- East commander, receives the NATO flag from Maj. Gen. Ferenc Kajári, commander of KFOR, during the KFOR RC - East transfer of authority ceremony at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, March 4, 2022. The 86th IBCT, Vermont Army National Guard relinquished responsibility of KFOR RC-East to the 116th IBCT during the Transfer of Authority ceremony. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Marla Ogden, 138th Public Affairs Detachment)**

2020, a year of which was focused on preparing for their unique mission as the main U.S. contingent in Kosovo.

"I'm convinced that lasting peace, safety and security is achievable through hard work, commitment and dialogue," Samulski said. "And this gives me hope for the future of Kosovo and the greater Balkans region."

To signify the official transfer of authority of the RC-East mission, leaders from the 86th IBCT passed the NATO flag to Kajári, who then passed the flag to the 116th IBCT command team. The passing of the flag from the outgoing commander to the incoming one ensures the command is never without official leadership, representing a continuation of trust while signifying an allegiance of Soldiers to their commander.

"The 29th rotation, the Vermont brigade, (set) the standard high," Kajári said. "But I'm confident that you (the 116th IBCT) will excel in your tasks and will meet the requirements."

Speaking at the ceremony, Samulski praised the work of the 86th IBCT Soldiers and expressed his commitment to carrying out NATO's mission of maintaining a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement for all people and communities in Kosovo.

"Your hard work over the last year has been an absolute testament to your motto, Ready to Go," Samulski said to the outgoing Soldiers. "As we put on this blue patch on our left shoulder, we understand the importance that holds. We will continue to uphold the tenets and values of NATO's mission here in Kosovo."

The VNG's 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 29th Infantry Division serves as their aviation task force for RC-East providing medical casualty transportation and air mobility for all KFOR troops. They conducted their transfer of authority ceremony February 16.

*By SFC Warren Wright, 138th Public Affairs Detachment*



**U.S. Army Soldiers from the 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Vermont Army National Guard and 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Virginia Army National Guard, prepare to exchange their state flags during the Kosovo Force Regional Command- East transfer of authority ceremony at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, March 4, 2022. The transfer of authority ceremony represents the transfer of responsibility of the mission from one unit to another. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Marla Ogden, 138th Public Affairs Detachment)**



# The FoG — Friends of the Guard

*Another quick update on the FoG's support of the VANGHF. Along with these artifacts, the Friends of the Guard (FoG) volunteers are also currently restoring a UH-1 Huey, M4A3E8 Sherman tank and a DUKW (Duck) Amphibious truck. The FoG is part of the Virginia National Guard Historical Foundation and during 2021 contributed 1059 hours of work on preservation projects at the JFHQ.*



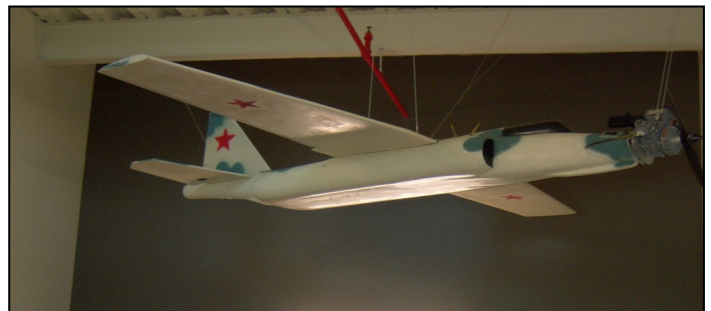
An M-84 Armored Mortar Carrier is delivered to the JFHQ at DSCR and carefully lowered onto a display pad where the refurbishment and preservation will take place. The M-84 is a variant of the M-59 Armored Carrier vehicles and was introduced into the Army in the late 1950s but was replaced soon after by the M113 Series.



Before winter weather brought a halt to the restoration of the M-84, the volunteers were able to remove most of the rust and completed the first coat of paint. When finished, the Carrier will be restored to 1960s color scheme and tactical markings. From left: John Perdue (USN CW4), Brian Wood (MI), Steve Bourgeois (ORD), Jim McClure (ENG), Craig Jewell (QM), Forrest Malcomb (QM). On top of the vehicle Tom Michels (ORD), Doug Weiser (AV). Not seen here are Cheyenne Johnson (ADA) and James Ebertowski (TC).



The pieces of an RCMAT fiberglass drone as it looked when brought to the JFHQ. It was used by the 111th ADA as a target for Stingers. This large aircraft model is based on the Soviet Anti-tank aircraft, the F-25 Frogfoot.



Now preserved and carefully touched up, the reassembled F-25 is mounted in the East stairwell of the Joint Force HQ. A large mural of 111th ADA soldiers has been added to complete the scene, replicating how the F-25 was used in the late 1980s/early 1990s.



Driven inside by the cold and rain, the volunteers continue to repair and preserve the 1918-dated ammo cart that will be displayed inside the JFHQ. The cart is particularly interesting because it still has the original wooden wheels.



# D-Day Memorial Upcoming Events

The National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, VA endeavors every day to honor the valor, fidelity, and sacrifice of the Allied forces on D-Day, including the heroes of the 29th Division. But it's probably no surprise that the pandemic has made that mission more difficult in the past two years. For a while, visitation lagged, school groups were unable to come, and major events had to be scaled back or cancelled altogether. Fortunately now, however, things seem to be returning to normal—attendance is approaching pre-pandemic levels again, travel is becoming newly popular, and major commemorations are back on the calendar.

But the pandemic did reveal one new avenue for the Memorial to meet its mission: we now live in a digital world, and there is a great demand for online content dealing with WWII. Accordingly, the Memorial's Lunchbox Lecture Series transitioned to online presentations at the start of the pandemic, and due to a great response remains virtual. An archive of fascinating talks remains on the Memorial's Facebook and YouTube pages, and the schedule of upcoming lectures can be found at [www.dday.org](http://www.dday.org)

In addition, the Memorial will unveil a new initiative this spring: its first ever podcast. Titled "Someone Talked!" the podcast will feature internationally known scholar John McManus, joined by April Cheek-Messier and John Long from the Memorial staff. Through bi-monthly episodes they will invite authors, historians, and other experts to tell the story of World War II through this innovative format, focusing both on well-known stories and aspects of the war you may have never considered.

But as important as these virtual outreaches are, not everything can be solely online! For those who are or will be in the vicinity of Bedford, the Memorial is pleased to offer a return to in-person public events, giving visitors the opportunity to pay tribute in several moving ways:

**Friday, May 27, 7:00**

**PM:** the return of the annual Stars and Stripes Forever concert. As the sun gently settles in the west, join the Jefferson Choral Society for a rousing performance of toe-tapping music. A great way to kick off Memorial Day Weekend!

**Monday, May 30, 11:00 AM:** Memorial Day Commemoration. Speaker David Carey, a Vietnam veteran and former prisoner of war, will inspire and challenge us to honor the men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

**Monday, June 6, 11:00 AM:** 78th Anniversary of D-Day. Join us in person or virtually as we commemorate the anniversary of the Normandy landings. Historian John McManus will be the featured speaker, and will be on hand afterwards to sign books, including his latest: "Island Infernos: The US Army's Pacific War Odyssey, 1944."

Look for more detail and other upcoming events at [www.dday.org](http://www.dday.org).

*By John D. Long, Director of Education, D-Day Memorial*



**John McManus**

## Young man's love of history nurtured by the D-Day experience of his Grandfather



**Cael Sink**

Not many 8-year olds love history and know as much about World War II as Cael Sink does. Cael has participated in the D-Day camps offered at the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, VA and has visited the Memorial many times.

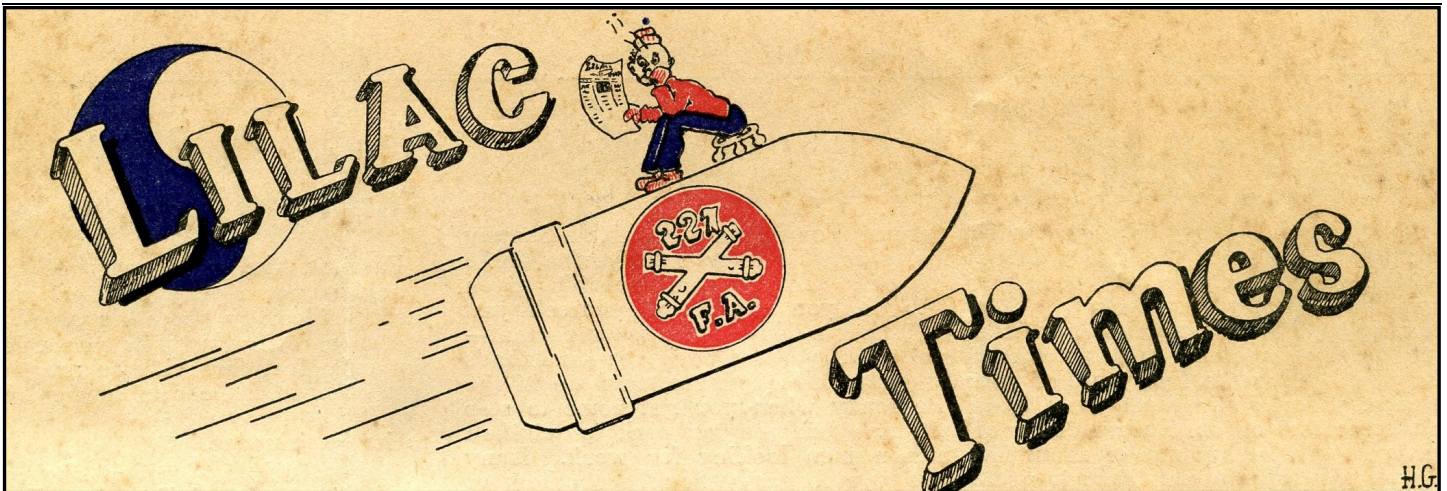
Cael gets his love of history and knowledge of D-Day firsthand. His great grandfather, John B. Sink, was part of the 29th Division, D Company, 116th Infantry on D-Day. John arrived at Omaha Beach after the first wave. Cael has heard this story, and others, since he was born.

Last year, Cael's elementary school teacher told the kids to decorate a tee-shirt however they wanted. Cael chose to draw the Overlord Arch from the National D-Day Memorial on his. He also spent hours last summer reenacting D-Day in a kiddie pool. Who knows what he'll create next? One thing is for sure, this young man's love of history isn't going away.

*Submitted by Karolyn Sink,  
Post 64, Roanoke, VA*



**D-Day Swimming Pool**



One of my family's keepsakes from my father, Lloyd Lane, is a 2 September 1945 issue of "The Lilac Times" a small newspaper published by the 227th Field Artillery Battalion during their occupation duty at Brake, Germany in the Bremen Enclave. All of the 29th Division units in WWII had code names that began with the letter "L" and for the 227th their code name was "Lilac".

This is issue No. 8 and has two mentions of my father in it. Once in the article "Point Blank Persuasion" accompanying this note and the second in an article with a photo of my older brother David at the age 2 and a half.

I'm sure other 29th Division units also had their own news sheets or papers as well as the "29 Let's Go" division newspaper. And most had probably advanced from the simple mimeographed single page during the fighting to a nicely produced copy on newsprint as they occupied small towns where printing presses were available.

This issue has 8 pages, measuring 8.5 x 12 inches and has articles with news from each artillery battery, ie. "Able's Fables", "Baker's Capers" and "Charlie's Chatter". Along with sports coverage, news about education classes, world news, recreational opportunities and locations of interest in their area to visit.

*Dale Lane, Post 94, son of a 29er, Indianapolis, IN*

### POINT BLANK PERSUASION

From the 2 Sept 1945 issue of "The Lilac Times",  
printed in Brake, Germany  
(Lilac was the call sign for the  
227th Field Artillery Bn.-155mm howitzers)

When the Infantry reports its progress, its Intelligence can state accurately the number of prisoners taken. The Artillery is sometimes credited with having eliminated certain enemy units or installations as military factors, but rarely does an Artillery battalion have an opportunity to capture enemy personnel en masse. That is what makes the story of the 227th's occupation of its second position in Normandy on D+5 so unique.

The battalion survey team headed by Capt. Valor and Lt. Honick and including men presently with the battalion: Pfc's Lane, Bricker, and Taghon (all five of whom have since attained considerable rank) were surveying the new position when they were approached by three excited Frenchmen. The combined survey team didn't know enough French collectively to understand one calm Frenchman. After much articulating and gesticulating, the surveyors finally gleaned that the house situated about 250 yards away contained beaucoup Jerries—who could be induced to surrender. No one present, however, was willing to attempt this piece of salesmanship. It was decided that the best thing to do would be to take up good defensive positions around the house and "sweat out" the arrival of Able Battery, who was to occupy that particular field.

And "Sweat in out" turned out to be an apt phrase, for it was a full hour before the Able convoy moved into the field. They had been warned that snipers were in the area and machine gunners were on the alert at the turret mounts of every truck so equipped.

Cpl. John Ambrosini, at the gun on the ammo vehicle, thought he spotted a sniper strapped to a tree and let loose with a short burst. But between the first and last round of that burst every man in the battery must have fired his carbine. This little salvo had no apparent affect. During this shooting the battery executive had been proceeding with the laying of the howitzers and as it happened the direction of fire was directly over the farm house. The base piece, when laid, was aimed point blank at the house. The gunner was about to measure the minimum elevation to the top of the farm, when he suddenly jerked his head away from the sight and peered over the upper shield. For through the telescopic sight he thought he had seen—yes, by gosh, he had seen it. A whole company of Germans was filing out, hands upraised. Roughly sixty Krauts were "kaputlating".

In the course of the ensuing interrogation, the ranking officer was asked why he had surrendered without a fight. His reply was illuminating.

"We would have fought it out against small arms fire, but when you prepared to fire that big gun at us point blank—it was useless to resist."

*Submitted by Dale Lane, whose father, Lloyd Lane is mentioned in the article.*



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# SAVE OUR PATCH!



**Our most urgent cause in 2022 is to defend our famous and iconic Blue and Gray shoulder patch from the work of the DOD's Naming Commission to have the patch retired.**

A Special "29 Let's Go!" support fund (a 501 (c)(3)) has been created that will be used to educate the public, inform decision makers, and engage Congress about the 29th Division's legacy. These tax-deductible contributions will be managed by The Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge in a capital growth grant fund to ensure that there are always funds ready to support this and future issues, as well as programs that further the purposes of the Fund and the 29th Division Association. Please go to our website **[29thdivisionassociation.com/donate/](https://29thdivisionassociation.com/donate/)** and donate directly to the "29 Let's Go!" fund.

Contributions to the Fund can also be made payable and mailed to:

"29 Let's Go" Support Fund  
P. O. Box 2008  
Staunton, VA 24402-2008