



Guard Employment Programs' Importance Grows as Economy Struggles



GAPI contractors Cindy Koenig, Kris Recendez, and Bryn Burkard attend TEAMS Symposium at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

On 12 May 2011, civilian contractors for the Army National Guard's (ARNG's) Guard Apprenticeship Program Initiative (GAPI) participated in a small business and training symposium hosted by the Transition Employment Assistance Management Service (TEAMS) at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Representing GAPI were Kris Recendez, Cindy Koenig and Bryn Burkard, who staffed a table and networked with attendees, discussing GAPI and other ARNG employment programs, such as the Job Connection Education Program (JCEP).

TEAMS is a U.S. Army Garrison Command-directed and -managed operation whose orientation is to implement, evaluate and report outcomes on "delivery of comprehensive outpatient

transition assistance" at Walter Reed (see http://www.walterreed.amedd.army.mil/garrison/sites/directorates/teams_main.asp for more information). TEAMS accomplishes its mission by partnering with "federal and state agencies, private sector employers, service providers, veterans' service organizations, the Department of Defense and medical support staff" in delivering "comprehensive transition and employment assistance" to Active Duty military personnel, Reserve and Guard members, and military family members. Given the slow pace of and setbacks to the nation's economic recovery and labor market picture, it is clear that ARNG's employment programs can play an expanding and crucial role in assisting Soldiers and their families in re-establishing their economic stability.

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Since SOCGuard first profiled ARNG's employment initiatives (see the December 2009 issue of *ARNG Education News*, at <http://www.soc.aascu.org/socguard/PublicationsSOCGuard.html>), the nation's economy, and therefore its employment climate, has failed to rebound as most Americans would have hoped it would. Unfortunately, this slow economic recovery has hit military veterans, including ARNG members, harder than most prospective job applicants.

Considering Guard and other servicemembers' and veterans' ongoing military-related sacrifices prior to and during the economic crisis' emergence nearly five years ago, their struggle to

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enter or re-enter the job market appears especially poignant. Before deployment (or one of multiple deployments), many Guard Soldiers and other servicemembers leave jobs and career tracks behind only to return to a severely constricted labor market.

It is true that the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) protects servicemembers and veterans from employment discrimination and ensures retention of positions held prior to military service that removes them from such positions. However, a number of factors have combined to result in high unemployment figures for veterans as they return to the workforce. First, the depth and breadth of the nation's economic downturn has strained some sectors of the job market to the point that fewer jobs exist to which veterans can return. Moreover, extended or multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with numerous domestic deployments for Guard members due to natural disasters, have kept many Soldiers and other servicemembers almost perpetually out of the job market. How can they build or rebuild their civilian employment résumé when another deployment will come soon after they've landed a much-needed job?

According to a 2010 Bureau of Labor Statistics report released in March of 2011 (see <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm> for more information), unemployment numbers for veterans

correlate closely with those of the general population. For veterans between ages 18 and 24, unemployment stands at 21.9 percent, slightly higher than for their non-veteran counterparts (19.7 percent). Rates for veterans aged 25 to 34 is 13.1 percent. For disabled veterans, as well, the unemployment rate of 9.1 percent echoes that of non-veterans at 8.7 percent. For current or past Guard and Reserve members the unemployment rate was 14 percent, while the overall rates among veterans not affiliated with the Guard or Reserves was 12.1 percent. While these data appear in the report to mollify concerns that veterans' struggles within the job market echo those of their non-veteran counterparts, such data almost certainly do little to reassure veterans and their families, especially in light of the aforementioned sacrifices related to deployments.

Moreover, the U.S. Congress, senior military leaders and veterans' service organizations are concerned enough by the servicemember and veteran unemployment figures that they are seeking and proposing solutions. The TEAMS symposium is one example, as are the ARNG employment programs. Other solutions should be forthcoming. On 1 June, as the House Committee on Veterans Affairs held hearings on veterans' employment and workforce transition, Florida ARNG's Assistant Adjutant General, MG James Tyre testified on the "urgency of putting America's veterans back to work" (see "Returning Guard Members Face Challenging Labor

Market, General Tells Congress," by 1LT Jesse Manzano, FLARNG, at <http://www.ng.mil/news/archives/2011/06/060311-Congress.aspx>).

While many of MG Tyre's comments focused on Florida's employment picture for Guard members and veterans, his description for Florida could also represent a snapshot of various locations across the country. He recognized progress made by the National Guard to help Guard members find work but admitted that due to multiple deployments and the severity of the economic crisis, this progress has been muted. The state achieved its gains via "employer partnership programs with several state and federal agencies, as well as with private and non-profit organizations." At the same time, MG Tyre noted, if the Guard cannot advance its employment transitional or job locator resources with increasing success, the Guard itself suffers by, perhaps, losing members whose economic hardship upon returning home, in addition to sacrifices during their frequent deployments, causes them to reconsider re-enlistment. In this way, the Guard could lose invaluable experience and skill levels that have taken years to build as currently serving members might view their service in the Guard as hindering their ability to compete in the civilian job market.

For additional information on National Guard Employment Programs, go to <https://education.ng.mil/rendercontent.aspx?contentID=87>.

FIFTEEN EMPLOYERS RECOGNIZED BY DEFENSE SECRETARY WITH FREEDOM AWARD

On 31 May, the Office of the Secretary of Defense announced the names of 15 employers with the department's highest honor for businesses, the Freedom Award, which recognizes exceptional support for the Guard and Reserve. Instituted in 1996 and administered by Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a Defense Department

agency, the Freedom Award has been conferred to only 145 businesses since its inception.

This past year, over 4,000 nominations were submitted by Guard and Reserve members and their families. Winners will gather in Washington, DC, on 22 September 2011 to receive their awards

at the 16th Annual Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award Ceremony. Last year's ceremony included pre-award meetings with Vice President Joseph Biden and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

This year's award recipients are as follows:

- 3M Company, St. Paul, MN
- Ameren Missouri, St. Louis, MO
- Burt County Sheriff's Office, Tekamah, NE
- CSX Transportation, Jacksonville, FL
- Electrical Contractors Inc., Omaha, NE
- Ford Motor Co., Dearborn, MI
- Hanson Professional Services Inc., Springfield, IL
- Integrity Applications Inc., Chantilly, VA
- Orange County Sheriff's Department, Santa Ana, CA
- Principal Financial Group, Des Moines, IO
- Qwest Communications, Denver, CO, acquired by CenturyLink Inc., Monroe, LA
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Yankton, SD
- State Employees' Credit Union, Raleigh, NC
- Town of Gilbert, AZ
- Wells Fargo & Co., San Francisco, CA

Even to be in contention for the award, employers are seen to "exceed what is required by law, putting into place formal and informal initiatives that include providing the difference between military and civilian salary during deployments, continuing full benefits, sending care packages and providing personal support to the families of employees called away from home," according to one report that appeared at <http://www.ng.mil/news/archives/2011/06/060211-Guard.aspx>.

ESGR, whose efforts on behalf of Guard and Reserve members and their families, receives annual support through the efforts of some 4,500 volunteers from the business, government, education, and military communities. Begun in 1972, ESGR's mission is to "develop and maintain employer support for Guard and Reserve service" through advocating on servicemembers' behalf, recognizing exemplary support, elevating awareness of relevant laws, and resolving conflicts between servicemembers and employers.

For more information, go to <http://www.esgr.org/site/>.

WOMEN SOLDIERS FROM NEW YORK ARNG GEAR UP FOR CHALLENGING MISSION

According to a recent article posted at the National Guard Web site (see "Female Combat Troops to Link Afghan Women, New York Guard's 27th Brigade," by SPC J.P. Lawrence, at <http://www.ng.mil/news/archives/2011/06/060711-Female.aspx>), 10 women members of the NYARNG are engaging in training to form a Female Engagement Team (FET). Currently training at Ft. Drum, the FET will eventually travel to Afghanistan with the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT).

1LT Kristen Rouse, platoon leader for the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, will serve as the FET's leader during training and deployment. While other ARNG units have employed FETs, this group's experience is unique in that it is the first time that women Soldiers will deploy attached to combat units in an infantry battalion as "cultural mediators," essentially marching and fighting with those units. Then, they will engage Afghan women in discussions to determine their concerns and give voice to those concerns.

According to 1LT Rouse, "If female Afghans can be engaged, that opens up the other half of the population," so that U.S. military commanders can "get to know the terrain of their operations in a more fair way."

Because local custom forbids men in Afghanistan to speak with unmarried women, lack of access to Afghan women raises crucial issues for "modern counter-insurgency doctrine," which requires interaction to build trust between local residents and military units. Not only would vital information be lost without access to many local women, but their roles in helping to bond communities, as well as any challenges that U.S. forces might help them overcome, represent lost opportunities without building bridges to interact with them. In part for these reasons the Marines began to send female troops as mediators on combat missions in 2009.

FETs can gauge aspects of the social "climate" where an operation is taking place, building relations in a village by sharing vital information or assistance on matters related to health care or other crucial resources.

As the NG News article indicates, although women U.S. Soldiers have past experience accompanying combat squads, "what makes this unit unique is that each female is dedicated solely to the FET mission."

1LT Rouse confirms that most often, FET activities take the form of "additional duty." She continues, "On my last deployment, we had female Soldiers, but I needed them to be mechanics, I needed them to be truck drivers. I couldn't spare them. They had full-time jobs. So to say, 'I want you to do FET, too,' that's pretty hard to do and still have a functioning unit."

Also joining the unit are two sisters, SPC Serena Barone and SSG Theresa Barone-Lopez, who share with other unit volunteers "a sense of humanitarian vocation." According to SPC Barone, "We both discussed it and decided to volunteer," concluding that, "I think that women in the United States have a lot of freedom and Afghan women don't. And I want to help in some way."

Pre-deployment training at Ft. Drum for FET volunteers includes intensive Dari language training and proper culinary habits, such as how to "properly eat with one's hands."

All of this cultural preparation has fueled the hopes among volunteers as to the potential effectiveness of their mission. SPC Mary Bobb shared her hope that "we're going to interact with the Afghan females, because they don't have voices over there. We're hoping we can be a voice for them and express how they feel and what they want and what they're not getting. And then we can pass that up to their chain of command."

Beyond their cultural emersion, the FET participants must “prepare for the rigors of combat missions,” which translates into pushups and marches in full combat gear, along with the mental preparation needed to confront the inevitability of battle situations. Since all volunteers entered the service in a non-combat occupation, this adjustment has led to some anticipation.

SPC Bobb admits that her “first reaction was fear,” considering that “infantrymen are trained for that kind of situation, and we’re not. I’m a truck driver. I’m not used to carrying 10-15 pounds on my back and walk 25 miles. It’s going to be a challenge.”

1LT Rouse also anticipates the mission’s challenges but believes that its rewards will be greater. Not certain whether or not the mission will succeed unequivocally, she says, “There’s so much work to be done, and at such great risk, but if we can go and help our units accomplish their mission of providing safety and security in our region by getting atmospheric and helping the Afghan government’s outreach, and if we can help make it better for women and their children in specific area,” the experience will have been worth the risk.

Although 1LT Rouse doesn’t believe the FET’s purpose is to “change values” among Afghan women, she does hope that the Team’s outreach might change “women’s minds about what women are worth or what they are capable of,” so that “if we do indirectly change the valuation of women, great. But that’s not our purpose. We’re there to support our unit’s mission, which is also to support the government of Afghanistan.”

“All we can do is our little piece,” 1LT Rouse concluded, “and we’re going to give it our best effort.”

GUARD’S DOMESTIC COMMITMENTS CONTINUE ALONGSIDE OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENTS

ARNG’s ongoing participation in Iraq, Afghanistan and other overseas engagements, often involving multiple deployments for many Soldiers in all states and territories, can overshadow the fact that the Guard continues to respond to calls to deploy domestically at a moment’s notice to natural disasters. Be it the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 to the current tornados in the Midwest, floods in the Mississippi River Basin or wildfires in Arizona, ARNG units continue to heed the call to assist in their state or region, or even across the country.

In fact, an article by SGT Darron Salzer suggests that over 5,000 Guard members have responded just to the tornado and flood relief efforts (see “National Guard’s Tornado, Flood Response Jumps to 5,000 Over Past Week,” at <http://www.ng.mil/news/archives/2011/06/060311-National.aspx>).

Flood relief operations occurred simultaneously in “Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Vermont and Wyoming,” which took the form of “transportation and aviation support, levee patrols and security, assisting local and federal civilian emergency management agencies, evacuation support, search and rescue operations and sandbag operations.”

At the time of the article’s appearance (3 June), 3,000 Soldiers were active in North and South Dakota alone to combat flood waters that spread after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had to release backed up water behind severely threatened dams on the Missouri River. Further south, Mississippi and Louisiana Soldiers assisted in efforts to fight back the Mississippi River as it breached levees upstream. About 1,200 Guard members joined in these activities.

Meanwhile, tornados in Missouri and Massachusetts taxed Guard strength in those states, with some 450 Soldiers and Air Guard members activating just in Massachusetts and another 275 Soldiers deploying in Missouri.

Add to these natural disasters the worst wildfire in Arizona’s history, the “Wallow Fire,” which led Governor Jan Brewer on 7 June to declare a state of emergency and activate the AZNG. To read reports from the Arizona Guard and Governor Brewer’s office, see <http://www.ng.mil/news/archives/2011/06/060711-Arizona.aspx> and <http://www.ng.mil/features/fires2011/default.aspx>.

Recent estimates of wildfire damage put total acreage affected at over 800,000. Initially, the Guard’s role was to assist crews in getting three 2,500 gallon tankers of water to firefighters. As the fire continued to expand, the Guard’s role was sure to follow suit and in intervening weeks, Army and Air National Guard members helped bring the wildfire under more control, even as it spread into New Mexico.

As of 22 June, the fire was determined to be 58 percent contained, after having damaged or destroyed well over half a million acres of wilderness.

For latest updates on the wildfire’s progress, see <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/2011/06/22/20110622wallow-fire-highway-180-reopens-abrk.html>.

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NAIMES ANNOUNCES DEADLINE FOR STUDENT SPOTLIGHT AWARD APPLICATIONS

Administered and supported by the National Association of Institutions for Military Education Services (NAIMES) and MBS Direct LLC, the NAIMES Student Spotlight Award Program provides \$1,200 to Active Duty servicemembers in any military branch who are using federal tuition assistance (FTA) in a Voluntary Education program.

Eligibility does not extend to ROTC or military academy students and those who are using special tuition assistance programs. Students, themselves, submit applications under any of three categories: undergraduate students with fewer than 60 credit hours earned; undergraduate students with more than 60 credit hours earned; and graduate students. Applications are available and transmitted online, by the application deadline of **2 September 2011**. See <http://www.naimes.org> for access to the application and guidance. Students need not attend NAIMES-member institutions to be eligible for a Student Spotlight Award.

For additional information, prospective applicants may also notify Cheri Arfsten, Chair, Student Spotlight Award Committee, at cheri.arfsten@ppcc.edu.

DANTES FUNDING FOR EXCELSIOR COLLEGE EXAMS ENDS ON 1 OCTOBER

According to the DANTES Information Bulletin (DIB), DANTES's support for Excelsior College Examinations (ECE) will cease on 1 October 2011. The DIB article suggests that servicemembers "who require an ECE should contact their local education office to determine if their respective service branch provides Tuition Assistance (TA) funding for the ECE."

SOCGuard contacted a representative at National Guard Bureau (NGB) and learned that, "unfortunately, the

Guard will not be supporting ECEs after DANTES ceases to fund it."

For access to the DIB article, go to http://www.dantes.doded.mil/Dantes_web/DANTESHome.asp and click on the publication icon. For verification from NGB, contact 1LT Michael Olsen, at michael.peder.olson@us.army.mil.

SOCGUARD FINISHES THIRD QUARTER WITH EXTENSIVE OUTREACH SCHEDULE

Completing a very busy travel schedule from March to June, SOCGuard staff looks ahead to the fiscal year's completion and eventual plans for FY 2012

outreach and networking. However, the final three months of FY 2011 still hold opportunities for SOCGuard and Education Services Officers (ESOs) to plan summer activities.

Between March and June, SOCGuard staff participated in college workshops in Michigan, Georgia/Alabama, Kansas, Kentucky, Ohio, Montana, Connecticut, and Minnesota, higher education conferences in Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Washington state, and Washington, DC, and college visits in Missouri, Montana, Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

For more information, contact Marcy Shapiro, SOCGuard Project Director, at shapirom@aascu.org.



Student veteran panelists (left to right), Adam Rinko, Frederick Bond, Rickey Kitts, Christina Colla, and Diana Jones discuss experiences at SOC Workshop in Connecticut. Also pictured, first row, right, Joyce Larson, SOCGuard Project Director, and seated behind her, CPT Paul Draper, CTARNG ESO.



Student veteran panelists discuss their experiences transitioning from combat to the classroom.

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