

NJDMAVA HIGHLIGHTS

DECEMBER 18, 2015



Door-kicking pioneers

Story and photo by Sgt. Devon Bistarkey, 444th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Sometimes, forging a new path requires kicking in doors. For the first two female combat engineers in the New Jersey Army National Guard, that is exactly what they did.

Staff Sgt. Antonell Ng and Sgt. Linette Rodriguez became among the first women in the Army to be awarded the 12B combat arms military occupational specialty in November 2015 with their graduation from the Engineer School at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

“To know that I’m making history and I’ve helped lead the way for other females – I feel honored,” said Ng.

The Department of Defense announced earlier this month that it will remove all gender-based restrictions on the military in January 2016, clearing the way for women to serve alongside men in combat arms units.

Ng and Rodriguez said they are proud to be among the pioneers. The pair said one of their first challenges came when their request to attend the training at the Engineer School was denied. They say they were told that they would have to wait for women’s facilities within the



Staff Sgt. Antonell Ng, second from right, and Sgt. Linette Rodriguez, right, of the New Jersey Army National Guard's 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion, stand in formation Dec. 5, 2015. The Soldiers are the state's first female combat engineers and are among the first in the nation to be awarded the combat engineer occupational specialty as part of the Department of Defense initiative to remove all gender-based restrictions on combat positions.

training areas were completed.

They kept asking until the answer was ‘yes.’

“I didn’t give up, and I got there,” said Ng.

Once in the course, both Ng and Rodriguez found no reason why women were restricted from the role before.

“We carried our weight very well,” said Rodriguez who found the demolition component of her training the high-

light of the course.

For Capt. Angel Perez, the Soldier’s company commander, females transitioning into this function creates a greater opportunity to put the best Soldier in the job.

Rodriguez said that no matter their gender, all Soldiers are expected to know their jobs. Allowing women into new roles “adds balance to the Army,” she said.

COVER: AIRMEN VISIT HOME

Airmen from the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, sing along with the fourth graders from the Seaview School in Linwood, N.J., during the 15th Annual Holiday “Song-fest” at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Vineland, N.J., Dec. 16, 2015. For more about the visit, turn to page 5 for the complete story. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)

Veterans Outreach Campaign

Veterans Outreach
Campaign and Medal
Ceremony
Jan. 26 – 28
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DMAVA medal ceremony Jan. 26
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TOUGH GUYS EAT THEIR BROCCOLI

*Story by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht
and Airman 1st Class Julia Pyun
108th Wing Public Affairs*

*Photos by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht
108th Wing Public Affairs*

TOUGH GUYS EAT THEIR BROCCOLI

By day, Staff Sgt. Leon Jackson wrestles the heavy metal exoskeleton of aircraft. By night, the 108th Wing Airman tosses grown men to the ground and twists their bodies till they give up the fight.

A single-minded determination led Jackson to the gold medal at the International Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation 2015 World Jiu-Jitsu No Gi competition in Long Beach, Calif. on Nov. 7 after only three years of competing in the sport.

The first key to his unlikely success?

“My mother raised me right,” said Jackson, 25. “She raised me to be tough.”

The second?

Vegetables. Lots and lots of vegetables.

“I’m a no-meat athlete,” Jackson said.

“A lot of people ask how someone so big can get by on a vegan diet, but I’m used to it.”

Jackson switched to the vegan diet when he earnestly began Jiu-Jitsu training after one of his Middle East deployments with the Air National Guard.

At first, he marveled at the diet’s ability to boost his cardiovascular endurance and reduce inflammation – huge benefits in a martial art where the objective is to throw an opponent to the ground and lock them into a submission hold.

Then Jackson began to embrace veganism as a lifestyle, even creating a website to unite other no-meat Jiu-Jitsu athletes.

“I feel better knowing that my dietary choice reduces my carbon footprint and saves the lives of animals,” Jackson said.

Jackson visits the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst gym every morning at 5 a.m. for his first workout of the day. After his workday as a full-time aircraft structural maintenance mechanic, he hits the gym again before heading to his neighborhood Jiu-Jitsu academy.

There, he trains Ultimate Fighting Championship fighters like Frankie Edgar, Edson Barboza, Corey Anderson as well as World Series of Fighting Feather Weight Champion, Marlon Moraes. It might be the quality of training partners that has helped the six-foot-one, 215 pound Jackson win more than 20 tournaments in addition to the one in San Francisco.

In addition to his personal training, he also trains young people.

“We teach the kids about perseverance and having a non-quitting spirit,” said Jackson. “You learn a ton about yourself through



Staff Sgt. Leon Jackson, left, grapples with Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Professor Chris Matakas Dec. 9, 2015. Jackson has won numerous jiu-jitsu awards, most recently at the International Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation 2015 World Jiu-Jitsu No Gi competition in San Francisco Nov. 7, where he won both gold and silver medals.

Jiu-Jitsu. There will be times when you get frustrated with your technique or you lose a major tournament. Sometimes you doubt yourself and want to give up, but if you stick with it, you learn to fight your way out of certain situations. If you’re stuck in a submission (hold), you have to learn how to escape or else your arms are going to break or you’ll be choked unconscious. You can apply this mentality to your life and in everyday situations.”



Staff Sgt. Leon Jackson, a fabrication specialist with the 108th Wing, cooks a vegan meal for himself at his home in Bordentown, N.J., Oct. 28, 2015.

Jackson applies this to his demanding job with the Air Guard, where mistakes can compromise the safety of air crews.

Jackson’s supervisor, Master Sgt. Russell Howarth, calls Jackson an asset to the team.

“Leon is ambitious and not afraid to try new tasks. He’s always volunteering and willing to learn,” said Howarth. “He’s a full-timer, so I can always rely on him when I’m in a pinch. He’s open-minded and a great asset to everyone. I hope he continues to have the same mindset and attitude, and I can definitely see him moving up in the world.”

For now, Jackson is motivated by the prospect of more world championships.

“Every day when I wake up, I think about this quote, ‘Hard work beats talent, when talent doesn’t work hard,’” he said.

Someday, though, he wants to own his own academy to share the joy of what he calls “the gentle art.”

“Not only is Jiu-Jitsu very addicting, but it’s also very therapeutic,” he said. “We all have something that we turn to when we need to clear our minds. Jiu-Jitsu is the tool I use to escape and free my mind.”

New Jersey Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Wayne Woolley contributed to this story.

Around the State



Fourth day of Hanukkah

Lt. Col. Yaakov B. Bindell, left, the New Jersey National Guard State Chaplain, lights the Shamash, or guardian candle, on the Menorah during a Hanukkah candle lighting ceremony at the Main Base Chapel, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., Dec. 9, 2015. The event was co-sponsored by the Main Base Chapel and Jewish War Veterans Post 126. Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem during the Maccabean Revolt. Hanukkah is observed for eight nights and days, starting on the 25th day of Kislev according to the Hebrew calendar, which may occur at any time from late November to late December. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)

Trees for troops

New Jersey National Guard Soldiers and Airmen choose trees at the Christmas Trees for New Jersey Military Families event at the Joint Military Family Assistance Center, Bordentown, N.J., Dec. 14 2015. The New Jersey National Guard leadership, New Jersey Department of Agriculture, New Jersey Christmas Tree Growers Association and the New Jersey Agricultural Society's Farmers Against Hunger Program welcomed military members and their families at the Center where more than 12 New Jersey Christmas Tree growers donated approximately 125 trees to New Jersey National Guard Soldiers and Airmen. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)





Senior Airman Dana Rhoads, right, 177th Fighter Wing, shakes hands with a New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home resident during the 15th Annual Holiday "Songfest" at the Home at Vineland, N.J., Dec. 16, 2015.

Airmen visit veterans

Story and photo by
Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen
New Jersey National Guard
Public Affairs

The harmony of holiday cheer resonated throughout the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Vineland Dec. 16, 2015.

Sixteen Airmen from the 177th Fighter Wing joined forces with more than 80

fourth graders from the Seaview School in Linwood, N.J., and brought their singing talents to the Home's residents during their Annual Holiday Songfest.

The Home's veteran population includes residents that have served from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

This was the fifteenth year the New Jersey Air National Guard members have visited the Home. The visit's purpose was two-fold: First to bring donated items from the Home's wish list to the residents and second, to perform holiday songs for the residents.

In years past, Chief Master Sgt. Timothy Donovan and Senior Master Sgt. Mike Monteith coordinated the 177th's effort, working with the Chiefs' Council and the Junior Enlisted Council, as well as other individuals to fulfill the Home's wish list.

But both sergeants felt it was time for a change in leadership.

"It was time for us to step back and let someone new take over," said Monteith.

"The 177th Junior Enlisted Council has taken over the operation," said Staff Sgt. Stacey Pareene, 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron. "I'm really excited to see the kids visit the residents and be involved."

The Council also raised more than \$500 for needed items.

"We were able to buy wish list items that help in the veteran's daily living," said Pareene.

As in years past, Airmen and fourth graders were divided into groups and sent out to spread cheer to the residents.

The carolers sang in the hallways and dayrooms, as well as serenaded bedridden residents. They also passed out holiday greeting cards and chatted with the veterans.

And while some of the Airmen had probably not ever sung in public, their efforts were matched by the looks of happiness and joy in the residents eyes as they performed for them.

AIRMEN TRAIN WITH VIRTUAL REALITY

Story and photos by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht, 108th Wing Public Affairs



Airman First Class Joseph Bickel, 108th Security Force Squadron, responds to a simulated threat in a VirTra firearms training simulator at a U.S. Marshal training site in Lawrenceville, N.J., Dec. 12, 2015.

It was a day like any other – blue sky, tranquil breeze, when suddenly the unexpected happened: gunshots rang out. Swiftly responding, Security Forces Airmen made their way through numerous rooms, past injured people, and neutralized the threat.

Luckily, this was all part of their training.

On Dec. 12, these New Jersey Air National Guardsmen got some highly technical virtual reality training at the U.S. Marshal's training site in Lawrenceville, N.J.

The V-300 VirTra firearms training simulator offered an unprecedented 300 degree view of interactive screens lit by 5 high definition projectors and a sound system that would fit into any major movie theater. A box, strapped to the cops' belts, shocked them when they were struck by enemy fire.

The U.S. Marshals instructors quipped, "These can be a real motivator."

The Airmen got to go through several scenarios, including a high-risk traffic stop they did as individuals, and an active shooter scenario where they got to work with a partner.

"Remember to keep watching, and to keep communicating," said one of the instructors from the Marshals office. "Keep your head on a swivel."

One of the event's organizers, Tech. Sgt. Heather Perez, from the 108th Secu-

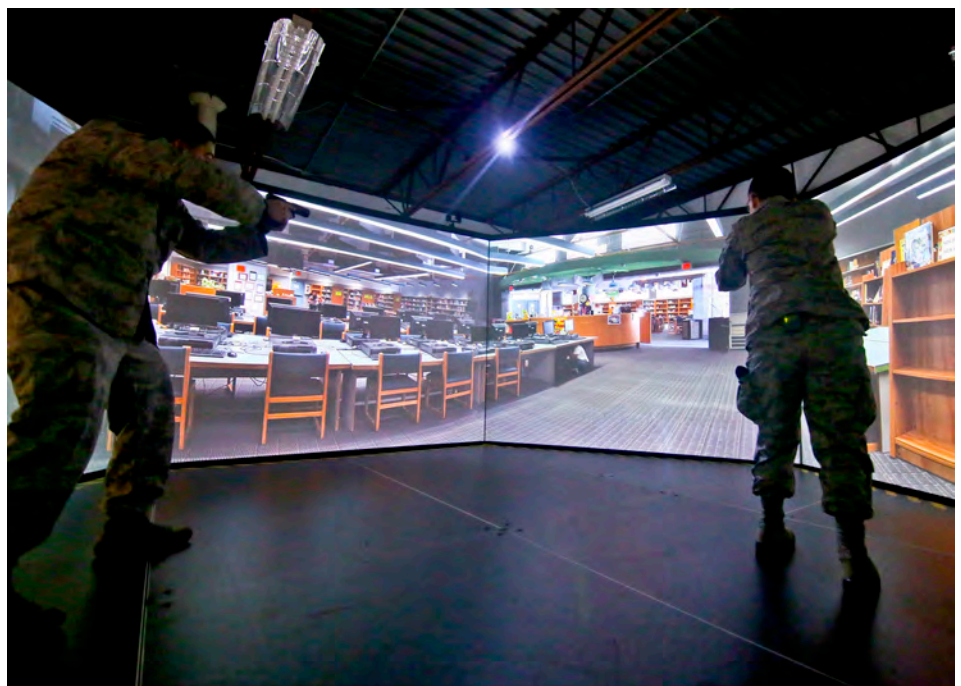
rity Forces training section, had nothing but praise for the days' training, a first of its kind for the 108th and the Marshals.

"This is great hands on training," said Perez. "The Airmen get to see how they react to these various events individually, as well as with a partner. The technology is amazing."

Perez also noted that this would hope-

fully be the first of many joint training ventures with the U.S. Marshals, and that the younger tech savvy Airmen loved the virtual reality aspect.

"This training is very interesting and fun for the young Airmen, this kind of technology is hopefully keeping them motivated to stay in Security Forces," said Perez.



Security Forces Airmen from the 108th Wing respond to a simulated active shooter while assisted by a U.S. Marshal instructor. The 108th Wing Security Forces Airmen participated in high-risk traffic stop and active shooter scenarios.

VETS GET CONCERT AND DONATION

VETERANS HAVEN HOLIDAY UPDATE



Above: In what has become tradition at Veterans Haven North the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of New Jersey arranged a concert by the Lambertville Brass Band Dec. 11, 2015. The VFW state department volunteers were joined by VFW members of District 19, Hunterdon County to provide holiday refreshments and gift cards to every resident of the facility. Below: Santa arrived early at Veterans Haven North as Catholic War Veterans State Commander Anthony Moskal, second from right, presented a \$1,000 check to Sean P. VanLew Sr., facility superintendent, center, Dec. 15, 2015. Members of Catholic War Veterans Post #405, Tom Carpenter, left, Matt Hogan and Joe Fazio, far right, joined in on the presentation. (Veterans Haven North photos)



Wreaths Across America at Doyle

Photos by Kryn P. Westhoven, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs



Civil Air Patrol cadets from the Jimmy Stewart Composite Squadron, Twin Pines Composite Squadron, Pineland Composite Squadron and the Allentown Composite Squadron were joined by the Company Grade Officer Council of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst and Boy Scouts in placing the 1,808 wreaths at Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery in North Hanover for the annual Wreaths Across America event Dec. 12, 2015. The Doyle ceremony coincided with volunteers honoring all the veterans laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery.



The Department of Veterans Affairs Claims Clinic

for
Veterans, Dependents and Survivors
*"Enhancing the Veteran
Experience"*

*Hosted by Michael Blazis
Director, Newark Regional Office
&
Trenton Vets Center*

WHERE: Trenton Vets Center
934 Parkway Avenue #201
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WHEN: Tuesday, January 26, 2016/Noon – 4PM

Who should come? Veteran, Servicemembers and dependents of who are interested and eligible to receive VA benefits and entitlements

****This is a great opportunity to get information about VA benefits and entitlements, submit a claim for benefits or receive information about the status of your pending VA claim****

This event is open to the public

For more information contact Jennifer Myers at 973-297-3384



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