



National Guard Bureau Emergency Response Training Exercise

5.6
Magnitude
Earthquake
hits Buffalo,
NY.

National
Guard
troops
take to the
streets of
Erie County
to assist
local
authorities.

Joint Task
Force 6
commands
National
Guard
support
forces.

Vigilant Guard

2009



2009

Vigilant Guard Exercise Largest ever in State

*Story and Photos by Staff Sgt. Dennis Gravelle,
369th Sustainment Brigade*

BUFFALO -- The largest military/civilian disaster response exercise ever held in New York brought more than 1,300 troops from five states to the Niagara Frontier the first week of November, 2009.

The drill, part of the Vigilant Guard exercise series run by United States Northern Command and National Guard Bureau, gives National Guard Forces the chance to practice emergency response operations with local, state, regional and federal partners against both natural disasters and terrorist attacks.

"Vigilant Guard is an opportunity for military and civilian professionals to train together and prepare for a potential catastrophe we all naturally hope will never happen," said Brig. Gen Michael Swezey, commander of the Guard's Joint Task Force 6. "This exercise was developed from lessons learned from the terrorist attacks on 9-11 and from Hurricane Katrina."

In the exercise scenario an earthquake measuring 5.9 on the Richter Scale hit near the City of Buffalo on Oct 30, at 2 p.m.

The earthquake caused tremendous damage to the urban core of Buffalo, Erie County and southern Niagara County.

The National Guard was called out by the Governor to support the local emergency responders.

"Governor Patterson understands as much as any of us how important it is that we all work together to become prepared, to be able to respond to any emergency, to any disaster that we face here in New York State," said Denise O'Donnell, the state's deputy secretary for public safety.

To make the earthquake exercise more realistic, a rubble pile was created at the former Spaulding Fiber Plant in Tonawanda, and casualties were placed on the rock to simulate a disaster scene so that specialized National Guard and emergency response teams could work together to practice life saving skills.

"From the start of the exercise we have had numerous agencies out there, mostly military doing site surveys to start us off, looking over the



Soldiers from the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, High Yield Explosive (CBRNE) Enhanced Response Force Package (CERFP) help Tonya M. Quarles playing the role of a casualty during Vigilant Guard.

rubble pile, looking over the potential for what we had to do," said Donald McFeeley, incident commander, and Buffalo Fire Department division chief.

"They checked the area for hazardous materials, and any issues that might present a problem for search and rescue teams."

Checking for hazardous materials is the responsibility of the Civil Support Team.

Upon direction of the Governor, the state's Adjutant General will employ the CST to augment local and regional terrorism response capabilities in events known or suspected to be the target of weapons of mass destruction.

The team may also be used as a state or federal resource in times of natural disaster, during a large scale release of toxic chemicals threatening life or property, or other incidents of national significance.

McFeeley added that the military is a good asset to ask for when you need help.

The armed forces have a lot of assets that they bring to the table, from medical personnel to people that can just help out, he explained.



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"This is the first time I have worked with the Military and the communication has been great," McFeeley said. "They were very approachable and basically told us they were under our command, I have nothing but good things to say about them."

After the scene has been cleared by the CST the long process of removing casualties from a disaster area to begin decontamination and medical treatment begins.

That mission belongs to the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, High Yield Explosive (CBRNE) Enhanced Response Force Package (CERF-P).

The CERF-P is comprised of four functional elements, command and control, casualty search and extraction, casualty decontamination, and medical.

Specified Army and Air National Guard units are tasked to provide the capabilities in addition to their regularly assigned missions.

Army National Guard chemical companies typically provide the decontamination capability and engineer companies typically provide the search and extraction capability.

These units will have specialized equipment and training to perform operations in a Weapons of Mass Destruction WMD environment.

In order to establish the medical element quickly without duplicating capabilities, the Air National Guard medical groups provide the medical support.

These highly skilled personnel may also be augmented by Army National Guard medical personnel at the discretion of the Adjutant General.

"CERF-P is a mass decontamination task force that will aid citizens of this country in times of natural disasters or terrorist attacks," said 1st Lt. John L. Passarotti, officer in charge for the New York Guard, the all-volunteer state militia which augments the National Guard "We have a search and extraction element that removes people from demolished buildings, we bring them to our decontamination lines where we wash the contamination off them, then we bring them to our medical service providers where they receive first aid, and then they are shipped to area hospitals to receive further care."

According to Dr. Robert D. Jacobi, PhD, University of Buffalo professor of geology, the likelihood of a significant seismic event occurring in Western NY is not as remote as one would think.

"During the past 20 years, geologic research that I have conducted with my colleagues at the University of Buffalo and other institutions has led to an understanding that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, western NY, in fact, the entire state, is crisscrossed by literally hundreds of faults," he said. "Many of them, including the largest in our area, the Clarandon-Linden Fault, remain seismically active today."

John R. Gibb, director of the NY State Emergency Management Office added that the citizens of NY State expect state and local forces to work together when incidents large or small strike their communities.



Soldiers from the 105th Military Police Company, the 102nd MP Battalion, and Soldiers from the New York Guard prepare a civilian casualty for decontamination during Vigilant Guard.

It's through these exercises that we practice our plans and hone our skills to ensure a quick and effective response.

Vigilant Guard will help us to collectively enhance our response and recovery capabilities in the region.

"Much time and effort has gone into making this a meaningful training exercise that will someday help save lives in an emergency situation, that's what makes this training so very, very important," said Tonawanda Mayor Ron Piloizzi, and Vietnam Veteran.



2009

Headquarters Joint Operations Center Has Exercise Role

Story and Photo by Eric Durr, Division of Military and Naval Affairs

LATHAM--They don't get down and dirty like the Soldiers and Airmen in the field, but when the National Guard deploys forces in aid of civil authorities in New York, the 30 people who staff the New York State Joint Operations Center (JOC) kick into high gear too.

The state-of-the-art command and control center at the Division of Military and Naval Affairs Headquarters in Latham is modeled after command centers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The \$280,000 facility has space for the key players on the headquarters team--operations, intelligence, personnel, logistics, and communications--and space for liaisons from Army Aviation, the Air National Guard, the 42nd Infantry Division, 53rd Troop Command, and liaison officers and NCOs from other states.

The job of the JOC is to take the information flowing in from around the state, and help the Adjutant General make decisions, explained Major Robert Stabb, the JOC Officer in Charge.

They do this by keeping track of the COP, military-speak for the Common Operational Picture, a visualization of the operation and the terrain its happening on that, ideally, is uniform at all command levels.

To do this the command center is equipped with five video screens which allow key information, news reports, video transmitted from the scene, and briefing slides to be shown simultaneously.

A specially built "Disaster-LAN" software system, modeled on that used by the New York State Emergency Management Office allows the JOC staff to track and pass information among themselves and commands in the field.

For the JOC team, Vigilant Guard kicked off on Friday, Oct. 30, when the notional earthquake hit the Buffalo area.

For the next week the JOC tracked the real world flow of troops into and out of the exercise, while also responding to exercise generated problems and incorporating changes into their processes.

The JOC staff learned what worked, what didn't work, and what they needed to do better to track the operation and paint that accurate COP.

"It was a good depiction of a real world situation," said intelligence analyst Sgt. Erin Martin, a member of the J-2 Section who deployed to Afghanistan with the 27th Brigade Combat Team in 2008.

The analysis skills she honed in a combat zone came in handy, but in a different way, Martin said.

In combat she was trying to predict what the Taliban would do next, in this situation the role was to analyze the area and determine what risks and hazards area civilians and relief forces would face so the risks could be mitigated.

"This is what they pay us to do," said Lt. Col. Ron Ridner, Deputy Director of Domestic Operations. "We need to capture everything and learn from it."



LATHAM--New York Army and Air National Guard members man the New York State Joint Operations Center in Latham during Exercise Vigilant Guard. The state-of-the-art command and control facility oversees the operations of the 20,000-member New York Military Forces.



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Guard Leadership Oversees Exercise Operations



NIAGARA FALLS RESERVE AIR FORCE BASE, Niagara Falls –

General Craig R. McKinley, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, accompanied by Maj. Gen. Joseph Taluto, New York State Adjutant General, greet Col. Michael Bobeck, commander, 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade, during a visit to the Soldiers of the 42nd CAB on Nov. 4 during the Vigilant Guard exercise.

The 42nd CAB are testing newly acquired field equipment such as a BASEX tent while conducting routine field operations. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Steven Petibone, 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade.



BUFFALO -- Maj. Gen. Joseph J. Taluto, New York State Adjutant General (right) speaks with Massachusetts Army National Guard CERFP team members at the Spaulding Fibre site in Tonawanda during Exercise Vigilant Guard. The Soldiers practiced rescuing mock casualties from the simulated earthquake disaster area, or rubble pile, located at the site. The soldiers are, from left: Spc. Mark Williams, Spc. David Lyons and Sgt. Randy Isaacs. Photo by Staff Sgt. Raymond Drumsta, 138th Public Affairs Detachment



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Physical Training Gear Does Double Duty for CERFP Soldiers



Massachusetts Army National Guard Sgt. Michael Palmer dons his decontamination suit prior to training on Tuesday Nov. 2.

Story and Photos by Staff Sgt. Ray Drumsta,
138th Public Affairs Det.

TONAWANDA -- While it seems like an odd wardrobe choice, the Massachusetts National Guard CERFP team members say their physical training uniforms are well-suited for their mission: to find, decontaminate and evacuate disaster victims.

The Massachusetts CERFP team is one of several such elements taking part in Exercise Vigilant Guard, a joint training opportunity for National Guard and emergency response organizations to build relationships with local, state, regional and federal partners against a variety of different homeland

security threats including natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks.

A rubble pile at the Spaulding Fibre Site in Tonawanda is being used to simulate a building destroyed by an earthquake, and CERFP teams are tasked with rescuing victims from it.

The acronym CERFP stands for Chemical, Biological, Radiological/ Nuclear, and Explosive (CBRNE) - Enhanced Response Force Package, and team members must don decontamination suits, gasmasks, rubber boots, rubber gloves and hardhats before they mount the rubble pile to find and decontaminate casualties.

While they stood out among their camouflage-clad Army and Air National Guard counterparts at the Spaulding Fibre site on Tuesday, First Sgt. Paul Marcinek of the CERFP team explained that deploying there in physical training uniforms, commonly known as PT clothes, for physical training, is all about speed and safety.

"It's faster, and safer for the Soldiers and Airmen," he said. "If it's 80 degrees outside, it's 90 degrees in the suit." Wearing PT clothes on these missions has been their standard operating procedure, said Marcinek, who hails from Holyoke, Massachusetts.

The PT clothes are more comfortable to wear under the protective gear, said Sgt. Michael Palmer, of Lynnfield, Massachusetts. "You can get pretty dehydrated in these suits," he said.

Apart from the rubble pile and troops in PT clothes, the Spaulding Fibre site looked like a typical field problem on Tuesday, complete with dirt now churned to glutinous ooze by rain and vehicle traffic.

The CERFP team members had no dry place to stand while pulling on their suits and rubber boots.

But Palmer said he preferred the rainy and colder weather.

"I'd take this over a 80 to 90 degree day anytime," he said.



2009

Massachusetts Moves into the Action



Lockport -- Members of the Massachusetts National Guard's 1st Civil Support Team moved into the mix of a simulated earthquake and are designed to detect the presence of chemical, biological, and radiological weapons or hazardous materials and then inform civil and military responders on the kind of threat they face. The CST normally moves onto a site before a National Guard CERFP, a team trained to rescue and decontaminate victims of a WMD attack, or its civilian equivalent. Massachusetts has contributed a CERFP as well as their CST to the exercise.

Massachusetts Commander Visits Troops

Lockport -- Massachusetts Army National Guard Commander Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Sellars and Massachusetts National Guard Command Sgt. Major David Costa (left) join members of the Massachusetts National Guard's 1st Civil Support Team on Tuesday, Nov. 3, during Exercise Vigilant Guard being held here. The Massachusetts Guardsmen and women, who are specially trained to detect hazardous materials and special weapons, are among 1,300 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Massachusetts, and the U.S. Virgin Island who are participating in the exercise, which simulates a major earthquake in the Niagara Falls area.



Bay State Guardsman Take Part in Vigilant Guard

Photos by Pvt. 1st Class Jeremy Bratt, Joint Forces Headquarters-NY



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CERFP Lifts Simulated Victims out of Virtual Earthquake Area

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Ray Drumsta,
138th Public Affairs Det.

TONAWANDA -- It's like a disaster area - which is the whole point for New York National Guard forces taking part in Exercise Vigilant Guard in Western New York this week.

These forces took on the disaster Monday afternoon, mounting a rubble pile at the Spaulding Fibre Site in Tonawanda to rescue mock earthquake victims. The pile simulates a building destroyed by an earthquake, and the mock victims, lying on or in the rubble, provided more realism for the training exercise.

Vigilant Guard is a national exercise program sponsored by the National Guard Bureau and United States Northern Command to provide a joint training opportunity for National Guard and emergency response organizations to build relationships with local, state, regional and federal partners against a variety of different homeland security threats including natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks.

The Spaulding Fibre Site is just one area being used for this training, which more than 1300 National Guard troops and hundreds of local and regional emergency response professionals are taking part in.

The troops on the rubble pile Monday were part of a task force called CERFP, or Chemical, Biological, Radiological/Nuclear, and Explosive (CBRNE) - Enhanced Response Force Package.

Composed of medical personnel from the New York Air National Guard and military police and engineers from the New York Army National Guard, CERFP's mission is to find the casualties, extract them from the rubble, decontaminate them, treat their injuries and evacuate them from the disaster area.

On Monday, CERFP deployed to the Spaulding Fibre Site and set up decontamination and medical treatment areas. Then CERFP members, dressed in sweltering decontamination suits, gasmasks, rubber boots, rubber gloves and hardhats, mounted the rubble pile to find casualties, move them off the rubble pile to the treatment areas.

The pile is composed of unstable concrete slabs, rusty steel plates and a pair of crushed cars. Pfc. Brandon Preisch, who was part of the group rescuing casualties, felt the pile lent realism to the earthquake scenario.

"It looks like a building collapsed," said Preisch, of the 27th Brigade. "There's debris everywhere." It was tiring work "especially in the suits," and the mask sometimes made it difficult to walk on the shifting debris, he added.

"When it fogs up, it gets kind of hairy, because you can't see," he said. Rescuers had to be careful of falling in the rubble, which contained pieces of broken rebar, he added.

While the pile made for a treacherous work environment, the wounded - who were dressed up in fake wounds and pretending to cry for help - motivated him to move quickly, said CERFP member Pvt. Jeremy Glynn of the 27th Brigade.

"Your blood starts pumping, and you really want to get those people out of the there," he said.

In this scenario, the medical personnel from the New York Air Guard would expect to treat crush injuries, respiratory conditions and exposure to hazardous materials, said Air National Guard Capt. Kelly Hall, medical plans and operations officer for CERFP. Hall, of the 174th Fighter Wing, said they would perform a fast triage and quickly stabilize victims for evacuation.

"The key thing is to get the patients out of the disaster area to definitive care as soon as possible," she said. The airmen, she added, have been doing exercises like this since 2005, and some of the medics are even skilled in confined-space rescues.

"We're trained for this," she said.



New York Army National Guard Soldiers rescue a mock casualty from a rubble heap during Operation Vigilant Guard in Tonawanda. The soldiers are part of a joint Army and Air National Guard team specially trained to find disaster casualties, decontaminate them if necessary, treat their injuries and evacuate them from disaster areas.



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Members of the New York National Guard CERFP (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, High Yield Explosive (CBRNE) Enhance Response Force Package, made up of National Guard Soldiers and Airmen and the all-volunteer New York Guard move a simulated casualty to the decontamination site at the former Spaulding Fiber Plant in Tonawanda, NY. The site has been equipped with a rubble pile which simulates a hospital collapsed in a 5.9 Richter earthquake. The operation is part of Exercise Vigilant Guard which teams almost 1,500 National Guard troops with civilian responders.



Tonya M Quarles, Buffalo, NY plays the role of a casualty during a Vigilant Guard Exercise held in Buffalo, NY. Vigilant Guard is a national exercise program sponsored by the National Guard Bureau and United States Southern Command, and is designed to provide training for National Guard Forces to practice emergency response operations.



2009

Local Airport practices Real World Role during Simulated Emergency



Buffalo-Niagara International Airport -- New York Air National Guard Airman 1st Class Kevin Rech, of the 174th Fighter Wing, and Staff Sgt. Josh Nichter, of the 107th Airlift Wing, join Niagara Frontier Transit Authority Police Officer Ed Carney to provide security at the airport. The members of the Air National Guard security forces, who are normally tasked to defend bases around the world, deployed to the airport to simulate assisting civil authorities in maintaining order in the wake of a disaster. Photo by Pvt. 1st Class Jeremy Bratt, Joint Forces Headquarters-NY

(From back to front) Staff Sgt. Warren Jones, 107th Airlift Wing, Security Forces squadron, Staff Sgt. Brandon Whitt, 109th Airlift Wing, Security Forces squadron, and Officer Karen Skipper, Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, patrol the Buffalo International Airport. The Airmen are part of the National Guard Reaction Force, a team of security forces Air National Guardsmen from many eastern states. The reaction force has been called upon during the Vigilant Guard exercise to join the ranks alongside transportation authority personnel providing additional airport security. They are also providing convoy security, rubble site security and base security.

Photo by Sr. Master Sgt. Ray Lloyd, 107th Airlift Wing





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Niagara Air National Guard ready for Vigilant Guard



Civil engineers from the 107th Airlift Wing, work together with members of Alpha Company, 642nd Aviation Support Battalion, Army National Guard to construct a tent city. The work crew erected 32 Rapid Deployment System shelters to house up to 300 military responders. The RDS are highly mobile systems designed to be self contained temporary housing. Each RDS comes complete with all necessary equipment to safely set up each shelter in a matter of a few hours.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Peter Dean, 107th Airlift Wing.



(Left) Senior Airman Chance Soda, 107th Airlift Wing, Civil engineering Squadron works alongside Airman 1st Class Steven Jones, 106th Rescue Wing, Civil Engineering Squadron, Long Island, N.Y.

(Right) Master Sgt. Thomas Pilarz, 107th AW, Civil engineering Squadron.



The Airmen are preparing a self contained mobile heater for use. The heating system comes complete with duct work, thermostat and a carbon monoxide detector. The heaters are part of a new rapid deployment shelter system designed to temporarily house military responders in time of a natural or manmade disaster. The system is being set up to provide temporary housing for Vigilant Guard military responders.

Photos by Staff Sgt. Peter Dean, 107th Airlift Wing.



Medics load mock casualties in to a C-130 for transport for further treatment. The medics from many different states joined together at the Niagara Air Reserve Station for a Vigilant Guard exercise.

Photos by Tech. Sgt. Cathy Perretta, 107th Airlift Wing.



2009

Support is their Middle Name

Civil Support Units find Hazardous Materials for Civil Authorities

*By Staff Sgt. Raymond Drumsta,
138th Public Affairs Detachment*

LOCKPORT -- While other parts of Exercise Vigilant Guard are marked by the din of machinery and shouts of troops and first responders training to rescue mock earthquake victims, the action here is relatively quiet.

Here Civil Support Team (CST) troops like Army Staff Sgt. Phillip Pasquariello and Army Sgt. Tyler Fotiuo, dressed in billowy hazmat suits and rubber boots -- enter a darkened factory carrying buckets, flashlights and a small rolling cabinet known as a sampling toolbox. Their pace is careful and deliberate, and the only sounds are their calm voices and the rhythmic hissing of their breathing equipment as they search the building's shadowy recesses for hazardous materials.

Pasquariello and Fotiuo belong to the Pennsylvania National Guard's 3rd WMD Civil Support Team, one of several such units taking part in Exercise Vigilant Guard. They were on duty for three games of the World Series in Philadelphia, and arrived in Lockport to join the exercise on Wednesday, said Lt. Col. Timothy Gwinn, commander of the 3rd CST (WMD).

According to the training scenario, several citizens living in an abandoned pesticide factory went to the hospital with symptoms consistent with hazardous material exposure, Gwinn said. The unit was called out to perform their mission - the early detection and identification of chemical, biological, radiological/nuclear and explosive materials, he added.

These hazardous material classes are abbreviated "CBRNE," which Gwinn and unit member Sgt. First Class David Walck pronounce "C-Bernie." Like other CST units, they support civil authorities by finding and identifying these materials "things that would surpass what local first responders would have in the way of detection capability," Gwinn explained.

Walck states the unit's mission just as bluntly.

"We never assume control of the site," Walck said. "The CST's role is to assist, advise and assess for civil authorities." The first thing they do after arriving on the scene of a suspected CBRNE incident is to link up with the incident commander, he added.

After gathering intelligence from the incident commander, the CST troops use their detection gear to check the site's perimeter for hazardous materials, Walck explained.

Then a reconnaissance team enters the site itself while the other CST troops set up a decontamination station for soldiers and airmen entering and leaving the site, he added.

"From the time the commander accepts the mission, we have 90 minutes to get downrange," Walck said.

Downrange, he explained, is the suspected contaminated area, also called the "hotzone."

Based on that initial reconnaissance, unit members enter the site to gather samples until the mission is complete, or until they're relieved by another unit, Walck said. In addition to their loose-fitting hazmat suits which provide splash and vapor protection, unit members use a sampling toolbox to gather suspected hazardous materials to be tested and identified in the unit's mobile laboratory, he added.

Within the factory, Pasquariello and Fotiuo move from spot to spot, using pipettes and other tools to take samples of suspected liquid and solid hazardous materials. With their gloved hands they pluck items from toolbox's accessible trays, and they appear to use extra care when they hand the tools to each other at each spot.

Their hazmat suits are roomy enough to cover their self-contained breathing apparatuses and have transparent plastic faceplates and sleeves with built-in gloves. Though the faceplates fog up as they work, the suits' bulk and gloved sleeves allow Pasquariello and Fotiuo to pause, draw their arms back into their suits, wipe their faceplates clear and continue the mission.

Walck said the suits are so hot that he sometimes finds his sweat pooled in the bottom of his boots after a mission.

In addition to supporting the Philadelphia Fire Department's hazmat team during part of the World Series, they were recently on duty for the G20 conference in Pittsburgh and public sporting events throughout the summer, Gwinn said.

Their participation in Exercise Vigilant Guard Wednesday was "another opportunity to train in a unique environment with our Soldiers," he stressed.



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"Constant training keeps us on the edge, keeps us sharp," Gwinn said. "Being able to come to a different venue that's outside of our area just adds one additional challenge to the things we do."

Walck said he enjoys the work.

"I'm a college drop-out," he said, smiling. "I never thought I'd use the chemistry and biology I learned, and now I have to use it in my job. This is the most fun I've had since leaving the Marine Corps."

The 3rd CST WMD is one of several such elements taking part in Exercise Vigilant Guard, a joint training opportunity for National Guard and emergency response organizations to build relationships with local, state, regional and federal partners against a variety of different homeland security threats including natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks.

Exercise Vigilant Guard is a national exercise sponsored by the National Guard Bureau and United States Northern Command. The Lockport site is just one area in Western New York being used for the exercise, which more than 1300 National Guard troops and hundreds of local and regional emergency response professionals are taking part in.



Lockport--Army Sgt. Tyler Fotiuo, from the Pennsylvania National Guard's 3rd Civil Support Team (CST), takes a sample to check for mock hazardous materials in an empty factory in Lockport. The building is being used as a training area for Exercise Vigilant Guard. The 3rd CST is just one such unit using the Lockport site to train to find hazardous materials. In an actual disaster, CSTs find and identify hazardous materials, advise civil authorities on their effects and consequences, and assist in the authorities' response



2009

NY Aviation Takes to the Skies for Disaster Response



IREMANS PARK, Tonawanda -- Sgt. James Wunders and Sgt. Casey Harris, medics from the 466th Area Medical Company transfer one of four simulated wounded personnel from a ground evacuation vehicle to a UH-60 Air Ambulance Helicopter flown by the 249th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) at Fireman's Park on Nov. 3, as part of the Vigilant Guard exercise.

The wounded personnel evacuated were found at a simulated "rubble pile" nearby as a result of a collapsed hospital caused by a simulated earthquake near the Buffalo area. Photo by Sgt. Ally Andolina, 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade.

NY's Deputy Public Safety Director Visits Vigilant Guard

NIAGARA FALLS RESERVE AIR FORCE BASE, North Tonawanda -- Denise O'Donnell, Deputy Secretary of Public Safety (left) listens to Col. Michael Bobeck, commander, 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade as he briefs her on aviation operations during Vigilant Guard inside the 42nd CAB's tactical operations center located on the Niagara Falls Air Force Base.

The exercise involves New York Air and Army National Guardsmen as well as local first response teams to include fire departments and police agencies. Photo by Sgt. Ally Andolina, 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade





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BUFFALO-- New York Army and Air National Guard Medevac crews move a simulated patient at Erie County Medical Center in Buffalo to the helicopters.



2009

Troops and Civilians Train to be on Same Page in Disasters

*Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Raymond Drumsta,
138th Public Affairs Det.*

TONAWANDA – “Purple suits” is a frequently used phrase used to denote interoperability among the United States Military branches – soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines working together.

In the post 9-11 age, with military forces joining forces with civilian authorities and first responders in things like Exercise Vigilant Guard, that purple has taken on a deeper shade.

Civilian authorities like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Urban Search and Rescue Team put some more blue in the purple on Tuesday as team members Paul Medeiros, an emergency medical technician, and Tim Robinson, a paramedic, trained with Massachusetts troops at the Spaulding Fibre in Tonawanda.

The FEMA personnel helped troops perform triage on mock earthquake victims in a simulated collapsed building known as the rubble pile, and showed at least one Soldier how to cut up a crushed car with tools like the jaws of life and other tools. Citing 9-11 and the Oklahoma City bombing, Medeiros said civil authorities and military forces have worked together on many occasions.

“The list is endless,” he said, adding that events like Exercise Vigilant Guard are vital to honing command



Bob Reardon of the Federal Emergency Management Agency Urban Search and Rescue Team (right) shows Spc. Joshua Poitras, Mass. Army National Guard CERFP member (left) how to use the jaws of life to cut up a car at the Spaulding Fibre site in Tonawanda during Exercise Vigilant Guard.

and control during disasters. He appeared to enjoy working with the Soldiers and Airmen on the rubble pile.

“They were doing a good job with the resources they have,” he said. “We were talking the same language.”



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Robinson said their team's mission is to rescue victims from collapsed concrete buildings. They're based in in Beverley, Massachusetts, he added, and train regularly with the New Hampshire National Guard.

"We work together all the time," he said. The Massachusetts troops positive intentions should be bolstered by more training and work with real patients, he added.

"When you come to the scene of a disaster, it's

nice to see people you recognize," he said.

The FEMA Urban Rescue Team and Massachusetts National Guard are just some of the civil and military forces taking part in Exercise Vigilant Guard, a joint training opportunity for National Guard and emergency response organizations to build relationships with local, state, regional and federal partners against a variety of different homeland security threats including natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks.



In the Town of Tonawanda, construction crews systematically placed a combination of rubble, vehicles and mannequins to create a variety of training scenarios. This realistic site with talking mannequins provided rescuers the ability to perform both search and rescue, and search and recovery exercises. It also provided the platform for medical personnel to evaluate and evacuate the casualties.



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2nd CST Tests Full Capabilities While in Niagara Falls

*Story and Photo's By Staff Sgt. Dennis Gravelle,
369th Sustainment Brigade*

Niagara Falls -- Being ready to keep Americans safe from another terrorist attack, whether foreign or domestic is a job that the Citizen-Soldiers of the National Guard take very seriously, especially when training.

A Vigilant Guard exercise held the first week in November provided an opportunity for National Guard Soldiers to practice emergency response operations and to show that they are ready for any kind of incident.

During the exercise the 2nd Civil Support Team received an 18 month external evaluation at a vacant Public Safety Building on Hyde Park Blvd. in Niagara Falls, November 5th, 2009.

"The reason we are here today is that we are conducting the periodic evaluation for the 2nd Civil Support Team, Weapon of Mass Destruction," said Daniel Robbins, division chief, civil support readiness group east. "Our evaluation cycle is 18 months, and we are here to determine the proficiency of the core competence of the 2nd CST.

The scenario for the evaluation was that the Niagara Falls Police Department recently caught a leader of a terrorist cell from Canada, and the rest of the cell is still at large. The lead investigator received a letter in the mail with a white powder substance in it, and a day later the investigator became ill. Hospital reports confirmed the white powder was anthrax.

According to Thomas E. Benton, the deputy commander of 2nd CST, there is another envelop in the building that may be similar to the one that the lead investigator opened and local authorities needed the assistance of the 2nd CST to retrieve the letter and analyze it.

The mission of the CST is to support civil authorities at a domestic Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, High Yield Explosive (CBRNE) Enhanced Response Force Package, CBRNE incident site by identifying CBRNE agents/substances and assess current and projected consequences and advise on appropriate measures and assist with appropriate requests for state response.

"We assist the incident commander with communications, medical advice, and of course identifying the substance that may be in the area, then advice on how to address the situation, once we know what were dealing with," Benton said. "I like to think of it as a hazardous material team on steroids; we have a



The 2nd Civil Support team participating in exercise Vigilant Guard received an 18 month evaluation to determine the proficiency of the core competences of the unit. Two team members clear a parking lot to make sure it is free of chemical and biological agents.

lot of capabilities that we can bring to the table."

Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster added that the city has a large industrial and critical power infrastructure and draws a lot of tourism throughout the year. Therefore, they are a high profile place and need to be constantly vigilant in the field of homeland security.

"We know that we can't do everything locally, in spite of our best efforts, from our public safety departments, to be able to protect our citizens, but also be certain that nothing happens here," he said. "We welcome the assistance of the National Guard, we know they are here to back us up if we have a contingency that we can't handle and we are happy to assist them in any way possible."

According to Robbins, each CST has a total of 12 tasks that must be completed for evaluation that encompasses their full mission and provides for the tasks and sections of the teams. Each of the seven sections has subtasks and sub missions they must be able to perform.

"The 2nd CST is one of the original teams that was established in 1999," Robbins said. "This team is always at the top of their game, and has always been able to demonstrate a high level of proficiency at their tasks."



This map illustrates the earthquake fault lines in Western New York.



2009

Exercise Vigilant Guard concludes in Western New York

State's largest emergency response exercise deemed overwhelming success



A member of Vermont's 15th Civil Support Team conducts an initial recon of the disaster scene at the former Spaulding Fibre Plant site in Tonawanda, NY.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Abbott, Joint Forces Headquarters-NY

*Story by Lt. Col. Paul Fanning,
Joint Forces Headquarters – NY*

ERIE COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER, CHEEKTOWAGA

-- The state's largest joint military and civil authority emergency response exercise concluded in Western New York where more than 1,300 National Guard troops along with civilian emergency response professionals have been simulating an earthquake disaster for nearly a week.

Exercise participants from special disaster response Guard units, urban search and rescue teams and emergency management professionals from numerous agencies and departments have been working diligently in the region since Monday, following the arrival of troops at the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Base on Sunday following activation by Governor David Paterson.

"The exercise has gone extremely well and we have experienced a level of coordination and interaction among military and civil authority partners that we have never achieved in previous training efforts," said Brig. Gen. Mike Swezey of the New York National Guard.

"The Guard is grateful for the enthusiastic and dedicated involvement of local, state and federal partners. We have completed the exercise play and have now begun the after action reviews so that we can capture lessons learned."

"It's clear to all right now that the benefits of our collective efforts will be felt long after," he added.

"This has been a great opportunity for Erie County and our local communities from the very beginning," said Greg Skibitsky, Commissioner of Erie County Emergency Services.

"Holding an exercise like this not only provides real training value to the professionals that conduct hands-on response as well as emergency management, but also provides the opportunity for networking among the many and various agencies and departments that will be involved when a real disaster strikes."

"This will lift participants up in preparedness for the next emergency and there is sure to be one, some time, some day in the future," Skibitsky said.

Under the scenario, the earthquake strike had devastated homes, businesses, highways and bridges and produced numerous deaths, injuries and displaced people. The affects overwhelmed local authorities who reached out for state and military assistance.

Training locations included the former Spaulding Fibre Plant site in Tonawanda, unused buildings in Lockport and Niagara Falls, additional military security support at the Buffalo-Niagara airport, a military command post at the Connecticut Street armory in Buffalo and the Erie County



2009

Emergency Operations Center in Cheektowaga.

"We have had more participation from urban search and rescue and Guard emergency response teams in this exercise than has ever happened before," said Brian Rousseau, Deputy Chief of Special Operations, New York State Office of Fire Protection and Control.

"I have heard directly from many observers including FEMA that the approach used here in Vigilant Guard should be considered a national model," he said.

"This has been far above and beyond what anyone else has ever done. For the first time we have joined local, state, national and even international teams for a common training experience. The value for boots-on-the-ground performers and emergency managers has been enormous," Rousseau said.

"The key to this event has been to bring as many partners as possible together for a shared training experience," said Tim Riecker, training manager for the New York State Emergency Management Office.

"Erie County took the lead in this effort and participants have come from local, state, federal and international departments and agencies. We are still measuring and quantifying the lessons and benefits gained and there are many," he added.

Vigilant Guard is a national exercise program sponsored by the National Guard Bureau and United States Northern Command. It is a training opportunity for National Guard forces for state emergency response and serves as a means to exercise relationships with local, state, regional and federal partners.

More than 1,300 National Guard troops from New York and other states were committed along with local, state, national and international emergency response units and agencies.

The exercise resulted in realistic training focused on protecting lives and property. Across the nation there are four Vigilant Guard exercises annually and this was the first time it was conducted in New York state.

