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Kentucky wing selected as the AFA's 2004 Outstanding ANG Flying Unit

By Tech. Sgt. Amy Mundell
Cargo Courier Editor

The Air Force Association has named the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing as its Outstanding Air National Guard Flying Unit for 2004, based in part on the wing's exceptional performance last year while participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Global War on Terror.

During the award period, which encompassed all of 2003, the wing deployed hundreds of aircrew members, maintenance troops and support personnel to multiple locations in Southwest Asia, Europe and Africa, where they flew missions into dozens of countries while supporting a broad range of military operations.

Col. Mark Kraus, commander of the 123rd Airlift Wing, said he was honored for the unit to be chosen for the award.

"I'm really proud of the men and women of the 123rd for having been named the outstanding flying unit in the Air National Guard for 2004," he said.

The colonel attributed the wing's success

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TOP: A Kentucky Air National Guard C-130 taxis into Ramstein Air Base, Germany, following an airlift sortie. Hundreds of Kentucky airmen deployed to Germany in support of the Global War on Terror last year.

BOTTOM: 48 members of the 123rd Civil Engineers Squadron board a Kentucky C-130 as they prepare to deploy to Iraq last November. The troops spent four months at Baghdad International Airport.

*Photos by Senior Airman
Phillip Speck/KyANG*



Reserve forces taking advantage of VA home loans

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — There has been a dramatic increase in the amount of Department of Veterans Affairs home loans to National Guardsmen and reservists in recent years, a top department official said.

The amount would increase even more if they knew that being on active duty dramatically reduces the time it takes for them to become eligible for the loans, said Keith Pedigo, director of the VA Loan Guaranty Service.

He said VA officials try to get the word out to all guardsmen and reservists, but it is difficult to reach all of them because they are spread out across the country.

“I would guess that many of them are not aware of the requirements for a home loan,” Mr. Pedigo said. “However, I would expect that those who are interested in buying a home would go to the trouble to find out exactly what it takes to use the home-loan benefit.”

Normally, guardsmen and reservists must serve six years before becoming eligible for a VA home loan, Mr. Pedigo said. But, he said, that requirement changes dramatically

when they are called to active duty during wartime.

“They’re then subject to the same eligibility requirements as a regular active-duty servicemember,” he said. “During wartime, you only have to serve for 90 days to become eligible for a VA home loan.”

Those who are discharged with a service-connected disability with less than 90 days’ service are also eligible, Mr. Pedigo said.

During peacetime, the eligibility requirement is 181 days of continuous active duty with an honorable discharge. Eligibility is also granted to those who are discharged with a service-connected disability with less than 181 days service.

Mr. Pedigo said VA officials are making “more and more” loan guarantees for guardsmen and reservists, and they expect that number to continue to climb.

“We try to promote this benefit to the reserves and National Guard through various means,” he said.

Currently, about 3.5 percent of VA-backed loans are made to those who qualified based on National Guard or reserve service, he said.

There are some differences in the basic eligibility requirements between home loans for active-duty and reserve-component

troops, Mr. Pedigo said.

He said the best way for guardsmen and reservists to find out if they qualify for a home loan is to submit an application for a certificate of eligibility to one of the two VA Eligibility Centers. The center in Winston-Salem, N.C., handles states east of the Mississippi River. The Los Angeles center handles states west of the Mississippi.

“They should submit the application along with a copy of their service record,” Mr. Pedigo said. The certificate of eligibility proves eligibility for the home-loan benefit.

Another difference between the reserve-component and active-duty benefit is in the amount of fees paid — reservists pay a slightly higher fee, he said.

The fee consists of a certain percentage of the loan amount: 2.75 percent for National Guard and reserve servicemembers, 2 percent for others. These percentages can be lowered with down payments of 5 or 10 percent.

The fee does not have to come out of the servicemember’s pocket, Mr. Pedigo said. It can be included in the loan amount.

“So if you don’t have the cash, that’s not a problem,” he said.

Some extended guardsmen, reservists may get GI Bill boosts

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Guardsmen and reservists whose active-duty time is extended past the normal 12-month call-up may be eligible for active-duty-level benefits of the Montgomery GI Bill under certain circumstances, said a senior Department of Veterans Affairs spokesman.

Currently, people participating in the active-duty GI Bill receive \$800 or \$985 per month for full-time training, depending on their length of service. But reserve-component people receive only \$282 per month for full-time training, said Dennis Douglass, VA deputy director for education service.

Reserve-component people are now eligible for the greater active-duty benefit when their active-duty time is extended to 24 or more months, Mr. Douglass said.

He said the Montgomery GI Bill historically has been broken into two segments: the Montgomery GI Bill for active duty and the Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve for the reserve components.

The reserve version is for troops assigned to the Selected Reserve of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard and the Army and Air National Guard.

It provides education and training opportunities for eligible

servicemembers who have completed high school.

“The active-duty bill is a program designed for those who enlist in active military service for a period of two-plus years,” Mr. Douglass said. “If they only serve two years, they get a lesser benefit than an individual who signs up for three or more years.”

He said the authors of the two programs never imagined that reservists and guardsmen would be called up to active duty for extended periods of time as they have been in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“I don’t think that was envisioned in the original legislation,” he said.

The program for active-duty servicemembers and veterans is currently paying \$800 per month for full-time training for those who serve two years and \$985 per month for those who serve three.

Mr. Douglass said the \$282 that reserve-component people get per month is a “dramatic difference” in the level of benefits.

“Another interesting difference in the two programs is that in the Selective Reserve program, eligibility starts when the military tells us to start it,” Mr. Douglass said.

High-school graduates are eligible for benefits after they complete their initial period of training and have been assigned to a Reserve or Guard organization. Eligibility for active-duty people, however, does not begin until after they have served for two years.

Raptor continues USAF air superiority record

By Capt. Chris Karns
325th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. — With air dominance training under way here, the Air Force's newest asset, the F/A-22 Raptor, is proving its worth every day as it nears initial operational capability.

The Raptor will eventually replace the F-15 Eagle, an aircraft with an undefeated 104-0 combat record, according to Brig. Gen. Larry New, former 325th Fighter Wing commander. The general said that combat record will continue with the addition of the Raptor to the Air Force team.

While the Eagle's record speaks for itself, 30-year-old technology can only extend that record so much farther, said Col. Timothy Merrell, the 325th Operations Group commander and a new F/A-22 pilot.

Some foreign fighters currently match or exceed U.S. fighter capabilities, and today's F-15s and F-16 Fighting Falcons cannot penetrate the double-digit surface-to-air missile threat without losses, Colonel Merrell said.

"Adversaries are not standing still and weapons continue to evolve and improve, as

does the quality of pilots being produced by other nations," he said.

Even the most seasoned Eagle pilot will tell you that despite its impressive track record, the technological gap has closed, and the need for the Raptor is real, said General New, an F-15 pilot with more than 3,000 flying hours.

"Just because the Warsaw pact dissolved and the Cold War ended doesn't mean threat capabilities don't still exist, or continue to exist and advance in the future," he said.

"The Raptor brings on the next generation of applying technology to war fighting, putting our aircraft two generations ahead of any threat and removing us from our current status of weapons system parity," the general said. "Raptor technology combined with realistic training will provide air dominance, under which all other military actions become possible."

The Raptor combines the best attributes of current fighter aircraft with stealth, maneuverability and "supercruise" — the ability to reach and sustain supersonic speeds without the use of afterburners. Combine these attributes with the Raptor's avionics

system, which integrates data from several sources for the pilot to view on one easy-to-read display, and you have an aircraft which gives pilots a first-look, first-shot and first-kill capability, Colonel Merrell said.

"We're approaching Raptor training with an open mind to fully develop its potential," General New said. "Realistic training, combined with the best-fielded equipment our nation can provide, gives us a capability superior to the adversaries we've faced in conflict."

Tyndall's 43rd Fighter Squadron is training all future F/A-22 pilots. Since the base received its first F/A-22 in September 2003, Tyndall pilots have flown nearly 250 cumulative hours and more than 253 sorties in the Raptor as the aircraft moves closer to initial operational capability.

But pilots are not the only Airmen raving about the Raptor. Maintainers are finding the Raptor's new technology a quantum leap over the legacy systems of the past.

"The Raptor (contains) fourth-generation stealth technology and has a fully integrated avionics suite, yet it remains the most maintenance-friendly airplane ever," said Capt. Rognald Christensen, the 43rd Aircraft Maintenance Unit's officer in charge.

One maintenance-friendly feature is the portable computer that hooks directly into the aircraft. It enables maintenance crews to conduct operational checks on the ground, eliminating the need to get into the cockpit during engine runs. It also contains a library of 1,300 technical orders.

Integrating technical orders with maintenance tasks ensures fingertip access to information and that each step is completed correctly before allowing the maintainer to proceed, Captain Christensen said.

Easy access to components is another feature, said Master Sgt. Richard Street, section chief of the 43rd Aircraft Maintenance Unit.

"On the Raptor, I don't have to remove one component in order to reach another," Sergeant Street said.

"We owe it to future generations to give them new things to work with and the opportunity and responsibility to take those new things and deliver effects in ways we never thought of," said Lt. Col. Mike Stapleton, 43rd Fighter Squadron director of operations. "The F/A-22 will do just that and more."



Time's Up

ROBINS AIR FORCE BASE, Ga. — Chief Master Sgt. Cheryl Adams, left, and Col. Beth Grote have been testing the proposed Air Force utility uniform. The wear-test period ended July 31.

Chief Adams is command chief master sergeant for Air Force Reserve Command, and Colonel Grote is AFRC's director of logistics.

Photo by Sue Sapp/USAF

Ky. airmen return from Ramstein AB

Cargo Courier Staff Report

Seventy-seven members of the Kentucky Air National Guard and three Kentucky C-130 aircraft returned home July 25 from a deployment to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, where they were based while flying missions in support of U.S. military operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and other locations across Europe.

Most of the airmen deployed for the mission, called Operation Joint Forge, on June 25.

They comprised the third and final rotation of the Kentucky airmen to support Joint Forge this year.

Two Kentucky C-130s and about 70 Kentucky Air Guard members were based in Germany for various lengths of time between April 15 and June 6 as part of earlier rotations in support of the mission, which has existed under a variety of names since the mid-1990s.



Senior Airman Phillip Speck/KyANG

Members of the 123rd Airlift Wing use the Thoroughbred Dining Facility's new Grab-N-Go option to get lunch in a hurry. The new lunch option allows customers to bypass the normal hot-meal lines and receive a sandwich, chips, dessert and drink. Services personnel hope the new option will boost patronage.

New Grab-N-Go option available at Thoroughbred Dining Facility

**By Tech. Sgt. Jennifer Thiery
123rd Services Flight**

The Thoroughbred Dining Facility is now offering a Grab-N-Go meal option during drill weekends with hopes of increasing the facility's patronage.

The new option allows customers to bypass the normal, hot-meal lines, sign the appropriate form and grab their choice of sandwiches, chips, dessert and drink.

Customers may then eat their meals at alternate locations outside the dining facility, such as their work areas.

The 123rd Services Flight is offering the Grab-N-Go option on a trial basis, according to Thoroughbred Dining Facility officials.

If it proves popular, the service will be continued as a regular feature.

Dining facility managers hope the new option will boost the customer base, said Master Sergeant Harold Goodlett.

"It is our goal to increase dining facility attendance during drill weekends, and cus-

tomers satisfaction is one of the keys to that goal," he said.

"By offering a quick meal, we hope to achieve a higher level of customer satisfaction."

Food selection for the Grab-N-Go meal initially will be limited because dining facility managers want to survey demand for the new option, Sergeant Goodlett explained.

Once the demand is high enough, new items will be added to offer a variety of food choices.

As always, the dining facility has a main line that includes a choice of meat items, starches and vegetables.

The snack line consists of hamburgers, cheeseburgers, grilled chicken breasts, french fries and onion rings. A full salad bar also is also offered.

Besides the new Grab-N-Go option, carry-out is available for all items.

Meals are free for traditional enlisted guardsmen. All other personnel, including officers, AGRs and active-duty troops, pay \$3.30 per meal.

AFA award

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to the hard work, dedication and professionalism of its troops during the extremely high operations tempo of the past few years.

"Their wartime performance is nothing short of stellar, and it continues today. We haven't slowed down much; we've just changed direction — out of Europe now and soon into South America" as the wing prepares for an upcoming Air Expeditionary Forces mission to provide airlift services from Puerto Rico.

"Selection for this award only validates the dedication and professionalism that I see in our folks day to day, and it's an honor to serve alongside them."

The award recognizes the wing's total performance in 2003, including its support of state and local events.