

**Soldiers performed more than 640 security missions**

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# Freedom Salute honors service in Afghanistan

Approximately 40 Soldiers from the Virginia National Guard's Hampton-based Provincial Reconstruction Team Security Force Platoon gathered July 22 in Williamsburg to conduct a Freedom Salute in honor of their service in Afghanistan. The Soldiers returned home in late March after serving on federal active duty in Afghanistan since June 2011.

"We started with the words discipline and honor, and they were our foundation," said Capt. James Covington, commander of the platoon. "You guys lived up to those words, and then some. I can't even begin to tell you how proud I am of everything you have done."

The Soldiers performed more than 640 security missions in support of PRT Uruzgan while the PRT was operating in potentially dangerous areas to rebuild infrastructure, assist with agriculture, build wells and provide healthcare to the people across their area of operations in Afghanistan.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2012/07/24/1732/>



Secretary of Public Safety Marla Graff Decker presents the Governor's National Service Medal to a Soldier of the Security Force Platoon in Williamsburg July 22.

## Virginia National Guard News Headlines

### Virginia Guard honors, thanks volunteers for their support

Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Long, Jr., the Adjutant General of Virginia, and his wife Diane Long, recognized Virginia National Guard volunteers at the Virginia National Guard Volunteer Recognition Workshop July 14 in Virginia Beach.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2012/07/18/1691/>

### Virginia Regional Training Institute trains Soldiers as infantrymen

National Guard Soldiers from five states, along with Soldiers from the U.S. Army Reserves, sweltered and trained in the July heat at Fort Pickett, Va., as part of the 11B Infantry Transition Course.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2012/07/20/1707/>

### STARBASE Academy launches in Winchester

The Virginia Guard hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Winchester STARBASE Academy July 23 at the Cherry-Beasley Readiness Center in Winchester. Students from Frederick Douglass Elementary School took part in the first-ever five-day program that ended July 27.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2012/07/24/1743/>

### Virginia troops lead exchange with Tajikistan Peacekeeping Battalion

A seven-man team from the Virginia National Guard ended its three-week State Partnership Program exchange in Tajikistan by spending July 7- 13 with the Tajikistan Peacekeeping Operations Battalion at Shamsi Military Base in the capital city of Dushanbe.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2012/07/23/1670/>

## Mark Your Calendars!

### Aug. 2: Hiring Our Heroes Veterans Event

A hiring fair for veteran job seekers, active duty military members, Guard and Reserve members and military spouses will be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Hampton Roads Convention Center, 1610 Coliseum Drive in Hampton.

This event caters to the Greater Hampton Roads region and will be a one-of-a-kind FREE hiring fair for both employers and job seekers.

To register for the hiring fair, visit [hiringourheroes@uschamber.com](mailto:hiringourheroes@uschamber.com) or call 202-463-3110.

To register for ESGR employment workshops held during the same time as the hiring fair, visit [www.HoH.GreatJob.net](http://www.HoH.GreatJob.net).

# RTI rappel masters challenge youth

Rappel masters of the 1st Battalion, 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute, from Fort Pickett, Va., instructed approximately 210 candidates from the Commonwealth ChalleNGe program down a 40-foot rappel tower June 23 at Fort Story, Va.

Commonwealth ChalleNGe is the Virginia component of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, a five and a half month program which focuses on preparing at-risk teens and high school dropouts for the General Educational Development test and future employment, military or higher education opportunities.

The rappelling participants were in the "Pre-ChalleNGe" phase, a two-week indoctrination period to determine if prospective cadets are prepared for the rigorous program.

"We like coming out here, showing them how to repel and overcome their fear because we were all there at one time too," said Sgt. 1st Class Robert Homer, noncommissioned officer in charge of the rappel master program at the 1-183rd RTI.

"Everyone, Soldier or civilian, is apprehensive when they first get up on the tower," said Homer. "But they learn to overcome their fears, and trust in their gear."

Alex Humphrey of Alexandria, Va., said he is looking forward to becoming one of the anticipated 190 cadets after the five-mile march June 26.

"I started doing drugs, got in with the wrong crowd, got wild with it, and started not caring," said Humphrey.

Run-ins with the law landed Humphrey in jail twice and he was on probation when his mother found the Commonwealth ChalleNGe and convinced her son to apply.

On June 27, cadets enter the "ChalleNGe" phase, a 20-week residential period of academics, physical fitness, counseling (both individual and group), life skills, and team building. Cadets live on post in military barracks, eat in the post dining facility, and attend school on the State Military Reservation at Virginia Beach.

Instructors, mostly Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps reservists and retirees, teach cadets good hygiene, manners, and academics in classes capped at 15 students. These small classes allow for a hands-on approach with personal attention, said retired Marine Sgt. Rogers Rascoe Jr., a security officer with the program.

"We teach them how to walk all over again," said Rascoe, "to be mature young men and women."

Considering the troubled backgrounds these 16-19 year olds come from, the attrition rate during holiday breaks is very small. On return from break, parents frequently thank the instructors recounting stories of hearing their son or daughter get up at 5:30 a.m. and start cleaning the house.

The program estimates that 40% of the program's graduates go onto college and 10% enlist in the military, but all must have a job or volunteer position before they leave the program.

"They come in with their shoulders down, but by the time they finish the program they're sure of themselves and standing straight, that's my joy," said Rascoe.

"I want to be here," said Humphrey. "To get my life back



**Instructors from 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute, assist candidates from the Commonwealth ChalleNGe Youth Program with rappelling July 23 at Fort Story, Va. Commonwealth ChalleNGe is a 22-week quasi-military residential program designed to challenge, educate and motivate at-risk youth from around Virginia.**

on track, get discipline, get out of here, go to college and do something with my life."

With this dedication, Humphrey will surely be one of the 3,000 cadets who have completed this rigorous program and have gone on to lead successful lives.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2012/07/26/1717/>

## MORE ON THE WEB

**Tajikistan info exchange focuses on basic Soldiering skills**

<http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2012/07/23/1664/>

**Va. Guard employers participate in Boss Lift at Langley AFB**

<http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2012/07/16/1661/>

**Photos: Soldiers demonstrate indirect fire capabilities**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/vanguardpao/sets/72157630751168208/>

**Photos: Guard prepares for disaster during CERFP exercise**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/vanguardpao/sets/72157630748462970/>

**Photos: Senior leaders observe bridging operations**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/vanguardpao/sets/72157630734806626/>

**Photos: 192nd Intelligence Squadron, Civil Air Patrol exercise GIIEP capabilities in a joint tasking**

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