

LTC Schwickerath Reflects on Career at NGB and Before

When he arrived at National Guard Bureau (NGB) as Education and Incentives Section Chief, he was then MAJ Ronald Schwickerath. Now LTC Schwickerath recalls, "It was just me and SFC Hardy, and two people at SOCGuard." Clearly, education programs and their administration have advanced significantly in the Army National Guard (ARNG) during the last six years.

In various ways over the years, serving now as Deputy Chief in what is NGB's EDU Division, LTC Schwickerath has used his leadership, which combines a devotion of personal and professional energy to an enterprise, and it is leadership that has helped promote education within NGB. Moreover, his dedication has not gone unrecognized by his peers, evidenced by his receipt of the Council of College and Military Educator's (CCME's) President's Award in 2006.

However, after over 20 years in the Guard, LTC Schwickerath's philosophy on education and educational support has a more practical orientation, too. He is adamant in his belief in "the traditional Guard," part-time Servicemembers who maintain full-time careers apart from their military service. In terms of their education, Guard members and Reservists have to "do it themselves," that is, maintain a job for full-time pay, go to work and go to school. They lack much of the financial support afforded to the Active Duty Servicemembers. He also points out that for most Guard Soldiers, himself included, their military and civilian occupations are usually not related. This fact is reflected in many of his experiences prior to coming to NGB.

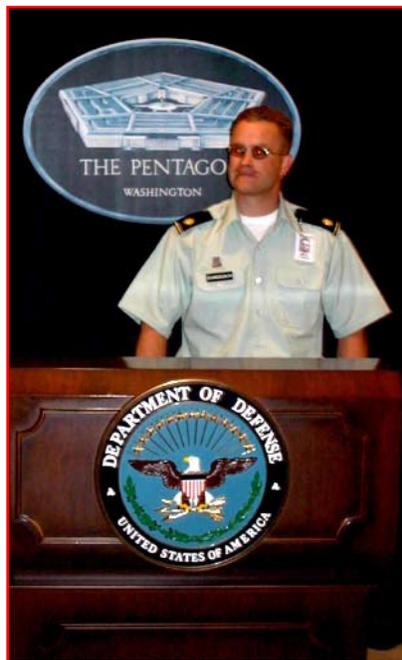
Though born and raised in Iowa, LTC Schwickerath considers himself an Arizonan, having come to NGB from Arizona. Among his civilian occupations, he was Security Director for the Iowa Department of Transportation, a Martial Arts Instructor, specializing in Tae Kwon Do and kick boxing (at one time managing three academies), a school teacher and activities director for Essex Community School in Iowa, a Math teacher and Head Coach in Mohave Valley, AZ, Department Chair, Head Coach and teacher in Laughlin, NV, a business owner, and City Commissioner at Bullhead City, AZ, whose population is over 50,000.

Meanwhile, as he advanced in these diverse civilian career paths, his ARNG ca-

reer posed its own challenges. Even as he taught in Mohave Valley, he served as Company Commander for Transportation unit in Flagstaff, AZ. Balancing these duties required him to navigate a 250-plus mile commute between Flagstaff, Prescott, and Show Low, AZ, overseeing a company whose Soldiers numbered over half Hopi and Navaho Indians. It is a memory he relishes and one that taught him much about managing Soldiers from diverse backgrounds.

Later, brief months after the September 11th Terrorist Attacks, LTC Schwickerath was appointed Chief-of-Staff for a Border Support Task Force on the U.S.-Mexican border. Coordinating activities that involved 400 to 500 AZARNG Soldiers, he worked with representatives of the U.S. Departments of Justice and Treasury for about six months beginning in late-December of 2001. Overall during this period, unbeknownst to most Americans, close to 3,500 U.S. troops monitored all ports-of-entry along the border, establishing a presence, though an unarmed one. This situation had challenges of its own for those in the ARNG, since their presence hindered not only illegal border crossings, but the illicit drug trade as well. According to LTC Schwickerath, a number of Soldiers supporting this effort had their lives or those of their families threatened. It would be shortly after completing this assignment that he would come to NGB, and the rest, as they say, "is history."

Perhaps that, too, is not ironic, for a man who once pursued a nuclear engineering degree at Iowa State University and who was attracted, instead, to a Bachelor's degree in History. He was also awarded a second Bachelor's degree in Education at Iowa State, and would later complete his Master's in Education degree at Northern Arizona University. As LTC Schwickerath relates the story, he was an ROTC student and was part of a group of students in the first two years of his engineering program. During one of the classes, a NASA engineer addressed the class and talked about a major project in which he participated at NASA that kept him deep in research, behind a desk, for a very long time. LTC Schwickerath says he left that class thinking seriously on his choice of major and what he wanted to do with the rest of his career. He decided, "I'm a people-person, and I wanted to get into a field where I'd work directly with people." He could not see himself spending hours, and days, working in a single office on a project. That is what led



LTC Ronald Schwickerath addresses a group at the Pentagon.

him to decide on studying history and education. Again, his peers would agree—that was the right choice.

As he prepares to assume yet another position of leadership for ARNG, a Department of Defense position at Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), LTC Schwickerath reflected fondly on his years at NGB. He leaves taking with him many well wishes from co-workers inside and outside of ARNG. Continued success, LTC Schwick.

National Guard Bureau and Education Services Officers Participate in SOC Consortium Workshop

On 27 March 2009, Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) hosted a Consortium Workshop for educators in the Washington, DC-area, at its headquarters in the District. Higher education administrators from institutions in the District of Columbia, Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, and even from as far away as Texas, Alabama and Kentucky, attended the event. The program featured presentations by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), on the Post-9/11 GI Bill, by the American Council on Education (ACE), on awarding credit for military training and experience, and by SOC staff members, on the SOC organization, as well as on how the education community can improve their outreach to military and veteran students. SOCGuard Project Director, Marcy Shapiro, and Program Manager, Dan Riggle, delivered the “Battlefield to the Classroom” presentation, focusing on how the higher education community is addressing, or can address, challenges faced by some combat veterans who are returning to the classroom after deployments.

ARNG was well-represented at the workshop, with six at-

tendees from NGB, three Education Services Officers (ESOs), and one education office staff member. Participants from NGB included LTC Mary Macguire, Education Oversight Branch Chief, MAJ Scott Loring, TA Program Manager, CPT Jeremy Serafin, GI Bill Program Manager, Ms. Ela Karczewska, Counseling Program Manager, Ms. Laura Greenfield, Testing Program Manager, and Ms. Sunita Allwerdt, Education Services Specialist. Also participating were CPT Brian Zdunowski, ESO for the Maryland Army National Guard (MDARNG), 1LT Kurt Rauschenberg, Education Services Specialist for MDARNG, CW3 D’Juana Goodwin, ESO for Virginia Army National Guard (VAARNG), and CPT Josh Behsudi, ESO for District of Columbia Army National Guard (DCARNG).

Both the NGB and ESO participants played important roles during general sessions, a “lunch-and-learn,” and afternoon breakouts, communicating with educators in the audience and one-on-one, with presenters, and with SOC/SOCGuard staff on a range of issues. During the Post-9/11 GI Bill session, LTC Macguire, MAJ Loring, and CPT Serafin all shared during the presentation about the unique situation faced by ARNG Soldiers and those who counsel and advise them with respect to their GI Bill benefits. NGB’s presence and insights were crucial for this session, both because of confusion surrounding the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and the perception that it might equally benefit all veterans, including those serving in the ARNG. According to NGB representatives at the SOCGuard event, there is a growing sense that Guard Soldiers might be misinformed about the potential impact of this GI Bill program on their overall benefit package. After CPT Serafin raised the issue of challenges for ARNG Soldiers based on how Post-9/11 GI Bill information is being released, MAJ Loring pointed out the elevated level of effort and responsibility moving to NGB, the GI Bill Support Team



NGB and ESOs join SOCGuard in Washington, DC. From L to R, Danielle Strand, Dan Riggle, Sunita Allwerdt, Marcy Shapiro (behind Sunita), CPT Jeremy Serafin, Laura Greenfield, CW3 D’Juana Goodwin, LTC Mary Macguire, Ela Karczewska, CPT Brian Zdunowski, CPT Josh Behsudi, MAJ Scott Loring, 1LT Kurt Rauschenberg.



ESOs lead discussion at lunch. From L to R, CW3 Goodwin, CPT Behsudi, Marty Kindsvatter (Harford CC), Danielle Strand (partially hidden), 1LT Rauschenberg, CPT Zdunowski.

at the Education Support Center at Camp Robinson, and ESOs, to present clearer information to ARNG Soldiers. It is becoming their task to reach out to Soldiers quickly, with accurate information, to explain the Post-9/11 GI Bill in the context of Soldiers' other GI Bill options. In many cases, NGB representatives pointed out, Guard Soldiers could lose potential benefits if they quickly opt to sign up for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. It will fall to those counseling Guard Soldiers to take into account how other GI Bill programs, and Federal and State Tuition Assistance (TA) programs might enter into calculations when Soldiers consider applying for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.

Addressing educators in the audience, LTC Macguire and MAJ Loring appealed for their understanding and asked that they refer Guard Soldiers on their campuses to those within ARNG who can best counsel them with respect to their benefits. For the VA speaker, NGB representatives hoped to communicate the unique situation faced by ARNG with the emergence of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which in some cases, through the intense outreach surrounding the benefit

program, has overshadowed Soldiers' awareness of existing programs that were designed specifically for ARNG.

Because of the strong showing at the event by ARNG ESOs from Maryland, Virginia and DC, SOCGuard organized a separate "lunch-and-learn" session, specifically for educators to speak one-on-one with ESOs from their respective locations. Three higher education institutions attended the session, which turned out to be advantageous, as each ESO was able to address issues particular to his/her jurisdiction, and each school could pursue answers to questions particular to her institution. Representatives from University of Maryland University College and Harford Community College were able to speak at length with CPT Zdunowski and 1LT Rauschenberg, clarifying a number of issues on-the-spot. Moreover, even though New Jersey ARNG's ESO was unable to attend, a representative from Monmouth University in New Jersey stayed for the entire session, learning strategies for working with ARNG Soldiers within her state and getting follow-up information on whom to contact in her state. SOCGuard staff, Marcy Shapiro, Dan Riggle, and Danielle Strand, were also at the session to assist during question and answer and to do follow-up discussions with schools.

At the day's final, breakout sessions, several NGB staff members and ESOs stayed until the end, joining SOCGuard staff at the session focusing on SOCGuard. Both breakout sessions were well-attended by educators, who benefited from getting information through the combined expertise of ARNG and SOCGuard personnel.

After the conference, SOC President Kathy Snead communicated to staff that the workshop was a resounding success, reflected in written and spoken comments from those who attended. Certainly, participation by NGB and the ESOs contributed greatly to the workshop's overall success, and SOC/SOCGuard were pleased that ARNG was so strongly represented on this day.



A break during the SOC Workshop. L to R, Marcy Shapiro, CPT Serafin, Dan Riggle, CW3 Goodwin, 1LT Rauschenberg, CPT Zdunowski.

Army Vocational Technical (AVOTEC) Soldier Program

As of 15 January 2009, the U.S. Congress announced and selected the Army to participate in AVOTEC, an education pilot program designed to provide expanded education opportunities for Soldiers, officers and Wounded Warriors serving on active duty—including National Guard and Reserve Soldiers on extended active duty.

Officially launched as of 1 February, AVOTEC will enable Soldiers to enroll in non-college degree courses that prepare them for employment in high-demand career fields and to take certification and licensure exams related to those professional fields. Open to all eligible Soldiers at any time during their active duty service, AVOTEC is designed to specifically benefit Soldiers as they make the transition to civilian life. However, it is not a program for veterans.

Soldiers who are interested must enroll in courses before separating from the Army. In addition, officers who participate in the program will not incur an additional service obligation. All eligible Soldiers who wish to participate should view the eligible programs listed at https://www.hrc.army.mil/site/education/VOTEC_Program.html. Simply go to the desired location (or to "Online"), click on the state and view the list of eligible programs. Eligible programs are all "non-degree," are not longer than 18 months in duration, and must be paid for by 30 September 2009 (including all instruction, certification, and licensing costs).

Congress approved AVOTEC under the Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance and Continuing Appropriations Act of 2009. The pilot was funded for \$19 million, solely for use under the program. Individual awards cannot exceed \$4,500 during a fiscal year, and no GI Bill or other educational benefits may be used to pursue activities under the AVOTEC program. However, Soldiers may use AVOTEC funds in conjunction with traditional Tuition Assistance (TA), provided the final total amount of funds awarded does not exceed \$4,500 in total costs (the statutory maximum for TA and AVOTEC per fiscal year, per Soldier).

Therefore, if a Soldier has already used \$1,000 in TA for a traditional college program, he or she may only obtain the remaining \$3,500 may for use in the AVOTEC Program for that fiscal year.

For education institutions interested in participating, only community colleges, private, trade and technical schools approved by the Department of Education are eligible to submit programs for inclusion on the AVOTEC Web site. Programs vary in length and subject matter and range in duration from several hours to several months. Fields covered by the programs include computer certification, health care, leisure and hospitality, event planning, food service, construction, transportation, law enforcement, finance, real estate, geriatric and child care professions and mechanics.

Though AVOTEC programs are designed to prepare Soldiers for state or national license or certification, not all

include licensing or certification exams. However, Soldiers who complete AVOTEC programs that do not include a certification test can apply for those certifications through AVOTEC. To do so, participants must still be on active duty by the time they complete the program. The pilot program is scheduled to end by 30 September, or until funds are expended.

Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts Available Through MilitaryOneSource

Military Spouses of Active Duty Servicemembers, Reserve and Guard Soldiers with at least one year remaining on active duty orders will have access to funds of up to \$6000 (\$3,000 per year for two years), payable to an approved school, to complete a degree, license, or credential in a high-growth, high-demand, portable career field. Military OneSource will be the primary point-of-contact for, and will manage, the program via their Web site and Call Center. The program's intent is to improve retention by increasing family income potential and by decreasing the stressful impact of Permanent Change of Station (PCS) on military families.

The following are Frequently Asked Questions, taken from the program Web site:

What is Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program?

The Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program is a Department of Defense (DoD) program that provides financial assistance--up to \$6000--to spouses of active duty military members and spouses of activated Guard and Reserve service members (deployed for a year or more) for certification, licensure, education or training in careers in high-growth, high-demand occupations.

Who is eligible for The Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program?

Legal spouses of military service members with a minimum of one year remaining on Active Duty are eligible for the Program. This includes spouses of active duty service members, Coast Guard deployed with the Navy, Active/Guard Reserve (AGR), and Reserve Component service members (Guard and Reserve) called to active duty for a year or more.

How will my eligibility be verified?

We will use DEERS to verify your status and eligibility for the Program based on your sponsor's social security number you enter when you create a profile. If you are not in DEERS or your personal information is out-of-date, please call 800-538-9552 or go to <http://www.TRICARE.osd.mil/DEERSAddress> to update your information in DEERS.

Your privacy is extremely important to us. MyCAA only uses your sponsor's social security number to verify your eligibility for the Military Spouse Career Advance Account Program. All of our information is transmitted securely. If you have more questions, contact your Military OneSource Career and Education Consultant (1-800-342-9647).

What if my sponsor has a Date of Separation in DEERS that is less than a year away, am I still eligible?

Yes, if your sponsor is on active duty now and is intending to re-enlist or to transfer to the Guard or Reserve for a period of a year or more, you are eligible. Contact your Military OneSource Career and Education Consultant (1-800-342-9647).

What if my sponsor is activated Guard or Reserve, but doesn't still have a year left on his orders, am I still eligible?

Yes, if your sponsor's is activated now on one of several recent deployments or activations totaling one year, you are eligible. Contact your Military OneSource Career and Education Consultant (1-800-342-9647).

What if I am legally separated or divorced from my sponsor, am I still eligible?

No, the legislation establishing the Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program specifically excludes spouses who are divorced and spouses who are married to, but legally separated from, their sponsor under court order or statute of any State or territorial possession of the United States.

What if I am also a member of the armed forces (active duty, guard, reserve or inactive reserve), am I still eligible?

No, the legislation establishing the Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program specifically excludes spouses who are also members of the armed forces. (Veteran status of the spouse is not a limiting factor.)

What if I need to take another class in order to finish my Career Plan and my sponsor has less than a year remaining on active duty, can I do that?

Yes, as long as you actually begin your Career Plan within the time period specified and you continue to qualify as the spouse of an active duty or reserve component service member, there is no continuing requirement for length of service or length of deployment. Contact your Military OneSource Career and Education Consultant (1-800-342-9647).

Can I participate in The Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program if I already have a job?

Yes, if you are under-employed, or need a license, certification, credential, education, or training in order to maintain employment or be employed after relocation with your sponsor, you may obtain Program funding.

What do I have to do to apply for The Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program?

To apply for the Program, you must complete an online profile and call a Military OneSource Career and Education Consultant (1-800-342-9647) to create a career plan and goal. If you need any assistance with your profile or eligibility questions, please call Military OneSource.

Is there a cost to me?

There is no cost to participate in the Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program. However, if your license, certification, credential, education or training expenses exceed the \$6000 limit, you will be responsible for paying the remaining costs. Additionally, the program does not cover expenses that are not submitted by the Payee (a government entity or government sanctioned body, school, institution, program, or agency providing certification, licensing, educational instruction, or vocational training or testing as part of a Spouse's Career Plan) as part of the instruction-related cost. Examples of non-covered expenses could include books, application fees, student activity cards, supplies, equipment to include computers and / or distance learning delivery systems, parking fees, duplicative courses or courses repeated due to previous failure, medical services, matriculation, assessment of experiential learning graduation fees, child care, or transportation.

Are there any other requirements?

After enrolling in Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program, you must establish a career goal and create a Career plan. During your Program, you must ensure your grades, certificates and test scores are reported in your online record. Upon completion of your certification/licensure/education/training, you must notify Military OneSource of graduation or plan completion. Finally, once you find a job, you must notify Military OneSource of your employment.

What if I'm not interested in participating in Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program?

Even if you are not currently interested in participating in the Program, you can still create a profile, participate in forums, serve as a mentor, and access the resources that the site offers.

Careers supported under the program are wide-ranging, including a number in business/management, from cost estimators, to executive assistants, and project management;

To learn more about ARNG education
go to:

<http://www.virtualarmy.com/>
and follow the "Education" link.

other careers include childcare/daycare, education, financial services, health services, homeland security, hospitality, human resources, information technology, legal services, and various trades.

The MilitaryOneSource Web site is located at <http://www.militaryonesource.com/skins/MOS/splash.aspx> and is currently being upgraded.

NGB Welcomes New Team Member

NGB-EDU has welcomed a new member to its team. Sunita Allwerdt is currently serving as an Education Specialist, where her responsibilities, for the most part, involve special projects, counseling, and tuition assistance. Prior to coming to NGB, Ms. Allwerdt worked as Education Services Specialist (ESS) at Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base in California.

In addition to her regular duties as an ESS at Camp Pendleton, Ms. Allwerdt implemented the education portion of the Career Advancement Account Demonstration Program for Military Spouses, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor and Family Member Employment Assistance Program. Prior to serving as ESS at Camp Pendleton, Ms. Allwerdt was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, where she worked as Assistant to the Director of Distance Education for the University of Maryland University College (UMUC)-Asia. Moreover, she was a Registered Respiratory Therapist for 10 years, which gave her the career portability she needed as a military spouse.

Ms. Allwerdt has a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Studies (cum Laude) from UMUC and is more than half way through a Master of Science in Administration degree, with concentration in Information Resource Management, from Central Michigan University. Married to an active duty U.S. Marine, she and her husband have two sons, Reilly, who is seven, and Soren, who is four. She is originally from Montreal, Canada. Welcome, Sunita.

SOCGuard Bids Farewell to Program Manager

SOCGuard is wishing a fond farewell to Danielle Strand, Program Manager. During her brief tenure, she took the lead on creating SOCGuard's new promotional brochure and will, until she departs on April 10, contribute her editorial expertise to SOCGuard Web site upgrades now being completed by SOC for each of its programs. Those improvements will assist everyone who relies on SOCGuard for timely, pertinent electronic information and published materials.

Danielle will take a new position as Coordinator for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Engaged Learning activities for Anne Arundel Community College. These activities will include internships, service-learning, research and community-based projects for

STEM. As the STEM Engaged Learning Coordinator, she will serve as a central resource for STEM-related activities and programs that support student connections with the community, manage workforce development, as well as collaborate with individuals of the higher education community to enhance, promote and facilitate community based learning for STEM.

SOCGuard wishes Danielle well in her new position.

Montana State University Reaches Out to Veteran Students

Montana State University, in Bozeman, has enhanced its outreach to veteran students through a letter to student veterans from Allen Yarnell, Vice President of Student Affairs. In addition to thanking students for their service to the country, acknowledging their sacrifices, and welcoming them to the university, the letter details a host of services available to student veterans on Montana State's campus, via Web sites and contact information.

Among the specified services documented in the letter are the Office of Veterans Affairs, Disabilities Services, and Counseling Center, to address distinct needs, especially those experienced by combat veterans. The Veterans Affairs Office also offers individual help with GI Bill processing and other administrative requirements, and the university provides an on-line application process for veterans as a part of their admissions package.

Following is a list of the offices and Web sites provided in the welcome letter: Office for Veteran Services, <http://www.montana.edu/wwwres/veteran/index.shtml>; Disabilities Services, <http://www.montana.edu/wwwres/disability/index.shtml>; Counseling Center, <http://www.montana.edu/wwwcc/>; and on-line application, <https://apply.em-bark.com/ugrad/montanastate/26/>.

The letter also provides contact information for the Director of Veterans Services, Brenda York (406-994-2824, byork@montana.edu), and the Director of Admissions, Ronda Russell (406-994-2452, rrussell@montana.edu).

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