

NGAUS 128th General Conference AAR

CW2 James P. Ditter

This past week the National Guard Association of the United States wrapped up its 128th General Conference in Albuquerque, NM. The Iowa National Guard was well represented, and must be commended for their continued 100% membership (22nd year in a row). Iowa delegates proudly displayed "100% State" yellow ribbons beneath their name tags.

I am doing this trip report as requested by the IANG Senior Leadership, the INGOA President, the Command Chief Warrant Officer, and a strong desire to communicate my experiences as a company grade officer while attending this important event with a desired end state of seeing more company grade officers attend in the future.

The IANG as well as the IA Officers Association chose my wife, Rachel and I to attend the conference on orders. The goal was to attend as many ODP Classes and Speaking Events as possible and provide input and gain an outlook from a company grade officers point of view. There were planned ODP sessions in both the morning and afternoon beginning Saturday, and ending Monday afternoon before the States Dinner.

The Chief of the NG Bureau had an open, round table discussion on the current state of the Guard, the future, the positives and the negatives. He fielded many challenging questions, some very tough and a few very heartfelt. A valuable point made at the conference was by a SGM who currently heads up the Enlisted Association. He made a point to say we must get our enlisted involved early in key organizations such as these. If we get them involved early then as they commission, or become senior enlisted they are more prone to stay involved.

The Warrant Officer Corp was well represented as well. Although the Chief of the NGB kept addressing the large group of Company Grade Officers as LT's and CPT's. The Warrant Corp did have our own breakout session and ODP was conducted. Topics and side tones included the additional positions and duties Warrants are being assigned to today, such as command, and staff. The Warrant Corp is looking to expand and strengthen it's presence within NGAUS.

Many side tones were conducted in and out of the conference, one particular discussion I remember is a General Officer asking a Junior Officer why he felt more company grade don't participate in these events. He asked if it was cost. The response was open and honest and led to a discussion. The company grade stated that he felt out of place "politicking" for his profession. He made a point that if he were to need a "new coat", then his chain of command would make it so. I to feel that as a company grade officer my peer was making a good point and had a valid concern. I to looked around and saw soldiers and airmen in uniform signing petitions and such and was a little put back. The General went on to say that we must have a voice, we must support our fellow deployed and future deployed Soldiers and Airmen in the fight. We must fight for new equipment and have a voice on "The Hill" regarding health care, retirement, pay, training, and

equipment. This is the proper platform, the proper outlet. We are currently better than 50% of the force in the War on Terror. This is the one time that we can meet with our own General Officers, our elected officials, both from our own state, and from around the country and voice our concerns and well as our Soldiers and Airmen concerns. This is the proper channel. NGAUS is one of the most powerful lobbying groups in Washington D.C. I was on orders so I was not allowed to sign petitions nor vote in the elections. I did however contact my elected officials through the NGAUS website to voice my support on several key issues during the conference. Retirement was a big talking point, but here is what was gathered. There is not one single agreed upon strategy to present to the Congress. All the organizations (NGAUS, EANGUS, MOAA, AUSA, and others) must come together and agree on one plan and that plan must be taken forward.

The National Guard Empowerment Act was also a key issue. It is imperative that the Chief of the NGB become a Four Star General. One more star makes all the difference in clout, pull, and a position of authority. As well, having a seat on the Joint Chiefs will benefit the Guard in numerous ways. The NGAUS was very outspoken on the fact we should not allow our Governors to lose control of the National Guard. The President of the United States is pushing for the ability to take control of the Guard forces without the Governors consent or prior knowledge in the event of natural or man-made disasters. "Do you want to be under the control of the same people who run FEMA?", the Chief chuckled.

TriCcare was the third point that we must continue the fight for. Our National Guard deserves health care coverage. Our National Guard must remain healthy in order to be deployable, and our Nation needs our National Guard to be deployable. One in three Guardsmen does not have health care coverage.

The company grade officers were all in agreement and voiced our opinions to the Chief of the NGB regarding the lengthy Mobilization and Demobilization process. We all stated we would deploy many times over for him, just do not send us to a mobilization station. His reply, and it got a standing ovation was this, "We deployed thousands of Guard soldiers overnight from all 50 plus states and territories in response to Hurricane Katrina, and we did it without mob and demob".

I wish to thank the IANG and the IA Officers Association for this opportunity. My wife Rachel thanks you as well. We will be back to attend the 130th Conference in Maryland in 2008. We will miss next year due to deployment. My wife and I wish to challenge the senior leadership of Iowa to set aside the training dollars to allow three more soldiers and their spouses to represent the state of Iowa next year in Puerto Rico to attend the NGAUS 129th General Conference as well as the Officer Development Program sessions.

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