



Minnesota National Guard Report

July 21, 2008

The 13,000 citizen Soldiers of the Minnesota National Guard have made substantial contributions to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Since September 11, 2001, at least 17,000 members of Minnesota's National Guard have been deployed.ⁱ Fourteen members of the Minnesota National Guard have given their lives in OIF.ⁱⁱ

The Minnesota National Guard's 1st Brigade Combat Team (BCT) of the 34th Infantry Division has the distinction of having the longest deployment of any unit in the U.S. military in the past seven years: 22 months, 16 of them in Iraq.ⁱⁱⁱ More than 2,600 of the BCT's 5,000 troops come from Minnesota, making that the 1st BCT's tour the largest deployment of the Minnesota National Guard since World War II.^{iv} The servicemembers of the 1st BCT and their families also bore the burden of having their tour extended by 125 days when President Bush announced the surge; the unit had originally been scheduled to return in March 2007, but instead came home in August 2007.^v Minnesota's Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Larry Shellito (USA), described the extension as a "raw deal," saying, "We have every right to be angry."^{vi} Members of the Minnesota National Guard have also deployed to assist in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, to patrol the border with Mexico, and to fight forest fires.

The deployment of the 34th Infantry Division's 1st BCT, as well as those of Minnesota's other Guard units, have taken their toll. Studies conducted by the Department of Defense have found that half of the members of the National Guard and Reserves develop some form of post-combat mental health issue after they return from Iraq or Afghanistan and are 29% more likely to develop such an issue than their active-duty counterparts.^{vii} The VA Medical Center in St. Cloud has seen over 1,500 veterans of OEF and OIF, approximately one in three of whom who have been provided with psychiatric care.^{viii}

Those who remain on the home front have also made considerable sacrifices. Families not only face the emotional hardships of having a loved one deployed to a war zone but also the family member deployed is often the family's main breadwinner, creating financial hardships. Some Minnesota businesses have gone without key employees for almost two years.^{ix} Deployments can also disrupt small businesses owned by deployed Guard members, forcing them to either lie fallow or to be taken over by someone else.^x An estimate from Veterans for America of the costs of lost productivity caused by the deployments of the Minnesota National Guard to date is \$561 million.^{xi}

Given the current rate of deployments, the length of those deployments, and the fact that the Guard currently only possesses half of its authorized equipment, some have raised concerns about the National Guard's ability to respond to emergencies within Minnesota.^{xii} Maj. Gen. Shellito assured the people of Minnesota that the Guard stands



“ready to serve,” whatever the pace of deployments or amount of equipment available may be.^{xiii} Challenges also exist for first responders such as police officers who must not only recertify their skills and learn new laws and procedures, but must also modify behavior such as extremely aggressive driving that, while lifesaving in a war zone, can be detrimental in the civilian world.^{xiv}

In response to the challenge created by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the State of Minnesota has instituted a number of innovative programs. One initiative has received national attention, the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon program. This program organizes seminars for community leaders and families on what Guard members can expect upon returning from their tours. The program has the Soldiers muster 30, 60, and 90 days after their homecoming in order to foster camaraderie and make them aware of the counseling, family, and business resources that are available if they have difficulty reintegrating into civilian life.^{xv} The Minnesota Legislature has also recently passed the Minnesota Veterans Sentencing Mitigation Act. This legislation encourages judges to consider non-incarceration alternatives for veterans who are first-time, non-violent offenders and can show that post-combat psychological disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were an important contributing factor to the commission of their crimes.^{xvi}

The people of Minnesota have demonstrated their support for their citizen Soldiers. It is up to the Bush Administration and the presidential administration that follows it to ensure that the Minnesota National Guard is not damaged by additional unsustainable deployment policies.

Minnesota Army National Guard Units

- **34th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Brigade Combat Team**
 - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): March 2006 to July/August 2007
 - 22-month deployment; 16 months in Iraq
 - Served six months in Kosovo immediately prior to tour in Iraq
 - Tour extended by four months
 - Longest deployment for a U.S. military unit in the post-9/11 period
 - 10 fatalities
 - 2,600 soldiers from Minnesota
 - Biggest deployment of Minnesota National Guard since WWII
 - Drove more than 4,500 convoy escort missions, disarmed more than 400 explosive devices, built seven water purification plants, and constructed 90 miles of roadway in the Dhi Qar region
- **34th Combat Aviation Brigade**
 - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): Summer 2008 to 2009
 - 723 soldiers
 - Estimated 12-month deployment

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- About 25% of the members of the 34th CAB have already served a tour in Iraq^{xvii}
- Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF):
 - B Company, 2nd Battalion, 211th General Support Aviation Battalion
 - Returned home in 2007 after flying CH-47 Chinooks on 5,400 combat missions in Iraq
- OIF: 2007 to 2008
 - The 2nd Battalion, 147th Assault Helicopter Regiment
 - Deployed to Iraq in 2007 with UH-60 Blackhawks and is expected home in summer of 2008
- The 34th Combat Aviation Brigade has also assisted in suppressing fires, provided emergency transportation during floods, provided heavy-lift capabilities at the I-35W bridge collapse, and assisted with recovery of a downed aircraft
- **84th Troop Command**
 - Provides essential field artillery, chemical, and engineering capabilities
 - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF):
 - In 2007, the 849th and the 851st Engineer Companies deployed in support of OIF
- **347th Regional Support Group**
 - Deployed finance and personnel specialists overseas in 2007



List of Acronyms

BCT: Brigade Combat Team

MAP: Military Adjutant Program

OEF: Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan)

OIF: Operation Iraqi Freedom

PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

TBI: Traumatic Brain Injury

ⁱ Minnesota National Guard, “Current Operations,”

http://www.minnesotanationalguard.org/current_operations/, July 17, 2008. There are more than 10,700 Soldiers in the Minnesota Army National Guard and more than 2,300 Minnesota Air National Guard members.

ⁱⁱ United States National Guard Bureau, “Some Gave All...” July 14, 2008,

<http://www.ngb.army.mil/features/somegaveall/index.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rachel Stassen-Berger, “Iraq veterans return home: Now, a ‘new normal’: Relieved but restrained, a Minnesota soldier returns from Iraq. First, he’ll fish. Then, he’ll begin the long task of learning how, and how much, the war has changed his life,” *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, Minnesota), July 24, 2007.

^{iv} Jeremy Olson, “VA studying, stress, depression in soldiers: Returning Guard members to be evaluated,” *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, Minnesota), June 19, 2007.

^v Curt Brown and Mark Brunswick, “In Minnesota, dismay over extension; Surprised, disappointed, and angry,” *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, Minnesota), January 12, 2007.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health, “An Achievable Vision: Report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health,” June 2007, p. ES-2.

^{viii} Kari Petrie, “VA hires 61 workers to take care of vets,” *St. Cloud Times* (Minnesota), July 13, 2007.

^{ix} H.J. Cummins, “Combat veterans, employers must recognize need for adjustment; When soldiers come home from Iraq and Afghanistan, they also have to make peace with a civilian job. A Minnesota chaplain is trying to help, with counseling for counselors,” *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, Minnesota), July 21, 2006.

^x Dan Heilman, “Some lawyers deployed in Iraq have difficult homecomings,” *The Minnesota Lawyer*, March 12, 2007; David La Vaque, “Soldier not the only one pressed into service; With her husband, George, preparing for a mission in Iraq, Amy Gibson has taken over around the house and at their business, HighTec Truck and Automotive Repair in Ham Lake,” *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, Minnesota), August 15, 2007.

^{xi} Estimates of lost productivity costs were determined by multiplying the number of Minnesota National Guard deployments by the average annual income for members of the National Guard and Reserves (\$33,000/year), as determined by Wallsten and Kosce; Scott Wallsten and Katrina Kosce, “The Economic Costs of the War in Iraq (Working Paper 05-19),” AEI-Brookings Joint Center for Regulatory Studies, September 2005, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=848408, pp. 7-8.

^{xii} Minnesota National Guard, “2007 Annual Report,” January 2008,

http://www.minnesotanationalguard.org/aboutus/assets/2007_Annual_Report.pdf, p. 10; “Blowdown blaze sets new border priority for Guard; Troops on border with Canada, not Mexico, better able to respond to state emergencies,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Minnesota), July 18, 2006; “Fire training makes Guard more valuable to Minnesota,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Minnesota), August 3, 2006.

^{xiii} Maj. Gen. Larry Shellito, “Guard is ready, and able, to serve,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Minnesota), July 22, 2006.

^{xiv} Petrie, “Police officers reintegrate after returning from duty: From veteran to rookie,” *St. Cloud Times* (Minnesota), August 6, 2007.

^{xv} Minnesota National Guard, “2007 Annual Report,” pp. 18-19.



^{xvi} Ruben Rosario, “Surviving the unseen wound: Post-traumatic stress disorder left a Twin Cities veteran with a criminal conviction. But now he hopes his experience and a new state law can help others like him,” *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, Minnesota), June 19, 2008.

^{xvii} Jason Hoppin, “Home-cooked meal in store for Guard,” *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, Minnesota), April 7, 2008.