Written by Illinois National Guard PAO
Friday, 17 August 2012 13:42

Freedom Salute Planned Aug. 18 for Specialized Group Who Helped Improve Afghan Farming

SPRINGFIELD, IL (08/15/2012)(readMedia)-- Approximately 60 Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers will be recognized Aug. 18 by the National Guard Bureau Freedom Salute Campaign for their sacrifice and service in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The ceremony for 1st Team of the 14th Agribusiness Development Team (1-14th ADT) will be at 2 p.m.at the Hoogland Center for the Arts, 420 South Sixth Street in Springfield.

"With Illinois producing more than $9 billion in agricultural commodities each year, there are no people in the world that know the business of agricultural like our Illinois farmers," said Gov. Pat Quinn. "I'm proud that this group of Illinois farmers donned their military uniforms and put their civilian skills to use in our nation's defense. The knowledge they passed on to Afghans will help a fledgling democracy secure a viable and peaceful future for its citizens and will help cap the discord that leads to disillusionment and terrorism."

Mobilized in April 2011, the ADT deployed for one year to conduct agricultural support operations in Afghanistan that revitalized and established a strong, growing and sustainable agricultural industry. The team provided basic agricultural needs and services working alongside the Afghan government agriculture agencies. They also taught and trained Afghan Extension Agents and farmers.

"When the Illinois National Guard sends men and women to war, we are sending the most motivated and the best trained and best equipped troops in the world," said Maj. Gen. Dennis L. Celletti, the Acting Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard. "This was certainly true of the 1-14th Agribusiness Development Team, where both their military and civilian skills were put to the test."

The team improved irrigation to more than 4,100 hectares of farmland. They also developed a functional Agricultural Extension Agent Program and hosted 34 training events. The ADT modernized Afghan farming techniques.

The ADT conducted 240 convoys, facilitated 5,145 farmer training days, trained 2,960 famers

through Agriculture Extension Agents and assisted with forestry projects resulting in more than 60,000 seedlings being planted.

The ADT received the Meritorious Unit Citation and Valorous Unit citation. Thirteen Soldiers received a Bronze Star Medal, one Soldier received a Purple Heart Medal, 45 Soldiers were recognized with Army Commendation Medals and 58 Soldiers qualified for the Combat Action Badge.

The Soldiers are from all parts of Illinois. Many of them were specifically chosen for the mission based on their education and civilian background in agriculture.

Agriculture in Afghanistan accounts for 31 percent of the Afghan Gross Domestic Product and employs 78 percent of the over 30 million people in the country. National Guard ADTs work to improve the function of Afghan governmental agencies that are needed to sustain a viable agriculture sector and to educate and train Afghan farmers in modern agricultural methods and techniques. The changes will improve the quality of life and provide economic stability in the region.

The Freedom Salute Campaign program is a small way to show these patriotic citizen-Soldiers, their families and employers how much their sacrifice is appreciated. On behalf of the National Guard Bureau, the Illinois Army National Guard will present each eligible Soldier with an encased American flag, as well as a sequentially-numbered commemorative coin, certificate of appreciation and lapel pin. Families will also receive items recognizing their support and sacrifice. The Freedom Salute Campaign is one of the largest Army National Guard recognition endeavors in history. It is designed to publicly acknowledge Army National Guard Soldiers and those who supported them while deployed.

News media attending the ceremony should arrive at least 30 minutes prior to the ceremony. Media attending the event are asked to contact the Public Affairs office at 217-761-3569 by 3 p.m. on Aug. 15. For more information call the Public Affairs Office at 217-761-3569
.