ON GUARD

New Mexico units show their stuff during Bosslift exercise

Sandyly, the F-16 is just three minutes away. I'm lying in a prone position on a bench at the tail end of an KC-135 aerial tanker looking out a small window. Beside me, “Boomer,” an Air National Guard sergeant and refueling boom operator from an Ohio base, talks over at me and gives a slight nod and smile. I'm the civilian newbie here and he's saying to me, without words, “This is cool, isn’t it?”

Boomer, hands on a panel of controls, softly reads the refueling beam — yes, first, the business-end of the hose includes small whirrings that aid in positioning — (into the receiving port on Refueling Pilot's station) in visual communication with the F-16 pilot; the cockpit of the F-16 sees the KC-135's refueling boom as a target — it's a most enlightened — employees of Guard and Reserve members. Altogether, about 100 people from businesses around the state have joined in the Bosslift exercise.

The morning had started out with briefings at KAFB about New Mexico's Guard and Reserve capabilities. Steve Bowers, a retired brigadier general and head of New Mexico ESGR, bragged on the caliber of Guard and Reserve members and argued that compared to the nation's regular military services, the Guard and Reserve deliver at “pennies on the dollar.”

On Bosslift day two, we're bussed out to Melrose Range near Clovis to watch F-16s do practice bombing and strafing runs, then see an Army Guard unit do a rescue mission of a downed pilot while coming under fire from a band of insurgents.

As we board the KC-135 for the flight home, all we can talk about is how impressed we are with every-thing—we've seen. To a person, we're convinced that our New Mexico Guard and Reserve members — including soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who work shoulder to shoulder with us at Sandia — are, as Steve Stevens, a retired brigadier general and head of New Mexico ESGR, brags on the caliber of Guard and Reserve members, attack a helicopter landing zone.

Bosslift is staged by the New Mexico Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) program. Sandia has been involved along an ESGR because it's widely recognized as one of the state's best — that’s most enlightened — employees of Guard and Reserve members. Altogether, about 100 people from businesses around the state have joined in the Bosslift exercise.

That Ohio Guard unit, the 122nd Airlift Wing, has dispatched the KC-135 to New Mexico to support an annual event called Bosslift, which is intended to increase New Mexico Guard and Reserve capabilities to local employers and potential employers.

Bosslift exercise is designed to show off the Guard's aerial refueling capabilities — and to impress those of us who don't see this stuff every day.

We're impressed.

Steve Bowers, the Guard's National Guard commander Col. Jay Bledsoe speaks next. He looks like the one-time Detroit Lion he was, a big, rangy guy whose cockpit callsign is “Bluto.” (If you know anyone from the Sandia's Animal House, that's him.) He tells us that his unit — our neighbors and colleagues in Detroit — are “fully integrated in the war on terror. Our operational tempo is very high . . . we've never been busier.”

NM Guard Adjutant General Kenny Montoya (left photo) provides a mission briefing photo above. Guard and Reserve members discuss coordinating training exercises in flight photo, right panel with NM Air National Guard Commander Col. Jay Bledsoe.

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