

# In the trenches

## National Guard rescue training

By **Patty McQuillan**, Communications Officer

*"Down a little. Down a little.*

*"Right there. Cease fire.*

*"Take it all the way to your right, son, to the corner.*

*"There now, perfect.*

*"If you can, tie your walers off.*

*"Now, the thrust blocks – toss them in. Make them even with the walers.*

*"Get a measurement. Call it out.*

*"Are you at 110?"*

**Jeret Kinnaird**, a state employee of the Air National Guard, shouts out directions to a group of National Guard firefighters from Michigan, Ohio and Idaho. There is no hiding the fact that Kinnaird is a military man. His instructions on inserting supports into trenches are clear, concise and commanding.

Kinnaird is a lead instructor at the Air National Guard Urban Search and Rescue Regional Training Site in New London. The training is nationally recognized as the best in the country, and this past July, Kinnaird received the Firefighter of the Year Award from the Air National Guard Fire Chiefs Association.

The Stanly County Air National Guard Base is the only location in the United States that provides the Rescue Technician Program to other Air National Guard firefighters. Kinnaird said about 80 percent of the Guard members who train at the Stanly air base play dual roles as firefighters with the Guard and in their civilian life.

"What spurred this training are natural disasters, 911, earthquakes and anything of that nature – wherever this type of work is needed," Kinnaird said. "For example, the State of North Carolina can activate our FEMA team at our unit in Charlotte and say, 'we just had a hurricane come through, we have structure collapses, or if in the west, a tornado. We go in and shore up collapsed structures.'"

Kinnaird and two other instructors teach Rescue Technician 1 and 2. Tech 1 is Rope Rescue and Confined Space training. Tech 2 is Trench Rescue, Structure Collapse, Breaching and Breaking, Lifting and Moving. Each course lasts 12 academic days. The training on Aug. 13 was on how to shore up trench walls and how to rescue victims who may have been installing cables or water lines when a collapse occurred.

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Photographs by **Patty McQuillan**, Communications Officer.

**WALK IN MY SHOES**



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"Our goal is to put in panels to hold that wall and capture it where we can get our victim out," Kinnaird said. "We're not trying to move that wall – we're trying to capture that wall."

Each scenario dictates the time it takes to remove a victim. If buried deeply, a rescue could take four to six hours. If the victim is in a simple straight trench, it may take 45 minutes. A t-shaped trench takes more time because cave-ins are more likely in corners. Teams are to be ready and on stand-by to replace workers every 15 to 20 minutes.

Kinnaird, while being direct, is also personable. He either learns the names of the trainees, or gives them nicknames.

"Smit-Dog – use your tape measure and go from the top of the first block to your waler," Kinnaird shouts out. "See if it's straight."

Once the walers — wooden support panels — are in place, three sets of airshores — aluminum rescue struts — are lowered, two airshores at a time to capture the corner of the L Trench. The first airshore is placed at the halfway point of the trench; the second airshore is placed two feet down from the lip of the trench; and the third airshore is placed two feet from the bottom of the trench floor. Air cylinders fill the airshores whose ends expand from one wall to the other against the wooden panels and hold them in place.

A worker mistakenly places his hand on the end of an airshore, and Kinnaird quickly corrects him. Safety is foremost.

"Sometimes, they fail to realize that their lives are in our hands," Kinnaird said. "Yes, we are all Air Guard and firefighters, and firefighters in the outside world, but your life is in our hands. In this type of environment, there's nothing to blame – nothing. This is a dangerous work environment."

A technical trench is either T- or L- shaped, with the most dangerous area being the inside corners. Kinnaird verbally guides the trainees who are regulating the air pressure from the two air cylinders as to how many pounds per square inch should be pumped into the airshores. Both sets of cylinders should have the same PSI reading:

*"50 and 50?"*

*"Walk it up to 80."*

*"80 and 80?"*

*"Walk it up to 100."*

*"Walk it up to 110."*

*"Are you at 110? Are you at 110," he asks both Guard members.*

*"Pin it, spin it, lock it, toenail it!"*

Kinnaird points out the reality of what the trainees are learning.

"As you can see, there's a lot going on," he said. "If it was just a straight trench, it would be so much easier to accomplish. Shooting to 250 psi in a technical trench – there's a possibility of blowing out the corner. We can't do that.

"In the outside world, the trench won't be as pretty and nicely cut as this, so we throw something different at them – using the same tactics but going about it in a different way."

In 2010, the Great Oaks Institute of Technology and Career Training of Ohio trained 25 members of the 145<sup>th</sup> Air National Guard Firefight-

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ers for the Rescue Technician I and II certification, and Kinnaird said that's when he fell in love with the training.

Goodfellow Air Force Base in Texas, offered the training, but only for three National Guard firefighters in the entire country. Seeing the importance of opening a training site, Chief Master Sgt. Daryl Cook, chief of Fire Emergency Services for the North Carolina Air National Guard, started the Urban Search and Rescue School in 2011 to train Air Guard firefighters.

Kinnaird and the two other instructors at the Stanly County Air National Guard Base train up to 30 members per class and each class runs 12 days straight. Last year, they taught 13 classes in 10 months. Since the beginning of the training, more than 1,200 fire fighters from around the country have been trained at the Stanly Air Guard base.

Kinnaird recounted how one student saved a truck driver's life when his semi-tractor trailer truck went off a bridge. He used his rope rescue training to pull the driver to safety.

Kinnaird feels he is lucky to be a teacher and said he is no better than his students. However, his supervisor, Chief Master Sgt. Cook, feels otherwise.

"Firefighter Kinnaird is an exceptional firefighter and trainer," Cook said. "He dedicates countless hours to ensure the department and the Rescue Technician Program are without a doubt the best in the country. We are reminded constantly by student feedback that the dedication he provides is a key factor in a superior course."

In 1998, Kinnaird followed his parents from Florida to North Carolina, and he lives in Hickory with his wife and four dogs. "I love it up here," he repeated twice.

After high school, Kinnaird had an offer from a small college in Ohio to play football, but instead he enlisted in 1987 with the Active Duty Army, influenced by his father who had served in the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War. During the next decade Kinnaird was stationed at Fort Sill, Okla.; White Sands, N. M.; Korea; Germany; and Fort Stewart, Ga. He also served in Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Kinnaird enlisted with the Air National Guard in 2008 and was hired for the state firefighter position in 2010.

"If I could compare anything to the camaraderie in the Army – I get it right here," Kinnaird said. The bond he and the two other instructors build with the students in two weeks is incredible, he said.

"Some have come to us and said, 'This is the best Air Force Training that I have ever received. You guys are awesome instructors.'"

Kinnaird and his wife have two grown sons ages 23 and 25, both of whom



proudly served in the U.S. Army with the youngest still serving.

"My two boys knew after graduating high school it was go to college or serve your country," Kinnaird said.

In his free time, Kinnaird said he likes to play golf, travel to the mountains to hike and camp or "anything outdoors."

The next day's training simulated removing a victim from a trench using a 150-pound mannequin. The two week training will also include instructions on breaching and breaking – how to properly work through a concrete wall or floor to enter collapsed buildings safely and locate victims.

"We challenge our firefighters," Kinnaird said. "How you train and how you carry yourself is how you fight. You train as you fight. You bring a mentality to this."

Kinnaird brings an authoritative, committed approach to the training he provides. Despite the intense southern heat, the National Guard's firefighting members listen carefully, are ready to carry out the orders and seem to appreciate the practical training they have received from Kinnaird. ▴