

Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve for the 39th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Arkansas Army National Guard

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Mobilizing the 39th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) was a major task for the brigade, the Arkansas Army National Guard, the State of Arkansas, family members of the mobilizing Soldiers, and affected employers.

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) is a Department of Defense (DOD) organization that promotes a culture in which all American employers support and value the military service of their employees. DOD established ESGR in 1972 to gain and maintain employer support for guard and reserve service by recognizing outstanding support, increasing awareness of the law, and resolving conflict through mediation. ESGR is the lead DOD organization for this mission under DOD Directive 1250.1, National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. Today, ESGR operates through a network of more than 4,500 volunteers throughout the United States, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Since its establishment, the Arkansas ESGR Office has served the Soldiers of the Arkansas Army National Guard. ESGR's first involvement with the 39th IBCT began with the Soldier Readiness Processing (SRP) sessions and continued to the actual deployment of the brigade. The ESGR team saw every Soldier as he processed through the predeployment sessions. These weekly programs began at 7:30 a.m. and lasted until after 6:00 p.m. Team members would visit with 150 to 200 Soldiers during each session.

Prior to the SRP, ESGR sponsored a program to recover used cell phones, which it traded for calling cards. Team members distributed these cards along with other ESGR deployment information to each Soldier. During the Soldier's interview, ESGR members asked if the Soldier currently held a civilian job and if he anticipated any problems with the deployment. Most Soldiers responded that civilian employers were outstanding and that they were not anticipating any problems.

In these positive cases, ESGR encouraged the Soldiers to nominate their employers for the ESGR Patriot Award, which recognizes the employer for that support. In one humorous interview, a Soldier stated that his boss said he never wanted to see the Soldier again. When the team member asked the Soldier to explain, he smiled and responded that he was self-employed!

As the 39th deployed to Camp Shelby, MS, the ESGR team began planning for a Boss Lift. This program invites guard and reserve Soldiers' employers to visit their employees to observe training. This trip also served as a farewell to the brigade as it deployed to Iraq. The ESGR team scheduled a C-130 aircraft from the 189th Airlift Wing of the Arkansas Air National Guard for the mission.

The Arkansas ESGR team acquired a list of employers and civic leaders and sent out invitations. Fifty-one guests included military leaders, congressional members and staff, ESGR escorts, employers, and civic leaders. The list also included sixteen city mayors, which verified the tremendous community support for the Soldiers of the 39th Brigade. In coordination with the 39th leadership and the adjutant general, the team established an agenda and obtained final approval for the trip and the aircraft from the ESGR headquarters. The team initiated the process of screening all participants to allow access to Little Rock Air Force Base (AFB).



Figure 1. 39th IBCT ESGR Boss Lift

The guests arrived early at Little Rock AFB. After greetings and briefings, the group departed on time to Hattiesburg, MS, just north of Camp Shelby. After a short bus ride to Camp Shelby, the guests spent the next six hours observing the 39th in training, receiving briefings, undergoing a simulated improvised explosive device attack of their bus, and enjoying meals, ready to eat. The group returned to Little Rock AFB with many favorable comments about the 39th, the intense training, and the ride on the C-130.

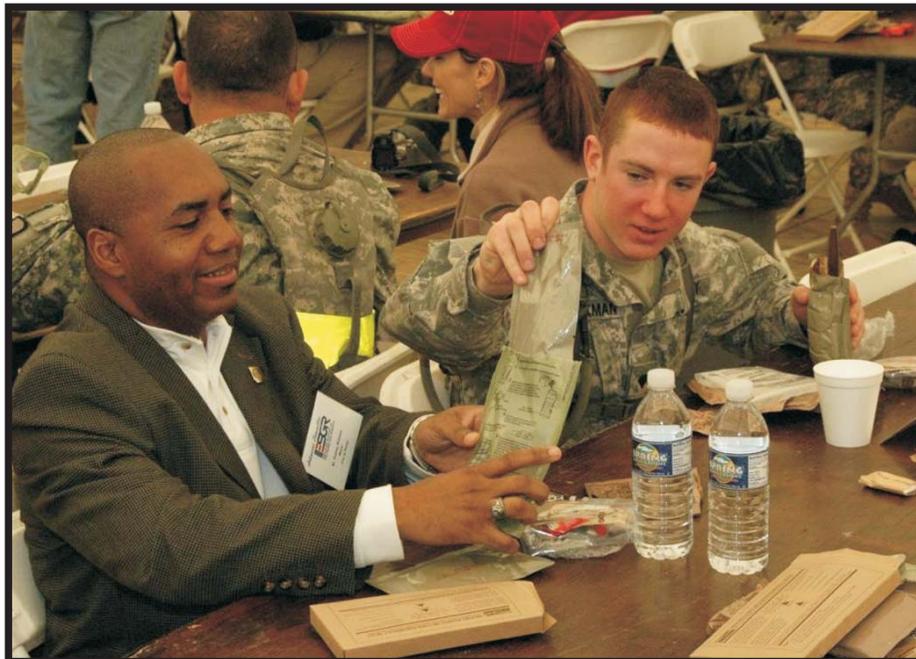


Figure 2. Delicious beef stew

The support of the 39th IBCT did not stop after its deployment to Iraq. The ESGR team continued to work with the Soldiers by Internet and cell phone. The team answered their questions about employment status when they returned. There were also inquiries from employers who wanted to clarify their responsibilities during the deployment.

General Wofford, the Arkansas Adjutant General, received several requests from employers to take them to Iraq to visit the troops of the 39th IBCT. This was not possible, so General Wofford suggested the ESGR team bring the troops and Iraq to the employers.

The ESGR team stepped into action again. Working with the general's staff and public affairs offices in Arkansas and Iraq, the team established a program to present a live video session between the guests at Camp Robinson and the 39th's headquarters in Iraq. The 39th's public affairs office in Iraq produced an outstanding video that highlighted the 39th's Soldiers, their activities, and the overall mission.

Once again, the ESGR team compiled a guest list and mailed out invitations. Twenty-two civilian guests joined the ESGR team at Camp Robinson. The program was a tremendous success. The highlight was the live 20-minute conversation between Camp Robinson and the 39th's commander, command sergeant major, and staff in Iraq.



Figure 3. 39th IBCT ESGR Virtual Boss Lift

ESGR members served a delicious barbeque lunch and took a group photograph. The guests all signed the photograph, and the team mailed it to the 39th in Iraq.

When the 39th IBCT returned home, the ESGR team participated in civic organization briefings and media interviews that discussed the homecoming and reemployment issues. ESGR provided briefings and informational material for the reintegration program. ESGR members were present at each of these meetings, which were scheduled for two weekends a month. ESGR members emphasized the Patriot Award Program and received hundreds of requests for the award.

Today, ESGR members are still excited about their work with the Soldiers of the 39th IBCT and the Soldiers' employers.