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Guard deploy to Middle East

Abreanna Blose
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USA TODAY NETWORK

More than 150 soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard’s 661st Engineer Construction Company are heading to the Middle East for a year-long deployment.

The Macomb-based unit held a mobilization ceremony Aug. 24 at Macomb High School, according to a community announcement.

The soldiers will build and maintain infrastructure for U.S. forces in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility, which includes buildings, roads, protective berms and barriers, and other fortifications.

“Today we mark not just the departure of the unit, but the dedication, the training and the sacrifice it took to get here,” Capt. Larnell Brown, the 661st Engineer Construction Co. commander, said in the announcement. “Your soldiers worked tirelessly to support this mission. They are detail-oriented, fully committed and mission-focused. They will make a lasting impact far beyond our tour.”

Unit has a history of service

The 661st Engineer Construction Company was formed in 2005 in Sparta. The unit deployed to Afghanistan in 2011-12. It was re-stationed to Macomb in 2016. It was activated for both the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21 and for the Presidential Inauguration security mission in 2020.

Recently, the unit built a quarter-mile running track at Marseilles Training Area, saving the state about \$300,000. It also completed road repairs, parking lot expansions, building repairs and



More than 150 soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard’s 661st Engineer Construction Company mobilized in Macomb on Aug. 24 for a year-long Middle East deployment. PROVIDED BY THE ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

new construction at military training facilities in Illinois, Michigan and Minnesota. The unit maintains and operates \$37 million of construction equipment.

Community support is crucial

District 71 State Rep. Dan Swanson, a retired Illinois Army National Guard lieutenant colonel and Iraq veteran, also thanked the families and employers.

“Take care of your soldiers, take care of yourselves, and call your families

back home,” he said in the announcement.

Swanson suggested that the soldiers with young children take some children’s books with them and read over the phone or video chat. He asked the soldiers to send cards back to their families, their employers, their schools and their churches.

Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge, the deputy assistant adjutant general of the Illinois Army National Guard, spoke about the critical importance of the en-

gineers’ mission in strengthening the infrastructure and protecting their fellow soldiers. He praised the soldiers’ professionalism and unwavering discipline.

This story was created by reporter Abreanna Blose, ablose@gannett.com, with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Journalists were involved in every step of the information gathering, review, editing and publishing process. Learn more at cm.usatoday.com/ethical-conduct.

Airport gets new name to honor aviation pioneer

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The Galesburg Regional Airport will be renamed in honor of Harrel W. Timmons. The dedication ceremony is scheduled for 4:30 p.m. Sept. 5 during the Annual National Stearman Fly-in, according to a community announcement.

Timmons founded Jet Air Inc., the airport’s fixed-base operator, in 1969 and served as its president until his re-



Timmons

tirement in 2023. Under his leadership, the airport has grown to serve a diverse group of recreational pilots, corporations and businesses. Timmons played a key role in the airport’s recent upgrade by the Federal Aviation Administration to a regional airport, whichS allows for increased services and funding.

See AIRPORT, Page 2A

Global trade drives IL manufacturing and jobs

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A new report highlighted the impact of international trade on Illinois manufacturers and the broader Midwest economy, according to a community announcement.

Illinois manufacturers exported nearly \$69 billion in goods in 2024, supporting economic activity across the state.

The study, conducted by the Midwest Manufacturing Association in partnership with the Illinois Manufacturers’ Association, found that the thirteen Midwest states exported an estimated \$390 billion in manufactured goods in 2024. This figure represented 22 percent of all U.S. exports, according to the announcement.

The report’s release coincided with the 2025 Farm Progress Show in

See TRADE, Page 2A

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