

Illinois National Guard Computer Network Defense Team among the best

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SPRINGFIELD - The Illinois National Guard Cyber Defense Team competed in the Army National Guard's 5th Cyber Shield Exercise at Camp Atteberry-Muscatatuck, Butlerville, Indiana April 17-30, 2016.

Cyber Shield is a defensive-focused cyber exercise designed to develop, train and exercise National Guard cyber-capable forces, threat analysis teams, reporting mechanisms, leaders and critical partnerships.

"Working together with our civil partners brings capabilities and strength that we haven't had in the past to our overall cyber defense," said Brig. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, the Assistant Adjutant General, Illinois Army National Guard. "Cyber warfare is the future battlefield and the National Guard is the best at defending both here at home and abroad. We will continue to make leaps and bounds in Cyber Defense."

More than 750 competitors from 30 states and territories including Army National Guard, Air National Guard, and United States Army Reserve service members participated in the cyber exercise.

Teams were given eight hours to defend a city against numerous attacks in multiple scenarios increasing in difficulty over five stages. Approximately 25 questions were asked in each stage.

The Illinois National Guard team held third place the entire week, dropping to fifth out of thirty five teams in the final day of competition.

"The team did extremely well this year. We have definitely improved our team dynamics as well as our technical proficiencies from our past experiences at Cyber Shield," said Galvin. "The team also integrated really well with the State of Illinois Security Engineers and Deputy Chief Information Security Officer who was working as our network owner throughout the exercise."

Cpt. Jamie Galvin of Lake St. Louis, Missouri with Joint Force Headquarters in Springfield, Illinois, said she wants to continue to build partnership with the State of Illinois and hopefully expand Illinois National Guard partnerships to local universities and the local FBI field offices.

Though Illinois has competed 4 years in the Cyber Shield Exercise, this was the first year the team brought enough members to fill an offensive and defensive team.

Galvin said Illinois brought a high performing team to the competition this year.

"Each of these Soldiers and Airmen bring a distinct skillset that makes, in my opinion, the National Guard have a competitive edge over our active duty counterparts when it comes to the Cyber Security mission," said Galvin. "These individuals bring with them a great deal of experience from their military backgrounds as well as from their civilian backgrounds."

Sgt. Joseph Daniels of Chatham, Illinois with Joint Force Headquarters said though this team is very skilled many of its member are new to this cyber exercise.

"Members of the team who weren't as experienced as others really kicked up their skill level during the exercise," said Daniels. "We all learned from this exercise. There were things throughout the exercise that we had to come together to figure out, but there wasn't one obstacle we didn't overcome."

During the competition the team was tested on its ability to maintain the fictional city's functionality and security during each test/crisis in the Cyber City.

"This is the future," said Daniels. "We are training to fight. Infantrymen train ground tactics and clearing rooms, we train in a virtual box because that is where we will fight the enemy."

Daniels said the team fought off website defacements, Distributed Denial of Service attacks, and enemies attempting to shut down the water supply, change street light timing and attempts to disrupt power plants.

"Our team's biggest strength is our communication and our team work," said Galvin. "Both of those skills enabled the team to quickly react to cyber-attacks during this exercise."

Galvin said the skills the team is acquiring and using during these exercises are industry standard skills.

"They are becoming certified in industry leading certifications like Certified Ethical Hacker Certified Information Systems Security Professional," said Galvin.

Galvin said she hopes to continue to develop the team technically through the development of the Illinois National Guard Cyber Lab. The Cyber Lab will test Soldiers in the same way they are tested in the Cyber Shield Exercise.

"In 2017 my goal is to train and develop the technical skills of our Soldiers throughout the state to keep their technical proficiencies at a high level," said Galvin. "When I assumed leadership of this team, I developed a three year plan for technical development, manning, and equipping and we are positioned to meet the goals of that three year plan a year ahead of schedule."