



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 4, 2020

20-40

CONTACT: LTC Chris Messina

OFFICE: 615.313.0662

christopher.g.messina.mil@mail.mil

Murfreesboro Guardsman testing community for COVID-19

By: Staff Sgt. Timothy Cordeiro, Joint Strategic Communications Office

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - Throughout 2020, the Tennessee National Guard has been supporting various foreign operations around the world, as well as domestic emergencies at home. The most pivotal of them all has been COVID-19, and for one Tennessee National Guardsman, it's a battle that serves great purpose.

Sgt. Robert Neal, a member of 2nd Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, has been an infantryman since he first joined the Tennessee National Guard seven years ago. Neal just recently deployed to Poland for nearly a year before returning home to Tennessee this past February. A few weeks later, the Tennessee National Guard began accepting volunteers to help fight COVID-19. Neal knew it didn't matter who or what the enemy was, but that he wanted to be a part of defeating it.

"I had just got back from deployment and it seemed like a great opportunity," said Neal. "Any chance I get to help out my community, I'm going to jump on it."

Neal, a Murfreesboro native, first volunteered to be part of Tennessee's fight against COVID-19 back in March. Since then, he's completed various medical and sanitation training courses prior to being activated to support drive-thru testing sites operated by the Tennessee National Guard and the Tennessee Department of Health.

Neal, who had taken some anatomy classes while completing his Animal Science degree at Middle Tennessee State University, began his COVID-19 activation by conducting traffic control. Next, he performed administrative work at various testing sites, and has now worked his way up to being a tester, swabbing members of the community to test for the virus. He has worked in some capacity at testing sites in Colombia, Pulaski, Clarksville, and Murfreesboro. Neal is currently serving at the COVID-19 testing site in Cookeville.

"In the National Guard we have a lot of different roles," said Neal. "Sometimes we are asked to do different things for the betterment of the team, and as an infantryman, that ability to pivot and focus on the next mission is drilled in you from the start of Basic Combat Training."



More than 2,000 Soldiers and Airmen with the Tennessee National Guard have been activated at some point to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in our communities. In addition to operating drive-thru testing sites across the state, the Tennessee National Guard have also been tasked with testing in prisons and nursing homes, establishing alternate care facilities in vulnerable communities, and performing testing missions in some of the hardest hit areas.

Neal is one of the few that have been activated to fight the pandemic, and also supported law enforcement during periods of civil unrest both here in Tennessee and in the National Capitol Region back in June.

“Everyone’s doing different things in their civilian roles outside of the National Guard,” said Neal. “It says a lot about Guard members and our ability to adapt. We’ve been working through the pandemic and periods of civil unrest, while also completing our annual training requirements. We have a lot on our plate but we’re always ready for the next challenge.”

- (30) -



Sgt. Robert Neal, an infantryman with 2nd Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, conducts COVID-19 testing at a drive-thru rural assessment site in Montgomery County, Sept. 28. Neal has been supporting the fight against COVID-19 in Tennessee communities since March, when Gov. Bill Lee officially activated the Tennessee National Guard. (photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy Cordeiro)

All Tennessee Army and Air National Guard press releases can be found at
<https://www.tn.gov/military/news.html>

###