

167 MEDICAL GROUP

MISSION

LINEAGE

167 Tactical Clinic
167 Medical Squadron
167 Medical Group

STATIONS

Martinsburg, WV

ASSIGNMENTS

167 Airlift Wing

COMMANDERS

LTC David L. Porter

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

SAVING lives is top priority for Air Guard medical technicians deployed to a medical facility near Baghdad International Airport, even if they must work outside the job specialty for which they were trained. Martinsburg-based 167th Airlift Wing members, assigned to the 447th Expeditionary Medical Squadron, conduct multiple jobs during a daily shift, said Master Sgt. Bill Wnek, a 167th AW member and the squadron's nursing services superintendent. Medical Technicians are responsible for the emergency room and trauma ward, ambulance response, aero-medical evacuations, immunizations, X-rays, pharmaceutical dispensing, laboratory work, medical record maintenance and blood supply management. Although they receive initial training in all these fields, back home the technicians usually only do one of these jobs at a time, the superintendent said. "In a combat environment, we don't have the luxury of staying within our specialties," Wnek said. "We need to branch out and help everywhere we can." Response times have to be quick when people's lives are at stake, so trainers familiarize med techs with the squadron's area of responsibility and train them on radio procedures, in addition to their basic emergency-care duties, said Tech. Sgt. Sterling Castillo, a 447th EMEDS independent medical-duty technician. For airmen who thought all they would be doing in Iraq was sick-call duty, these experiences will leave them with plenty of stories to tell, said Dr. (Lt. Col.) Gary Benedetti, the squadron's chief of medical staff and an orthopedic trauma surgeon. "These technicians perform as well as people at any major hospital trauma center in the States," Benedetti said. 2004

2006 PLAYAS, N.M. former medical clinic is rising like a phoenix after years of neglect in this abandoned New Mexico borderland town as a group of West Virginia Air Guard members establish medical services for personnel serving in Operation Jump Start. Until 1999, Playas housed employees of the Phelps Dodge Hidalgo copper smelter in remote, sparsely populated southwest New Mexico within sight of Mexico. The smelter closed, leaving Playas nearly abandoned. The Department of Homeland Security paid about \$5 million for the 1,840-acre town in 2003, according to media reports, and it is now being used as a training center by the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology. It is the New Mexico Tech Playas Training Center. It is also close to National Guard Soldiers and Airmen participating in Operation Jump Start, the National Guard's support to Customs and Border Patrol to secure the U.S. border with Mexico. Seven West Virginia Air Guard medical personnel are renovating the town's former medical clinic for people who face medical risks in the harsh desert climate. "Our mission is to deliver general medical care in an innovative manner in an isolated area," said Capt. Anita Fouch, a nurse practitioner with the West Virginia Air Guard's 130th Airlift Wing. Jump Start troops are susceptible to such risks as dehydration, sunburn, insect bites and stings, snake bites and twisted ankles, medical team members said. "We were the first to respond to the request by the governor of New Mexico to the governor of West Virginia," said Col. David Porter, a flight surgeon and the commander of West Virginia's 167th Medical Group. Porter's team was told on July 8, a Saturday, to prepare to deploy. "By Tuesday we were all ready," he said. "We've been very proud to be able to be here and to serve the Citizen-Soldiers who are out there pounding the desert. "There's usually a core in every unit that steps up, and these are the ones," Porter said. He has deployed five times since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He has served in Southwest Asia. "This is desert," Porter observed. "It's just like Southwest Asia. You're going to see a lot of the same things – minus, of course, the war trauma that you see there, and even that's a possibility." The first order of business was reestablishing Playas' medical clinic. The building needed to be

cleaned. It needed telephone and computer lines, air conditioning and water. It needed to be stocked with medical supplies. But the team members did not start from scratch. The examining tables, some beds and other equipment left behind when the town was abandoned are all serviceable, they determined. Porter said Operation Jump Start is a good training opportunity. "There's nothing like hands-on to really learn the job," he said. The Airmen, who include four medical technicians and a medical administrator, would rather not see any Citizen-Soldiers professionally. "Be physically in shape to begin with," Porter recommended to Citizen-Soldiers deploying for Jump Start. "Start your hydration before you leave home." While medical team members say Citizen-Soldiers should be cautious while on duty, they also say many injuries happen during off-duty hours. "Be cautious during your recreation," Porter said. "Avoid excessive abuse of alcohol because it leads to dehydration the next day during duty hour and lack of concentration. Alertness in the desert is critical. Cute spiders don't make good pets." These West Virginia Air Guard members initially deployed for a month say they're proud to serve. "It's good to be a part of something that directly impacts the lives of all Americans, not just the military," Fouch said. "We're very much needed. This is not something that just impacts the lives of the people on the border. This is a nationwide event."

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Sources

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