

Her hard work pays off

Maj. Kimberly Tschepen becomes the first woman to lead Idaho's 145th Brigade Support Battalion

Dylan Brown/Lewiston

The first woman ever to lead an Idaho National Guard battalion had a suspicion she'd made history when she assumed command of the 145th Brigade Support Battalion.

But Maj. Kimberly R. Tschepen focused instead on her 18 years of service to Idaho's 116th Cavalry Brigade Combat Team Battalion.

"That's just how we operate, I don't really think of it in that respect," she said. "But I'm definitely honored and hope I can set an example for those to follow."

Tschepen became the commander for the National Guard's 500 men and women in Lewiston, Orofino, Kamiah, Moscow, Bonners Ferry, Sandpoint and Post Falls on Jan. 4.

After taking over for Lt. Col. Ryan J. Robinson of Sandpoint, Tschepen became a role model of sorts for young women in the service to look up to. But she said there is only one proven way to climb the ladder, whether you're a man or woman.

"I hope I can encourage other females to want to advance and progress, or even come into the military," she said. "But I like to think that it wasn't based on my gender, getting the role, but it was based on my merits, my experience and qualifications for the position - hard work just pays off."

Tschepen, who lives near the brigade's headquarters at Gowen Field in Boise, came to the Gem State in 1994 from North Dakota. She volunteered for the Guard the next year, ultimately getting her officer's commission in 1997.

Like many others, Tschepen saw the service as a way to help pay for life's many expenses and it did help her earn her mechanical engineering degree from Boise State University. But she stayed because her fellow service members became a home away from home. She doesn't plan on leaving the Guard anytime soon.

"They'd come visit, but I'd only see them a couple times a year," she said of family two states away. "So the Guard became my extended family over time. I don't really want to leave, I like being part of the organization and being part of the successes and contributing to that."

The family ties only got stronger, Tschepen said, during the brigade's two deployments to Iraq.

The entire brigade spent six months training in Texas and Louisiana in 2004, and then spent most of 2005 stationed primarily in Kirkuk in northern Iraq. Tschepen and company then went back to Iraq for another year beginning in September 2010.

After the two tours, Tschepen worked her way up to a staff officer's position. In 2012, she became the 145th's executive officer - the second in command. Now she has assumed responsibility for the entire northern Idaho Guard unit.

"This is definitely a role not to take lightly," she said. "To be able to lead all the soldiers, that's what it's all about - taking care of them and making them successful and the whole battalion successful."

Tschepen, who will be promoted to lieutenant colonel later this year, also plans on reaching out to the communities across the region that are home to her soldiers.

"I'm looking forward to getting to know the soldiers in the battalion better, as well as getting to know the communities that support our soldiers," she said. "The Guard family doesn't just include the soldiers that we work with. It extends into their families, it extends into the surrounding communities and the employers that support them."

Brown may be contacted at dbrown@lmtribune.com or (208) 848-2278. Follow him on Twitter @DylanBrown26.