

Woman Takes Command Of 369th Harlem Hell Fighters



Media Advisory

WHAT: Col. Stephanie Dawson, the first female brigade commander in New York Army National Guard history, will take command of the 369th Sustainment Brigade, known as the Harlem Hellfighters because of the unit's daring conduct in World War I, in a Change-of-Command Ceremony on Sunday, Nov. 16.

WHO: Col Stephanie Dawson the incoming commander, and Col. Kevin McKiernan, the outgoing commander of the 369th Sustainment Brigade.

WHEN: 2 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 16

WHERE: Harlem Armory, 2366 5th Avenue, Harlem

BACKGROUND:

The Change of Command Ceremony dates back to the days in which a military unit's flag marked its position in the line of battle. The colors were always near the commander, so troops knew where to rally on the battlefield. Today the transfer of the colors marks a change in the unit and gives the soldiers their first opportunity to see and hear their new leader.

Col. Stephanie Dawson:

Col. Stephanie Dawson is the first female officer in New York National Guard history to command a brigade level unit. Her last assignment was deputy commander of the 369th Sustainment Brigade. Prior to that she served as commander of the 27th Rear Operations Center and deployed that unit to Iraq in 2003/2004. Dawson also served as a platoon leader and company commander during her military career. As executive officer for the 369th Corps Support Battalion during the unit's 9-11 activation, she helped spearhead battalion relief, security, supply, transportation, and other logistics support missions for initial Ground Zero operations.

Dawson is a 2007 graduate of the Army War College, as well as the Army's Command and General Staff College and the Combined Arms and Services School. Her awards include the Bronze Star, the Meritorious Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, and the Global War on Terrorism Medal.

In civilian life she is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) and works for the Chief Operating Officer for the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey where she is Assistant Director of Operations. Dawson is also a life member of her local Veterans of Foreign Wars Post and 369th Historical Society

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369th Sustainment Brigade:

The 369th Sustainment Brigade is one of nine such support units in the Army National Guard. A Sustainment Brigade provides command and control for combat service and combat service support units which enable the Army's combat teams to fight by providing fuel, ammunition, medical supplies, repair parts, and medical and other services.. A Sustainment Brigade can support from one to 10 brigade combat teams depending on the number of service and support units it controls.

The 369th traces its heritage back to the 15th Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard, an all African-American unit organized in 1916. In 1917 the regiment was sent to France and renumbered as the 369th Infantry, but because American Army officers maintained segregated combat formations, the Soldiers were initially used for supply duties. The French Army, though, was more than happy to have these Soldiers fight for them and in May 1918 the 369th went into the trenches.

In tough fighting in France the unit won a regimental Croix de Guerre from the French Army, and 200 individual Croix de Guerre were awarded. The unit also sustained 1,500 casualties and won itself the nickname "Harlem Hell fighters" and the respect of the German opponents and French allies. The 369th saw more frontline service than any other American unit in World War I.

In World War II the unit served as the 369th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment, and in the Gulf War of 1991 it served as the 369th Transportation Battalion.