

Army Cyber Soldiers Support High School in Cybersecurity Competition

By Steven Stover, Public Affairs Officer, 780th Military Intelligence Brigade (Cyber)

BALTIMORE – Soldiers representing the 782nd Military Intelligence Battalion (Cyber), 780th MI Brigade, are supporting a high school team participating in this year's CyberPatriot IX National Finals Competition at Baltimore's Hyatt Regency, April 3 to 5.

More than 4,400 teams competed in this year's CyberPatriot competition; however, only 28 teams received an all-expenses paid invite to this season's National Finals. Of those 28, 13 All Service high school teams, representing eight states, beat out more than [300 other teams from across the country](#) in order to receive an invite at the Platinum-level which, of the three tiers, has the highest degree of difficulty and the only tier where teams have the opportunity to advance to the National Finals competition.

The All Service Division teams are of the same service and are scored within their specific category. The categories are: Air Force JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps), Army JROTC, Navy JROTC, Marine Corps JROTC, Civil Air Patrol, and Naval Sea Cadet Corps.

The other two divisions are the Open and Middle School.

According to the Air Force Association (AFA) CyberPatriot IX National Finals Competition program, the mission of CyberPatriot is to spark the interest of our nation's youth in the area of cybersecurity and other STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education and career paths.

The only All Service team to receive an invite from Hawaii was the Army JROTC CyberPatriot team from Leilehua High School in Wahiawa. The team name and school mascot, is the "Mules," and consists of CyberPatriot members and cadets: Tyler McWilliams, 9th Grade, Jacob Huerta, 10th Grade, Jarod Olive-Stalling Jr., 10th Grade, and Brandon Unrein, 12th Grade. The team's coach is retired Army Lt. Col. Nick Spiridigliozzi, the Leilehua High School JROTC senior instructor.

"The competition is important because it is a National Security need. We are challenging the next generation to be part of the defense of the nation by learning cybersecurity," said Spiridigliozzi. "It is also a career avenue for a lot of the students. I've had probably 85 percent of my CyberPatriot students in the past six years, choose to go into the cyber defense/cybersecurity career field."

The CyberPatriot rules state the coach can request support from "qualified technical mentors." Volunteers who possess appropriate IT knowledge and skills. Since 2015, Cyber Soldiers from Detachment-Hawaii, 782nd MI BN, 780th MI BDE, based out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, have volunteered their time to mentor the CyberPatriot team from Leilehua High School.

Representing the unit, and traveling with the team to Baltimore are Army Spc. Evan Wittman, a cyberspace operations specialist and the lead mentor, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Lee Unrein, a cyberspace operations technician, and Spc. Jacob Cochran, a cyberspace operations specialist.

“I hope that the students truly comprehend what they’ve accomplished by attending the CyberPatriot National Finals,” said Wittman. “That they enjoy themselves while taking hold of this fantastic learning opportunity, and that we walk away with valuable lessons learned to enable future iterations of the Leilehua Mules CyberPatriot team to make it to the National Finals.”

Though not always the case, all four CyberPatriot team members are military dependents, and Leilehua senior, Brandon Unrein, is the son of CW3 Unrein.

The journey to the National Finals has been a long one. Requiring commitment and long hours from both the students and their Soldier mentors. To receive the invite the Mules had to compete in several rounds of competition where they had to identify flaws or cybersecurity vulnerabilities in operating systems while keeping the computer functions working. Of the six Hawaii teams, three received a Platinum-level award, and three received Gold; however, it was the team from Wahiawa that took the First Place AFA State award.

“Tremendous growth in all these students. There wasn’t a whole lot of computer experience when we started, said Spiridigliozzi. “The mentors have actually built the kids from – just guys who knew how to get on the internet, maybe do a little Facebook, social networking – to guys who really understand what it takes to secure computers, what it takes to build and maintain the networks.”

Spiridigliozzi said it’s not just the support of the mentors that is critical, but also from the service member’s command and the Hawaii Department of Education. He stated that the CyberPatriot program and its support of military dependents, is a perfect example of the Joint Venture Education Forum, a partnership between the Department of Education in Hawaii and the military.

“There are several reasons why we should partner with our local communities and the high schools,” said Lt. Col. Chris Longo, deputy commanding officer, 780th MI BDE. “Through partnership our communities get to know and understand the Army and its Soldiers; these students are our future as they are tomorrow’s Cyberspace warriors.”

In fact, the Army cyber brigade is hoping to expand their support.

“There’s an opportunity, given the geographic dispersion of the 780th Military Intelligence Brigade, to expand our partnership with our local communities and the high school JROTC CyberPatriot programs,” said Longo. “We have elements, not only in Hawaii, but in San Antonio, Augusta, Georgia., and here at Fort Meade, Maryland.”

For more information on how the competition works, visit www.uscyberpatriot.org.



(101-7252) BALTIMORE – From left to right, the Leilehua High School CyberPatriot team, their coach and mentors: Cadet Tyler McWilliams, Army Spc. Jacob Cochran, Cadets Brandon Unrein, Jarod Olive-Stalling, and Jacob Huerta, Army Spc. Evan Wittman, retired Army Lt. Col. Nick Spiridigliozzi, the teams coach and JROTC senior instructor, and Army Chief Warrant Officer 3 Lee Unrein. McWilliams, Huerta and Unrein aspire to be cyber defense professionals for the National Security Agency, and Olive-Stallings wants to be a Naval Officer after graduating from high school. The three active duty Soldiers are assigned to Detachment-Hawaii, 782nd Military Intelligence Battalion (Cyber), 780th Military Intelligence Brigade (Cyber), based out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.



(101-7208) BALTIMORE – From left to right, Brandon Unrein, Tyler McWilliams, Jacob Huerta, and Jarod Olive-Stalling, the CyberPatriot team from Leilehua High School, Wahiawa, Hawaii, listen to Army Chief Warrant Officer 3 Lee Unrein, Detachment-Hawaii, 782nd Military Intelligence Battalion (Cyber), following the system familiarization phase of the CyberPatriot IX, National Finals Competition, at Baltimore's Hyatt Regency, April 3. The team was prepping for the Facebook challenge later that evening.



(101-7231) BALTIMORE – Leilehua High School CyberPatriot team captain, Jacob Huerta (left), listens to instructions from an event organizer during the system familiarization phase of the CyberPatriot IX, National Finals Competition, at Baltimore’s Hyatt Regency, April 3.



(101-7223) BALTIMORE -- Leilehua High School CyberPatriot team member, Tyler McWilliams, familiarizes himself with the computer system he and his fellow team members will use during the CyberPatriot IX, National Finals Competition, at Baltimore’s Hyatt Regency,

April 3 through 5. Over the next several days 13 All Service high school teams will compete in various cybersecurity challenges for the top award.



(101-7229) Awards' Table



(101-7248) School banner