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Serving the New York Army and Air National Guard, Naval Militia, New York Guard and Families



FROM THE LEADERSHIP

Drill is Sacred, Love Your Unit, Have Fun, 53rd CO Says

For three decades, I have had the honor of serving alongside the Soldiers of the National Guard of New York.

I began my career in the 1st Battalion, 156th Field Artillery before becoming an aviator and commanding at every level in the 42nd Combat Aviation brigade.

I've deployed in support of our nation, leading Soldiers through challenging missions in Iraq. I've, also responded to domestic emergencies here in New York and in Puerto Rico.

I am proud to have served with all the amazing Soldiers who work every day within our aviation units and flight facilities. I trust those Soldiers with my life, and I will forever be proud to be an Army Officer and Army Aviator.

Those experiences shaped my leadership philosophy and reinforced my belief that our greatest strength has always been our people.

Now, I am immensely proud and humbled to serve as the commander of the 53rd Troop Command.

This organization represents some of the most capable, resilient, and dedicated Soldiers in our force.

Every unit within the 53rd Troop Command brings unique skills and capabilities that are essential to our state and national missions.

Whether responding to emergencies here at home, supporting communities during times of crisis, or preparing for federal mobilization, our Soldiers answer the call with professionalism and pride.

As we move forward together, I ask every Soldier, NCO, warrant officer, and officer to remain ready.

Readiness is not simply about equipment or training schedules — it is a mindset.

It requires discipline, physical and mental toughness, and a commitment to excellence every day. We must continue building resilient formations capable of adapting to any challenge placed before us.

I also expect every Soldier to maintain a strong Warrior Spirit.

Be ready and if need be; be lethal.

Our profession demands aggressive action in accomplishing the mission while never compromising safety.

We can and will execute difficult missions successfully, but we will do so through disciplined leadership, sound risk management, and accountability at every level. Mission accomplishment and safety are not competing priorities — they go hand in hand.

There are three things I always tell Soldiers: Drill is sacred. Love your units, and have fun".

I absolutely consider drill sacred. The limited time we spend together each month matters tremendously.

Drill weekends are where we build readiness, strengthen teams, mentor young leaders, maintain standards, and reinforce the bonds that make our units successful.

I encourage every Soldier to approach drill with energy, professionalism, and purpose. Ensure your employers, friends and family understand the commitment and return that by sharing your successes. Live the Army Values and be Proud, Ready and Resilient

Love your units. Take pride in your uniform, maintain and master your equipment, weapons and care for Soldiers serving with you.

Great units are built on trust, teamwork, discipline, respect and genuine care for one another. When Soldiers truly care about their unit, people and equipment, there is no mission they cannot accomplish.

Finally, have fun.

Serving can be tough. Find opportunities to truly enjoy your training. Have a positive attitude and recognize it is ok to love being a Soldier.



Brig. Gen. Jason Lefton

The best memories of your time as a Soldier will be the laughs you share with your buddies during tough times. Make your training challenging, tough, innovative and fun. I have yet to see an order removing fun from the Army.

The New York Army National Guard has a proud history of service and sacrifice. We also have a tremendously positive reputation. **gt**



Brig. Gen. Jason Lefton (right), the commander of the 53rd Troop Command, receives the flag from Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, during a ceremony at Camp Smith Training Site near Peekskill, N.Y., Jan 11, 2026. Brig. Gen. Isabel Smith relinquished command to Lefton during the change of command ceremony presided over by Shields. Photo by Sgt. Richelle Cruickshank, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

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Governor Kathy Hochul, Commander in Chief
Maj. Gen. Raymond Shields, The Adjutant General
Eric Durr, Director of Public Affairs
Lt. Col. Jean Marie Kratzer, Public Affairs Officer
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New York National Guard Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, adjutant general Army address Division of Military and Naval Affairs employees during a town hall meeting at New York National Guard Headquarters in Latham, N.Y. on April 27, 2026. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.

FRONT COVER: STEWART AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. — Senior Airman Jonathan Rivera, 105th Base Defense Squadron defender, shoots at a target during a training exercise at Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, March 6, 2026. The 105th Base Defense Group is charged with providing highly trained, lethal and rapidly deployable security forces, capable of defending the 105th Airlift Wing's and U.S. Air Force's installations, assets and personnel against a full spectrum of threats. Photo by Senior Airman Sarah Post, 105th Airlift Wing.

BACK COVER: NEW YORK — Spc. Daniel Pan (left) and Sgt. Conner Battiste, both of the 69th Infantry Division stand with Irish Wolfhounds, the official mascot of the 69th Infantry in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral before the start of the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade on March 17, 2026. The 69th began the celebration at St. Patrick's Cathedral with a ceremonial mass and marched uptown on Fifth Avenue from 44th to 79th Street. The Regiment was joined, during the march, by leaders from across New York State and nation partners from Sweden. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Rothwyn, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

Bay Shore Resident Selected as New York State First Sergeant of the Year

Story and photo by Capt. Jason Carr, 107th Attack Wing

FRANCIS S. GABRESKI AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, WESTHAMPTON BEACH, N.Y. — New York Air National Guard Senior Master Sergeant John McGhee, a Bay Shore resident and Bronx native, assigned to the 106th Rescue Wing (RQW), has been selected as the New York State First Sergeant of the Year for 2026.

McGhee currently serves as the wing first sergeant for the 106 RQW, at Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base in Westhampton Beach, New York. As first sergeant, McGhee is responsible for advising the commander on readiness, health, morale, welfare, and quality of life of Airmen and families to ensure a mission-ready force.

McGhee enlisted in the Air Force in 2006 and transitioned to the Air National Guard in 2010, where he served as a water and fuels systems maintenance specialist with the 106th Civil Engineer Squadron. In 2020, he was selected as first sergeant for the 103rd Rescue Squadron while also serving the 106th Operations Group. McGhee was selected as the wing first sergeant for the 106 RQW in 2022.

"Being named First Sergeant of the Year validated that the mission came first for me." said McGhee. "My goal was to make sure our Airmen were truly taken care of and our leadership standards were upheld."



U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. John McGhee, a first sergeant assigned to the New York Air National Guard, 106th Rescue Wing, poses for an official photo at Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base, Westhampton Beach, New York, Jan. 08, 2026. Senior Master Sgt. McGhee has been selected as the New York State First Sergeant of the Year for 2026.

McGhee was selected over candidates from all five Air National Guard wings across the state.

"I didn't earn this alone," said McGhee. "I earned it with my team of first sergeants."

McGhee's award represents the third consecutive year that the New York State First Sergeant of the Year was selected from the 106th Rescue Wing.

"Senior Master Sgt. John McGhee's selection as New York State First Sergeant of the Year is a testament to his exceptional leadership and unwavering dedication to the Airmen of the 106th Rescue Wing," said Command Chief Master Sgt. Edward Rittberg, senior enlisted leader of the 106th. "We are extremely proud of him and wish him the best of luck competing at the regional level next."

The 106th Rescue Wing, based at F.S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base in Westhampton Beach, New York, operates and maintains the HC-130J Combat King II search and rescue aircraft, and the HH-60W Jolly Green II search and rescue helicopter. The 106th Rescue Wing is home to a special warfare squadron with pararescuemen and combat rescue officers, specializing in rescue and recovery, and deploys for domestic and overseas operations. gt



Museum Director Retires

Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, presents the New York State Conspicuous Service Medal to Courtney Burns the director of the New York State Military Museum, during a ceremony to mark Burns' retirement after 22 years of Service to the Division of Military and Naval Affairs , at the museum in Saratoga Springs, New York on Feb. 9, 2026. Burns has served as director of the museum for the last 12 years. Photo by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff.

Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, Ends 40-year Military Career During April Retirement Ceremony

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times Staff

LATHAM, N.Y. — New York Army National Guard Brigadier General Isabel Rivera Smith ended her 40-year military career during a retirement ceremony on Friday, April 24, 2026, at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, New York.

Smith, who enlisted as a truck driver in October 1985, and is a veteran of the Iraq War, was serving as director of joint staff for the New York National Guard.

She has also served as the commander of the 5,074 Soldiers of the 53rd Troop Command.

Smith currently lives in Albany but will be relocating to Fayetteville, North Carolina where her family has a home. Major General Michel Natali, the assistant adjutant general, Army, and the presiding officer at Smith's retirement ceremony, praised her as an outstanding leader.

Her role as director of joint staff made Smith directly responsible for managing the New York National Guard's responses to the Covid 19 pandemic, an influx of migrants to New York City, and then the corrections officers strike in 2025, Natali said.

At the same time, she was also responsible for managing the New York National Guard's training partnerships with the militaries of South Africa, Brazil and Sweden, he added.

"That was a tremendous amount of trust and responsibility for one of the most dedicated and hard-working officers that I've ever had the privilege of working with" he said.

In her remarks, Smith thanked the people she'd served beside over the years, as well as her family-her husband Peter, their seven children, and their nine grandchildren-for supporting her during her career.

She recalled that as a young Soldier she stood in a formation, watching a warrant officer retire after 40 years and thinking, who would be dumb enough to stay in the Army that long.

"Now I guess that's me," she said to applause.

Serving as an enlisted Soldier made her a better officer, Smith said.

She concluded by telling the members of the National Guard in the audience to " continue to be a beacon of hope and strength that you've always been."

"Serve with honor, always lead with integrity, and always, always take care of each other," she said.

As director of joint staff Smith was responsible for coordinating operations and activities involving both the New York Army and Air National Guard, as well as the New York Naval Militia and the New York Guard, the state's volunteer defense force.

During the ceremony she was presented with the New York State Conspicuous Service Medal and the Defense Superior Service Medal.

After joining the Army Smith was assigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where she served in the 368 Air Defense Artillery Battalion.

In 1988, she enlisted in the North Carolina Army National Guard; and in 1989, she transferred to the New York Army National Guard. In 1995, Smith was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Quartermaster Corps after graduating from Officer Candidate School.



Army Brig. Gen. Isabel Rivera Smith, the director of joint staff for the New York National Guard is awarded the Defense Superior Service Medal by Major General Michel Natali, the assistant adjutant general, Army, during her retirement ceremony on April 24, 2026 at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, New York. Smith, who enlisted in the Army as a truck driver in 1985, has over 40 years of military service. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.

Smith's assignments also included serving as commander of the 369th Special Troops Battalion and as Deputy Team Chief - at the Iraq Police National Headquarters in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn.

Smith also served in several key staff assignments, including deputy director of logistics for the New York National Guard, executive officer for the Office of the Adjutant General, and Chief of Staff for the 53rd Troop Command.

Smith's military education includes the Basic NCO Course, Command and General Staff College, the U.S. Army War College, the Joint Task Force Commander Training Course, the National Security Management Course at the University of Syracuse, and the Harvard Kennedy School Senior Executives in National and International Security Course.

Her awards include the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the Humanitarian Service Medal. Smith is also the recipient of the 2017 Latina Style Military Service Award.

Smith was born and raised in Lorain, Ohio.

She holds a bachelor's degree in human services from Mount St. Mary's College, ans a master's degree in education in Counseling and Development from Long Island University. gt

New York Army National Guard Aviators Receive French Medal for 2023 Action in Iraq

Story and photos by Sgt. Jean Sanon, 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade

ROCHESTER, New York — Six New York Army National Guard Soldiers who helped rescue 34 French special forces during an August 2023 firefight in Iraq, received the French equivalent of the Bronze Star, during a Feb. 22, 2026, ceremony at Army Aviation Support Facility 2 in Rochester, New York.

The Soldiers, assigned to Bravo Company of the 3rd Battalion, 126th General Support Aviation Battalion, were presented with the French National Defense Gold Medal with Bronze Star.

The aviation Soldiers were honored for providing rapid aerial support to French special operations forces who pinned down under enemy fire near Hawija, Iraq, on the night of Aug. 28 and 29, 2023. The French unit was conducting a mission against ISIS terrorists.

Major General Michel Natali, the New York National Guard's assistant adjutant general, Army, who presented the French medals, praised the Soldiers for their quick response in loading up and moving a French quick reaction force of 30 troops into the fight.

"The French government did not have to recognize our Soldiers, but they went that extra mile to identify our Soldiers who were working that evening to keep their Soldiers safe. We're very appreciative of what the French government has done in recognizing our troops," Natali said.

The medals were authorized by French General Thierry Burkhard, then France's Chief of National Defense Staff, in March of 2024.

At the time of the mission, the New York aviation crews were on standby at Erbil Air Base as part of Operation Inherent Resolve.

When 35 French Special Forces troops took casualties and requested reinforcement and extraction, two CH-47F Chinook helicopters crewed by the Rochester-based Bravo Company launched in support.

Within 30 minutes, the aircrews loaded 30 French commandos to relieve them, flew 70 miles to the objective, then stayed nearby, ready to support.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Christopher Scott,who served as air mission commander during the operation, said uncertainty upon arrival created challenges.

"The biggest challenge was not knowing the situation on the ground or what support we had until we got on station," Scott said.

Scott said that the crew's preparation and cohesion were critical to executing the mission successfully.

"I'm most proud of the way the crew came together," he said. "They had the aircraft ready to go.While I was receiving the mission, the crew was already preparing the aircraft," Scott said.

Sgt. Jedediah Estrada, who served as a door gunner during the mission, said the recognition carries lasting personal meaning.

"Afterward, I read the French press release about the death of Sgt. Nicolas Mazier, [the] paratrooper with the French commandos who was killed in combat," Estrada said. "I've remembered him ever since."

"Being honored by the French government is a way for me to continue honoring his legacy — not just what our unit was able to do, but what we accomplished together with our partner force," Estrada said.

"It really brings together why we were there and what we were working to defeat," he added.

Also recognized during the ceremony were:

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Aaron Taylor of Blasdell, New York, who is now retired but has served in the New York National Guard since 2009.



Five of six New York Army National Guard Soldiers who received French medal in recognition of the aid they offered to French special operations forces in August 2023, stand in formation during an award ceremony in Rochester, New York, Feb. 22, 2026. The Soldiers were awarded the French National Defense Gold Medal with Bronze Star by Maj. Gen. Michel Natali, the assistant adjutant general for Army. Pictured are, from left, Staff Sgt. Jedediah Estrada, Staff Sgt. Samuel Sacco, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jared Twigg, Retired Chief Warrant Officer 3 Aaron Taylor, and Chief Warrant Officer 4 Christopher Scott. Not pictured is Sgt. Zachary Albright who was attending a school.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jared Twigg of Rochester, who joined the New York Army National Guard in 2007.

Staff Sgt. Samuel Sacco of Lockport, New York, who enlisted in the Army Guard in 2004, served until 2012, and then reenlisted in 2019.

Sgt. Zachary Albright of Elba, New York who enlisted in the New York Army Guard in 2022. Albright is attending a military school and could not be present for the ceremony.

The French National Defense Medal, known as the Médaille de la Défense nationale, was established April 21, 1982, to recognize honorable and meritorious service in support of France's national defense.

The medal is awarded in three grades, bronze, silver and gold, reflecting increasing levels of distinguished service. The gold grade recognizes particularly distinguished contributions to national defense. gt

Painting of Benedict Arnold as a Hero of the Battle of Saratoga to be Conserved for Display in NY State Military Museum

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times Staff



The painting "Benedict Arnold, Triumphant at Saratoga," painted by George Gray in 1937 is rolled out on tables at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. on Friday, January 16, 2026. The painting, which once hung in the Hendrick Hudson Hotel in Troy, N.Y. is going to be conserved and displayed at the military museum in time for the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Saratoga in 2027. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. — A massive painting memorializing Benedict Arnold's heroism during the 1777 Battle of Saratoga was unrolled for the first time since 2013 at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs on Friday, January 16, 2026.

The 25-foot-long by seven-foot-high painting, "Benedict Arnold triumphant at Saratoga," was opened across eight tables so that a painting conservation expert could examine it.

The painting has been in storage since it was originally donated.

The goal, according to museum director Courtney Burns, is to have the painting restored and hung in the museum in time for the 250th anniversary of the Battles of Saratoga in 2027.

Arnold is remembered as an infamous traitor for attempting to betray the American forts at West Point to the British.

But prior to that, he lead a key charge that forced the British to retreat during the fighting at Saratoga.

The painting by George Gray depicts Arnold leading American Soldiers in storming the fortification held by Hessian troops called the Breymann Redoubt.

The narration in the painting, explaining the significance of the scene, is by Kenneth Roberts, a historical novelist from the 1920s to 1940s who wrote two books featuring Arnold as a heroic figure.

John Lippert, a partner in the firm of Foreground Conservation & Decorative Arts, a Livingston, New York, company that specializes in restoring artwork, looked the painting over and took photographs.

Lippert said his company will clean the painting and do touchup work to bring out the original colors. Since it was painted in 1937 the varnish on the painting has turned dark, he explained, so his team will remove that.

The conservators will also need to repair a corner of the painting where an inset, depicting Arnold at the 1776 naval fight at Lake Champlain's Valcour Island, was cut out of the painting, Lippert said.

His team will also put the painting onto a wooden frame, so it is ready to be hung in the museum, Lippert said.

The work will likely take about six months, he added.

Burns said the cost of the project could be as high as $30,000.

The money, he said, is being provided through the Friends of the New York State Military Museum, a private not-for-profit.

The painting was donated to the New York State Military Museum in 2013 by the H. Lee White Marine Museum in Oswego, New York.

It was one of 233 Gray completed for the American Hotel Corporation in the 1930s to commemorate local history in their hotels according to a 2025 article in the Lehigh Valley News.

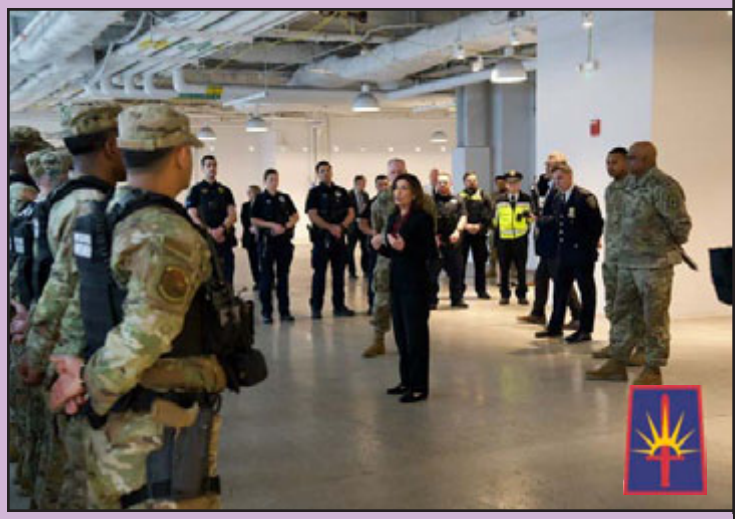
In this case, the painting was in the Hendrick Hudson Hotel in Troy which closed in 1966.

A companion piece by Gray, which also hung in the Hendrick Hudson Hotel, commemorating the 27th Division of the New York National Guard in World War I, currently hangs in the military museum. **gt**

Governor Hochul Visits Joint Task Force Empire Shield



NEW YORK — New York Governor Kathy Hochul speaks with New York National Guard Col. Jeffery Roth, the commander of Joint Task Force Empire Shield at the Moynihan Train Hall on Thursday, March 12, 2026. The governor visited task force members, as well as members of the New York State Police and New York Police Department to highlight security efforts in New York City during the conflict with Iran. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Leon Mabre, Joint task Force Empire Shield.



NEW YORK — New York Governor Kathy Hochul speaks to members of Joint Task Force Empire Shield at the Moynihan Train Hall on Thursday, March 12, 2026. The governor visit task force members, as well as members of the New York State Police and New York Police Department to highlight security efforts in New York City during the conflict with Iran. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Leon Mabre, Joint task Force Empire Shield.



New York Army National Guard Lt. Col. Andrew Prior relinquished command of Joint Task Force Empire Shield (JTF-ES) to Col. Jeffrey Roth during a March 13 ceremony at the Fort Hamilton Fitness Center, followed immediately by Command Sgt. Maj. Sean Goodridge transferring responsibility to Command Sgt. Maj. Karanlall Brijbukhan. JTF-ES, a tenant unit at Fort Hamilton under the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs, is a more than 700-member force conducting homeland security operations across the New York City metropolitan area. Photo by Mark Getman, Fort Hamilton Garrison Public Affairs.

DOCCS Officers Receive Conspicuous Service Medal

Story by Eric Durr , Guard Times Staff

LATHAM, N.Y.— The New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs has honored two Department of Correctional and Community Services for the work they did helping the New York National Guard ramp up for the 2025 correction officers' strike.

DOCCS Colonel Nathanial Gilles and Deputy Superintendent for Security Nicholas Korines were awarded the New York State Conspicuous Service Medal by Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, during a Tuesday, January 20, ceremony at Division of Military and Naval Affairs headquarters in Latham.

The medal recognizes individuals who distinguish themselves by exceptionally meritorious service in a capacity of great responsibility while supporting New York's military forces.

The two were recognized for the role they played in acting as liaison officers from DOCCS to DMNA during the strike, and especially in the early days of the strike.

On February 18, when Gov. Kathy Hochul ordered the New York National Guard to send Soldiers and Airmen into the prison system to replace striking guards, nobody knew what to expect, Shields said. The last time the New York National Guard was involved in a prison strike was for 16 days in 1979, Shields said.

"As you can imagine, the level of unknowns about working in prisons and the amount of anxiety was off the charts for our leaders and service members," Shields recalled.

Gilles and Korines were there to answer the questions New York Guard leaders and operational planners had about the mission, Shields said.

"Without Nick and Nate our planners would have been lost, and out responsiveness would have been greatly degraded," Shields said.

Gilles and Korines thanked Shields for the award, and Korines thanked the New York National Guard for rising to the challenge.

"I heard, during that time, that we were building a plane in flight, and that's exactly what it felt like," Korines said. DOCCS Executive Deputy Commissioner Jaifa Collado, who represented Commissioner Daniel F. Martuscello III, thanked Shields for recognizing the two DOCCS leaders.

She also thanked the New York National Guard for the support to DOCCS during the strike and since then. Just under 7,400 Guard Soldiers and Airmen were on duty in the porisons at one point before the involuntary mobilization ended on April 1, 2025, Shields said.

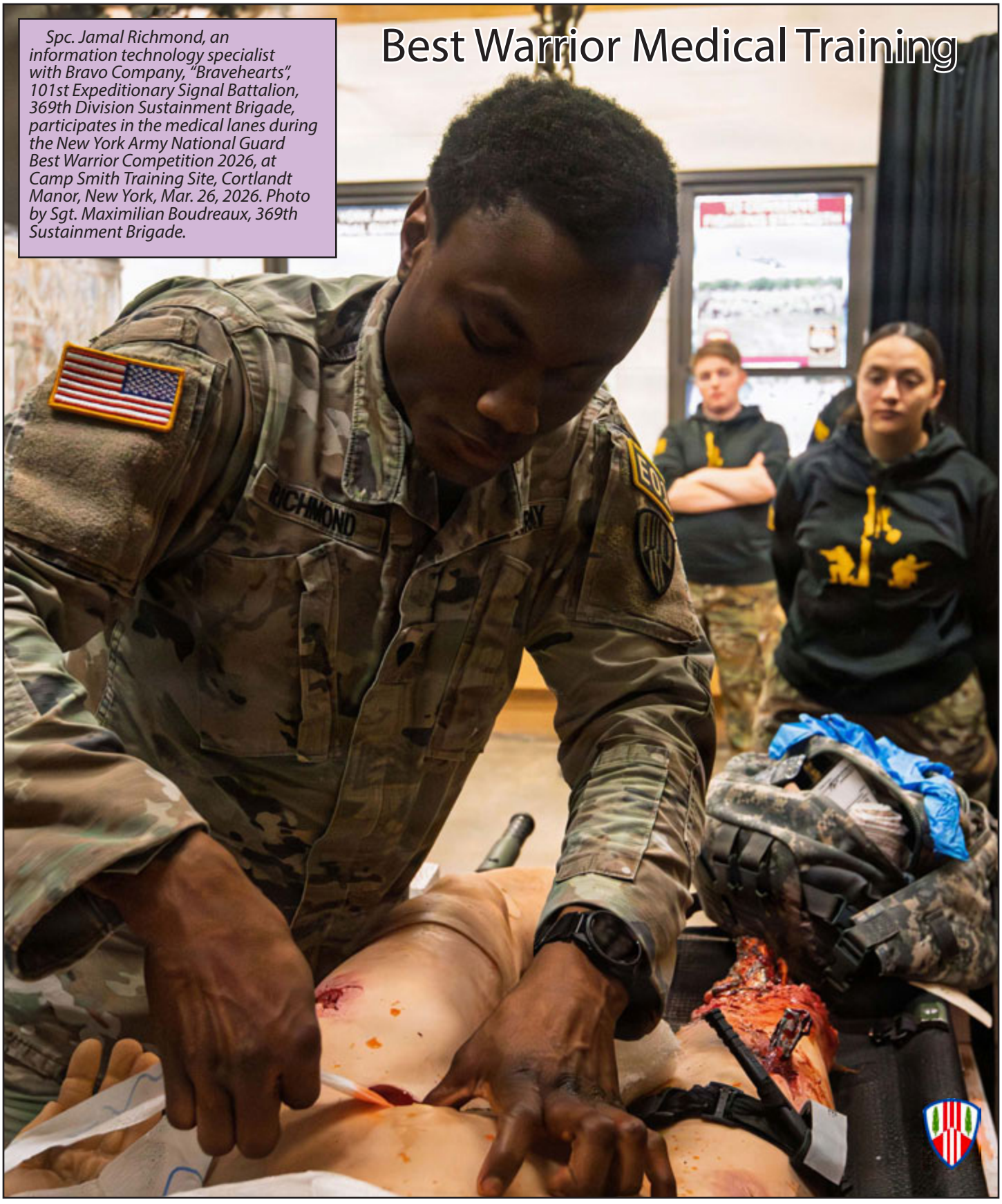
Since then, about 3,000 personnel have continued to work in the prisons as DOCCS seeks to recruit more correction officers.

Between February 18, 2025, and the end of the year, over 9,200 members of the New York Army and Air National Guard, New York Naval Militia, and New York Guard state defense force have served on the DOCCS support mission. gt



Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, presents the New York State Conspicuous Service medal to Department of Correctional and Community Supervision Col. Nathanial Gilles during a January 20, 2025, ceremony at Division of Military and Naval Affairs headquarters in Latham, New York. Gilles, along with DOCCS Col. Nicholas Korines, played a key role as liaison to the New York National Guard as Guard forces stood up to take on duties at 41 New York Correctional Facilities on February 18, 2025. Shields praised both men for the work they did assisting New York National Guard planners and leaders in carrying out this mission that involved more the 7,400 personnel at it's peak. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.

Best Warrior Medical Training



Spc. Jamal Richmond, an information technology specialist with Bravo Company, "Bravehearts", 101st Expeditionary Signal Battalion, 369th Division Sustainment Brigade, participates in the medical lanes during the New York Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition 2026, at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, New York, Mar. 26, 2026. Photo by Sgt. Maximilian Boudreaux, 369th Sustainment Brigade.



FORT HAMILTON, N.Y.— Members of the New York National Guard and Joint Task Force Empire Shield's Charlie Company, pose as winners of the Commander's Cup in Fort Hamilton, New York. Joint Task Force Empire Shield hosted a dining out ceremony on January 15, 2026. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Leon Mabra, Joint Task Force Empire Shield.

Joint Task Force Empire Shield Hosted Dining Out



FORT HAMILTON, N.Y.— New York Army National Guard Lt. Col. Andrew Prior, commander of Joint Task Force Empire Shield, commences a toast with distinguished guests in Fort Hamilton, New York. Joint Task Force Empire Shield hosted a dining out ceremony on January 15, 2026. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Leon Mabra, Joint Task Force Empire Shield.

Iron Battalion Snipers Dominate NYNG 47th Annual TAG Match

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Rothwyn and Sgt. Rosa Ibarra, 138th Public Affairs Detachment



U.S. Soldiers check each other's scores during the Adjutant General's 47th annual Combat Marksmanship Competition at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., April 10, 2026. Photo by Sgt. Richelle Cruickshank, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

CAMP SMITH TRAINING SITE, N.Y. — Four infantrymen with the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment swept every team category during the 47th Annual New York National Guard Adjutant General's Combat Marksmanship Competition.

The TAG Match, as it is commonly known, was held at Camp Smith Training Site, near Peekskill, April 9-12, 2026. The team, known as the "Swifty Shooters," outperformed dozens of competitors to claim the state's top honors in rifle and pistol precision.

The Swifty Shooters—Sgt. 1st Class Eric Mance, Sgt. Joseph Parrotta, and brothers Sgts. Sean and Parker Hornung—secured the Overall Team Competition title with a combined 1,114 points. The team also took first place in the Team Combat Rifle Match with 689 points and the Combat Pistol Match with 425 points.

Individual excellence was showcased by Sgt. Daniel P. Spring with the 105th Military Police Company, who earned first place for the Overall Individual Combat Award. Mance distinguished himself further by taking first place in the Open Individual Combat Rifle Match.

Other top performers included Sgt. 1st Class Adam J. Scanlon, who won the Open Combat Pistol Match, and Staff Sgt. Adam Alishauskas, who claimed the novice individual pistol title. Sgt. Walterangelo Tabelisma took first place in the novice rifle category, Sgt. Samuel C. Mabie received the "Bullseye" Award, and Master Sgt. Wes Peek won the Excellence-in-Combat Warrior Challenge.

Brig. Gen. Jason Lefton, commander of the 53rd Troop Command, presided over the awards ceremony on behalf of Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York.

Lefton said that the annual "TAG Match" is a critical training tool designed to increase lethality and foster professional excellence across the New York National Guard.

"You can put together a team of good shooters and be competitive, or you can put together a team of good buddies and have a lot of fun," Mance said. "When you can do both, you really have something awesome".

The competition carries deep historical significance, with awards named after New York military icons such as Sgt. Henry Johnson, the legendary Harlem Hellfighter, and Lt. Col. William "Wild Bill" Donovan, the Father of American Intelligence. These honors connecting modern Soldiers to a legacy of heroism dating back to the World Wars according to Lefton and Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Giamberdino, the senior enlisted advisor of the 53rd.

"We hold tryouts at least once each year for the recon and sniper sections, searching out the individuals that want to put in the work to get better and have the personality to work well with us," Mance said while he explained that putting together a great team should be the dream of every noncommissioned officer.

The winning team's success was built on shared operational experience, including a 2022 deployment to Kenya. Three members are qualified snipers, with Sgt. Sean Hornung previously holding Top Shot honors from the U.S. Army Sniper Course.

A support staff award was also given to Staff Sgt. Vincent Trexler with the 152nd Engineer Support Company.

According to Giamberdino, the skills honed at Camp Smith are intended to be brought back to home units to enhance overall readiness for state and federal missions.

Leaders in attendance, from Maj. Gen. Michael Natali, the assistant adjutant general of New York (Army) to Mance, who earned many first place honors, all echoed the understanding that the event served as a platform for Soldiers to share technical skills that strengthen the culture of marksmanship across the New York National Guard, demonstrating readiness and war-fighting capability. gt



U.S. Soldiers load their M17 pistols during the Adjutant General's 47th annual Combat Marksmanship Competition at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., April 10, 2026. Photo by Spc. Stuart Martin 138th Public Affairs Detachment.



U.S. Soldiers load their M17 pistols during the Adjutant General's 47th annual Combat Marksmanship Competition at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., April 10, 2026. Photo by Spc. Stuart Martin 138th Public Affairs Detachment.



Spc. Sean M. Hornung, an infantryman with Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, fires a M17 pistol during the Adjutant General's 47th annual Combat Marksmanship Competition at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., April 9, 2026. Photo by Sgt. Rosa Ibarra, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.



U.S. Army National Guard Soldier looks down range at targets during the Adjutant General's 47th annual Combat Marksmanship Competition at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., April 10, 2026. Photo by Sgt. Alexandra Pope 369th Sustainment Brigade.

175 Years at the Front: The Fighting 69th Leads World's Largest St. Patrick's Day Parade Once More

Story by Master Sgt. Warren Wright, 42nd Infantry Division

NEW YORK – For 175 years, Soldiers of the New York Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, known as the "Fighting 69th," have led the world's largest and oldest St. Patrick's Day Parade, celebrating Irish heritage.

On March 17, 2026, six hundred Soldiers from the battalion continued the tradition as they marched down Manhattan's 5th Avenue.

The battalion's morning began early as the Soldiers visited St. Patrick's Cathedral, joining city and state leadership for the renowned St. Patrick's Day Mass.

This year, the event was featured on the Fox and Friends national morning news show prior to the Mass. Host Steven Doocy interviewed Lt. Col. Andrew Prior, the battalion commander, and Sgt. Conner Battiste, and Spec. Daniel Pan, the battalion's two best Soldiers.

Following Mass, the Soldiers marched to 44th Street, where they assembled with the 42nd Infantry Division band and others at the parade's starting point. Joined by senior military leaders from the NYNG and the 42nd Inf. Div. band, the Fighting 69th then led 150,000 other parade participants up 5th Avenue, passing more than 2 million spectators along the nearly 2-mile route.

This year, officers from the Swedish military joined the New York National Guard leadership in the march. The New York National Guard has a partnership with the Swedish Military has part of the National Guard State Partnership Program.

Reflecting on the significance of the day, Prior shared memories of growing up in the city and watching the parade as a child.

"I remember one year was different because we had tickets to watch from the steps of St. Patrick's," he said. "It was my first memory of this unit. I remember sitting on my father's shoulders, staring at the Soldiers marching by, and my dad looked up and said, 'That's the Fighting 69th.'"

Because of the regiment's roots in Irish American history, St. Patrick's Day also serves as the battalion's "Unit Day," during which Soldiers are recognized for their accomplishments.

However, this year's recognition ceremony saw a change of venue as the battalion's Lexington Avenue Armory home undergoes extensive modernization. In a temporary shift of traditions, the Fighting 69th gathered instead at the historic Park Avenue Armory to honor the day's achievements.

"Now, this isn't Lexington Avenue; it's not the 69th Armory, but it is still an honor to be gathered here at the Park Avenue Armory," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Solmo, the New York Army National Guard state command chief warrant officer, and guest speaker.

"We would all rather be down the block in our own historic armory, but if we're going to be temporarily displaced, we could do worse than landing here," he added.

This year's celebration focused on the citizen-Soldier legacy, as leaders recognized the accomplishments of the battalion's Soldiers with awards, promotions, and scholarships.

The 69th began leading the parade in 1851 because of threats of anti-Catholic and anti-Irish attacks on the procession by nativist groups.

In 2021, when the parade was canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a group of 50 Soldiers from the 69th staged an informal parade up the route to keep the tradition alive.

The 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, supposedly earned the nickname "Fighting 69th" from Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. Maj. Gen. Raymond Shields, the New York Adjutant General, commended the battalion on hosting Swedish officers in this year's parade. "Sweden is a fantastic partner, and we are thrilled they got to see something very few people experience - marching in the parade today." gt



The Color Guard for 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 42nd Infantry Division presents the colors before a capacity congregation at Manhattan's St. Patrick's Cathedral, March 17, 2026. The morning Mass served as a prelude to the 265th New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade, which the "Fighting 69th" has led every year since 1851. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Rothwyn, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.



U.S. Army Lt. Col. Andrew Prior, commander of 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 42nd Infantry Division, New York National Guard, leads his battalion during the 265th New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade, March 17, 2026. Known as the "Fighting 69th," the battalion has spearheaded the world's largest St. Patrick's Day parade since 1851, with this year marking the storied unit's 175th time leading the procession. Photo by Master Sgt. Warren Wright, 42nd Infantry Division.





Left: U.S. Soldiers with the 1501st Quartermaster Company (Field Feeding), 369th Division Special Troops Battalion, 369th Sustainment Brigade, New York Army National Guard, prepare for Phase Two of the Phillip A. Connelly Food Service Competition, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., March 13, 2026. The 1501st is evaluated on-site during Phase Two, 14-15 March, 2026.

Right: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Fredery Alvarez, an advanced culinary noncommissioned officer assigned to the 1501st Quartermaster Company (Field Feeding), New York Army National Guard, prepares for Phase Two of the Phillip A. Connelly Food Service Competition, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., March 13, 2026.

1501st Field Feeding Team Prepare for the Philip A. Connelly Food Service Competition

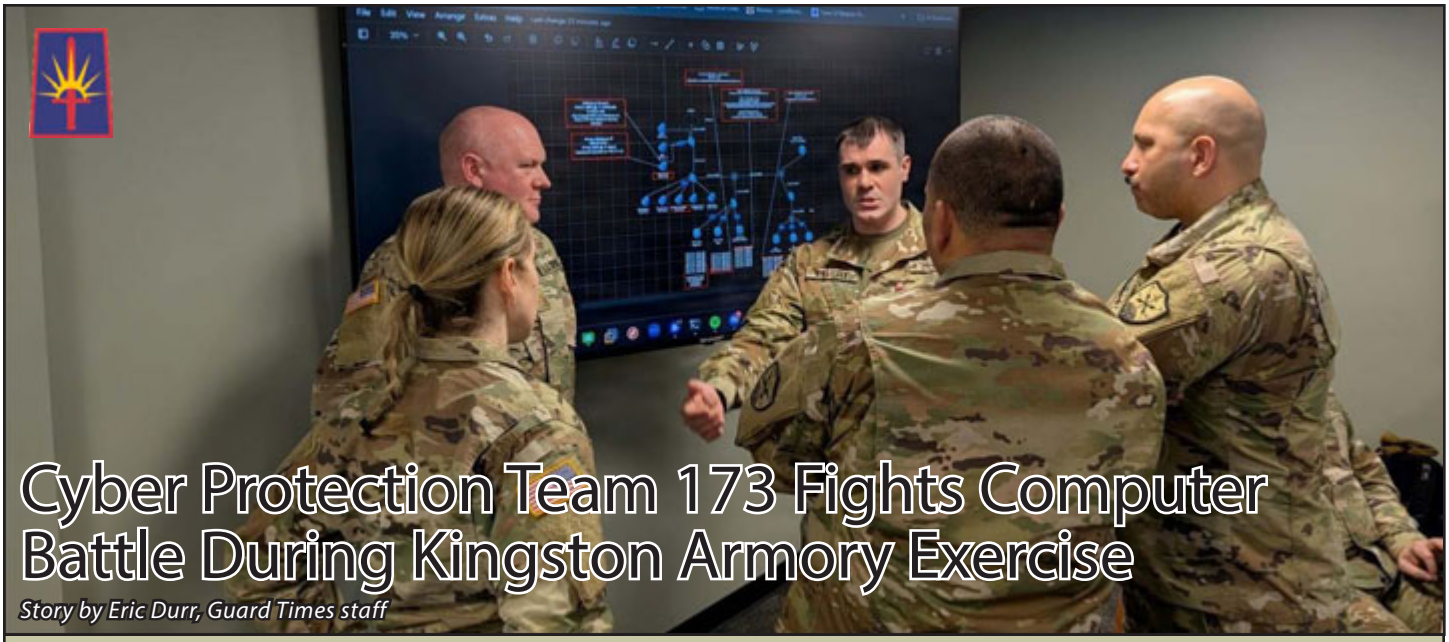
Photos by Sgt 1st Class Sebastian Rothwyn, 138th Public Affairs Detachment





Left: U.S. Army Spc. Gavin Kenyon with the 1501st Quartermaster Company (Field Feeding), New York Army National Guard, prepares a field sanitation tent for use during Phase Two of the Phillip A. Connelly Food Service Competition, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., March 14-15, 2026.

Right: U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Hopkins assigned to the 1501st Quartermaster Company (Field Feeding), New York Army National Guard, delivers a convoy briefing while preparing for Phase Two of the Phillip A. Connelly Food Service Competition, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., March 13, 2026.



Cyber Protection Team 173 Fights Computer Battle During Kingston Armory Exercise

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff

New York Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 173 Cyber Protection Team plan their next move during an exercise which took place at the Kingston Armory in Kingston, New York from February 23 to 26, 2026. The exercise pitted the National Guard cyber security experts against an enemy which had planted ransom ware into a utility companies computer network. The 173 CPT Soldiers had to determine how the attacker got access to the system, close the holes in security and negate the malware. Courtesy Photo.

KINGSTON, N.Y. — New York Army National Guard Major Corbin Lounsbury's Soldiers fight their battles with laptops.

"Our computer is our weapons system," explained Lounsbury, the commander of the New York and New Jersey National Guard's Cyber Protection Team 173, or CPT 173 for short.

From February 23 to 26, the CPT Soldiers fought an online campaign against a simulated "threat actor" who executed a blended cyber operation against an electrical utility.

The Soldiers were physically located at the Kingston Armory, but their battle took place inside the U.S. Cyber Command's Persistent Cyber Training Environment. This is a national-level computer simulation that replicates the challenges a CPT Soldier faces.

"The system can be programmed to provide cyber-Soldiers with varying threat levels, adversaries, and scenarios", Lounsbury explained.

The scenario was built around a classic attack against a computer network, said Major William Mackey, the officer in charge of the New York National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters' Defense Cyber Operations Element.

In the exercise scenario, the attackers conducted "reconnaissance" by identifying security weaknesses in the computer network, stole user logins and passwords in an operation known as "credential harvesting" Mackey said.

That information was then used to gain access to the computer and shut down key systems, he added. The mission for CPT 173 was to determine how the "bad actor" got into the system, close those holes in the defenses, find the malware – in the case "ransomware"—and end the threat, Mackey said.

The members of Lounsbury's Cyber Protection Team were also joined by the Division of Military and Naval Affairs Critical Infrastructure Response Team and the Defensive Cyber Operation Element in battling the simulated threat.

Thirty-four Soldiers took part in the exercise.

Ransomware is software that is placed on a system to shut it down. The hackers offer to remove the software once money—the ransom—is paid.

According to the FBI, in 2024, there were 3,156 ransomware attempts against American businesses and individuals, which cost over $12 billion.

Healthcare organizations have been especially susceptible to these attacks, according to the FBI's Internet Crime Report for 2024, but utilities—charged with providing electricity, water, and natural gas to hundreds of thousands of households - are also a concern.

A likely mission for a National Guard CPT is to help local governments and critical infrastructure companies counter these threats, Lounsbury said.

Fortunately, most of the CPT 173 members work in the computer security field in their civilian jobs, he said. As Guardsmen have always done, they use their civilian skills to further the mission.

Lounsbury, for example, has worked for General Dynamics in network protection since 2018.

TV and movies portray cyber experts defending a computer system by feel and instinct. But in real life, everything is much more methodical, Lounsbury said.

Just as any other unit would do when they are given a mission, the CPT 173 leaders spent two days using the Military Decision-Making Process and Joint Planning Process to plan their response to the threat, Lounsbury ."Actions are very planned and very deliberate, and nothing is done without approval," he said. "There are a lot of reporting and tracking processes we need to follow," he added.

The 173 Soldiers were very successful in countering the cyberattack during the exercise, Mackey said.

This was the first time a National Guard cyber unit conducted this type of simulation exercise and they still wrapped up their mission a half-day earlier than expected, Mackey said.

NY State and City Leaders honor 42nd Infantry Division's Major Sorffly Davius During Funeral

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff

BROOKLYN, N.Y. — New York Gov. Kathy Hochul ,New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, and New York Attorney General Letitia James joined together to honor New York Army National Guard Major Sorffly Davius during his funeral on Friday, March 27, in Brooklyn.

The 46-year-old Davius, a signals and communication officer assigned to the headquarters of the 42nd Infantry Division, died of sudden illness while on duty in Camp Buehring, Kuwait, on March 6, 2025.

The 42nd Infantry Division headquarters is deployed to Kuwait as the headquarters element for Task Force Spartan, the Army force in the region.

Davius' death occurred while Operation Epic Fury, the U.S. operation against Iran, was underway.

Davius, a Haitian immigrant, was a member of the New York Police Department~~,~~ who had also served on Joint Task Force Empire Shield, the New York National Guard security force in New York City.

Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, and other New York National Guard leaders were also present.

During the ceremony at the Christian Cultural Center, Shields presented Davius' wife Angeline, with a posthumous Bronze Star, recognizing the major's service in Kuwait.

Davius joined the New York Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 258th Field Artillery in 2013. Previously, he had served in the New York Air National Guard's 106th Rescue Wing after enlisting in 2004.

In civilian life, Davius served as a New York City Fire Department emergency medical technician before becoming a police officer.

In her remarks, Hochul highlighted Davius's life of service.

"Who in life takes on so many different challenges and every single one of them, he puts his life out there for others? He did that," Hochul said. "I am eternally grateful."

Mamdani also praised Davius for his service as a fireman, police officer, and Soldier. He was an example to all New Yorkers, the mayor added.

In her remarks, James told Davius' six children that she, too, had lost her father at an early age, but that he would always be with them.

"When you touch your heart, it's that beat that you will hear... from your father," James said.

New York Army National Guard Capt. Christopher Schwenk, who served as Davius' deputy in Kuwait and accompanied his remains back to the United States, read a letter from Major General Jack James, the commander of the 42nd Infantry Division.

Davius, according to Major General James, was "an outstanding officer who motivated his peers and subordinates to excel" and "a man who inspired us to be better people."



Official photo of Maj. Sorffly Davius. Courtesy photo.

New York City Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said that as a police officer, Davius was a steady presence at the 79th Precinct.

"No matter how hard the call, Sorffly stayed calm, flashing that familiar Cheshire Cat grin," he said.

Davius was also presented with the Honorable Order of Saint Barbara, a recognition of excellence for artillerymen, by Col. Jeffery Roth, the commander of the 42nd Infantry Division Artillery.

Davius awards include the Air Force Commendation Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, the National Defense Service Medal, the Air Force Expeditionary Service Ribbon, the Global War on Terror Service Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Air Force Overseas Service Ribbon, the Army Achievement Medal and the Humane Service to New York State Medal.

Following the funeral, a New York Army National Guard Honor Guard conducted graveside funeral honors at Pinelawn Memorial Park and Arboretum in Farmingdale, New York.



New York Army National Guard Major Sorffly Davius, a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion of the 42nd Infantry Division, poses for a photograph with his family following his promotion to major on May 13, 2024. Sorffly died in a non-combat incident that is under investigation while serving with the 42nd Infantry Division at Camp Buehring, Kuwait on March 6, 2026.



Members of the New York National Guard's Joint Task Force Empire Shield salute and New York Police Department members salute as police officers carry the remains of New York Army National Guard Major Sorffly Davius into the Guarino Funeral Home in Brooklyn, N.Y. on March 24, 2026. Davius, a member of the New York Police Department who also served in the New York National Guard's New York City security force, died in a non-combat incident while serving with the 42nd Infantry Division in Kuwait on March 6, 2026. His remains were transferred from Dover Air Force Base to Brooklyn for March 27, 2026 funeral services. Photo by Mark Getman, Fort Hamilton Public Affairs.



New York Attorney General Lettitia James speaks during funeral services for New York Army National Guard Major Sorffly Davius on March 27, 2026, at the Christian Cultural Center in Brooklyn. Davius, a member of the 42nd Infantry Division headquarters died while on duty in Camp Buehring, Kuwait as the result of a medical emergency. Davius had deployed to the region with the 42nd Infantry Division in support of Operation Spartan Shield. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Rothwy, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

Two 105th MP Company Soldiers are 2026 New York Army Guard Best Warriors

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff

CAMP SMITH TRAINING SITE, N.Y. — Two Soldiers from Buffalo's 105th Military Police Company were the winners in the New York Army National Guard's 2026 Best Warrior competition.

Spc. Trevor Lock took first place in the junior enlisted Soldier category, while Staff Sgt. Derek Tucker won the non-commissioned officer contest.

Nine Soldiers took part in the March 23-26 event, which was run by the 106th Regional Training Institute. The competition evaluated the Soldiers in physically and mentally demanding events designed to replicate real-world warfighting conditions, according to New York Army National Guard Command Sgt. Major Leylan Jones.

"I learned a lot from this best warrior competition", Tucker said. "It opened me up to opportunities to learn and train on things that I haven't before."

Lock said events like the Best Warrior help build leaders.

"The next generation of leaders can improve from this, not just compete in it," Lock said.

"You can build off this and get a lot of experience with different weapons and courses and gain different knowledge," he added.

Second-place in the NCO category went to Staff Sgt. Justin Jablanski, a combat engineer with the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

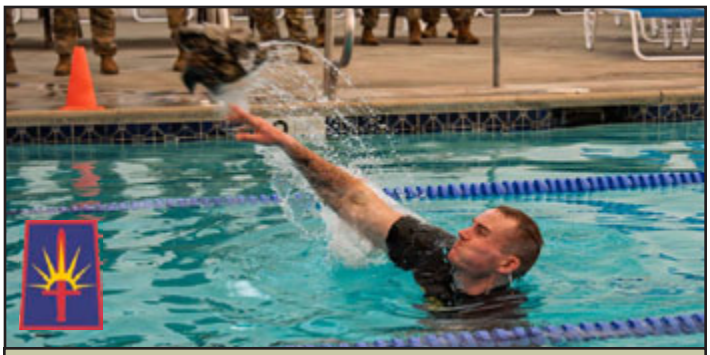
Spc. Jerry Remy, an infantryman with the 108th Infantry Battalion, finished second in the junior enlisted category.

Lock and Tucker will now compete in the northeast regional competition at Camp Fogerty, Rhode Island, in June, for the chance to go to the national Army Guard Best Warrior event.

Throughout the event, Soldiers navigated situational training exercise lanes, completed land navigation, and were tested on their physical fitness through the Expert Physical Fitness Assessment and the Army Fitness Test.

They also had to complete a written exam, go before a board of senior NCOs in their Class A uniforms, complete a medical skills test, and go through a mystery event, in this case, the air assault course obstacle course.

The final challenge was a 12-mile ruck march. The competitors were dropped off by bus at Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park in



U.S. Army Sgt. Derek Tucker, assigned to 153rd Troop Command, 105th Military Police, competes in the swimming portion of the German Armed Forces Badge for Military Proficiency during the New York Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition, in New Windsor, N.Y., Mar. 24, 2026. Photo by Sgt. Gianna Elle Sulger, 22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment.

> "I learned a lot from this best warrior competition, It opened me up to opportunities to learn and train on things that I haven't before."
>
> *—Staff Sgt. Derek Tucker, 105th Military Police Company*



U.S. Army Sgt. Derek Tucker and Spc.Trevor Lock, military police officers with the 105th Military Police Company, 102nd Military Police Battalion, receive gifts for first place at the New York Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition 2026 during an awards ceremony at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., Mar. 26, 2026. The event marks the first time the 106th Regional Training Institute has hosted the State Best Warrior Competition. Photo by Sgt. Richelle Cruickshank, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

Yorktown Heights and conducted their timed march there.

The nine Soldiers also had the opportunity to earn the German Armed Forces Badge for Military Proficiency. Earning the badge involves a fitness test, a 100-meter swim in uniform, and demonstrating first aid and pistol proficiency.

Senior Enlisted Advisor John T. Raines III, the principle advisor to the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, praised all the competitors during the contest award dinner.

This competition is not just about who is the fastest, the strongest, or even the most technically proficient," Raines said. "It is about who can embody the profession of arms at its highest level."

Raines' decision to visit the New York Best Warrior demonstrated the importance of the event and the caliber of the Soldiers competing, Jones said. **gt**



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Justin Jablanski, a construction engineer supervisor and combat engineer, with Alpha Company, 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, prepares to participate in an obstacle course during the New York Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition 2026, at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, New York, Mar. 25, 2026. Photo by Sgt. Richelle Cruickshank, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Justin Jablanski, a construction engineer supervisor and combat engineer, with Alpha Company, 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, participates in a mystery event during the New York Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition 2026, at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, New York, Mar. 25, 2026. Photo by Sgt. Maximilian Boudreaux, 369th Sustainment Brigade.



U.S. Army Spc. Jerry Remy, an infantryman with Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, participates in marksmanship lanes during the New York Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition 2026, at Camp Smith Training Site, Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., Mar. 25, 2026. Photo by Sgt. Kelly Smith, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

The 106th Achieves Milestones Training in Europe

Story by Tech. Sgt. Sean Madden, 106th Rescue Wing

FRANCIS S. GABRESKI AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, WESTHAMPTON BEACH, N.Y. — New York Air National Guard members assigned to the 106th Rescue Wing and 102nd Rescue Squadron participated in a multi-national readiness exercise across Europe, January 7 to 23, 2026.

Silver Arrow is an annual NATO exercise designed to improve interoperability and increase defense preparedness. It focuses on integrating tactics, systems, and procedures for combat effectiveness in the European Command (EUCOM) by bringing together forces from various NATO nations, including the United States, Canada, Latvia, Spain, Denmark, Italy, Poland and others.

The exercise is funded by the European Deterrence Initiative and specifically allocated to U.S. Air Forces in Europe for air reserve components, said Lt. Col. Richard Bloom, a pilot assigned to the 102nd and Silver Arrow mission commander. It facilitates aircraft to go over and do missions in Europe that help better the European defense.

Bloom explained there were many roles to play during the exercise. The 106th worked with the rescue forces that are permanently assigned to Aviano, Italy and performed forward arming and refueling point (FARP) operations with the Albanian Air Force, in Albania. In Germany the 106th trained with U.S. Special Forces doing airdrops and while working with our state partners in Sweden performed multiple other FARP operations, drop-zone (DZ) and landing-zone surveys.



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), prepares to conduct a static line jump from a U.S. Air Force HC-130J Combat King II aircraft from the 102nd Rescue Squadron, 106th Rescue Wing, over Stuttgart, Germany, on January 13, 2026. This jump was conducted as part of Exercise Silver Arrow, a multinational exercise focused on enhancing interoperability and readiness between partner nations. (Courtesy Photo)

Conducting FARP operations utilizes the ability of the HC-130J Combat King II aircraft to perform inflight refueling and puts that capability on the ground in environments where fuel is otherwise not available.

"We conducted the first ever FARP for the Albanian Air Force, we represented not only the U.S. Air Force and New York, but American armed forces as a whole," said Lt. Col. Matthew Belton, a pilot assigned to the 102nd.

Further headway was made with significant improvement to 106th capabilities in Europe and in Sweden, a partner nation with the NYANG.

"Prior to arriving in Sweden there were only 19 total FARP surveys in the EUCOM, seven of which are in the United Kingdom," said Belton. "We increased the EUCOM FARP capability by 26% by adding five FARP surveys in multiple strategic locations. In addition, we added six DZs to Sweden."

During the exercise, 106th Rescue Wing aircraft and crews, with maintenance and support personnel, ensured a 100% launch rate, conducted 21 sorties, dropped 76 personnel, and passed 3,000 pounds of fuel.

"We didn't miss a sortie," said Technical Sgt. Mohammed Faroze the lead HC-130J Combat King II crew chief during Silver Arrow. "We came in on our days off to get the plane flyable when we he had to."

The exercise helped give Faroze a new perspective on the role his unit plays and the role he has, in global rescue operations and overall mission success.

"I saw the big picture in what we do at home with training, it just all tied into everything we do overseas," Faroze explained. "We're constantly training at home, getting the plane ready, doing our due diligence, and as a result, we were able to not miss one sortie on this mission."

According to Belton, other notable firsts this year at Silver Arrow were the first operational visit by the 102nd Rescue Squadron to Sweden and the first C-130 maintenance integration between the New York Air National Guard and Sweden. Also, the first visit for the 102nd Rescue Squadron to Spain, opening opportunities for further integration.

The 106th Rescue Wing, based at Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base in Westhampton Beach, New York, operates and maintains the HC-130J Combat King II search and rescue aircraft, and the HH-60W Jolly Green II rescue helicopter. The 106th Rescue Wing is home to a special warfare squadron with pararescuemen and combat rescue officers, specializing in rescue and recovery, and deploys for domestic and overseas operations. gt



First Warrant Officer at 105th Airlift Wing

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Sarah Post, 105th Airlift Wing

Warrant Officer Johnny Cruz, 213th Engineering Installation Squadron assistant director of operations, poses for a photo next to a communications tower at Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, Feb. 6, 2026. Cruz is the first warrant officer at the 105th Airlift Wing and in the New York Air National Guard since the rank's return to the force in 2024.

STEWART AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. —For the first time in over three decades, the 105th Airlift Wing and New York Air National Guard have a warrant officer among their ranks.

Warrant Officer Johnny Cruz, 213th Engineering Installation Squadron assistant director of operations, graduated from warrant officer training school Dec. 18, 2025, becoming the first to hold such a rank in New York in decades.

Warrant officers are the ranks between enlisted airmen and commissioned officers, holding unique responsibilities and technical proficiencies within the U.S. Air Force rank structure. The Air Force's first warrant officers arrived in 1947 when 1,200 were inherited from the Army Air Force during the Air Force's transition to its own branch. However, the ranks were phased out in 1959, with the last warrant officers retiring from active duty Air Force in 1980 and from the Air Force Reserves in 1992.

In April 2024, the Air Force announced the return of the warrant officer to certain cyber-related career fields. "This wasn't something that I expected in my career path," said Cruz.

He heard about the return of the warrant officer rank and thought it was great for the Air Force, but he didn't think a position for one would come to the engineering and installation career field or his squadron.

Cruz, a Bronx, New York, native and current resident of Nearfield, Connecticut, joined the 213th EIS in 2013. During his enlisted tenure, Cruz spent a few years working in radar airfield weather systems, then with radio-frequency transmission. He served in both a drill status and full time Active Guard Reserve capacity, working his way up to E-7, master sergeant.

When an AGR warrant officer position was announced at the 213th, Cruz said the stars aligned.

"I thought being a master sergeant was great and I could have done it for the rest of my career," said Cruz. "So, I didn't necessarily think 'oh yeah, I'm the guy',I applied just to be an option, just in case someone more suited for the role wasn't available."

To become a warrant officer, Cruz submitted an application, which included letters of reccomendation from wing members. including a letter of recommendation from Ciprian. Then he, along with the other applicants, went before a selection board with Lt. Col. Matthew Zayatz, 213th commander, who selected Cruz as the best fit for the new position.

Zayatz said he was impressed by Cruz from the time he took command of the 213th in 2024, and even labeled him the 213th Problem Solver in his phone's contacts.

"From radios to fiber optics, he is a master of executing turnkey solutions for any operational need," said Zayatz. "That technical expertise combined with his outstanding leadership made him the natural choice to lead the way as the first warrant officer for our unit and the New York Air National Guard."

After being selected, he went to Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, for the two-month Warrant Officer Training School.

Training consisted of basic military style training, physical training and classroom learning. Since the warrant officer program only includes cyber-related fields currently, Cruz said there was also a lot of networking between the trainees, which will help the developing warrant officers as they progress in their careers.

Now, back at the 105th and officially a warrant officer, Cruz is learning his new role and determining what it means to be a warrant officer in the Air Force.

"As of now there are only 183 in the Air Force, and we as a cohort get to shape what we think this program should be and how warrant officers get to interact with everyone," said Cruz. gt



174th Attack Wing Airmen Train in Mississippi

Above: GULFPORT, Miss. — U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Joshua Vanwinkle, left, and Tech. Sgt. Rachel Hamon, weapons specialists assigned to the 174th Attack Wing, New York Air National Guard load a GBU-38 precision-guided bomb to a MQ-9 Reaper aircraft during exercise Sentry South 26-2, Gulfport, Mississippi, Feb. 22, 2026.

Below: GULFPORT, Miss. — U.S. Air Force weapons specialists assigned to the 174th Attack Wing, New York Air National Guard load GBU-38 precision-guided bombs onto a MQ-9 Reaper aircraft during exercise Sentry South 26-2, Gulfport, Mississippi, Feb. 22, 2026. Sentry South 26-2 is a large force employment exercise focused on major combat operations and joint maritime opportunities in a contested or degraded operational environment. Sentry South 26-2 applies joint and combined warfighting doctrine against realistic and robust enemy integrated threat systems, all while under safe and controlled conditions. Photos by Staff Sgt. Dylan McCrink, 174th Attack Wing.



Air National Guard Cold Weather Operations Course in Minnesota

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff, Barbara Olney, Eastern Air Defense Sector Public Affairs, Airman 1st Class Joshua Adamy, 105th Airlift Wing

CAMP RIPLEY, Minn.—Three New York Air National Guard security forces Airmen earned the right to wear an "Arctic" tab after making it through the Air National Guard's grueling 16-Day Cold Weather Operations Course held in January in northern Minnesota.

They dealt with sub-zero temperatures, wolves tracking them as they walked the woods in arctic-like conditions, and learned what it takes to survive and fight in the bitter cold.

"You don't understand how cold it is until you're there," said Tech Sgt. Kevin Meehan, a member of the 105th Airlift Wing's Base Defense Squadron.

"It might say it's only negative five but with wind chill it's just a different kind of cold, and there's no respite from it," Meehan said.

The course, known by its initials of CWOC, was conducted at the Minnesota National Guard's Minnesota National Guard's Camp Ripley Training Center near Little Falls.

Tech Sgt. Alexander Santana, who is also a member of the 105th Base Defense Squadron and Staff Sgt. David Blovat, a member of the 224th Air Defense Group's Security Forces Squadron, also took the course. The 224th Air Defense Group is part of the Rome-based Eastern Air Defense Sector.

The CWOC curriculum employs a "crawl, walk, run" methodology. The initial "crawl" phase consists of classroom instruction on key topics such as cold-weather injury prevention, risk management, and the use of specialized equipment.

Participants then progress to the "walk" phase, which involves practical outdoor application, including land navigation on snowshoes, hauling gear behind them on "Ahkio Sleds", and constructing natural thermal shelters.

Not everybody makes it through the course.

"It was a very physically and mentally challenging course," Blovat said. "The cold hits different when its -35 degrees with wind chill and it's just you and the gear you have packed in your ruck and you still have another 3 miles until your next tent site."

One of the biggest surprises for Meehan was the challenge of staying hydrated in such extreme conditions. "Everyone in the military knows hydrate, hydrate, hydrate. One thing you don't think about is it's so cold your water freezes," he said.

The final test was a grueling five-day "run" phase—a continuous field exercise that pushed participants to their limits,

In subzero temperatures, they navigated through deep snow, and built their own shelters for overnight survival.

The ultimate test of their resolve was a cold-water immersion drill.

Santana said he had expected a pure survival course.

But the course was physically demanding instead.

Teams of 9 to 12 Airmen pulled sleds weighing 400 pounds, loaded with tents, stoves, food, fuel, water and tools, while also carrying packs weighing 40 pounds, Santana said.



Air National Guard Cold Weather Operations Course cadre brief participants as part of the Air National Guard's CWOC at Camp Ripley Training Center, Minn. January 30, 2026. Photo by Senior Airman Addie Peterson, 105th Airlift Wing.

Santana said his team started shorthanded and Airmen dropped out early, forcing the remaining five to haul multiple sleds in temperatures below negative 30 degrees on one of the coldest nights of the course.

An added surprise was seeing the massive paw prints of Timberwolves in the snow all around where his team was, Santana recalled.

"It was cool, but kind of scary," he said. "There were no weapons, just us out there." **gt**



Air National Guard Security Forces specialists ruck across a frozen lake as part of the Air National Guard's Cold Weather Operations Course (CWOC) at Camp Ripley Training Center, Minn. January 30, 2026. The two-week CWOC course combined classroom instruction, outdoor skill development, and a field training event that required students to operate and sleep outdoors, incorporate land navigation, life saving Air National Guard Security Forces specialists ruck across a frozen lake as part of the Air National Guard's Cold Weather Operations Course (CWOC) at Camp Ripley Training Center, Minn. January 30, 2026. Photo by Senior Airman Addie Peterson, 105th Airlift Wing.

106th Leadership Engages Members During Town Hall Meetings

Story by Staff Sgt. Sarah McKernan, 106th Rescue Wing



U.S. Air Force Col. Jeffrey Cannet, 106th Rescue Wing commander, and Chief Master Sgt. Edward Rittberg, 106th command chief, speak with Airmen from the 106th Maintenance Group during a town hall meeting on Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base, Westhampton Beach, N.Y., March 7, 2026. Senior leadership held town hall meetings with wing members to discuss topics from the Defense Organizational Climate Survey. Photo by Tech Sgt. Kevin Donaldson, 106th Rescue Wing.

FRANCIS S. GABRESKI AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, WESTHAMPTON BEACH, N.Y. —New York Air National Guard Col. Jeffrey Cannet, commander of the 106th Rescue Wing, and 106th Command Chief Master Sgt. Edward Rittberg, conducted a series of town hall meetings with members of the 106th Rescue Wing to discuss topics from the Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS), March 6-7, 2026.

According to the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, the DEOCS is a survey conducted by the Department of War to provide commanders and leaders with information they can use to improve their unit or organizational climate.

"The DEOCS is a great opportunity for members to give their commanders an understanding of how they feel they're being cared for on this base," said Capt. Damina Townes, 106th Equal Opportunity director. "It's important to give that feedback so that we know what needs to be fixed."

The DEOCS asks questions about individuals' experiences within their unit or organization, and about their immediate supervisor, unit commander, and leadership.

Townes explained that the survey covers many different topics.

"It talks about communication, access to care and childcare," said Townes. "It asks if an individual has experienced discrimination or harassment. There are a lot of categories that the questions are meant to cover to provide a full view of the picture of the base."

The town hall meetings were held to create a forum where Airmen could ask questions and share additional feedback directly with wing leadership.

Cannet emphasized the importance of the DEOCS and how the resulting feedback helps leadership better understand the needs and concerns of Airmen across the wing.

"Filling out these DEOC surveys really helps us to understand where we stand as a wing, where we have some areas to improve, what we're doing right, what we're doing wrong," Cannet said.

"We owe it back to the wing to make sure that they understand that we are eyes open, ears open, we're listening, and we are trying to take positive action to move the wing forward," he continued.

Staff Sgt. Anthony Polidoro, who attended a town hall meeting, said he appreciated the opportunity to hear directly from wing leadership.

"It was really important to me as an enlisted member that the commander came down and directly addressed our concerns," said Polidoro, 106th Airfield Management. "Him being able to address multiple topics while being open to both positive and negative feedback showed a leadership that Airmen can really look up to."

106th leadership plans to continue hosting town hall meetings in the future to maintain open communication with members and ensure their feedback continues to shape improvements across the wing.

The 106th Rescue Wing based at Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base in Westhampton Beach, New York, operates and maintains the HC-130J Combat King II search and rescue aircraft, and the HH-60W Jolly Green II rescue helicopter. The 106th Rescue Wing is home to a special warfare squadron with pararescuemen and combat rescue officers, specializing in rescue and recovery, and deploys for domestic and overseas operations.

"The full mission profile we did, to capture all the points we're looking at, is to advance our younger aviators and continue to hone in the skills of our most experienced aviators so that we maintain our ability to save lives in the most effective and quick way possible," Harding said.

The 106th Rescue Wing, based at Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base in Westhampton Beach, New York, operates and maintains the HC-130J Combat King II search and rescue aircraft, and the HH-60W Jolly Green II rescue helicopter. The 106th Rescue Wing is home to a special warfare squadron with pararescuemen and combat rescue officers, specializing in rescue and recovery, and deploys for domestic and overseas operations.

The 109th completes 38th year of Antarctic support during Operation Deep Freeze

Story by Staff Sgt. Jocelyn Tuller, 109th Airlift Wing

SCOTIA, N.Y. — The New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing concluded its 38th year supporting American scientific research in Antarctica during the 2025–2026 Operation Deep Freeze season, March 11, 2026.

The 109th Airlift Wing deployed roughly 200 Airmen throughout the season in support of Operation Deep Freeze (ODF), the Department of War's annual mission to sustain the U.S. Antarctic Program.

The wing maintained three LC-130H aircraft at McMurdo Station, with a fourth aircraft staged in Christchurch, New Zealand.

The wing operates the ski-equipped LC-130H Hercules, the largest aircraft in the world capable of landing on snow and ice using skis. This unique capability allows the 109th to deliver heavy airlift to remote locations across Antarctica.

Aircrews and support personnel operated primarily from McMurdo Station. McMurdo Station is the largest of the U.S. year-round stations and the largest station on the continent. It is the central logistical hub for the U.S. Antarctic Program (USAP), supporting research on the continent and at the National Science Foundation's Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station. The station was established on December 18, 1955, and opened in 1956 as part of Operation Deep Freeze.

During the season, the wing flew 63 missions to Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station and 17 missions to West Antarctic Ice Sheet (WAIS) Divide in support of continued science operations and camp drawdown activities. Aircrews also conducted nine aeromedical evacuation missions to Christchurch. No airdrop missions were conducted this season.

LC-130H aircraft flew over 900 hours on the continent, with an additional 130 hours supporting deployment and redeployment operations.

Throughout the season, the 109th transported 1,086 passengers, delivered 1 million pounds of fuel and moved 2.6 million pounds of cargo in support of ODF. Missions focused primarily on sustainment operations at the South Pole and the WAIS Divide camp pullout.

"The success of this season reflects the dedication and professionalism of our Airmen," said Col. Steven Slosek, commander of the 109th Airlift Wing. "Operating in one of the most challenging environments requires teamwork, precision and adaptability. Their efforts ensured the successful completion of this year's ODF mission."

Operation Deep Freeze remains one of the Department of War's most demanding recurring missions. The 109th Airlift Wing continues to provide the only heavy airlift capability in the world able to conduct tactical landings on snow and ice, enabling year-round scientific research operations throughout Antarctica. gt







Top left: A LC-130 Skibird takes off in Antarctica. The New York National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing flies the LC-130 in support of Operation Deep Freeze, supporting the National Science Foundation in Antarctica. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Gabriel Enders, 109th Airlift Wing.

Top right: A U.S. Air Force Airman monitors a LC-130 Skibird while it offloads cargo at the South Pole Station, Antarctica. The New York National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing flies the LC-130 in support of Operation Deep Freeze, supporting the National Science Foundation in Antarctica.

Lower left: A LC-130 Hercules from the 109th Airlift Wing is loaded with cargo at Williams Field, Antarctica, Dec. 22, 2025. The ski-equipped cargo aircraft supports Operation Deep Freeze, the Department of War's annual mission to provide logistical support to the National Science Foundation in Antarctica.

109th Airlift Wing Officer Named NY National Guard Company Grade Officer of the Year

Story and photo by Tech Sgt. Madison Scaringe, 109th Airlift Wing

STRATTON AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. — Capt. Anton Andriyanov from the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing has been named the New York National Guard's Company Grade Officer of the Year, recognized for exceptional leadership, mission execution and resource management both overseas and at home station.

Andriyanov, a civil engineer assigned to the wing based at Stratton Air National Guard Base in Schenectady, was honored for his contributions during a recent deployment and his continued efforts to improve the quality of life for Airmen in New York.

During a deployment, Andriyanov led a $31 million construction program at two forward operating bases while overseeing 15 infrastructure projects designed to improve mission capability and combat readiness. He also coordinated with the deployed country's national and U.S. defense officials to advance $10.5 million in additional projects.

As part of those efforts, Andriyanov authored an installation development plan for a forward operating base in his deployed location, establishing standardized construction practices across the theater.

After returning to New York, he continued to strengthen the wing's infrastructure. Andriyanov secured funding for four construction projects and oversaw the selection of a firm to design the wing's first secure communications facility.

While his professional achievements earned him recognition across the New York National Guard, Andriyanov's path to military service was anything but typical.

Originally from Ukraine, Andriyanov spent much of his teenage life in Spain. His parents had hoped to move to the United States after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, but immigration delays meant the family remained overseas for years.

The paperwork finally went through when Andriyanov and his parents were able to immigrate to the United States. The transition brought him to the capital region where he continued pursuing a college degree in mechanical engineering.



Air National Guard Capt. Anton Andriyanov, a civil engineer assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing, poses for a photo at Stratton Air National Guard Base in Schenectady, New York, March 16, 2026. Andriyanov was named the New York National Guard's Company Grade Officer of the Year for exceptional leadership, mission execution and resource management both overseas and at home station.

Military service was not originally part of his plan.

Growing up in the post-Soviet world, Andriyanov said he had a very different perception of military life.

"I had a skewed idea of what the military would be like," he said. "I was thinking about Soviet-style living conditions and didn't really see it as something I wanted to do."

That perception changed when he attended a friend's graduation from Basic Military Training at Joint Base San Antonio–Lackland in Texas.

Seeing the ceremony and the pride displayed by new Airmen changed his outlook.

"I saw the pride, the traditions, and how people carried themselves," he said. "It was completely different from what I expected."

Before joining the military, Andriyanov worked for a renewable energy company, but the idea of serving continued to grow on him. He commissioned into the 109th Airlift Wing in 2020.

Compared to his previous work in the corporate sector, Andriyanov said his role in the Air National Guard has been far more meaningful.

"It feels much more fulfilling," he said.

In addition to his role as a civil engineer officer, Andriyanov currently serves as the officer in charge of the wing's Commander's Action Group, a volunteer-based initiative that brings Airmen from across the unit together to develop ideas that improve life on base.

The group works directly with wing leadership to identify opportunities and implement solutions.

Through the program, Airmen have helped launch several initiatives, including quarterly recognition programs, mentorship and professional development events such as "lunch and learn" sessions during drill weekends, and the revival of the wing's Airman's Attic program, which allows service members to donate and obtain uniform items.

The group is also working on additional programs tied to new Department of the Air Force physical fitness initiatives.

For Andriyanov, the Commander's Action Group is about giving Airmen an opportunity to take ownership and grow.

"It gives Airmen a chance to own a project and see it through to the end," he said. "That's great for character development and professional development."

Beyond the base, Andriyanov has also supported his local community by coordinating transportation and equipment for a homeschool sports team.

Andriyanov will now represent New York as he advances to compete with other Air National Guard members from across the country for the Air National Guard's Best Airman awards. gt

Elevating Force Protection With Tethered Drones



STEWART AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. —A tethered drone hovers in the air during a training session aimed at teaching Airmen how to operate the equipment, at Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, Feb. 9, 2026. The 105th Airlift Wing is introducing these drones to elevate situational awareness and enhance the wing's ability to respond to various types of situations. Photo by Senior Airman Sarah Post, 105th Airlift Wing.

Tech. Sgt. Enlists More Than 200 Individuals

Story and photo by Master Sgt. Jamie Spaulding, 109th Airlift Wing



SCOTIA, N.Y. — Tech. Sgt. Jason Malm celebrates a career achievement in Scotia, N.Y., January 29, 2026. Malm has enlisted more than 200 individuals into the New York Air National Guard.

STRATTON AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. — Tech. Sgt. Jason Malm, a recruiter with the 109th Airlift Wing, reached a significant career milestone by enlisting more than 200 people into the New York Air National Guard.

This rare achievement that supports the wing's continued readiness and long-term strength.

Malm reached the milestone in just over six years as a recruiter.

He enlisted in the New York Air National Guard in 2014 and began recruiting in 2019 after serving as a dental technician and later cross-training into Security Forces.

"When I was given the opportunity to become a recruiter, I made a promise that I would be the best recruiter the 109th had ever seen," Malm said.

"Hitting 200 enlistments feels like a promise kept, but it's not something I did on my own. Recruiting is a team effort," he said

Recruiting is critical to sustaining the 109th Airlift Wing's unique mission as the only Air National Guard unit equipped with ski-equipped LC-130 aircraft.

Colonel Steven Slosek, the wing commander emphasized that Malm's efforts directly contribute to operational continuity by filling key career fields and building a pipeline of trained Airmen.

"Tech. Sgt. Malm's milestone of 200 enlistments is a testament to his relentless personal drive and extraordinary dedication," Slosek said.

Malm credited his success to communication skills developed through both military and civilian experience. Before becoming a recruiter, he worked as a dental hygienist, firefighter, emergency medical technician, and real estate agent; all roles that required building trust and meeting people where they are.

Five Officer Candidates Commissioned

Story and photos by 1st Lt. Ed Shevlin, New York Guard Headquarters

CORTLANDT MANOR, N.Y. — Following a year of intensive training and evaluation, five officer candidates were commissioned as second lieutenants in the New York Guard during a ceremony held March 28, 2026, at Camp Smith Training Site.

Hosted by the 8th Training Command in Building 508, the ceremony marked the culmination of Officer Candidate School (OCS) Class 25-01.

The event drew senior leaders from across the New York Guard, along with family members and friends who gathered to witness the transition of the candidates into commissioned officers.

The newly commissioned officers are 2nd Lt. Mark Farrow, 2nd Lt. Christopher Giambrone, 2nd Lt. Charles Harvey, 2nd Lt. Rashad Lyston and 2nd Lt. Luis Thomas.

Throughout the rigorous OCS program, candidates were evaluated on leadership, decision-making, physical readiness and their ability to perform under pressure, according to Capt. Gabriel Felix, the commander of the 8th Training Command.

The commissioning ceremony formally recognized their successful completion of these demanding requirements and their readiness to assume leadership roles within the force, he said.

The class for exceeding expectations and demonstrating a strong foundation in leadership and professionalism.

"Above all, the caliber of [the class] is marked by their professionalism and leadershippotential," Felix said.

"They have met and exceeded rigorous standards designed to identify those worthy of leading service members. Their performance reflects a deep understanding of responsibility, accountability and ethical leadership. "

Two members of the class were recognized for exceptional performance.

Farrow was named distinguished graduate, an honor reflecting overall excellence throughout the course.

Harvey received the 1st Lt. John W. Schmidt Award for Academic Excellence, recognizing

superior achievement in classroom instruction and written evaluations.

Brig. Gen. Peter P. Riley, commanding general of the New York Guard, delivered remarks to the graduates, emphasizing resilience and the importance of leadership through action.



New York Guard Officers completed Officer Candidates School standing with their instructors. Standing left to right Command Sergeant Major Steve Vera, Second Lt. Charles Harvey, Second Lt. Mark Farrow, Second Lt. Christopher Giambrone, Second Lt. Rashad Lyston, Second Lt. Luis Thomas, and Captain Gabriel Felix at Camp Smith Training Site on March 28, 2026.

Quoting Theodore Roosevelt, Riley encouraged the new officers to embrace challenges and learn from their experiences.

"It is better to try and fail than to be among those weak-spirited souls who know neither victory nor defeat," Riley said. "Don't be afraid to make mistakes — just don't make the same mistake twice." gt



Commanding General of the New York Guard, Brig. Gen. Peter P. Riley addressing the graduates and all in attendance at the commissioning ceremony for Officer Candidate School, at Camp Smith Training Site on March 28, 2026.

New York Naval Militia Gets New MEBS Commander"

Story by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff

LATHAM, N.Y. — New Yorks fleet of patrol boats is getting a new boss.

New York Naval Militia Maj. Frank Cinturati, an Iraq war veteran, will be taking over from Capt. Don McKnight, the long-time commander of the Military Emergency Boat Service.

Known as MEBS for short, the boat service operates an 11-boat fleet that operates across the state and focus on port security, law enforcement support, and disaster response.

Sixty Naval Militia members man the MEBS fleet.

McKnight will be retiring from the New York Naval Militia in November after 21 years in the Naval Militia and 18 years as the MEBS commander.

"With the retirement of our (MEBS) commander, Capt. Donald McKnight, this November, we recognized that the incoming commander would benefit from his extensive experience and mentorship during the current 'boating season'," said Rear Admiral MaryEtta Nolan, New York Naval Militia commander.

Patrol Boat 440, based at the Coast Guard station on Staten Island, conducts regular security patrols of New York Harbor and the surrounding waterways as part of Joint Task Force Empire Shield.

Other boats operate on Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake Champlain, the New York State canal system and the Hudson River as required.

Cinturati' s office will be located at the US Army Garrison Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, N.Y. He will officially take command at the end of this year.

"I look forward to serving on the water, being able to further support the State Partnership Program, and to starting a new adventure," he said.

Cinturati enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Reserve in 2004.

He deployed to Iraq twice as a radio operator in the 2nd Battalion, 25th Marines. He served in Fallujah in 2006 and Al-Asad Airbase in 2008 and 2009.

He earned his commission as a 2nd Lt. in the United States Marine Corps Reserve, through the Marines Officer Candidate Course in 2014. He was assigned as a combat engineer and served with the 1st Marine Corps District.

He has also served with Joint task Force Empire Shield and represented the Naval Militia during staff talks between the New York National Guard and the Swedish Armed Forces in Stockholm, Sweden.

"Following a thorough selection process, Major Frank Cinturati was identified as an outstanding candidate for the position," Nolan said.

"His stellar performance in the intelligence section, combined with his leadership during the State Partnership Program's planning talks in Stockholm, clearly demonstrates he is the ideal choice for this role. I look forward to working with him to achieve our training goals," Nolan added.

Cinturati graduated from Molloy College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and History in 2010. He also holds a Master of Science in Global Affairs from New York University in 2013. He earned a Masters in protection management from John Jay College in 2014.

"I hope to build upon interagency partnerships, while leveraging new and emerging technologies to build upon readiness," Cinturati said.

During 2026, MEBS will be supporting Sail 250, a major maritime celebration featuring a nationwide tour of international tall ships and military vessels in New York City, July 4-8.

Cinturati resides with his family in Merrick, Long Island. gt



Maj. Frank Cinturarati standing aboard United States Coast Guard Cutter Vincent Danz on May 22, 2026. The Vincent Danz is one of two cutters named honoring the service and sacrifice of two 9/11 heroes. Courtesy photo.



Maj. Frank Cinturati operating New York Naval Militia Patrol Boat 400 with on a routine patrol in the area of Indian Point Nuclear Facility, south of Peekskill on January 8, 2026. Courtesy photo.

