



Volume 18 Number 4

# guardtimes

[www.dmna.ny.gov](http://www.dmna.ny.gov)

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



# FROM THE LEADERSHIP

## New York Air Guard is a "Force Like no Other"

On January 8, I was promoted to major general and assumed command of the New York Air National Guard.

I am humbled, energized, and fully aware that moments like these are never earned alone.

They are built over decades, through mentors who invested, Airmen who delivered, leaders who trusted, and families who sacrificed more than anyone will ever know.

The New York Air National Guard is a force like no other. It is a team that spans the full spectrum of airpower.

We have the 106th Rescue Wing, with their HC-130s, HH-60Ws, and Guardian Angels executing lifesaving combat search and rescue missions, as well as the 107th & 174th Attack Wing's precision MQ-9 Reaper operations.

The 109th Airlift Wing's LC-130s conduct polar airlift missions, and the 105th Airlift Wing's C-17s provide global strategic mobility, while the Eastern Air Defense Sector guards the skies over the eastern United States 24/7.

The New York Air Guard is the embodiment of versatility and excellence. These aren't just mission sets; they are lifelines to our nation's security and our state's resilience.

To the Airmen and civilians of this command which I now have the privilege to lead, this is not about a new rank or a new title. It's about responsibility, the responsibility of serving you with integrity, clarity, and purpose.

Command is not a reward; it is a trust, and I intend to earn that trust every day.

I come to you as a "Mustang,"

an officer who began this journey in the enlisted ranks.

I've walked the flightline with tools in hand, did your laundry when we deployed to Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War, stood with you as we mourned our losses, and learned firsthand that leadership is not about a position, it's about people.

It's about listening before speaking, serving before leading, and earning trust every single day.

Before I ever wore a commission, I wore stripes.

Those first ten years as an enlisted Airman shaped everything I believe about leadership.

I learned that the best ideas often come from the flightline, the shop floor, or the Airmen who make the mission happen.

I learned that rank may give you authority, but character gives you influence.

Ralph Nader possibly summed it up best: "The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers."

Those lessons will guide me as I take command. As such, you are inheriting a commander who believes deeply in three things:

- Mission clarity. When Airmen understand the "why," they will move mountains.
- Empowered teams. Leaders don't create followers; they create more leaders.
- Character above all. Our profession demands technical excellence, but it also demands moral courage, humility, respect, and adherence to standards.

We will face challenges. Every command does. We will face them together, with discipline, creativity, and the quiet confidence that comes from knowing we serve a purpose larger than ourselves.

Second only to Airmen safety, we will focus on recruiting and retention.

Our Air Guard should have celebrated being number one in the nation for a second year, but due to a rounding error, we lost

the title to Ohio. We will win it back this year.

As for my promotion: A star is not a symbol of personal achievement. It is a reminder that the Air Force expects more of you today than it did yesterday. More judgment. More steadiness. More accountability. More care for the people who wear the cloth of our nation.

I accept that responsibility fully.

To the Airmen I now have the privilege to lead: My promise is simple.

- I will listen.
- I will be present.
- I will be honest.
- I will never forget where I came from.


Let me close with the words of President Theodore Roosevelt,



**Maj. Gen. Gary Charlton**

who once said: "Far and away, the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."

This — right here, right now — is work worth doing.

Let's get to work! 



SYRACUSE, N.Y. — The 174th Attack Wing welcomed retired Maj. Gen. Kevin Bradley, former wing commander from 2008 to 2012, back to base for a Lean In Circle discussion on January 15. Bradley shared insights on leading teams, developing trust and what it truly takes to be an effective leader. His message reinforced that leadership is a skill forged through experience, reflection and service. It was an insightful and meaningful opportunity to learn from a former commander and welcome him back to the wing. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Duane Morgan, 174th Attack Wing.





# guardtimes

Volume 18, Number 4

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  
Richard Goldenberg, GUARD TIMES STAFF  
Stephanie Butler, GUARD TIMES STAFF

### About Guard Times

The Guard Times is published quarterly using federal funds authorized under provisions of AR 360-1 and AFI 35-101 by the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs and the New York Army and Air National Guard Public Affairs Office.

Views which appear in this publication are not necessarily those of the Department of Defense, the Army, the Air Force or the National Guard Bureau.

The Guard Times has a circulation of 17,000 and is distributed free to members of the New York State Military Forces and employees of the Division of Military and Naval Affairs.

### Submissions

Articles, photos and letters are welcome. Please provide article submissions via email saved in Microsoft Word or rich text format (rtf) along with high resolution digital (jpg) photos. Submission deadlines are March 15 (winter issue), June 15 (spring issue), September 15 (summer issue), and December 15 (fall issue). Send your submissions to:

Guard Times  
DMNA-MNPA  
330 Old Niskayuna Road  
Latham, New York 12110-3514  
OFFICE (518) 786-4581  
or stephanie.m.butler37.civ@army.mil

Complimentary or Back Issues of the Guard Times are available. Contact us at the address above or visit us on the web for current news, photos or to download prior issues at [www.dmna.ny.gov](http://www.dmna.ny.gov)



[www.dmna.ny.gov](http://www.dmna.ny.gov)

gt

## This Issue's Highlights:

### Faces of the Force

- 4 NY National Guard Col. Jason Lefton Takes Over 53rd Troop Command
- 5 Air Guardsman Wears Army's Newest Combat Recognition Badge

### Around the State

- 6 NY Air National Guard's 107th Helps Commemorate Millard Fillmore
- 7 Guard Soldiers Link into State Disaster Nerve Center
- 8 Army Guard Honors Nation's 8th President, Martin Van Buren

### The Joint Force

- 10 Service Members Honor Veterans During Wreaths Across America
- 11 722 Guardsmen Test Readiness During Camp Smith Exercise
- 12 Guard Members who Responded to 9/11 are Eligible to File for Disability Benefits
- 13 NY National Guard Marks 389 years with a Cake Cutting Ceremony

### Army National Guard

- 14 Army Guard Military Police Soldiers Return From Guantanamo Bay Duty
- 15 Army Guard is Top in Recruiting for 4th Year in a Row
- 16 Army Guard Provides Funeral Honors for Homecoming of WWII Airman
- 18 Soldiers Return Home from Horn of Africa Deployment on Veterans Day
- 21 New York Guard Psychologist is also Warhammer 40,000 Champion

### Air National Guard

- 22 NY Air Guardsmen play on All-Air Force Women's Rugby Team
- 23 C-17 Combined Test Force Stands up at Stewart Air National Guard Base
- 24 New York Air National Guard gets New Commander
- 26 109th Airlift Wing Flying 38th Antarctic Mission
- 27 174th Hosts US Merchant Marine Academy Midshipmen for Fall Internship
- 29 105th Airman Spotlight Tinatin Sadzaglishvili

### New York Guard and Naval Militia

- 30 2025 Annual Training Prepares Troops for Diverse Missions
- 31 Rear Admiral MaryEtta Nolan Takes Charge of New York Naval Militia



*NEWBURGH, N.Y.— Members of the 105th Airlift Wing participate in the Hustler 6 Memorial Ruck March for Tech. Sgt. Joseph Lemm and Staff Sgt. Louis Bonacasa at Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, Dec. 6, 2025. Lemm and Bonacasa, died while deployed to Afghanistan in 2015. Photo by Senior Airman Sarah Post, 105th Airlift Wing.*

*FRONT COVER: CAMP SMITH TRAINING SITE, N.Y. — New York Army National Guard, Pfc. Jerry Remy, an infantryman with Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, performs a high-crawl during the Expert Physical Fitness Assessment while participating in the Best Warrior Competition at Camp Smith Training Site, near Peekskill, N.Y., Oct 24, 2025. Photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Trinh, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.*

*BACK COVER: STEWART AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. — Members of the 105th Airlift Wing ruck across the flightline during the Hustler 6 Memorial Ruck March for Tech. Sgt. Joseph Lemm and Staff Sgt. Louis Bonacasa at Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, Dec. 6, 2025. The 105th Base Defense Group hosted the 6-mile ruck from Stewart ANGB to the Purple Heart Museum in New Windsor, NY, to honor Lemm and Bonacasa, who died while deployed to Afghanistan in 2015. Photo by Senior Airman Sarah Post, 105th Airlift Wing.*

# FACES of the FORCE

## Col. Jason Lefton Takes Over 53<sup>rd</sup> Troop Command

Story and photo by Sgt. Richelle Cruickshank, 138th Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP SMITH TRAINING SITE, N.Y. — New York Army National Guard Col Jason Lefton, a Niskayuna resident, assumed command of the 5,100 Soldiers of the 53rd Troop Command during a Sunday, January 11, 2026 ceremony at Camp Smith Training Site near Peekskill.

Lefton, who previously commanded the New York Army Guard's 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade and served as State Army Aviation Officer, replaced Brig. Gen. Isabel Smith who is retiring after 37 years of service.

The 53rd Troop Command is one of the New York Army National Guard's two general officer commands, and has units located across the state.

Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, said that Lefton is the right person to replace a proven leader like Smith.

"As the new commander of the 53rd Troop Command, Jason is a proven leader with tremendous experience leading complex organizations," Shields said.

In his remarks, Lefton said that he was "deeply honored and fairly humbled to stand before you today as commander."

Many members of his family live a military life, including his twin brother, who is a lieutenant

colonel in the New York Army National Guard, Lefton said.

His new role "is a great moment of pride for the family," he added.

He told the officers and non-commissioned officers in the audience that they were critical for the

Marion Military Institute in 1996.

Lefton will now serve as a traditional part-time Guard officer. He works full-time for the New York State Office of General Services.

Lefton joined Army Aviation in November of 2000 and became a

talion, 142nd Assault Helicopter Regiment, Lefton led the Battalion to Puerto Rico in response to Hurricane Irma and Maria.

He holds a Masters in Strategic Studies from the United States Army War College and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Phoenix.

He completed his bachelor's degree in Rhetoric and Communications at the State University of New York.

Lefton has civilian work experience as a fully registered representative in the financial services industry. He holds a commercial helicopter pilot license and single engine airplane license.

Lefton's awards include the Bronze Star, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commen-

dation Medal, the Army Achievement Medals, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Southwest Asia Service Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal Expeditionary Medal, the Overseas Service Ribbon, and the NATO Medal for service in the former Yugoslavia, the Combat Action Badge, Master Army Aviator Badge, and the Air Assault Badge.

He and his wife Heather have two sons, Mack and Seth. **gt**



New York Army National Guard Col. Jason Lefton, the commander of the 53rd Troop Command, receives the organizations flag from Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, during change of command ceremonies 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.

success of the unit.

"Thank you for your leadership skills and unwavering advocacy for our lives and Soldiers," Lefton said. "Your experience and guidance is critical to our success, and I look forward to working with you as well."

Lefton will be promoted to one-star, brigadier general at a future date.

Lefton has served in numerous leadership and staff positions in his 25-year career as an officer in the Army National Guard since earning his commission from the

UH-60 pilot in the 3rd Battalion, 142nd Assault Helicopter Regiment in January of 2001.

He deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina in support of the Stabilization Force 12 as a liaison officer for Multinational Division Southeast and the Task Force Battle Captain and deployed as a staff officer to Iraq.

Lefton has served as a company commander, battalion executive officer, brigade executive officer, and battalion commander.

During his time as a Battalion Commander for the 3rd Bat-

# Air Guardsman Wears Army's Newest Combat Recognition Badge

Story by Jaclyn Lyons, 109th Airlift Wing

SCOTIA, N.Y. — A New York Air National Guardsman assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing in Scotia, New York, is wearing one of the Army's newest combat recognition badges.

Master Sgt. Scott Potter, a Ravena resident, a combat arms instructor for the 109th Security Forces Squadron, has been awarded the Master Combat Infantryman Badge.

Authorized in March of 2025, the badge recognizes a Soldier who has received the Combat Infantry Badge for service in a war zone, and earned the Expert Infantry Badge.

The MCIB is awarded to soldiers who have previously earned both the Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB) and the Expert Infantryman

Badge (EIB). The Army authorized the "master" variants in March 2025 to allow those who held both qualifying badges to wear a single badge representing the culmination of those achievements.

Potter's enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1998. He served in the 82nd Airborne Division, the 25th Infantry Division, the New York Army Guard's 827th Engineer Company and the Vermont Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment before joining the Air National Guard in 2018.

While stationed with 82nd Airborne Division, he earned the EIB.

The EIB requires Soldiers to complete a five-day course of physical tests, land navigation courses,

military skills tests, marksmanship, medical knowledge and a 12-mile forced march.

Potter deployed with the 82nd to Fallujah, Iraq in 2003, where he earned the Combat Infantryman badge. He was there for the First Battle of Fallujah in April 2004 and the Second Battle of Fallujah in November 2004.

"To earn the Combat Infantry Badge, which is different from the Combat Action Badge, you had to have been directly engaged in a firefight- which in Fallujah during that time. It was an everyday thing," Potter said.

Potter left the military for four years before enlisting in the New York Army National Guard in 2008.

"I missed the military and joined as an engineer because my wife didn't want me kicking down doors anymore," he said.

He went to Afghanistan in the New York Army Guard. Then he joined Vermont's infantry battalion.

Potter said he made the decision



New York Air National Guard Master Sgt. Scott Potter, has been awarded the Master Combat Infantryman Badge, one of the Army's newest combat recognition badges. Potter is a combat arms instructor for the 109th Security Forces Squadron. Courtesy Photo.

to transfer to the Air National Guard for a slower pace as he got older.

"My wife's cousin's husband works here at the 109th and he recommended I check it out," Potter explained. **gt**

# First Sergeant of the Year

WESTHAMPTON BEACH, N.Y. — New York Air National Guard Master Sergeant Joeselyn Sanabria, a Coram resident originally from Manhattan N.Y., has been selected as the New York State First Sergeant of the Year for 2025.

Sanabria currently serves as the 106th Rescue Wing Force Support Squadron first sergeant, at Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base in Westhampton Beach, New York.

As first sergeant, Sanabria 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.

Sanabria enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1994 and served there until 2001. He joined the Air National Guard in 2012 where he was assigned to the 106th Maintenance Squadron as a hydraulics system specialist.

In 2023 he was selected as the first sergeant for the 106th Civil Engineering Squadron, then

in 2025 as the first sergeant for the 106th Force Support Squadron.

Sanabria was named his wing's 2024 First Sergeant of the Year, and went on to earn the 2025 New York State First Sergeant of the year title, besting candidates from all five air National Guard wings across the state.

"It's personal for me and to be the best in the state is humbling," said Sanabria. "I had a really good first sergeant in maintenance, who is still my mentor to this day and I just want to pay it forward."

This is the second consecutive year the New York State First Sergeant of the Year was selected from the 106th Rescue Wing.

"First Sergeant Sanabria is the face of our Wing and the state's first sergeants," said Senior Master Sgt. John McGhee, another first sergeant at the 106th.

"We're the tip of the spear for first sergeants in New York." **gt**



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Joeselyn Sanabria, first sergeant assigned to the New York Air National Guard, 106th Rescue Wing Force Support Squadron, poses for an official photo at Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base, Westhampton Beach, New York, Dec. 6, 2024. Sanabria has been selected as the New York State First Sergeant of the Year for 2025.

## NY Air National Guard's 107<sup>th</sup> Helps Commemorate Millard Fillmore

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

**BUFFALO, N.Y.—** The New York Air Guard's 107th Attack Wing honored Millard Fillmore, the nation's 13th president, Jan. 7, as the wing's Mission Support Group deputy commander laid a wreath at his gravesite in Buffalo.

Lt. Col. Andrew Rodgers, of Buffalo NY, placed a wreath on behalf of President Donald J. Trump at Fillmore's grave in Forest Lawn Cemetery.

Since 1967, under the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, military officers have upheld the tradition of placing wreaths on behalf of the sitting president at the graves of former presidents on their birthdays.

"It makes me feel incredibly proud," Rodgers said. "It's not every day you get to represent the men and women of the 107th for something like this."

The 107th Attack Wing is based at Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station.

"Being here, you feel a real connection between the history of Western New York and Fillmore's legacy," Rodgers added. "It's an honor to pay respect to a former president on behalf of the current one."

Members of the American Legion Francis J. Donovan Post, The Buffalo Club, Forest Lawn Cemetery staff, and members of the local community attended the ceremony.

Fillmore had a lasting impact on the Buffalo community, and Forest

Lawn Cemetery continues to help commemorate his legacy, according to Julie Snyder, chief executive officer of Forest Lawn Cemetery.

"As a historic cemetery with national landmark status, having a past president within our gates is an honor," Snyder said during her opening remarks. "We are proud to be one of only 40 cemeteries across the country that serves as the final resting place for a former president."

New York National Guard officers also present wreaths at the gravesites of Presidents Martin Van Buren, buried in Kinderhook in the Hudson Valley, and Chester A. Arthur, buried in Menands, a suburb of Albany.

Forest Lawn Cemetery, established in 1849, was one of the first professionally landscaped rural cemeteries in the United States and is the final resting place for more than 170,000 individuals, according to cemetery officials.

Fillmore was born in Summerhill, New York, in 1800 and died in 1874 after suffering a stroke. The ceremony marked the 226th anniversary of his birth.

He became a lawyer in 1823 and later served as a member of Congress and comptroller of New York State. He was elected vice president in 1848 on a ticket with President Zachary Taylor.

Fillmore was also a founding member of the University of Buffalo and served as a trustee of the



NY Air National Guard's 107th Mission Support Group Deputy Commander Lt Col Andrew Rodgers presents the presidential wreath on behalf of President Donald J. Trump at Millard Fillmore's gravesite, Jan 7 2026, Buffalo NY. Rodgers presented a wreath from President Donald Trump at the annual ceremony at Forest Lawn Cemetery.

university until his death.

Following Taylor's death in 1850, Fillmore assumed the presidency. He was the last member of the Whig Party to serve as president. While many Whigs later joined the emerging Republican Party, Fillmore declined and ran unsuccessfully for president in 1856 as the candidate of the Know

Nothing Party.

As president, Fillmore supported the Compromise of 1850, a series of laws that admitted California to the Union as a free state and banned the sale of enslaved people in the District of Columbia, while also requiring federal officials to assist in the capture of individuals who had escaped slavery. **gt**



Members of the American Legion Francis J. Donovan Post Rifle Team performs the "21-gun salute" in honor of President Millard Fillmore's 226th birthday, Jan 7 2026, Buffalo NY. This salute is considered the nations highest honor, reserved only for Independence Day, funerals of U.S. Presidents and former presidents.

# Guard Soldiers Link into State Disaster Nerve Center

Story and photos by Stephanie Butler, *Guard Times* staff

ALBANY, N.Y.— Eighteen New York Army Guard Soldiers, who link the Guard’s Homeland Response Force with state officials in an emergency, got a first-hand look at New York’s disaster response nerve center on Nov. 3.

The Soldiers, assigned to the 153rd Troop Command, visited the New York State Emergency Operations Center, or EOC, located in the basement of Building 22 at the Harriman State Campus in Albany.

The visit was designed to strengthen collaboration between the Guard’s disaster response force, and the New York State Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, according to Lt. Col. Alexander Prezioso, the Homeland Response Force’s senior liaison officer.

The Homeland Response Force, known as the HRF for short, is currently led by the 153rd Troop Command. The HRF provides the Federal Emergency Management Agency with a force that can assist first responders in dealing with a chemical, biological, or radiological attack in the FEMA Region II, including New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Liaison officers and non-commissioned officers represent their command at headquarters

and in operations centers to ensure information flow and effective mission planning.

EOC officials explained how the operations center processes information and allocates state resources to respond to disasters.

“We learned how the State EOC prioritizes missions, requests, and logistics based on real-time assessments,” said Prezioso.

When an emergency has been declared and the EOC is operating at full capacity, there are emergency experts from all New York State Emergency Service forces including Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Labor, Division of Military and Naval Affairs just to name a few, officials said.

The tour reinforced the importance of preparedness and cross-organizational understanding before an incident occurs.

Communication between the civilian forces and the National Guard is important in times of crisis, said Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Hart.

“This visit was very helpful,” Hart said. “I learned about some new contacts that will make my job as a liaison officer easier and more efficient.”

The tour provided valuable insight into how state agencies monitor, assess, and respond to


evolving emergencies. It also helped the team identify how the military can best synchronize efforts with state partners, Prezioso said.

“It helped to strengthen professional relationships with EOC staff and other interagency partners. This is essential for seamless collaboration during future emergencies, operations, and exercises,” he explained.

The Emergency Operation Center was first built in the Cold War Era as a bunker and has been in operation for more than 50 years.

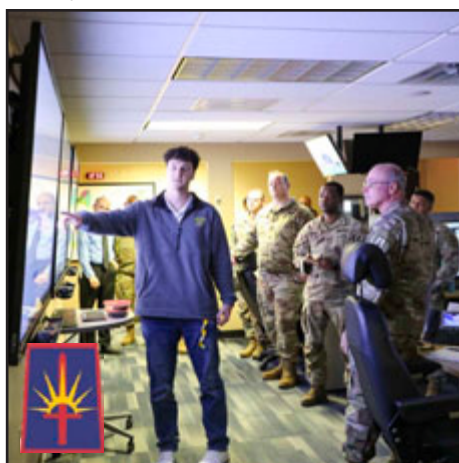
“Visiting the State Emergency Operations Center gave us a clearer picture of how the state manages crises and where the military fits into that structure. The relationships we built today will translate directly into more coordinated, effective responses when it matters most,” Prezioso said.

Learning how to work with state emergency services personnel before a disaster happens is critical for the HRF, said Col. William Snyder, the commander of the 153rd Troop Command Brigade and the HRF.

“Partnership is at the heart of what we do in the National Guard – with state and federal agencies, and the communities we serve,” Snyder said. 



Rollin Gold, a homeland security program analyst assigned to the New York State Emergency Operations Center, talks to New York Army National Guard Soldiers assigned as liaison officer for the 153rd Troop Command during a tour of the operations center in Albany, NY on Nov.3, 2025. Eighteen Soldiers serving as liaison officers visited the state EOC in order to understand how state agencies coordinate emergency response.



Sean Duffy, disaster preparedness assistant, assigned to the New York State Emergency Operations Center, talks to New York Army National Guard Soldiers assigned as liaison officer for the 153rd Troop Command during a tour of the operations center in Albany, NY on Nov.3, 2025. Eighteen Soldiers serving as liaison officers visited the state EOC in order to understand how state agencies coordinate emergency response.



Liaison Officers from the 153rd Troop Command took a photo in the tunnel to the underground Emergency Operation Center bunker in Albany, NY on Nov. 3, 2025. Eighteen Soldiers serving as liaison officers visited the state EOC in order to understand how state agencies coordinate emergency response.

# New York Army Guard Honors Nation's 8<sup>th</sup> President, Martin Van Buren

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times* staff

KINDERHOOK, N.Y. — New York Army National Guard Major General Michel Natali paid tribute to the nation's eighth president — Martin Van Buren — as he laid a wreath from President Donald J. Trump at Van Buren's gravesite here on Friday, Dec. 5.

Van Buren, who was nicknamed "Old Kinderhook," after the town where he was born and where died, served as president from 1837 to 1841.

Natali, who serves as assistant adjutant general, Army, for the New York National Guard, said it was an honor to pay tribute to Van Buren on his 243rd birthday.

Natali and New York Army Guard Command Sgt. Major Leylan Jones, placed the wreath sent by the White House at Van Buren's grave in Kinderhook Reformed Church Cemetery. Ten Soldiers assigned to New York Joint Force Headquarters saluted and presented colors, followed by a bugler playing taps.

Forty people braved the 15-degree Fahrenheit temperature and looked on as the wreath was laid.

Since 1967, military officers have placed a wreath sent by the current president at the graves of former presidents on the anniversary of their birth.

"I think it's a great tradition," Natali said.

"It feels good, it feels like we are in touch with our history. It reminds us of our legacy," Natali added.

The annual celebration is a community event. Wreaths were presented from the town and village of Kinderhook, the Kinderhook Garden Club, which maintains the Van Buren gravesite, the National Park Service which oversees the Martin Van Buren Historic Site, and the local group which helps support the historic site.

The fact that Van Buren returned to his hometown to live after his active political career ended is very significant, Natali said.

"When the time came to retire, he came back to his roots, to his hometown," the general said.

Sgt. Alexandra Medard, a member of the New York National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters, said it was an honor to be able to recognize a president.

Sally Naramore, a member of the Kinderhook town council, said she braved the cold weather because she wanted to recognize a national leader.

"It is important to recognize what each president did," she said.

"It is really celebrating, not so much the man, but the position. We need to remember what this position is supposed to be for, to be a servant of the people," Naramore added.

"It is important to recognize what each president did," she said.

Van Buren was born in the village in 1782, just as the American revolution was winding down. He

was the son of a tavern keeper and grew up speaking Dutch.

He died in July 1862, as the Civil War was raging, at Lindenwald his estate at the edge of the village, which is now a National Park site. He was buried in the cemetery of his local church alongside his wife Hannah, who died in 1819.

Van Buren, Natali noted in his remarks, was the first United States president who was not born as a subject of the King of England.

Van Buren served as president from 1837 to 1841. Prior to that he served as a judge, a New York State Senator, New York Attorney General, U.S. Senator, Governor of New York and Secretary of State.

He is credited with creating the Democratic Party as a national party, and for being a first-rate political operator. **gt**



New York Army National Guard Major General Michel Natali, assistant adjutant general, Army, speaks before placing a wreath from the White House during the annual wreath laying ceremony marking the birthday of President Martin Van Buren in Kinderhook, New York, on Dec. 5, 2025. Natali presented a wreath from President Donald Trump at the annual ceremony held at Van Buren's gravesite in Kinderhook Reformed Cemetery. Photo by Stephanie Butler, *Guard Times* staff.



New York Army National Guard Major General Michel Natali, assistant adjutant general, Army, and Command Sergeant Major Leylan Jones, salute after the placing a wreath from the White House during the annual wreath laying ceremony marking the birthday of President Martin Van Buren in Kinderhook, New York, on Dec. 5, 2025. Natali presented a wreath from President Donald Trump at the annual ceremony held at Van Buren's gravesite in Kinderhook Reformed Cemetery. Photo by Stephanie Butler, *Guard Times* staff.



WATERVLIET, N.Y. Colleen Casey, the Military and Family Readiness Manager at the 109th Airlift Wing, poses for a photo, along with other winners, after being presented with the Veterans' Champion award by the McNulty Veteran Business Center at a ceremony in Watervliet, New York, Nov. 6, 2025. Casey was recognized as a leader in the community who shows dedication, innovation, and positive impact in the military community. Courtesy photo.

## 109<sup>th</sup> Family Readiness Manager Awarded Veterans Champion Award

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

WATERVLIET, N.Y. — Colleen Casey, the 109th Airlift Wing's Military and Family Readiness Manager, has been awarded the 2025 Veteran's Champion Award by the McNulty Veteran Business Center.

This award, presented during the McNulty Veteran Business Center's Award Celebration on November 6, 2025, recognized Casey as a leader in the community who shows dedication, innovation and positive impact in the military community.

The McNulty Veteran Business Center, a local branch of the national Veterans Business Outreach Center organization, is a non-profit that helps the veterans and service members in entrepreneurship.

"It's wonderful to be recognized for my almost 16 years working with [service] members and their families," Casey said.

Casey explained that this recognition goes beyond herself.

"It means my resources and information are raising awareness to the military community.

It means I am doing my job to the best of my abilities. It means I am truly helping and making a difference. I love my job, and I love the satisfaction of knowing I am making and leaving a meaningful impact," she said.

As the manager of the Military and Family Readiness office, Casey serves as a central hub for resources and referrals. She regularly answers questions about deployments, finances, transitioning from the military and finding local resources.

Casey works closely with national, state and local agencies to stay up to date on what resources are available for service members and their families.

Earlier this year, Casey was also recognized as the Distinguished Citizen of the Year by the Scotia Glenville Elks for her service and commitment to community support.

She was notably helpful in assisting the Elks with their effort to provide backpacks and school supplies to service members' children.

"What Mrs. Casey does for Stratton Air National Guard Base and for the service men and women and their children is truly generous. She checked every box on my list for someone who I thought deserved this award," said Travis St. Louis, the Exalted Ruler of the Scotia Glenville Elks.

Casey said her passion for service is deeply rooted, as she comes from a proud military family. Her father was a Navy veteran, her husband a retired Army Sergeant Major, and several of her children currently serve in the New York Air National Guard.

"This award isn't just about my job at the 109th—it reflects a lifetime as a military spouse and mother," she said.

"I know I am appreciated – I receive many heartfelt thanks and words of praise daily. But these are the first tangible awards I have received. It's hard to explain how wonderful it feels to be recognized in person," Casey said. **gt**

# THE JOINT FORCE

## Service Members Honor Veterans During Wreaths Across America

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



Holiday wreaths lay at the headstones of veterans buried at the Gerald B. H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery in Schuylerville, New York, Dec. 13, 2025. The wreaths were placed during the annual Wreaths Across America event that remembers and honors veterans by placing remembrance wreaths on the graves of local veterans.

SCHUYLERVILLE, N.Y. — Forty Airmen, Soldiers and Sailors joined hundreds of volunteers to place wreaths at the graves of veterans at Gerald B. H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery in Schuylerville on December 13, 2025.

The annual Wreaths Across America event honors the nation's military veterans by placing remembrance wreaths on the graves of local veterans.

A total of 17,000 balsam wreaths were placed at the cemetery, according to the national Wreaths Across America organization.

Nine Airmen from the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing, Soldiers from the New York Army National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division, Sailors assigned to the Nuclear Power Training Unit in Saratoga Springs, and

Schenectady Naval Reserve Center took part in the wreath laying. Members of the Marine Corps and Coast Guard also participated.

The nationwide program took place in all 50 states where thousands of wreaths were laid in remembrance of those who served.

**“Each wreath we place is more than evergreen and ribbon, it is our visible promise that those who serve will never be forgotten.”**

— Col. Steven Slosek, commander  
109th Airlift Wing

“Each wreath we place is more than evergreen and ribbon,” said

Air National Guard Colonel Steven Slosek, commander of the 109th Airlift Wing. “It is our visible promise that those who serve will never be forgotten.”

The event began with volunteers placing wreaths throughout the cemetery and reciting the names of fallen heroes — a staple of the Wreaths Across America mission to “Remember, Honor and Teach.”

The wreath laying was followed by a ceremony featuring the presentation of wreaths representing each military service branch and remarks from community leaders and military representatives.

“Part of the instructions for placing the wreaths is that the veteran's name is spoken aloud so their memory is not forgotten,” said Navy Capt. David Tranotti, commanding officer of U.S. fleet

forces N01 and narrator for the ceremony.

“Continuing that message and tradition is important, especially for all the active duty and reserve personnel that could one day be in these grounds as well,” Tranotti said.

For many participants, the event provided a personal moment.

“My wife's grandparents are buried here in Saratoga National, so we've been coming up here every year to visit their graves. We started off by laying wreaths, and then decided we wanted to get more involved,” Tranotti said.

“The service members who rest here built the foundation on which we serve today. Their courage carved the path. Their sacrifice secured the freedoms we defend,” Slosek said. **gt**

# 722 Empire Shield Guardsmen Test Readiness During Camp Smith Exercise

Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Leon Mabra, Joint Task Force Empire Shield

**CAMP SMITH TRAINING SITE, N.Y.** — Seven hundred and twenty-two members of the New York National Guard's New York City security force tested their ability to deploy outside the city during emergency response drills held from September 15 to October 16 at Camp Smith Training Center near Peekskill.

The Soldiers and Airmen who serve in Joint Task Force Empire Shield, a state active-duty force which patrols key transportation hubs in New York, were taking part in an Emergency Deployment and Readiness Exercise, or EDRE.

According to Lt. Col. Andrew Prior, the exercise was meant to prepare the members of the task force, known as JTF-ES, to conduct missions they aren't normally tasked with, while also testing individual skills. To accomplish this, EDRE had three goals, according to Prior:

- Reinforce the skills JTF-ES

members were taught when they joined the task force.

- Prepare company and staff leaders to operate independently during a statewide response.
- Prepare JTF-ES for missions outside of their normal NYC based, security oriented operations.

JTFES is organized with a headquarters and five line companies. Each company's EDRE was a three-day deployment to Camp Smith which began with little warning, mirroring how real crises unfold, Prior said.

The exercise scenario was a powerful hurricane that affected a New York Community. Service members received an alert notification to report to their company areas, upon arrival they began an 18 hour continuous mission. The scenario pushed Soldiers and Airmen to confront multiple incidents happening at once such

as simulated flooding, disrupted supply routes, power loss, food shortages, logistics security, medical emergencies and civil unrest.

Company and platoon leadership established and maintained mission command while receiving injects from simulated municipal leaders. They also continuously battle tracked and conducted reporting to JTF-ES's TOC at Ft. Hamilton, Brooklyn.

Role players acted as displaced residents, local officials, and anxious civilians, challenging Service members to balance tactical decision making with empathy and communication. The exercise was not only about reacting to danger, but also about learning how to serve people at their most vulnerable, Prior said.

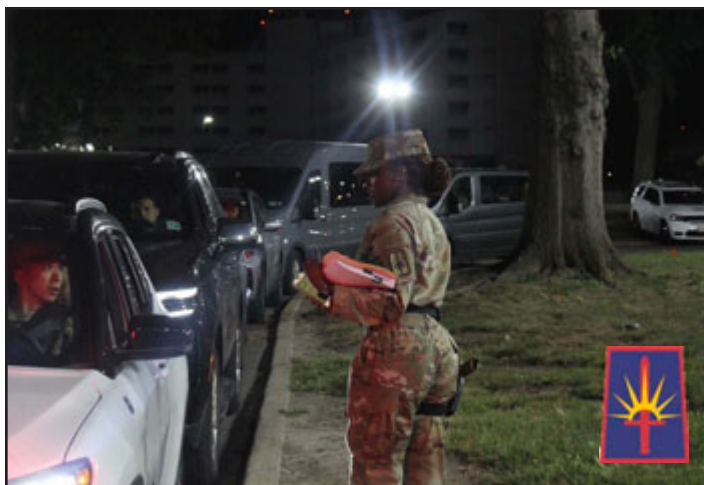
After the conclusion of the first day's scenario based training, The second and third days were focused on individual proficiency.

Each member qualified with the M17 service pistol and attended classes designed to reinforce the skills needed for both civil support and security operations.

Army Guard Staff Sgt. Reagan Reid, a member of the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, said the training was valuable. "This EDRE cycle left me wanting to be more proficient in carrying out my daily duties to the community," he said. "It gave me real insight into how to respond and assist during a real-world emergency," Reid added.

Air Guard Staff Sgt. David Romano, a member of the 106th Rescue Wing, said the exercise helped to broaden his understanding of JTF-ES' mission. "When we're at the airports, we're focused on security," he explained.

"Here we learned how that same discipline applies when people are relying on you for safety, food, or direction after a disaster." **gt**



New York Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Rachel Sharples, a member of Joint Task Force Empire Shield, finalizes convoy operations as part of an Emergency Deployment and Readiness Exercise being conducted at Camp Smith Training site in Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., on Sept 30, 2025. Over 700 members of the New York National Guard state active-duty security force which operates in New York City, took part in these readiness exercises between Sept. 15 and October 16.



New York Air National Guard Senior Airman Amadou Barry, a member of Joint Task Force Empire Shield, assesses a role-player for an injury as part of an Emergency Deployment and Readiness Exercise being conducted at Camp Smith Training site in Cortlandt Manor, New York, on October 7, 2025. Over 700 members of the New York National Guard state active-duty security force which operates in New York City, took part in these readiness exercises between Sept. 15 and October 16.

# NY National Guard Members who Responded to 9/11 Attacks are Eligible to File Notice of Potential Claim for Disability Benefits

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times* staff

LATHAM, N.Y. — Members of the New York National Guard who served on State Active Duty in New York City following the destruction of the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, 2001, can now register for the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs World Trade Center Benefits Program with information provided online.

This state-funded pension benefit is designed to compensate Guard members who developed a 9/11 related illness since the attacks that day on Sept. 11, 2001.

The extension of a pension benefit to 9/11 responders suffering from qualified health conditions was approved by the legislature and added to New York State Military Law in 2023.

Survivors of Guard personnel who die as a result of a 9/11-related condition may also be eligible for benefits.

These benefits also apply to members of the New York Naval Militia and the New York Guard --the state's two state defense forces-- who responded to the attacks.

Submitting the Application for World Trade Center Notice preserves the individual's right to file a claim in the future and waives no legal rights.

Registering preserves your right to file a claim in the future and waives no legal rights. A service member does not have to be sick to apply.

The deadline for filing this application is Sept. 11, 2026.

Instructions and documents required to file for this benefit, or to submit the application of notice, can be found online at <https://dmna.ny.gov/911/>.

[ny.gov/911/](https://dmna.ny.gov/911/).

More than 12,000 members of the New York Army and Air National Guard, the New York Naval Militia, and the New York Guard were part of the state response to the attacks between Sept. 11, 2001, and Sept. 11, 2002.

Service members who were on State Active Duty and involved in rescue, recovery or cleanup operations at the World Trade Center site, or in what is termed the New York City Exposure Zone, between those two dates, are

if an individual becomes permanently disabled due to certain conditions and unable to perform their job, they can claim the condition was the result of participation in the events of September 11 and after, unless it can be proven the condition was the result of other factors.

Qualifying conditions for this presumption include:

Upper respiratory tract (rhinitis, sinusitis, pharyngitis, laryngitis, vocal cord disease, upper airway hyper-reactivity and tracheobronchitis, or a combination of such conditions).

Lower respiratory tract (bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, reactive airway dysfunction syndrome and various forms of pneumonitis - hypersensitivity, granulomatous, or eosinophilic).

Gastroesophageal tract (esophagitis and reflux disease).

Psychological (post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, or any combination of these conditions).

Skin (conjunctivitis, contact dermatitis or burns, infectious,

irritant, allergic, idiopathic or non-specific in nature, caused by exposure or aggravated by exposure).

Also including new onset diseases (resulting from exposure as such diseases may occur in the future including cancer, asbestos-related diseases, heavy metal poisoning, musculoskeletal disease and chronic psychological diseases). **gt**



New York Army National Guard Soldiers set up a tent on the perimeter at Ground Zero, New York City, N.Y., Sept. 14, 2001. On Sept. 11, 2001, four coordinated terrorist attacks were carried out in the United States using U.S. passenger airliners with two of the attacks on One and Two World Trade Centers. Courtesy photo.

eligible to apply to the program.

Current and former members of the National Guard, Naval Militia and New York Guard, who responded to the 9/11 attacks, who are ill, are potentially eligible for benefits.

The maximum benefit is three-quarters of the annual State Active Duty pay the individual is authorized to receive by law.

The 2023 law provides a presumption that,



Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Solmo, Air National Guard Brig. Gen. Gary Charlton II, and Air National Guard Airman 1st Class Emma Grace Charboneau cut a birthday cake during a National Guard birthday celebration held on Dec. 12, 2025, at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, New York. Solmo, with 39 years of service, represented the history and traditions of the Guard, while Charboneau, who enlisted in 2023, represented the future of the Guard. Photo by William Albrecht, Guard Times staff.

# NY National Guard Marks 389 years of Guard History with a Cake Cutting Ceremony

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff

then went on to fight in the Revolutionary War and every conflict since, he said.

“You can be proud of your service in the New York National Guard and your role in protecting freedom and democracy and taking care of our fellow citizens in times of disaster,” Charlton said.

Solmo, who is responsible for overseeing the New York Army Guard’s warrant officer program, said it was rewarding to be part of the ceremony.

“It is a profound honor to be here today, representing the deep history and unwavering traditions of the National Guard,” Solmo said.

“My role is not just a title; it is a commitment to the men and women who make up our force, and it is with immense pride that I cut this cake in celebration of their recent service and accomplishments,” he added.

Solmo, who lives in Brooklyn, is a veteran of the Iraq War and has been awarded the Combat Action Badge and the Bronze Star. He has also deployed to the Horn of Africa.

Charboneau, said it felt “really special” to be representing the future of the National Guard during

the ceremony.

“It’s a unique experience,” she added.

Charboneau, a nursing student at Utica University who lives in Fultonville and who serves as a medical technician in the 109th Airlift Wing, said she joined the Guard to help pay for college.

“I really just wanted a new opportunity,” she said.

The National Guard is the oldest armed service in the United States and traces its history back to the citizen militias established when the original colonies were founded.

*“It is a profound honor to be here today, representing the deep history and unwavering traditions of the National Guard,”*

*- Chief Warrant Officer 5 Solmo, state’s command chief warrant officer*

The Guard claims December 13, 1636 as its official birthday, because on that date the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony officially established three militia regiments for the colony. **gt**

LATHAM, N.Y.—The New York Army Guard’s top warrant officer, who’s served since 1986, and an Airman who enlisted in 2023, saluted the National Guard’s 389th Birthday during a Dec. 12 ceremony at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, New York.

Chief Warrant Officer 5, William Solmo, the state’s command chief warrant officer, and Airman 1st Class Emma Grace Charboneau, cut a birthday cake during the commemoration of the Dec. 13, 1636, birthday of the National Guard.

Traditionally, the oldest service-member present joins the youngest in cutting the cake. Solmo, age 60, with 39 years of service, represented the history and traditions of the

National Guard, while the 20-year-old Charboneau, represented the Guard’s future.

They joined Brig. Gen. Gary Charlton III, the New York National Guard’s assistant adjutant general, Air, the presiding officer for the ceremony, in slicing the cake with a cavalry saber.

Charlton told the 100 service members attending the gathering that they can lay claim to a distinguished history.

Citizens began serving as part-time Soldiers as soon as Europeans began creating colonies in what is now the United States, Charlton said.

These militias defended their colonies against Native Americans and other European powers and

# ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

## Army Guard Military Police Soldiers Return From Guantanamo Bay Duty

Story and photos by Eric Durr, *Guard Times* staff

LATHAM, N.Y. — One hundred and four Soldiers assigned to the New York Army National Guard's 206th Military Police Company returned to their Latham headquarters on Saturday, Nov. 22, following an eleven-month deployment to the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba.

The Soldiers mobilized at the end of January and spent a month training at Fort Bliss, Texas before heading to Guantanamo Bay where they served as part of the security forces at the base.

Capt. Daniel Hill, the company's

commander, praised his Soldiers for their hard work and flexibility during the mission.

The Soldiers, who are based at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, flew into the Million Air facility at Albany International Airport Saturday evening at 5:15 p.m. From there they were bused over to the headquarters building on the other side of the airport where they were reunited with their families.

The Soldiers will now go on leave before returning to duty in January. **gt**



A Soldier assigned to the New York Army National Guard's 206th Military Police Company is greeted by family members at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, New York on Nov. 22, 2025 following their deployment to Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. One hundred 206th Military Police Soldiers returned from an 11-month deployment serving as part of the security force at Guantanamo.



A Soldier assigned to the New York Army National Guard's 206th Military Police Company is welcomed after his arrival at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, New York on Nov. 22, 2025 following a deployment to Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. One hundred 206th Military Police Soldiers returned from an 11-month deployment serving as part of the security force at Guantanamo.



Kayla Singleton displays the sign she made to welcome home her brother-in-law, a Soldier assigned to the New York Army National Guard's 206th Military Police Company while waiting for him to return to New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, New York on Nov. 22, 2025 following his deployment to Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. One hundred 206th Military Police Soldiers returned from an 11-month deployment serving as part of the security force at Guantanamo.



## Army Guard is Tops in Recruiting for 4<sup>th</sup> Year in a Row

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times* staff

New York Army National Guard recruiters talk with students attending the Orange-Ulster County Board of Cooperative Educational Services school in Goshen, New York on May 15, 2025, during a “Guard-X” event at which students learned about careers in the Army Guard. The New York Army National Guard’s recruiters were number one in the nation for the fourth year in a row in federal fiscal year 2025. U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Alexa Rexford, New York Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

LATHAM, N.Y. —For the fourth year in a row, New York’s Army National Guard is number one in the nation when it comes to recruiting and retaining Citizen Soldiers.

During federal fiscal year 2025, which ended on Sept. 30, the New York Army Guard recruited and retained a larger percentage of Soldiers –relative to its assigned strength—than the 53 other state and territorial National Guards.

The New York Army Guard’s assigned strength, reflecting 2025 recruiting success, was 11,700. This is 113 percent of the force’s authorized strength of 10,342 Soldiers.

Authorized strength is based on the number and type of units in a military force.

The Army National Guard assigns annual recruiting success scores based on recruiting of enlisted and officer personnel, retaining Soldiers in the ranks, and

the number of Soldiers who leave each state’s Army Guard.

For 2025 the New York Army Guard’s score was 134.29. The next highest score was 132.73 for the Rhode Island Army National Guard.

“Recruiting and retention is central to the culture of the New York Army National Guard,” said Major General Michel Natali, the New York National Guard’s assistant adjutant general, Army.

“Recruiting and retaining our Soldiers is a commonly understood priority at every echelon of our organization. In order to perform the wide variety of state and federal missions we respond to, we would be unable to do so without our most essential resource—our people,” Natali explained.

During federal fiscal year 2025 the New York Army National Guard recruited 1,878 enlisted Soldiers, 32 warrant officers and 155 officers for a total of 2,065 per-

sonnel. This number also includes Soldiers who transferred into the New York Army Guard from other states.

At the same time, New York Army Guard reenlisted 1,819 Soldiers whose enlistments were expiring.

The New York Army National Guard has been consistently increasing its strength.

The New York Army Guard’s assigned strength at the end of fiscal 2024, was 11,339 Soldiers. That was 109 percent of the authorized strength of 10,340 troops in September 2024.

At the end of federal fiscal year 2023, the New York Army National Guard was authorized a strength of 10,209 Soldiers and had 10,969 personnel assigned. This was 107.4 percent of authorized strength.

This is also the fifth year that New York was the top recruiting and retention state for the National Guard’s 10 largest state Army

Guard’s.

The New York Army National Guard is currently the fourth largest in the United States.

Lt. Col. John Harder, the commander of New York’s 303 Soldier-strong recruiting and retention battalion, credited the 130 production recruiters for the battalion’s success.

“Our partnerships with local high schools, colleges and organizations along with the professionalism of our recruiting force truly make the difference,” Harder said.

“The Army National Guard is just as much a part of the community as your local fire department or high school. Our recruiters are typically from the towns or cities they recruit from and personify the ‘Citizen-Soldier’ in all they do. This allows them to connect at level that other services cannot,” Harder added. 🇺🇸

# Army National Guard Provides Funeral Honors for Homecoming of WWII Airman

Story by Richard Goldenberg, *Guard Times* staff

LYONS, N.Y. — A Lyons resident who died in World War II was laid to rest with full honors by seven Soldiers of the New York Army National Guard at the town’s Old Elmwood Cemetery on Friday, Nov. 7.

The Honor Guard provided military funeral honors for Army Air Corps Staff Sgt. John A. Pagliuso, who died October 5, 1942, during a bombing mission over Papua New Guinea.

He was listed as missing until his remains were identified in March of this year.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Phillip Kovach, an Army Reservist from Rochester, N.Y., presented the colors from Pagliuso’s casket to his niece, Norma Jo Davis, now 79, of Canandaigua, N.Y.

“It’s closure for our family who never knew what happened to John. It’s wonderful,” Davis said of the ceremony.

The ceremony, intended for the family, expanded to a much wider celebration of Pagliuso’s service for Lyons and the Central New York veterans community.

“I received calls from all sorts of different veterans’ organizations to participate and attend. So yeah, this is bigger than I ever thought,” Davis said.

The New York Army National Guard military



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to the New York National Guard Honor Guard conducts a dignified transfer of the remains of U.S. Army Staff Sgt. John A. Pagliuso at Frederick Douglas International Airport in Rochester, N.Y., Nov. 5, 2025. Pagliuso, a former U.S. Army Air Corps aerial photographer, was killed on Oct. 5, 1942 when his B-25D Mitchell bomber was shot down over Papua New Guinea. Photo by Tech Sgt. Alexander Rector, 174th Attack Wing.

forces honor guard supports ceremonies like this in support of returning remains from the Vietnam War, Korean War and World War II.

Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Gosse, one of the honor guard members, said the ceremonies have unique impacts for the Honor Guard team.

“I’ve done a couple of these services now, and I think each one is special just because of the time that has passed, and we can finally lay them to rest in the way that they deserve,”

Gosse said.

“And it just shows how willing we are to give some type of closure to the families and to that veteran who gave that ultimate sacrifice. With these services, it means just a little bit more, because they can finally get their welcome home, and finally get some type of peace,” he added.

Staff Sergeant John A. Pagliuso was born to Italian immigrants in 1918, growing up in the village of Lyons, New York. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps at Mitchel Field, Hempstead, New York, October 3, 1939.

He trained as an aerial photographer and joined the 405th Bombardment Squadron, 38th Bombardment Group, and served in the Southwest Pacific Theater during World War II.

On October 5, 1942, the B-25D Mitchell medium bomber he was onboard did not return from a mission over the Territory of Papua (now Papua New Guinea).

Research of the incident from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency provided the family with details they had never known,



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to the New York National Guard Honor Guard conduct military funeral honors for U.S. Army Air Corps Staff Sgt. John Pagliuso, in Lyons, N.Y. Nov. 7, 2025. Pagliuso was a U.S. Army Air Corps aerial photographer, whose plane was shot down over Papua New Guinea. Photo by Tech Sgt. Alexander Rector, 174th Attack Wing.

Davis explained.

“He died before I was even born, so I never knew him,” she said. “All we knew from my mom is that his plane had gone down near Papua New Guinea. Now we have this report that gives us such explicit detail.”

Part of a flight of two, the bombers patrolled the coastal area near Buna until they made visual contact with one large enemy transport escorted by two Japanese destroyers.

They radioed the position of the convoy and immediately engaged the enemy force.

Six Japanese fighter aircraft proceeded to pounce on the twin-engine bomber, and Pagliuso’s B-25D was last observed in a steep dive with six Zeros on their tail.

The second aircraft successfully broke contact and safely returned to base, where the squadron scrambled six more B-25s, but those crews encountered opposition from enemy fighter pilots and were forced to jettison their bombs and return to base.

Officials reported Pagliuso and the five other crew members missing.

Search efforts located the aircraft crash site in 1944 and recovered only one set of remains for the six crewmembers, which were unidentified, later interred as Unknown X-133 at the cemetery established at Fort McKinley, Manila, known as the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial since 1960.

A final search in northern Papua took place from July through December 1948. A team of U.S. officers, enlisted men, and local guides, interpreters, and laborers questioned hundreds of local officials and residents but collected no additional evidence related to the crew of Pagliuso’s B-25D.

Pagliuso was memorialized on the Walls of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial in the Republic of the Philippines. His name will now receive a rosetta stone to mark his remains as identified.

His wife, Lucile Pagliuso, then residing in Jackson, Mississippi, during the war, received the notice from the War Department December 13, 1945 changing his status from missing to dead.

“What amazed me so much is the detail in this final report,” Davis said. “After all these years, they remain so diligent in researching the events leading up to his loss. It really gives me goosebumps.”

While the New York National Guard military

funeral honors team supports the services of more than 850 veterans each month, the return of former MIA service members is a special event, explained Sgt. 1st Class Michael Lebron, the casualty assistance officer for the family.

“I feel honored and a sense of brotherhood being able to represent the New York Army National Guard and all the service members who are unable to attend such a special return home,” Lebron said.

Lebron is also an aircrew member, serving as Flight Platoon Sergeant assigned to Company B, 3rd Battalion, 126th General Support Aviation Battalion in Rochester, where he flies with the CH-47 Chinook detachment.

“Being a flight crew member myself, I always feel proud and victorious when I’m able to contribute to getting one of our brothers-in-arms back home,” he said.

In 2021, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency recommended the disinterment of these Unknown remains with a list of possible candidates for association; those candidates included Pagliuso, one of the aircraft crew members. The remains were exhumed in December 2022 and escorted to the DPAA Laboratory in Hawaii for analysis.

His remains were confirmed through a DNA match with Pagliuso’s maternal niece and sister on March 17, 2025.

Reviewing all the details of the recovery of remains and the efforts to identify Pagliuso astonished Davis and the family, she said.

“It simply amazes me that the DNA from my aunt, given over 12 years ago, could be matched to those bones,” Davis said.

Now living a half hour away from the family hometown, Davis says her knowledge of Pagliuso’s life and service brings satisfaction and closure to the remaining family.

“He was an Eagle Scout who planted 100 trees in Lyons before the war,” Davis said. “We think about that every time we are in town. We’re so very proud of him.”

The lack of remains made closure for the family difficult, Davis said.

“The family never gave up hope, even though, as time went on, that hope diminished,” she said. “Our grandparents were approached about naming the VFW here in Lyons after him, and they refused, because they would have had to admit that he would never return.”

But Pagliuso did return. Pagliuso was laid to rest adjacent to his parents’ plot at Old Elm-



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to the New York National Guard Honor Guard carry the remains of U.S. Army Staff Sgt. John Pagliuso, during Pagliuso’s funeral service in Lyons, N.Y. Nov. 7, 2025. Pagliuso was a WWII veterans and U.S. Army Air Corps aerial photographer, whose plane was shot down over Papua New Guinea. Photo by Tech Sgt. Alexander Rector, 174th Attack Wing.

wood Cemetery.

“The cemetery plot was donated so that he will now lay right with my grandparents,” Davis explained. “It’s such an honor to have him home.” **gt**



U.S. Army Reserve Sgt. 1st Class Phillip Kovach, an Army musician assigned to the 198th Army Band, presents a United States Flag to Norma Davis, next of kin of U.S. Army Staff Sgt. John Pagliuso, during Pagliuso’s funeral service in Lyons, N.Y., Nov. 7, 2025. Pagliuso, a former U.S. Army Air Corps aerial photographer, was killed on Oct. 5, 1942 when his B-25D Mitchell Bomber was shot down over Papua New Guinea. Photo by Tech Sgt. Alexander Rector, 174th Attack Wing.

# Soldiers Return Home from Horn of Africa Deployment on Veterans Day

Story and photos by Maj. Avery Schneider, 153rd Troop Command

CHEEKTOWAGE, N.Y. — One hundred and twenty-one New York Army National Guardsmen returned home to Western New York in time to celebrate Veterans Day with their families.

The Soldiers from the Buffalo-based 152nd Engineer Support Company just completed a nine-month deployment to Djibouti, Somalia, and Kenya, where they provided critical engineering and construction support to ongoing counterterrorism operations.

“Today, on Veterans Day, we welcome home our Soldiers — men and women who carried our flag overseas and upheld the values of the United States Army and the National Guard,” said Col. William Snyder, commander of the 153rd Troop Command Brigade, and the senior officer who welcomed the 152nd ESC home in Buffalo.

“Their service reminds us that freedom isn’t guaranteed — it’s defended every day by ordinary Americans doing extraordinary things,” Snyder said.

The Soldiers flew into the cargo terminal at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport after demobilizing at Fort Bliss, Texas.

The 152nd ESC completed 205 construction projects valued at more than \$7.5 million during their time overseas.

“We were the de facto hard contractors, if you will, on any engineering projects throughout the Horn of Africa,” said Capt. Daniel Roche, commander of the 152nd ESC.

“We’re comprised of plumbers, carpenters, electricians, heavy equipment operators. So really anything and everything that had to do with force protection im-

provements, keeping people safer and, also, base improvements,” Roche said.

The company’s work included building aid stations and bunkers, improving perimeter walls, and upgrading operations centers for Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, a U.S. force conducting counterterrorism operations in the region. They also responded when monsoon rains caused flooding at base facilities across the region, using pumps to drain water and shoring up water-logged defenses.

The 152nd ESC mobilized for deployment at the historic Connecticut Street Armory in Buffalo on January 2. After training in Texas and flying to Africa, they assumed their mission from an Alabama National Guard ESC on February 11, nine months to the day before they returned home.

The deployment also marked the 152nd ESC’s first overseas activation as a whole company, earning the unit its first campaign streamer.

“The Army National Guard’s unique mission bridges the home front and the front line. The 152nd ESC proved they were ready when called, and there when needed,” said Lt. Col. Nicholas Whaley, commander of the 204th Engineer Battalion, the 152nd ESC’s first higher headquarters in New York.

“Their families showed what it means to support husbands, wives, sons, and daughters in uniform, and we can’t thank them enough for making their Soldiers’ sacrifices possible,” he added.

Those families waited eagerly outside the Buffalo Niagara International Airport with welcome home signs, warm embraces, and



A Soldier assigned to the 152nd Engineer Support Company, 204th Engineer Battalion, 153rd Troop Command Brigade, 53rd Troop Command, New York Army National Guard, holds his child and is welcomed home by his family on Veterans Day from a deployment to East Africa on Nov. 11, 2025 in Cheektowaga, N.Y. The 152nd ESC was deployed for nine months in Djibouti, Somalia, and Kenya, where they provided critical engineering and construction support to ongoing counterterrorism operations under the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa.



U.S. Army Capt. Daniel Roche, commander of the 152nd Engineer Support Company, 204th Engineer Battalion, 153rd Troop Command Brigade, 53rd Troop Command, New York Army National Guard, stands with family during a return home from a deployment to East Africa on Veterans Day on Nov. 11, 2025 in Cheektowaga, N.Y. The 152nd ESC was deployed for nine months in Djibouti, Somalia, and Kenya, where they provided critical engineering and construction support to ongoing counterterrorism operations under the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa.



A Soldier assigned to the 152nd Engineer Support Company, 204th Engineer Battalion, 153rd Troop Command Brigade, 53rd Troop Command, New York Army National Guard, hugs a family member during a return home from a deployment to East Africa on Veterans Day on Nov. 11, 2025 in Cheektowaga, N.Y. The 152nd ESC was deployed for nine months in Djibouti, Somalia, and Kenya, where they provided critical engineering and construction support to ongoing counterterrorism operations under the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa.



A Soldier assigned to the 152nd Engineer Support Company, 204th Engineer Battalion, 153rd Troop Command Brigade, 53rd Troop Command, New York Army National Guard, is hugged by a family member during a return home from a deployment to East Africa on Veterans Day on Nov. 11, 2025 in Cheektowaga, N.Y. The 152nd ESC was deployed for nine months in Djibouti, Somalia, and Kenya, where they provided critical engineering and construction support to ongoing counterterrorism operations under the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa.

wishes for a happy Veterans Day as their Soldiers return from Fort Bliss, Texas, where they completed demobilization.

“It’s a blessing to be back,” said horizontal construction engineer

Sgt. Spencer Sklar. It’s been a long nine, ten months. I’m just excited to see family and friends.”

A close friend of Sklar’s picked him up as part of a plan to surprise his parents who didn’t know their

son was back in the country.

Sklar said he was looking forward to keeping his tradition of celebrating Veterans Day by sharing a meal with his father, grandfather, and brother – who all

served in uniform.

“It’s exciting to actually go back and have a few fun memories with them,” he said. **gt**

## NYNG Honored by New York Stock Exchange



NEW YORK — Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York is joined by members of Joint Task Force Empire Shield after ringing the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange in New York on January 5, the first day of trading in 2026. The New York Stock exchange TV station also interviewed Shields as the exchange saluted the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs and the New York National Guard.



# 153<sup>rd</sup> Change of Command



*New York Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 153rd Troop Command Brigade, stand in formation during a change of command and transfer of responsibility ceremony for the brigade's senior leaders in Buffalo, N.Y., on Dec. 13, 2025. During the ceremony, Col. William Snyder and Command Sgt. Maj. Morgan Cady took over from Col. Christopher Guilmette and Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Giamberdino, who have led the brigade's more than 1,600 Soldiers since May 2022. Photo by Maj. Avery Schneider, 153rd Troop Command.*



*Col. William Snyder, commander of the 153rd Troop Command Brigade, Command, renders a salute at the conclusion of a change of command and transfer of responsibility ceremony for the brigade in Buffalo, N.Y., on Dec. 13, 2025. During the ceremony, Snyder took command from Col. Christopher Guilmette who led the brigade's more than 1,600 Soldiers since May 2022. Photo by Maj. Avery Schneider, 153rd Troop Command.*

*153rd Troop Command Brigade, Command Sgt. Maj. Morgan Cady, receives the colors of the brigade from Col. Christopher Guilmette, the brigade's commander, during a change of command and transfer of responsibility ceremony in Buffalo, N.Y., on Dec. 13, 2025. During the ceremony, Cady took on the duties of senior enlisted leader from Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Giamberdino. Photo by Maj. Avery Schneider, 153rd Troop Command.*

# New York Guard National Guard Psychologist is also Warhammer 40,000 Champion

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times staff*

**ATLANTA — New York Army Guard Maj. Matthew Southard has a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, two master's degrees, is a supervising psychologist for the NYPD, runs a sports psychology practice, and is the state behavioral health officer for the New York Army National Guard.**

He's also "Matt Aaron", the 2025 Warhammer 40,000 Hobby World Champion.

It's a title he earned – for the third time in four years – after competing in multiple Warhammer tournaments across the country as a member of the U.S. Army's official Esports Team.

In the world of Warhammer, this is a big deal.

Warhammer 40,000 is a 38-year-old tabletop hobby that involves building and painting miniature figures and fighting tabletop battles with them. The storyline resembles Dungeons and Dragons, but set in the far future with space marines, robots, elves, orks, tanks, and blasters.

Southard said he started going by Matt Aaron as an inside joke between friends. He continues to use it as his "gamer tag" because it affords him some privacy. It helps to keep the two parts of his professional and personal life separate, he explained.

As a Warhammer celebrity, he appears on Warhammer YouTube videos and podcasts discussing the game. He also travels around the country to teach seminars on how to paint Warhammer figures.

Warhammer players often compete in large events for best general, best painter, best sport, and sometimes a combination for best overall champion, Southard explained.

Southard said he got into the hobby at a young age. While he enjoyed playing the game, he was more drawn to the painting aspect of the game, Southard said.

But then life happened.

Southard earned degrees in psychology and biomedical science from the University of Buffalo.

Southard served in the 2nd Squadron, 101st Cavalry as a platoon leader and rear detachment troop XO, as a medical operations officer for the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and as a behavioral health officer for the 427th Support Battalion's medical company.

operations officer for the 27th Mobile Engagement Team.

Upon returning to NY, he completed his doctorate from the City University of New York.

While doing his residency at the Buffalo VA Medical Center, he met an old Warhammer buddy and got back into the hobby.

"The game is great social conduit in many ways" Southard explained.

"I am a psychologist, and the painting side is my creative outlet. It is my therapy in a way," he added.

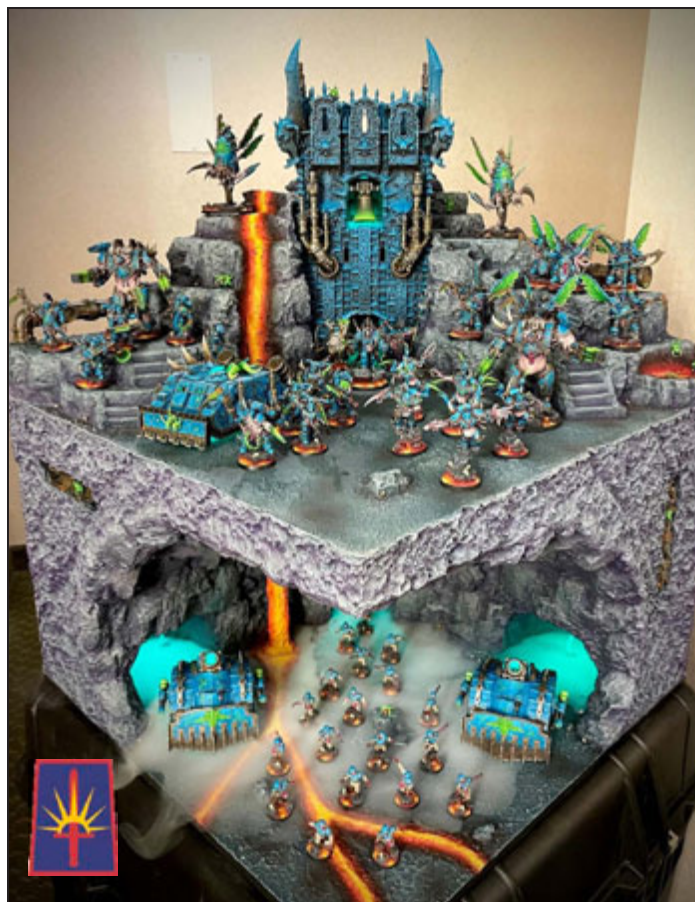
After getting back into the hobby, he also found success entering his painted figures into professional painting competitions where hundreds of people take part.

He was first introduced to the Army Esports Team after running into a team member at one of those events. That team member convinced him to join the team to represent the Army while continuing to play, he said.

The Esports Team is part of the Army's Marketing and Engagement Brigade. The team's members play video games and tabletop games while representing the Army.

The goal is to expose people in the gaming community to Soldiers and the idea of joining the Army, Army Reserve, or Army Guard, Southard explained.

Winning the championship meant competing in six nationally recognized tournaments. At the end of the season in November, total scores—based on both painting and generalship—are combined for yearly rankings for the year. **gt**



Warhammer 40,000 gaming figures painted by New York Army National Guard Maj. Matthew Southard displayed for a competition. The display board tells the story of a "Death Guard" Army mobilizing for battle. Southard, a New York Army National Guard behavioral health officer, has won the Warhammer 40,000 hobby championship three times and now competes as part of the Army Esports team. Courtesy Photo.

He also pinned on his New York Army Guard second lieutenant bars through the Canisius University ROTC program.

He earned a master's in psychology from Adelphi University in late 2011, then deployed to the middle east as the medical



New York Air National Guard Tech Sgt. Chanel Kung, makes a play during a women's rugby tournament in New Zealand on Dec. 7, 2021. Kung competed in the event with the Australian and New Zealand air forces as part of the All Air Force Women's Rugby Team.



New York Air National Guard Tech Sgt. Julia Nagy, and Tech Sgt. Chanel Kung, pose for a photograph during Armed Forces Rugby Championship try outs at the U.S. Olympic Committee's Elite Athlete Training Site in Chula Vista, California on Sept. 11, 2025. The two New York Air National Guard members competed as part of the All Air Force Women's Team.

## New York Air Guardsmen play on All-Air Force Women's Rugby Team

Story and photos by Maj. Robin Allen, New York Air National Guard Headquarters

**CHULA VISTA, Calif** —Two New York Air National Guard members played in the All-Air Force women's rugby team that competed against squads from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard during a September 6-8 tournament in Chula Vista, California.

Tech Sgt. Julia Nagy, a member of the 174th Attack Wing, and Tech Sgt. Chanel Kung, who serves in NY Air Guard headquarters, were part of the 15-member team that battled for first place in the Armed Forces Women's Rugby Championship.

The tournament was held at the U.S. Olympic Committee's Elite Athlete Training Site in Chula Vista.

The Air Force women lost to the Army team with a score of 14 to 15 in the final game of the tournament in which Kung scored one of two Air Force "trys" or goals.

"The team gave it all they could," said Air Force assistant coach Paschal Paschal to the U.S. Armed Forces Sports news site. "We gave [Army] a run for their money, and we didn't let them run all over us. We gave them a challenge."

"They've been our closest competition for the past six years," said Army Sgt. 1st Class Lolita Galdones. "They (the Air Force team) have a lot of skill; they have a lot of talent. They have a ton of players who continually develop themselves."

Being part of the Air Force women's team was a great opportunity, the two New Yorkers said.

"It's an honor to represent the Air Force, especially as members of the New York Air National Guard, Kung said. "We often see active-duty personnel in these positions, so being selected as Guardsmen is an incredible

feeling."

"Before being selected," Nagy said, "I was still finding my place within the Air Force, navigating the transition from a demanding deployment, the high of a mission followed by the challenge of reintegrating back into regular life."

"Seeing these incredibly strong, successful, and driven women was exactly what I needed; it was truly inspiring," she added.

Kung began her rugby career in 2021 during her freshman year in college when she joined the women's rugby club at SUNY Oswego.

She watched rugby being played at the Tokyo Olympics and decided she wanted to play too, Kung explained.

Nagy got into rugby while attending Syracuse University. She was on a run one day when the rugby coach asked her to join the team. She started practice the next day, she recalled.

Rugby, which was invented in England in 1823, is similar to football, but forward passes are not allowed, and players don't wear helmets and protective padding.

"American sports are about forward momentum and aggression," Nagy said.

"Rugby, on the other hand, requires you to unlearn everything you think you know and start from the beginning. It was a humble experience, forcing me to confront my limitations and develop a completely new mindset," she added.

Their passion for the game led Nagy and Kung to apply for the Air Force women's team. **gt**

# C-17 Combined Test Force Stands up at Stewart Air National Guard Base

Story and photos by Senior Airman Sarah Post, 105th Airlift Wing

STEWART AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. — This fall, the 105th Airlift Wing activated a C-17 Combined Test Force responsible for the development, testing and fielding of technologies that will benefit the 105th Airlift Wing's nine aircraft in various ways, as well as the entire fleet of U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster IIIs.

The detachment will perform operational and developmental testing and evaluation of new technologies for C-17 aircraft and support equipment.

"We have put forth this effort to improve the C-17's ability to fight and win in the 2025 arena and beyond against near-peer adversaries," said Col. Francis Farrelly, 105th Operations Group commander. "We want to make sure that we have our crews, as well as our jets, as ready and capable as we can possibly make them to achieve victory regardless of the threat environment."

The idea to establish an operational test unit originated around 2022 when the 105th Airlift Wing was asked to test microvane drag reduction technology. Microvanes, 4x16-inch, 3D-printed strips, were installed on the rear

of the C-17 to test their impact on fuel efficiency. Following a multi-year testing process, microvanes have enhanced mission capability and fuel efficiency at the 105th.

The 105th then began looking for more ways to enhance the capabilities of the C-17 through testing and development, which led to the activation of the C-17 Combined Test Force as a specialized test detachment.

In addition to microvane testing, they explored mission control technology with partnering agencies Rockwell Collins and Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

The C-17 Test Detachment is currently working on multiple other projects. They are testing adaptor improvements for the multiplex bus fault isolator by testing various adaptors' functionality within the C-17. They are also exploring use of the battlefield assisted trauma distributed observation kit, which will enhance patient care on aeromedical missions, and testing the airlift/tanker open mission system, aimed at providing secure airborne connectivity that will give aircrew an information advantage.

The most recent project the detach-



Microvanes sit on a table prior to getting installed on a C-17 Globemaster III at Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, Feb. 2, 2025. Microvanes are 3D printed devices that when installed on the rear of a C-17, reduce both drag and fuel consumption by one percent, saving the Air Force money and enhancing mission capability.



New York Air National Guard and Stewart Air National Guard Base leadership look at a C-17 Globemaster III equipped with Microvanes, at Stewart ANGB, New York, Feb. 2, 2025. Microvanes are 3D printed devices that when installed on the rear of a C-17, reduce both drag and fuel consumption by one percent, saving the Air Force money and enhancing mission capability.

ment has taken on is electric ground power unit testing. The C-17 is currently powered by an external, fuel-powered generator while on the ground to enable the use of many of the aircraft's functions, and the CTF is testing three advanced battery-powered ground power units to determine if they can support the requirements for power during ground operations.

Traditionally, the Air Reserve Component, which includes the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserves, served as a support function for the active duty Air Force to supplement wartime operations, according to Lt. Col. Joseph DeMonte, the 105th's C-17 Test Director. However, there has recently been a shift toward using ARC personnel and assets for more technology development and flight testing.

"We in the 137th Airlift Squadron have been able to jump on top of a lot of projects and lead the way in their development and emergence within the battle space," said DeMonte. "I think that since the Air Guard and Reserve component leadership has realized this opportunity, now we get to play a role in the development and fielding of technologies in the operational sense."

The Airmen of the 105th are excited to tackle the opportunities that come with launching the C-17 CTF, according to Farrelly, because it allows them to focus a cohesive and expansive team across the wing to advance test efforts. **gt**

# New York Air National Guard gets New Commander

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff

LATHAM, N.Y. — An Air Guard officer who started as an enlisted Airman, and served in the Persian Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan, assumed command of the New York Air National Guard during a Friday, January 9, ceremony at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham.

Major General Gary Charlton II, who has also commanded the New York Air Guard's 107th Attack Wing in Niagara Falls, and the 105th Airlift Wing in Newburgh, now heads the largest Air National Guard in the United States. Charlton, who lives in the Albany suburb of Loudonville, replaced Major General Michael Bank, who is retiring after 37 years of service.

He has been serving as assistant adjutant general, Air for the New York National Guard and will now serve simultaneously in both assignments.

Charlton was promoted from one-star brigadier general to two-star major general before assuming command of the New York Air Guard.

Major General Ray Shields,

the adjutant general of New York, and the presiding officer for the ceremony, said Charlton was the "right leader" to command New York's Airmen.

"You have the opportunity to continue to build the New York Air National Guard and to take the organization to new levels of professionalism," Shields told Charlton.

In his remarks, Charlton thanked his wife, Susan and his daughters, Megan and Ginger, as well as his extended family, for their support over the years.

"You have carried this career as much as I have," he said.

Charlton said his years as an enlisted Airmen shaped his command style as an officer.

"I Before I ever wore a commission, I wore stripes," Charlton said. "Those first ten years as an enlisted Airman shaped everything I believe about leadership," he added.

"I learned that the best ideas often come from the flightline, the shop floor and the Airmen who make the mission happen," he said.

"Leader is not about a posi-



Army National Guard Major General Ray Shields, right, the adjutant general of New York, presents the guidon of the New York Air National Guard to Air National Guard Major General Gary Charlton II, during promotion and change of command ceremonies held on January 9 at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.

tion, it's about people, it's about listening before speaking, serving before leading, and earning trust every single day," Charlton told his audience.

**"You have the opportunity to continue to build the New York Air National Guard and to take the organization to new levels of professionalism,"**

- Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, adjutant general of New York

The members of the New York Air Guard are the "embodiment of

versatility and excellence," he said.

Charlton, who is a command pilot with more than 3,400 hours in a variety of aircraft, started his Air National Guard career by enlisting in the 174th Fighter Wing at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base, in 1990 as a fuel system technician. He deployed with the wing's F-16s to the Middle East in 1990/ 91 as part of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm.

In 2000, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant and became an F-16 pilot. He served as the commander of the 138th Attack Squadron before being reassigned to the 107th Attack Wing at Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station. He served as the 107th wing commander from 2018 to 2022 and from 2022 to 2024, Charlton served as commander of the 105th Airlift Wing. 🇺🇸



Air National Guard Major General Gary Charlton II has new two-star general stars pinned on by his daughters during promotion and change of command ceremonies held on January 9 at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.



# Air National Guard, NYPD Sharpen Rescue Skills in Joint Training Exercise

Story by Capt. Cheran Campbell, 106th Rescue Wing



Members of the NYPD Emergency Services Unit and Airmen from the New York Air National Guard's 103rd Rescue Squadron, assigned to the 106th Rescue Wing, pose for a group photo at Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn, N.Y., Oct. 23, 2025. The units partnered for a two-day exercise involving simulated hostage rescue scenarios, close-quarters combat, and medical care. Courtesy photo.

FLOYD BENNETT FIELD, N.Y. — Airmen of the New York Air National Guard's 103rd Rescue Squadron, a part of the 106th Rescue Wing, partnered with the New York Police Department's Emergency Services Unit (ESU) for two days of simulated hostage rescue training at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, October 23-24.

The 103rd Rescue Squadron is made up of pararescue Airmen, also known as PJs, and combat rescue officers. These specialists are trained to rescue personnel from challenging situations, often behind enemy lines, and provide critical emergency medical care.

It takes three years of training in skills ranging from high-altitude parachute jumping to scuba diving and survival training to qualify in pararescue.

Master Sgt. Corey Ketelsen, a 103rd Rescue Squadron team chief, said the joint exercises provided his Airmen with a valuable opportunity to refine their expertise in a new environment.

"The entire point of the exercise was to give my guys a new location to practice their skills,"

Ketelsen said.

On Oct. 23, approximately 10 Airmen practiced rappelling from a helicopter onto a three-story building, simulating the rescue of wounded counter-snipers, teams trained to locate and neutralize enemy snipers, from a rooftop during a terrorist attack. The team secured the simulated patients, ascended back to the roof, and prepared the injured for airlift back to Gabreski Air National Guard Base for continued medical care, Ketelsen said.

"The extended helicopter flight allowed us to simulate ongoing medical treatment during a longer transit, which is a crucial aspect of our real-world missions," Ketelsen added.

The following day, the 103rd and Emergency Services Unit members collaborated on a simulated hostage rescue raid. Airmen and officers honed their close-quarters combat skills to clear a two-story building of simulated terrorists and provide immediate medical aid to the hostages.

According to Ketelsen, the scenario was designed to mimic real-world situations where the ESU might call upon the specialized abilities of

the 103rd to augment their capabilities during complex operations.

During the simulated hostage rescue, both agencies worked in unison to secure the building and ensure the well-being of the hostages.

Ketelsen emphasized that the exercise gave the 103rd Rescue Squadron Airmen the chance to learn new skills from the New York police officers, while enhancing their ability to operate together.

The training both expanded the medics' expertise and strengthened collaborative ties with the NYPD, showcasing the 103rd's versatility, Ketelsen added.

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**

# 109<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Flying 38<sup>th</sup> Antarctic Mission

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



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. The LC-130 Skibird is a variant of the C-130 Hercules aircraft, the Skibird is the only heavy airlift in the world equipped with skis to land on snow and ice. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Gabriel Enders, 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

**“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.”**

- Col. Steven Slosek, commander, 109th Airlift Wing

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**



Midshipman Braeden Dillon, a student at the United States Merchant Marine Academy, poses for a photo in front of a 174th Attack Wing MQ-9 Reaper, at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in Syracuse, NY, Dec. 1. Dillon, spent three-weeks at the installation completing an internship where he explored MQ-9 operations with the Wing's 108th Attack Squadron.

## 174<sup>th</sup> Hosts United States Merchant Marine Academy Midshipmen for Fall Internship

Story by Tech. Sgt. Alexander Rector, 174th Attack Wing

**HANCOCK FIELD AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. —**The New York Air National Guard's 174th Attack Wing hosted midshipman Braeden Dillon, a maritime transportation, logistics, and security student from the United States Merchant Marine Academy, King's Point, for a three-week internship at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base, Nov 17 to Dec. 2.

During the internship, Dillon learned about MQ-9 Reaper operations from members of the Wing's formal training unit.

The formal training unit (FTU), which is operated by the Wing's 108th Attack Squadron in partnership with the 491st Attack Squadron, a geographically separated unit belonging to the 49th Wing at Holloman Air Force Base, trains MQ-9 pilots and sensor opera-

tors. The schoolhouse is unique as it is the only MQ-9 FTU in the Air National Guard, and it is the only Air Force schoolhouse that trains MQ-9 aviators east of the Mississippi.

"Having Midshipmen Dillon intern with the 174th Attack Wing was valuable for both him, and our members, said U.S. Air Force Capt. Nicole Clay, an officer assigned to the 108th Attack Squadron, 174th Attack Wing, New York Air National Guard. "Not only was he exposed to all things MQ-9 from both an operational and maintenance perspective, but he was also able to provide insight to our members on the vital Merchant Marine mission."

As a graduation requirement, midshipmen at the academy must complete an internship. The

students are given a wide degree of latitude when selecting the internship, and many students elect to intern with military units or the private sector.

"I had to come up here all on my own and stay at the hotel for three weeks," said Dillon. "It's a lot of money, but I thought it was worth it because it's helping my future."

Students at the Merchant Marine Academy, like those at the other four U.S. service academies, attend tuition-free while incurring a service obligation after graduation.

"We have six years of mandatory service under the merchant marine," said Dillon.

Upon graduation, academy students are required to maintain their U.S. Coast Guard license and

repay their service obligation by serving on a U.S. flagged commercial vessel or by commissioning as an officer in one of the armed services.

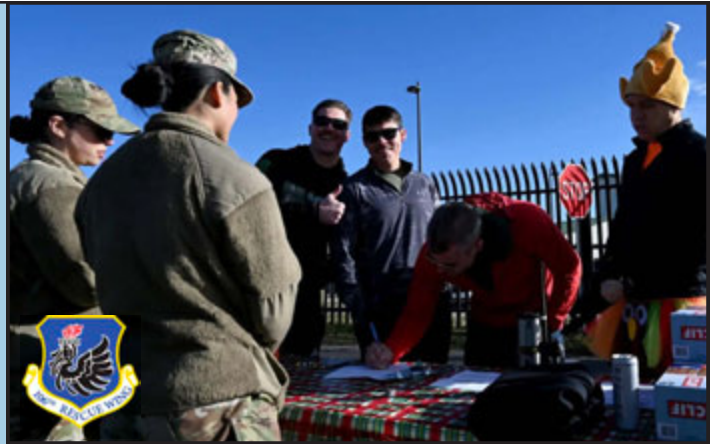
"We're allowed to commission into any branch of the armed forces," said Dillon "You can go Air Force Reserves or Air National Guard as well, which is what I'm trying to do.

Dillon's interest in the Air Force and aviation began at a young age through a family member's service.

"The Air Force was my favorite because my grandmother was a colonel in the Air Force and she's been talking about that with me since I was little," said Dillon. "I always wanted to be in the Air Force, so that's the reason I came here." **gt**

# Run, Run Rudolph 5K

FRANCIS S. GABRESKI AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, WESTHAMPTON BEACH, N.Y. — Members from the 106th Rescue Wing participate in a Run, Run, Rudolph 5K at Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base, Westhampton Beach, New York on December 5th, 2025. The holiday-themed event, organized by the 106th Force Support Squadron, drew 34 participants who braved freezing temperatures to boost morale and promote fitness across the wing. Courtesy photos.



# 105<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Commander Promoted to Brigadier General



STEWART AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. — 105th Airlift Wing Honor Guard presents the colors at Brig. Gen. Ryan Dannemann's, 105th commander, promotion ceremony at Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, Nov. 2, 2025. Dannemann is the first wing commander to have served his whole career at the 105th. Photo by Senior Airman Sarah Post, 105th Airlift Wing.

# 105<sup>th</sup> Airman Spotlight Tinatin Sadzaglishvili

Story and photos by Senior Airman Sarah Post, 105th Airlift Wing

**STEWART AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. — The 105th Base Defense Group relies on the dedication and expertise of its Airmen to carry out its mission of organizing, training and equipping defenders to execute defense operations globally – and Airman 1st Class Tinatin Sadzaglishvili, 105th Base Defense Squadron entry controller, is no exception.**

As an entry controller, Sadzaglishvili maintains the security and integrity of Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, by controlling access to the installation. She verifies visitors' reasons to be on base and issues their visitor passes, verifies the credentials of personnel entering base and conducts random vehicle inspections, so only authorized individuals and no prohibited items are granted access. She ensures only authorized individuals and items are on the installation by verifying credentials for everyone who enters the base and conducting random vehicle inspections.

"Being an entry controller can be challenging and sometimes repetitive, but it's also a critical role that keeps the base secure. I take pride in that responsibility,"

said Sadzaglishvili. "What really makes it enjoyable and interesting is the team I'm surrounded by. The people who work at the gate make even tough days better and help keep morale high."

According to Senior Master Sgt. Flavio A. Martinez, 105 Base Defense Group senior enlisted leader, Sadzaglishvili is driven and has an attention for detail that has led to more than five arrests at the base's main gate and multiple cases of contraband being discovered.

He also noted that just days after graduating from training, Sadzaglishvili was assigned to the Department of Corrections state active duty mission. When she returned to normal operations at Stewart ANGB, she quickly pivoted to flight operations and earning certifications for her job duties, including receiving a perfect score on one to be able to man the main gate by herself, and training other members.

"She is not settling, and the hope is that she inspires others to do the same," said Martinez.

Sadzaglishvili joined the New York Air National Guard to build a foundation for her future, for the valuable training, structure



**Airman 1st Class Tinatin Sadzaglishvili, 105th Base Defense Squadron entry controller, poses for a photo next to a 105th Base Defense Group police truck, at Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, Oct. 15, 2025. As an entry controller, Sadzaglishvili maintains the security and integrity of Stewart ANGB, by controlling access to the installation.**

and leadership opportunities, and to challenge herself by becoming the first member of her family to serve in the military. She hopes to develop technical skills, discipline and a work ethic that will benefit her.

"From professional develop-

ment and leadership training to the chance to serve my community and country, the Air National Guard has helped me grow in ways I wouldn't have experienced elsewhere," she said. "It gives me purpose, structure and the ability to keep challenging myself." **gt**



**STEWART AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. — Members of the 105th Base Defense Squadron listen to Gold Star Family members speak before starting the Hustler 6 Memorial Ruck March for Tech. Sgt. Joseph Lemm and Staff Sgt. Louis Bonacasa at Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, Dec. 6, 2025. The 105th Base Defense Group hosted the 6-mile ruck from Stewart ANGB to the Purple Heart Museum in New Windsor, NY, to honor Lemm and Bonacasa, who died while deployed to Afghanistan in 2015. Photo by Senior Airman Sarah Post, 105th Airlift Wing.**

## 2025 Annual Training Prepares Troops for Diverse Missions

Story by 1st Lt. Ed Shevlin, and Staff Sgt. Mike Bilski, New York Guard Headquarters



Training Class of 2025 and instructors stand for their graduation photo at Camp Smith Training Site, on October 9. The New York Guard conducted Annual Training at CSTS from October 2nd – 10th 2025. US Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Bilski, New York Guard.

**CAMP SMITH TRAINING SITE, N.Y.—One hundred and seventy-one New York Guard volunteers – just over half of the organization's 323-member strength – attended the state defense force's weeklong annual training at Camp Smith Training Site in October.**

From October 4 to 10, 56 recruits conducted their initial entry training, while five New York Guard officer candidates completed their training.

Another 13 members graduated from a basic communications course which trained them to operate high frequency radios and digital communications equipment.

The 67-recruit training class was the largest the New York Guard has seen recently, said New York Guard Capt. John Olszewski, the deputy operations officer.

The new members represented a wide range of professional backgrounds, ages and civilian skill sets, Olszewski said.

The size and diversity of the class reflect both growing interest in state defense work and the Guard's expanding operational requirements, he added.

Getting the latest New York Guard recruits thought this week-long training is important, Olszewski emphasized.

Getting New York Guard members to annual training so they can hone their skills and learn new ones, is the cornerstone of the New York Guard readiness process, Olszewski said.

The week-long event provides professional military education, qualifications and mission-

specific instruction necessary for service members to effectively perform in civil support roles across the state.

"This is where we shape the future of the force," he said. "Annual Training is not simply a requirement—it is where we build competency, confidence and cohesion."

Another key feature of the week-long AT was joint training conducted by the Guard's 56th Company and the 88th Company. Since the two companies are in the New York City metro area, they would likely respond to an emergency together, Olszewski said.

The two units' volunteers conducted training on triage and treatment of injured people.

"It is vital to the success of the mission that our two companies train together on a regular basis. "One Team, One Fight!" is not just a motto, it is our modus operandi," said 1st Sgt. Eric Rasmussen of the 56th Company.

A retired FBI special agent also conducted an active shooter seminar, where he discussed threat recognition and response techniques.

New York Guard Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Sean Gardiner also led a mandatory suicide prevention course.

Gardiner emphasized intervention awareness, peer support, and the need for command teams to remain vigilant in identifying stress-related risk factors.

"Readiness is not only tactical—it's mental, spiritual and emotional," Gardiner said. "If we are to be prepared to support New York, we must first ensure our own resilience."

Olszewski said the 2025 training cycle demonstrated operational growth, instructional modernization and a clear commitment to force readiness.

"The New York Guard is trained, prepared and ready to support the state and its citizens," he said. "AT 2025 proved that our members are not just showing up—they are stepping up." **gt**



New York Guard Sgt. William Howe and Pfc. William Sifonte dragging an injured Soldier from the scene of a simulated mass casualty event during the New York Guard's Annual Training on October 5, at Camp Smith Training Site. The New York Guard conducted Annual Training at CSTS from October 2 – 10, 2025. US Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Bilski, New York Guard.

# New York Naval Militia



## MaryEtta Nolan Becomes New York State Rear Admiral, Takes Charge of New York Naval Militia

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times* staff

Rear Admiral MaryEtta Nolan, the commander of the New York Naval Militia, salutes following the ceremony at which she assumed command of the New York Naval Militia on Nov. 21, 2025, at Division of Military and Naval Affairs headquarters in Latham. Nolan is the 25th commander of the 3,200 member force and the first woman to hold the role and the rank of state rear admiral. Photo by Stephanie Butler, *Guard Times* staff.

LATHAM, N.Y. — Greenfield Center, New York, resident MaryEtta Nolan became the first woman to assume the rank of State Rear Admiral and take command of the New York Naval Militia during a Friday, Nov. 21 ceremony at Division of Military and Naval Affairs headquarters in Latham.

Nolan, who previously served as chief of staff of the 3,200-member Naval Militia, replaced Rear Admiral Michael Perry, an Averill Park resident who has led the Naval Militia since 2023.

Perry is retiring after 35 years of service in the Navy Reserve and the Naval Militia.

Nolan, the 25th commander of the 134-year-old Naval Militia, is a retired perioperative care nurse and a retired member of the Navy Nurse Corps Reserve. She has

served in the Naval Militia since 2020.

The New York Naval Militia was created in 1891 as a seagoing version of the National Guard in the days before there was a Navy Reserve.

Most members of the New York Naval Militia simultaneously serve in the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard Reserve. They employ the skills they learned as members of the military on behalf of the state.

Currently, almost 400 members of the New York Naval Militia are part of the New York National Guard force which is working in state correctional facilities in support of the Department of Corrections and Community Services.

The New York Naval Militia also operates a fleet of 11 patrol boats

which work in support of local, state, and federal agencies.

Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, praised Nolan as being the right person for the job of leading the Naval Militia.

"You are assuming command of a vibrant and healthy organization of 3,200 service members," Shields told Nolan.

"We all know you are the right person to lead this organization into the future," he said.

In her remarks, Nolan thanked Shields and Governor Kathy Hochul for picking her for her new role.

"I am deeply honored to have been selected as commander of the New York Naval Militia, and it is especially meaningful to be the first female to hold this distin-

guished position," Nolan said.

She also praised Perry for his service and for serving as a mentor to her.

The Nov. 21 ceremony mirrored a shipboard ceremony in which Nolan, Shields, and Perry walked through lines of "sideboys" while they were whistled on board as though they were boarding a ship.

Nolan entered the Navy in 1984.

As a reserve officer, Nolan was assigned to the Portsmouth Naval Medical Center at Sewells Point in Norfolk, Virginia as clinical operations officer. She was also a "plank owner" when the Naval Medical Center, Portsmouth (NMCP) stood up a same-day surgical program at Fort Eustis Army Reserve Center in Newport News, Virginia. **gt**

