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



FROM THE LEADERSHIP

Our Military Forces Always Meet the Challenge

Hello everyone. I hope you and your family are doing well.

We finally made it to spring 2025 and are finally done with another cold, snowy and eventful winter!

The last time I wrote for the inside cover of "Guard Times" was in 2022. Since then, I have enjoyed reading the thoughts of our other senior leaders. But I thought it would be appropriate for me to write this section for this edition.

The biggest events since my last inside cover in 2022 have been domestic responses here in New York.

We finished our COVID-19 support in July 2022 (with 1.8 million total workdays); then started the Asylum Seeker support mission in September 2022, ending that in January 2025 (with 1.273 million total workdays).

Then from February 18 to March 31, 2025, we involuntarily mobilized almost our entire New York Army and Air National Guard to respond to the statewide prison strike.

At our peak on March 11th, we had 7,359 service members on duty.

The last prison strike in 1979 used more than 12,000 members of the New York National Guard at one time. As far as we know, the 2025 prison strike is our single largest activation for a state mission since 1979.

I want to thank everyone who responded.

I know this was not an easy mission. This was involuntary duty and involved working in unfamiliar conditions with incarcerated individuals; with uncertainty and

call-up; less than adequate living conditions inside the prisons; separation from family, friends, school or work; and many other inconveniences.

However, you must know your service was necessary and much appreciated by the governor and by me.

During the strike, every time I spoke to the governor, she had nothing but praise for the work you all did.

She also realized the sacrifice you were making and authorized special duty pay of up to \$2,000 per pay period.

Thank you to everyone involved in the involuntary mobilization.

On April 1, 2025, we reverted to a voluntary mission supporting the Department of Corrections and Community Services. As I write this, we have some 3,000 volunteer service members working in 34 prisons statewide.

This support, which we have now opened to our Naval Militia and the New York Guard members as well, could go on for many months.

In other areas, the New York National Guard and our State Defense Forces continue to exceed all expectations.

In an historic turnaround, both the New York Army and Air National Guard are national leaders in recruiting and retention.

The New York Army National Guard is on track to be the best recruiting and retention state of the 54 for FY 2025, which will be the fifth year in a row.

Our Army National Guard presently exceeds 112% assigned strength, and we are the national leader for quality strength, while our Air National Guard had the most accessions of any state in the 2024 fiscal year.

These are amazing accomplishments.

We are also now involved in our third State Partnership Program.

On July 12, 2024, Sweden and the New York National Guard signed our formal document to become partners under the National Guard Bureau program.

We have been partnered with South Africa since 2003, and Brazil since 2018.

Since signing the agreement with Sweden, our engagements and cooperation with that nation's military have taken off. Russia's war on Ukraine and Sweden's NATO membership in March 2024 have heightened that sense of urgency.

Lastly, we recently held the grand re-opening of the \$129 Million Jamaica Armory and Field Maintenance Shop after years of construction, and we awarded the construction contract to rehabilitate the Lexington Avenue Armory for \$123 Million.

In total we have spent more than \$373 Million on our armories in New York City, to ensure



Maj. Gen. Raymond Shields

that our Soldiers have world class facilities to train in.

Thank you all for everything you do to support the New York National Guard and our State Defense Forces.

We cannot do anything without you, your family's support, and that of your employer. Thank you for being a member of our organization. **gt**



CORTLANDT MANOR, N.Y. — Brig. Gen. Isabel Smith, 53rd Troop Command commanding general, was awarded a New York State Senate Proclamation by Senator Pete Harckham, New York State's 40th District Senator.

The New York State Senate Proclamation is awarded to individuals in recognition of their achievements, selfless service, and exemplary service on behalf of their country and state. Brig. Gen. Smith is the first woman to command one of the New York Army National Guard's two major commands, 53rd Troop Command, which consist of roughly 4,100 Soldiers. She was also the commander of the 369th Special Troops Battalion and Deputy Team Chief-Iraq Police National Headquarters in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2010. She was praised for her great work by Senator Harckham. Courtesy Photo.

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FRANCIS S. GABRESKI AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y.—Members of the 106th Rescue Wing Logistics Readiness Squadron pose for a group photo following an open ranks inspection on March 7, 2025. Photo by Staff Sgt. Sarah McKernan, 106th Rescue Wing.

FRONT COVER: PARSONS LAKE, CANADA — A LC-130 Hercules assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing flies over "Husky Camp" on Parsons Lake, Northwest Territories, Canada, March 4. "Husky Camp" is the name of the Arctic camp built for Operation Nanook-Nunalivut. The Polar Camp Skiway Team stays at the camp to build and groom the ski landing area for the LC-130 Hercules to land on. This was the first time a LC-130 Hercules landed on fresh water ice. Photo by Master Sgt. Jamie Spaulding, 109th Airlift Wing.

BACK COVER: FORT INDIANTOWN GAP, PA — New York Army National Guard Soldiers with the 187th Brigade Signal Company, 369th Sustainment Brigade, support the 42nd Infantry Division during Warfighter 25-3, between January 24 and February 7, 2025, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. The Soldiers shown here are setting up a high-capacity-line-of-sight system for communications. Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

FACES of the FORCE



James and Jamal Whitaker of Cheektowaga, N.Y. celebrate with family after having taken the oath of enlistment with the 107th Attack Wing, March 7, 2025, Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station. Following Airman Basic Training, they will attend the Air Force Security Forces Academy, at Lackland Air Force Base, TX. They will receive 65 days of training in basic military police functions including law enforcement, security, and combat tactics.

Cheektowaga Brothers Enlist in Air National Guard's 107th Attack Wing

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

CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y.— Two Cheektowaga brothers, James and Jamal Whitaker, were sworn into the New York Air National Guard on March 7, as the newest members of the 107th Attack Wing.

The two will become members of the wing's Security Forces Squadron after completing basic training and technical school in early 2026.

The Whitakers are 2021 and 2023 graduates of Tapestry Charter School in Buffalo.

Beginning in April, James and Jamal will attend the 107th Attack Wing's student flight training program while awaiting basic training dates.

As slots become available, they will attend Air Force Basic Military Training for 7.5 weeks at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

Following Airman Basic, they will attend the

Air Force Security Forces Academy, which is also located at Lackland. They will receive 65 days of training in basic military police functions including law enforcement, security, and combat tactics.

"I'm just really excited for all of it; the trials at basic, tech school, I definitely plan on college," James said.

The Whitakers's parents, Jennifer and James Whitaker, have served with the Buffalo Police Department for 17 years, as detective and lieutenant, respectively.

"Since our parents have a lot of experience in law enforcement, that probably helped us lean toward security forces" James said "And of course, it's an honor to serve," he added

For now, Security Forces is the first step in a Guard career full of potential, according to the brothers.

"I'm definitely planning for a career here, stay for my 20 years. But honestly right now, one day at a time," Jamal said.

James and Jamal took the oath of enlistment in the presence of their parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, who shared their pride and well wishes at the conclusion of the ceremony.

"I'm just so proud of them to be able to do what they do and make this decision on their own," said their father, James. "We've got their back all the way, whatever or however role or avenue they want to travel."

"It's just a privilege and an honor to serve and to be here to witness our sons, our young kings, take on the same challenge and decision on their own, it's fantastic," said their mother, Jennifer. 🇺🇸

222nd Recognized at Spacepower Conference

Story by Capt. Jason Carr, 107th Attack Wing



From left to right, Staff Sgt Jason Capostagno (222nd CACS), Gen B. Chance Saltzman, Chief of Space Operations U.S. Space Force, and Staff Sgt Curtis Grady (222nd CACS) shortly after being named the Space Force Association's National Guard Enlisted Service Member of the Year 2024 during the associations second annual Spacepower Conference held in Orlando, FL, December 10-12, 2024. Capostagno was named the winner of the Space category, while Grady was name winner for the Intelligence category. Courtesy photo.

ORLANDO, FL — Two New York National Guard Airmen have been recognized as enlisted service members of the year for 2024 by the Space Force Association.

Staff Sgt. Jason Capostagno, a resident of Rome, New York, was named National Guard Enlisted Airman of the Year in the Space Operations category.

Staff Sgt. Curtis Grady, a resident of Arlington, Virginia was named National Guard enlisted Airman of the Year in the Intelligence Operations category.

Both men are assigned to the New York Air Guard's 222nd Command and Control Squadron. The squadron supports the National Reconnaissance Office, the agency responsible for United States spy satellites.

The squadron is part of the

Niagara Falls based 107th Attack Wing.

The 222nd conducts space mission functions.

The leadership of the 222nd is extremely proud of both Airmen, said Chief Master Sgt Scott Rachon, the squadron's senior enlisted leader.

The Space Force Association is a not-for-profit that supports the U.S. Space Force and its personnel.

This was the first year the group presented the award to military members.

According to the association, recipients were selected based upon operational, national security, acquisition, or warfighting achievements.

The awards recognize officers, enlisted members, and civilian personnel from the Space Force, as well as from the Air Force Reserve or Air National Guard, in three categories: Space Operations, Cyber Operations, and Intel Operations.

Capostagno served as the space battle management subject matter expert for National Guard Bureau space operations integrating U.S. and NATO space domain initiatives with the Indonesian National Armed Forces.

In 2024, Grady was selected to support a federal intelligence analyst position at the National Reconnaissance Office. He was the sole intelligence expert support a 20-person team. This was the first time an Air Guardsman was selected for the job. **gt**

Airman Honored During Mets Game

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff



Master Sgt. Greg Mihalko, a member of the New York Air National Guard headquarters staff, is saluted as the Veteran of the Game during a Met's game at Citi Field, N.Y. on April 5, 2025. Courtesy Photo.

NEW YORK — New York Air National Guard Chief Master Sgt. Greg Mihalko was recognized as "Veteran of the Game" by the New York Mets during the teams opening weekend game on April 5.

Mihalko, who is assigned to the New York Air National Guard's headquarters detachment, was recognized on the field during the seventh inning stretch in the game between Major League Baseball's New York Mets and Toronto Blue Jays at Citi Field in Queens.

Mihalko, a resident of Stephenstown, New York, who has served in the Air Guard for over 36 years, said he's been a Mets fan since he was a kid.

His wife Kristin, daughter Olivia and son Mitch, who is a member of the 109th Airlift Wing's Security Forces Squadron, joined him.

Mihalko was nominated for the honor by his military colleagues.

"Chief Mihalko has spent his career serving others, and the staff here wanted to do something special to show how much that's meant to all of us," said Captain Joshua Bowers, Executive Director of the New York Air National Guard.

"It's not every day you get to honor a friend and colleague like this—especially in a way that connects to something he's loved his whole life," Bowers said.

Being on the field was "overwhelming," Mihalko said.

"It's been a dream of mine from the first time I went to Shea Stadium [the former home of the team in Flushing, Queens] to be on the field during a Mets game," Mihalko said.

His grandparents were Mets fans and got him hooked on the team, he explained.

"I always had dreams of being in front of 40,000 fans cheering for me," he said. "It didn't happen the way I imaged, but it finally happened."

Mihalko joined the Air Force in 1989 as an F-16 avionics systems technician. In 1993 he transferred to the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing.

Over the years, he's held numerous leadership roles in the 109th Airlift Wing and at state headquarters. **gt**

AROUND THE STATE

New York Thanks Afghan, Iraq War Vets with Commemorative Medals

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times* staff

LATHAM, N.Y.—The New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs is now issuing commemorative Afghanistan and Iraq War medals approved by the legislature and Governor Kathy Hochul in 2023.

The medals are not for wear on a uniform but were designed and authorized as a way for the legislature to thank veterans of these wars for their service.

Two bills, signed into law by the governor in November 2023, created the New York State Afghanistan War Commemorative Medal and the New York State Iraq War Commemorative Medal.

The Afghan War medal is awarded to members of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan between October 2001 and August 2021.

The Iraq War medal is for service members who served in Iraq between March 2003 and December 2011.

Last year the Division of Military and Naval Affairs began issuing commemorative medals to military veterans who served in the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

"On behalf of the legislature and Gov. Kathy Hochul, we at the Division of Military and Naval Affairs are proud to be able to play a role in recognizing the military service of those who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan," said Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York.

Veterans can apply for the medals online by going to the Division of Military and Naval Affairs website at <https://dmna.ny.gov/awards/>.

Applicants can use an online form to request the medals, or they can print out, and mail in an application form.

Applicants must be New York state resident now, or have been a New York state resident when they served in Iraq or Afghanistan.

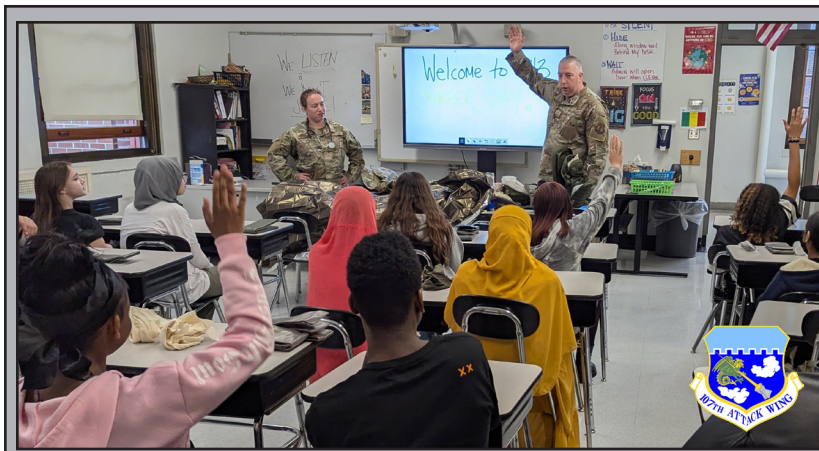


The New York Division of Military and Naval Affairs is issuing state medals commemorating service in the Iraq War, left, and the Afghan War, right, to those who served in the conflict. Veterans need to provide a DD314 providing their service in Iraq or Afghanistan. The state medals were approved by the governor and the legislature to thank veterans for their service. They cannot be worn on military uniforms. Courtesy Photo.

Applicants must provide a digital or paper copy of their Department of Defense Form 214 (DD214) Certificate of Release or discharge from Active Duty, as proof of military service in the two

theaters of action.

Family members and other designated individuals can apply on behalf of a veteran. The medal can also be award posthumously. **gt**



Army and Air Guardsmen Showcase Benefits of the Force at Career Day

BUFFALO, N.Y.—U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Donald Trzepacz and Staff Sgt. Victoria Broadwell, aerospace medical service specialists assigned to the 107th Medical Group, 107th Attack Wing, New York Air National Guard, speak to students during career day at the Lovejoy Discover School #43 in Buffalo, N.Y., March 20, 2025. New York Army and Air National Guardsmen were invited to the school to talk to students about what it's like to serve in the armed forces in their communities and around the world. Photo by Maj. Avery Schneider, 153rd Troop Command.

Jamaica Armory's Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Photos by Staff Sgt. 1st Class, Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade



NEW YORK — New York National Guard leaders and New York State partners join Maj. Gen. Raymond Shields, the adjutant general of New York, and New York State Office of General Services Commissioner Jeanette Moy, to cut the ribbon during a ceremony at the Jamaica Armory in Queens, N.Y., Feb. 13, 2025. This 190,000-square-foot historic State Armory for the Division of Military and Naval Affairs was rehabilitated and modernized to meet the needs of today's New York Army National Guard. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

Historic Lexington Armory Groundbreaking Ceremony



NEW YORK — New York Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Raymond Shields, the adjutant general of New York, and New York State Office of General Services Commissioner Jeanette Moy, join state partners in a groundbreaking ceremony at the Lexington Avenue Armory, New York, N.Y., Feb. 13, 2025. This 180,000-square-foot historic State Armory will be transformed into a 21st-century space tailored to meet the needs of the modern New York Army National Guard. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

THE JOINT FORCE

Over 8,200 New York Guard Soldiers and Airmen on Duty for Illegal Prison Guard Strike

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times* staff, Maj. Avery Schneider, 153rd Troop Command, and Staff Sgt. Jordan Sutton, 138th Public Affairs Detachment

ALBANY, N.Y. — Over 8,200 New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen mobilized in response to the correction officers strike that kicked off on Feb. 17.

The strike started at prisons in Elmira and Collins and spread to 42 of 45 prisons before it was officially declared over by Gov. Kathy Hochul on March 10.

More than 12,000 officers walked off the job, violating a state law that forbids them from striking.

As prison guards began walking off the job, the governor signed an emergency order on Feb. 18, directing the New York National Guard to mobilize and replace the striking Guards on Feb. 19.

At the mobilizations peak on March 11th, there were 7,359 Guardsmen on duty, with more than 5,300 personnel in the prisons.

During the last correction officers strike in 1979, Gov. Hugh Cary deployed 12,000 National Guard personnel to replace striking prison guards.

The Guard Soldiers and Airmen deployed by Gov. Hochul, watched over incarcerated individuals in medium security prison dorms, maximum security cell blocks, and minimum security campuses. They conducted head counts, delivered meals, and monitored special housing units for inmates in solitary confinement, among myriad other duties.

Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, said the way the Soldiers and Airmen rose to the challenge made him proud.

“Their response to the prison strike and the ongoing staffing shortages of the Department of Corrections was phenomenal,” Shields said.

“They endured involuntary mobilization, austere living conditions, stressful duty, unfamiliar interactions with incarcerated individuals, long days and nights, and uncertainty when the mission would end,” he said.

“And most significantly,” Shields added, “being away from family, friends, and work, our service members answered the call and went above and beyond what I could ever expect.”

Despite that official end date of March 10, over 4,400 Soldiers, Airmen and Naval Militia members were still on duty on April 1, when the mission transitioned into a longer term mission moving to a volunteer-only force.



Service members assigned to the Bravo Co., 101st Expeditionary Signal Battalion, provide support at Eastern Correctional Facility in Napanoch, N.Y., Feb 25, 2025. New York National Guard service members were deployed to provide support to the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision during a strike by correction officers. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Pietrantonio, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

The governor directed that Guard Soldiers and Airmen, joined by members of the Naval Militia, remain on duty to ensure the understaffed correction officers

force could conduct duties without excessive overtime.

As of April 25, Joint Task Force-Sentinel, operating out of the Thompson Road Armory at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in Syracuse was overseeing 3,010 Soldiers and Airmen, supplementing the 10,000 correction officers who returned to work.

The goal was to shrink the force further and bring more volunteers on board.

The initial mobilization order on February 18 was for New York Army National Guard units.

The commanders of the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the 153rd Troop Command, and the 369th Sustainment Brigade were each assigned operational areas and units across the state.

The 153rd was responsible for Western New York prisons, while the 369th handled prisons in the



UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters from the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade transport Airmen from the 109th Airlift Wing flying over Stratton Air National Guard base in Scotia, N.Y. in support of the DOCCS prison strike response. Photo by Maj. Avery Schneider, 153rd Troop Command.



U.S. Airmen assigned to the 106th Rescue Wing, disembark from a U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter assigned to the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade, at the Dansville Municipal Airport in Dansville, N.Y., Feb. 22, 2025. The airmen were among 40 from the wing deployed to reinforce National Guard service members as part of a joint-force response to provide support to the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Service during a strike by corrections officers. Photo by Maj. Avery Schneider, 153rd Troop Command.

Hudson Valley and the 27th Brigade supported Central New York and New York's North Country, the Adirondacks and the region along the Canadian border.

The 42nd Expeditionary Combat Aviation Brigade was also placed on state active duty orders in order to move people and supplies quickly across the state.

On Feb. 20, for example, three UH-60M Black Hawks picked up 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Soldiers at a baseball field in the Bronx to transport them 250 miles north to Bare Hill Correctional Facility near Malone.

By the end of the mission, the aircrews had flown over 600 hours and transported 1,050 passengers.

When advance parties arrived at some prisons on February 18, additional correction officers began walking off the job. This left the Soldiers and supervisors to handle their duties.

For units like the Auburn-based 102nd Military Police Battalion, supporting the state's Department

of Corrections and Community Supervision, known as DOCCS, was not far from their federal military role, which includes establishing and operating military prisons.

But for other units, like the Buffalo-based 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion and Niagara Falls-based 2nd Squadron, 101st Cavalry Regiment, planning and executing operations inside the walls of prisons was completely new.

Capt. Timothy Sullivan, the commander of the Brigade Engineer Battalion's military intelligence company, said his Soldiers had to learn on the job as they went to work at Orleans Correctional Facility in Albion.

"They were able to adapt, communicate, follow orders, and do the mission to the best of their ability," Sullivan said.

Soldiers worked in twos or threes to ensure safety at all times.

Spc. Tamia Grant, an automated logistics specialists in the 101st Expeditionary Signal Battalion,

found herself working in the Special Housing Unit – the solitary confinement area – of Eastern Correctional Facility in Napanoch.

She spent 12-hour shifts checking on inmates every 30 minutes.

She got used to the mission, Grant said, and her leaders worked hard to make sure the Soldiers were comfortable.

"My leadership is doing an amazing job," Grant said.

"If we have any comments, questions or concerns, they have an open-door policy," she said.

"We can go to them and tell them maybe, like, we're not feeling comfortable in an area, and they'll take the proper precautions to move us around and switch us for different shifts," she added.

Leaders at all levels, from Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general, to brigade commanders, to command sergeants major, spent their days on the road visiting the prisons to check on the troops and the mission.

"I need to see what my Soldiers are experiencing," explained Col.

Patrick Clare, the commander of the 369th.

Col. Christopher Guilmette, the commander of the 153rd, compared what he saw on his visits to stories of the 1979 prison strike he heard from his father, who served in the Army Guard then.

"In '79, the responding Guardsmen had to cross the correction officers' picket line to enter the facility, and the striking correction officers were resistive and violent," Guilmette said.

"Supplies and care packages had to be flown by helicopter into the prison perimeter to avoid crossing the picket line," Guilmette said. "I am glad we did not encounter anything close to that situation."

As the mission kicked off, conditions were austere. Soldiers were living inside the prisons, sleeping on cots in unused gyms or dorms or wherever they could find space.

Living inside the prison could be overwhelming, said Pvt. Cornell Ashby, an automated logistical specialist in the 133rd Composite Supply Company.



U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Raymond Shields, adjutant general of the state of New York, speaks with Julie Wilcott, Superintendent of the Attica Correctional Facility in Attica, N.Y., Feb. 22, 2025. Shields and members of the state National Guard's command team visited service members deployed as part of a joint-force response to provide support to the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Service during a strike by corrections officers. Photo by Maj. Avery Schneider, 153rd Troop Command (This photo has been altered for security purposes by masking individual names.)

“Some days, I wake up and I feel like a Soldier,” said Ashby, who was assigned to Fishkill Correctional Facility.

“Other days, I see the barbed wire and it feels like I’m something else,” he added.

While Army Guard units were mobilized first—a total of 6,673 Soldiers were part of the mission—1,397 members of the New York Air National Guard also went on duty.

They were assigned to the Army Guard brigades to reinforce units already in the prisons.

Eventually, 185 Naval Militia members also went on duty.

As the mission progressed, efforts were made to make things better.

Starlink internet systems were obtained so that Soldiers and Airmen could use internet access to keep in touch with families, for entertainment, and to work on their academics.

The systems also made it easier for companies dispersed across the state to communicate with their higher headquarters.

MREs were replaced with catered meals and even Door Dash food deliveries.

Cots were replaced with mattresses and eventually Soldiers and Airmen were moved into hotels when possible. The Division of Military and Naval Affairs eventually contracted with 125 hotels and motels across the state for rooms.

Personnel were also given days off when possible.

“Soldiers are trained to adapt to difficult conditions until we can resolve those difficulties,” said Capt. Saul Rodriguez, commander of the 133rd Composite Supply Company.

“But we are always actively working to fix their conditions so they can succeed,” he added.

“Internet access was a big boost to morale before we were able to get hotel rooms, because it enabled them to take a mental break,” he said.

“Morale got a lot better in that second week when we could get them into hotel rooms.”

Spc. Justin Hall, a member of Alpha Company of the 427th Brigade Support Battalion, who was assigned to Auburn Correctional Facility, said his unit leaders were looking out for the Soldiers.

“Our leadership does rounds. They will check on every floor,



U.S. Soldiers assigned to the 369th Sustainment Brigade, New York Army National Guard, provide support to correctional facilities throughout New York State, Feb. 25, 2025. New York National Guard service members were deployed to provide support to the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Service during a strike by corrections officers. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

make sure every Soldier is perfectly fine. If we need anything, they will get it for us,” Hall said.

“My hours are pretty fair. I get about seven hours of sleep, you know, pretty average,” he added.

“We had Walmart runs to get,

you know, personal needs and stuff like that. They made sure we were fed and we had showers overall,” he said.

The governor’s decision to compensate Soldiers for the rigors of the mission, with a retroactive



U.S. Soldiers assigned to the 369th Sustainment Brigade, New York Army National Guard, provide support to correctional facilities throughout New York State, Feb. 23, 2025. New York National Guard service members were deployed to provide support to the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Service during a strike by corrections officers. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.



U.S. Army Lt. Col. Frank Quintana, a military police officer assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 153rd Troop Command, 53rd Troop Command, New York Army National Guard, speaks to members of the brigade staff in the Connecticut Street Armory in Buffalo, N.Y., Feb. 22, 2025. The 153rd Troop Command oversaw operations of National Guard service members deployed to correctional facilities across western New York as part of a joint-force response to provide support to the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Service during a strike by corrections officers. Photo by Maj. Avery Schneider, 153rd Troop Command (This photo has been altered for security purposes by masking operational information.)



New York Army and Air National Guard personnel pose with Department of Corrections and Community Supervision instructors at the DOCCS training facility in Albany, on March 10, 2025. Working with the New York Army National Guard's 106th Regional Training Institute DOCCS created a five-day crash course in basic correction officer skills for New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen on duty in the state's prisons during an illegal strike. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jordan Sutton, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

basic housing allowance pay, and \$2,000 per pay period special duty pay, was also appreciated, Grant said.

"I feel like the TAG (the Adjutant General) and the Army National Guard, is doing a phenomenal job with making sure everyone gets their pay and just keeping us updated on everything and not withholding information," she said.

"As soon as they get the information, they're putting it out immediately," Grant added.

The servicemembers did more

than just keep order in the prisons.

Pfc. Quintel Turner, a combat engineer with the 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion defended an incarcerated individual during a violent attack by other incarcerated individuals, likely saving his life.

Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Austin Basile, an air force structural maintenance specialist from the 106th Rescue Wing, saved incarcerated individuals from overdosing on two separate occasions.

To better prepare Guardsmen

for the continuing mission, the 106th Regional Training Institute teamed up with DOCCS to create a training program. The one-week course, conducted at DOCCS headquarters in Albany, at Camp Smith and at Groveland Correctional Facility, shared some basic correction officer skills.

"It's teaching them and getting them familiar with proto-

cols, procedures, things that may occur in prison, drug awareness, gang awareness, how they operate in the prison," explained Sgt. 1st Class Brian Lopez, the Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of the training program. **gt**

Department of Corrections and Community Supervision conducts a correctional officer training course for NY National Guardsmen at their training facility in Albany, March 10, 2025. The correctional officer training is a five day course curated by the NY Army National Guard and DOCCS in order to formally train the guardsmen on proper skills and tactics of a correctional officer. Properly training guardsmen enhances their safety while working in correctional facilities. Photos by Staff Sgt. Jordan Sutton, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.



NY Continues Swedish Partnership Engagements

Story by Eric Durr and Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff

LATHAM, N.Y. — New York Army Guard infantrymen, aviators, and logistics Soldiers will train with the Swedish military both here and in Sweden over the next two years, according to plans sketched out in February by Swedish military and New York Guard leaders.

New York Air Guardsmen in the 106th Rescue Wing, the 152nd Air Operations Group, and the 274th Air Support Operations Squadron, will also be training with their Swedish counterparts, as a result of the discussion held on February 27 and 28.

The New York Army National Guard's 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the 369th Sustainment Brigade, and the 42nd Expeditionary Combat Aviation Brigade are all planning exercises over the next two years, according to Maj. Melanie Padilla, the New York National Guard State Partnership Program director.

Our engagements will range from small subject matter expert exchanges of 5 to 10 people and grow to participation in large scale exercises with participation of a few hundred in 2027, Padilla said.

Seventeen Swedish officers and three civilians were at the Latham, New York headquarters for two days of talks as part of the State Partnership Program relationship with the New York National Guard.

The State Partnership Program pairs state National Guards with the militaries of other nations. New York has partnerships with South Africa, and Brazil. The agreement with Sweden was signed in 2024.

The Swedes and New York National Guard broke into working groups to discuss and determine training engagements between the two organizations from 2025 through 2027.

"The SPP engagements that were agreed upon fosters cooperation between the New York National Guard and Sweden to allow our organizations to strengthen our interoperability and allow for our organizations to learn from each other," Padilla said.

The Swedish team also visited the New York Air National Guard's 174th Attack Wing at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in Syracuse. There, Airmen fly operational missions with the MQ-9 Reaper a remotely operated aircraft.

"We have met a couple of times now, and it is so easy to work with you, and how easy we connect and work with each other, we have talked about real business, real exercises, and how to develop our capabilities," explained Maj. Gen. Johan Pekkari, the chief of the Swedish Defence Staff's Strategy Unit.

The Swedish visit coincided with the state active duty mission to replace striking prison

guards, so some Swedish leaders got to sit in a Commanders Update Briefing being conducted in the Joint Operations Center as well.

"It was an excellent experience to see some of your current operations and the capabilities you have," Pekkari said.

At the same time, the Swedish delegation was visiting New York, nine New York Army National Guard Soldiers were in Sweden observing a

Swedish wet gap crossing exercise, Padilla said.

The New York Air National Guard's 152nd Air Operations Group, which specializes in air campaign planning, will hosting Swedish Air Force leaders during exercises here in the United States, and will also travel to Sweden to train there.

The 274th Air Support Operations Squadron, a New York Air Guard unit specializing in close air support, will train at home and in Sweden



Brig. Gen. Isabel Smith, director of joint staff, meets with civilians that work for Sweden's military during a State Partnership Program engagement at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, N.Y. on Feb. 27, 2025. The State Partnership Program pairs state National Guard's with the militaries of countries around the world in bilateral training and exchange partnerships. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.



New York Naval Militia's top officers meet with Swedish Military members during a State Partnership Program engagement at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, N.Y. on Feb. 27, 2025. The State Partnership Program pairs state National Guard's with the militaries of countries around the world in bilateral training and exchange partnerships. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.



New York National Guard members meet with Swedish military members during a State Partnership Program engagement at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, N.Y. on Feb. 27, 2024. The State Partnership Program pairs state National Guard's with the militaries of countries around the world in bilateral training and exchange partnerships. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.

with their counterparts.

The 106th Rescue Wing, based on Long Island, will be working on search and rescue exercises with their Swedish counterparts.

This summer, the Swedish Army will send observers to participate in a similar Engineer training exercise in New York with the 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion and the 204th Engineer Battalion, Padilla said.

A port security exercise with Swedish naval personnel and the New York Naval Militia, the U.S. Coast Guard, and New York City police and fire units in the New York Harbor will also be held later this year, she said.

The New York Naval Militia has also been invited to participate in a port security exercise in Sweden. **gt**



New York National Guard members meet with Swedish military members during a State Partnership Program engagement at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, N.Y. on Feb. 27, 2025. The State Partnership Program pairs state National Guard's with the militaries of countries around the work in bilateral training and exchange partnerships. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.



New York National Guard members meet with Swedish military members during a State Partnership Program engagement at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, N.Y. on Feb. 27, 2025. The State Partnership Program pairs state National Guard's with the militaries of countries around the work in bilateral training and exchange partnerships. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.

204th Engineers Train with Sweden on Wet Gap Crossing

SKILLINGYARD TRAINING AREA, SWEDEN — Members of the 204th Engineer Battalion observed a river crossing operation in Sweden as part of the State Partnership Program. In the photo at left, Capt. Joe Brown, assigned to the 204th Engineer Battalion, looks on as a Swedish Bandvagn 206, a tracked all-terrain carrier, approaches a water crossing to place an amphibious float as part of the Swedish

Armed Forces Gota Regiment Wet-Gap Crossing exercise at Eksjo Training Area., the Swedish center of excellence for ordnance disposal and military engineering, on Feb. 26, 2025.

At right, New York Army Guardsmen review a Swedish engineer command post at Eksjo, on Feb 26, 2025. Photos by Capt. Zachary Dean, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.



NY National Guard Provided Military Funeral Honors for over 8,700 Families in 2024

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff

LATHAM, N.Y. — New York Army and Air National Guard Honor Guards provided military funeral honors for the families of 8,783 veterans during 2024.

Federal Public Law 106-65 directs the military to provide funeral honors to any veteran or former military member who was not dishonorably discharged from service.

Because the Army and Air National Guard are community based military forces, the responsibility for discharging this duty falls to those forces.

By law each former service member is entitled to a two-person detail which folds and presents a flag to the family and plays taps usually using an electronic insert into a bugle at each funeral. Retired military members and those who die while still serving are entitled to more elaborate services which include a full seven person detail and a firing party.

The New York Army National Guard Honor Guard program is centralized with 116 Soldiers, including both full-time and part-time members who operate at eight locations across the state.

The Army honor guard effort is budgeted for \$1.5 million annually and operates 29 vehicles.

In 2024, the New York Army National Guard conducted 6,833 military funerals. The detachment on Long Island, where the Veterans Administration's Calverton National Cemetery is located, conducted

2,245 services.

The New York Air National Guard supports the funeral honors program with base honor guards located at four air bases and Eastern Air Defense Sector. The 107th Attack Wing, based at Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, provides

personnel for that base honor guard who serve alongside members of the United States Air Force Reserve's 914th Airlift Wing.

Eighty Airmen served on the base honor guards in 2024 in both full-time and part-time volunteer status.

During 2024 New York Air National Guard personnel provided funeral honors 1,950 times. Like the Army National Guard, the busiest team, is the one that provides funeral services at Calverton National Cemetery.

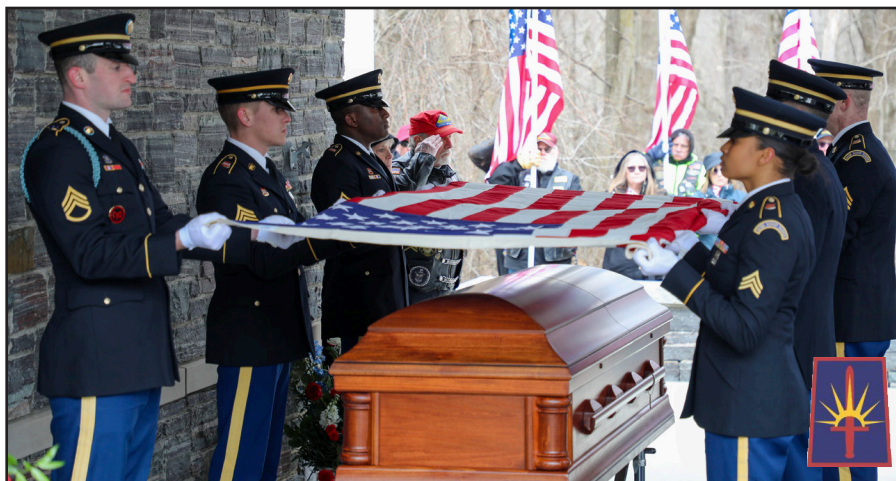
The Honor Guard of the 106th Rescue Wing, located in Westhampton Beach on Long Island, conducted 647 military funerals in 2024.

While the Army Guard Honor Guard only conduct funerals, the Air Guard base honor guards provide color guard details for parades and other events.

As the number of veterans in New York has declined the number of military funeral honors requests have declined as well.

In 2012 there were 838,000 veterans living in New York while in 2022 that number was 580,000, according to the Census Bureau.

In 2012 the New York National Guard conducted 1,759 funerals while in 2022 that number was 9,824. 🇺🇸



Soldiers assigned to the New York Army National Guard Honor Guard prepare to fold the American Flag over the casket of Chief Warrant Officer 2 Casey Frankoski at the Gerald B. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery in Schuylerville, New York on March 22, 2024. Frankoski, a helicopter pilot, was killed in a March 8, 2024, outside Rio Grande City, Texas while patrolling the Southwest Border. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.



New York Air National Guard Honor Guard members assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing fire a salute during military funeral honors for Senior Master Sgt. Matthew King at Gerald B. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery in Schuylerville, New York on Dec. 17, 2024. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Gabriel Enders, 109th Airlift Wing.

New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen Secure Presidential Inauguration

Story by Capt. Stephanie Fernandez, 138th Public Affairs Detachment

WASHINGTON — Over 500 New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen supported inaugural ceremonies for President Donald Trump's second term in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 20.

The New Yorkers were among 7,445 Guard members-- 6,113 Soldiers and 1,332 Airmen-- from 48 states who were part of Joint Task Force-National Capital Region, which assisted District of Columbia Metro Police and federal law enforcement in keeping order during the 60th Presidential Inauguration.

"Most of the Soldiers and Airmen are military police or security forces, so this kind of mission comes naturally to us in our everyday taskings. There's a lot leading up to it, a lot of preparation," explained Lt. Col. Nicholas Paolini, the commander of the 104th Military Police Battalion.

Paolini also served as the com-

mander of the New York Task Force.

The New Yorkers were tasked to assist the D.C. Metro Police in crowd management at the stations of the Washington Metro. They also set up traffic control points, Paolini said.

The 408 military police Soldiers came from the 105th, 107th, 422nd, and 222nd Military Police companies, as well as the headquarters of the 102nd MP Battalion and the 104th MP Battalion.

The 97 Security Forces Airmen who participated came from the 105th Airlift Wing, the 174th Attack Wing, the 109th Airlift Wing, the Eastern Air Defense Sector, and the 107th Attack Wing.

The 105th Airlift Wing supplied a 12- Airmen field feeding team, and the New York Army Guard sent public affairs and communications specialists.

The 24th Civil Support Team, whose members are trained to identify dangerous chemical, biological, or radiological substances in an emergency, sent 12 Soldiers and Airmen to support their Washington, D.C. counterparts.

The biggest challenge facing the Guardsmen on traffic and crowd management duty was keeping warm, explained Staff Sgt. Michael Cerrato, a member of the 104th.

On January 20, the high was 27 degrees, and the 18 mile-per-hour wind made it feel like it was 14 degrees, according to the weather service.

The weather was cold enough that the noon ceremony was moved from the front of the Capitol into the inside Rotunda for only the third time in history. The last time the oath of office was taken indoors was in 1985, during President Ronald Reagan's second

inauguration.

Troops working outside rotated between warming tents and outside duty.

Members of the New York militia, guarded President George Washington at the very first presidential inauguration in New York City on April 30, 1789.

Modern New York Guardsmen have been involved in the ceremonies since 2009.

For 1st Sgt. Jordan Brendan from Buffalo's 105th MP company, the 2025 ceremony was his third time on the mission.

"Being bestowed the honor of serving the nation for my third presidential inauguration, I have to say, this one was different," he said. "Although the temperatures were low, the motivation and esprit de corps were at an all-time high," Brendan said. 



1st Sgt. Jordan Brenden, assigned to the 105th Military Police Company, speaks with a Washington D.C. Metro Transit Police Officer at a metro stop in Washington D.C., Jan. 20, 2025. Approximately 8,000 National Guard service members from approximately 40 states and territories comprise JTF-DC to support the 60th Presidential Inauguration, continuing a legacy that began in 1789 when their predecessors escorted George Washington to the first inauguration. Photo by Spc. Joseph Liggio, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.



Airman 1st Class Troy Thorn (left), 224th Security Forces Squadron, 224th Air Defense Group, and Airmen Benjamin Bachner, 205th Base Defense Squadron, 105th Airlift Wing, assigned to Joint Task Force-District of Columbia (JTF-DC), patrol a metro station in Washington D.C., Jan. 20, 2025. Approximately 8,000 National Guard service members from approximately 40 states, territories, and the District of Columbia comprise JTF-DC to support the 60th Presidential Inauguration, continuing a legacy that began in 1789 when their predecessors escorted George Washington to the first inauguration. Photo by Spc. Joseph Liggio, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

42nd Passes Warfighter Exercise

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff, and Master Sgt. Warren Wright, 42nd Infantry Division

FORT INDIANTOWN GAP, PA — Over 1,300 New York Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 42nd Infantry Division and its brigades waged computerized war from January 24 to February 6 at Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania.

The eight-day Warfighter exercises also included 1,000 Soldiers from 11 other states whose units would fall under the 42nd in wartime.

The Soldiers, staff and commanders of the division and subordinate brigade headquarters practiced coordinating the actions of multiple infantry, armor, sustainment, fires, and aviation brigades in a battle with more than 10,000 Soldiers and billions of dollars' worth of equipment operating over hundreds of miles of terrain in a simulated fight.

During the exercise, leaders, staff officers, and Soldiers participate around the clock, making decisions involving logistics, intelligence, operations, and tactics, which played out in the computer simulation.

Soldiers passed message traffic and reports, prepared battle plans, and wrote the orders to execute those plans.

Soldiers who were tasked to keep communications and planning systems running did the same jobs they would do in a combat environment.

Soldiers assigned to the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team in Syracuse, the 369th Sustainment Brigade from New York City, and the 42nd Expeditionary Combat Aviation Brigade in Latham each set up command posts at Fort Indiantown Gap.

Guardsmen from the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team in New Jersey, the 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team from Vermont, and the 197th Fires Brigade from the New Hampshire Army National Guard, as well as smaller elements also took part.

Four different computer simulations were integrated into one system known as WARSIM, short for Warfighter Simulation, to test the Soldiers.

The WARSIM is extraordinarily detailed and mimics the real world, down to the terrain features, the types of weapons systems used, their



A Soldier assigned to the Signal Intelligence and Sustainment Company, 42nd Infantry Division, set up radio communication devices Jan. 29, 2025, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. The communication equipment was set up as part of the division's Warfighter exercise in order to maintain unit readiness. Photo by Sgt. Grace Nechanicky, 42nd Infantry Division.

capabilities, and how engagements with the enemy are determined according to Carson Davis, the support team manager with the Combined Armed Center's Mission Command Training Program, which conducts the training.

"You can make a fighting position for it. If you try to drive it up certain slopes, it won't go. It does a lot of things a normal tank can and can't do. There are a lot of things that the war sim does that are very, very accurate. And that accuracy is what makes the Warfighter realistic. The more accurate the simulation is, the more realistic the Warfighter is," he explained.

The focus of the training was on battling what the Army calls a "peer competitor." That translates into a military force which has tanks, artillery, helicopters, missiles, and aircraft similar to those used by the United States.



The commanding general of the New York Army National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division, Maj. Gen. Jack James, discusses operations with the commanding general of 18th Airborne Corps, Lt. Gen. Gregory Anderson, as he visits with the New York Soldiers during the division's warfighter exercise Feb. 3, 2025, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. Photo by Sgt. Grace Nechanicky, 42nd Infantry Division.



Soldiers assigned to the 42nd Infantry Division relay command directives Jan. 29, 2025, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. The Soldiers' participation in the division's Warfighter exercise ensures the unit maintains readiness and proficiency in their respective military occupational specialties. Photo by Sgt. Grace Nechanicky, 42nd Infantry Division.

To prepare for this exercise, Soldiers conducted previous training exercises at Fort Indiantown Gap. The final exercise was held in November 2024.

Leaders also took part in a week-long seminar at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to hone their knowledge of tactics and the latest Army operational doctrine.

"We pursued a thoughtful and comprehensive training plan to get ready, including our three command post exercises, James said.

The Army calls this kind of fight "Large Scale Combat Operations" or LSCO, for short. The U.S. military has not faced this kind of enemy since World War II.

"For the Soldiers of the 42nd Infantry Division, the information they received from the simulation is an accurate replication of what they would see during actual combat operations," said Col. Andrew Couchman, the division's operations officer.

The training they conduct on mission command functions effectively prepares the division staff to deploy and successfully conduct operations when called upon, he said.

"If it were to do this for real in a conflict zone, we would still be in that (command post) environment," Couchman said.

On top of the mandated training requirements placed on the division from the Army, the senior leadership also added additional tasks.

These were not required by the exercise evaluators but are vital to the division's success during real-world operations, such as the location of the main command post and conducting a command post "jump," where the location is rapidly moved from one location to another during operations. **gt**



Chief Warrant Officer 5 Sean Fredericks with Headquarters Support Company, 42nd Infantry Division, conducts M17 pistol familiarization and qualification at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., Jan. 25, 2025, in order to maintain mission readiness and prepare for upcoming operations. Photo by Sgt. Grace Nechanicky, 42nd Infantry Division.



Chief Warrant Officer 5 Aaron E. Teichner, the aviation mission survivability officer with the New York National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division, participates in the division's Warfighter 25-3 exercise at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., Jan. 29, 2025. More than 1,300 National Guard Soldiers participated in the massive command post exercise, participating around the clock, making decisions involving logistics, intelligence, operations and tactics. Photo by Sgt. Grace Nechanicky, 42nd Infantry Division.



Brig. Gen. Isabel Smith, the commander of the New York Army National Guard's 53rd Troop Command, visits with members of the New York Army National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division during the division's Warfighter exercise Feb. 1, 2025, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. Smith's visit during the exercise allows Soldiers of the 42nd ID to showcase their ability to operate in a simulated tactical environment. Photo by Sgt. Grace Nechanicky, 42nd Infantry Division.



Soldiers with the New York National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division relay command directives during the division's Warfighter 25-3 exercise at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., Jan. 29, 2025. More than 1,300 National Guard Soldiers participated in the massive command post exercise, participating around the clock, making decisions involving logistics, intelligence, operations and tactics. Photo by Sgt. Grace Nechanicky, 42nd Infantry Division.



New York Army National Guard Spc. Francisco Dominguez, assigned to Signal Intelligence and Sustainment Company, 42nd Infantry Division, fills containers with fuel Jan. 29, 2025, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. The fuel was allotted to generators that were powering communication equipment which was set up as part of the division's Warfighter exercise in order to maintain unit readiness. Photo by Sgt. Grace Nechanicky, 42nd Infantry Division.

Army Guard Gets New Command Chief Warrant Officer

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times staff

LATHAM, N.Y. — Command Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Solmo, a Brooklyn resident and Iraq war veteran, became the top ranking warrant officer in the New York Army National Guard during a Dec. 19, 2025 ceremony at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham.

Solmo is responsible for recruiting new warrant officers and advancing the careers of the 253 warrant officers currently in the force.

He replaced Chief Warrant Officer 5 Mark Shumay, a Greenwich, New York resident, who held the job for two years. Shumay, an Army aviator, returned to full-time piloting duties.

Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, praised Solmo as a first-rate leader with a great deal of experience.

Shields also pointed out that of the over 11,300 Soldiers in the New York Army National Guard, there are only 16 positions for this highest warrant officer rank.

In his remarks, Solmo thanked Shields for placing him into the position. He vowed to

work to recruit more warrant officers and help develop the force.

Solmo enlisted in the New York Army National Guard in 1986. In 1996 he deployed to Bosnia with the 133rd Maintenance Company.

He was appointed as a warrant officer in 2001, serving in the 69th Infantry Regiment. He responded to the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and deployed to Iraq with the 69th Infantry in 2004-2005.

He served in a number of vehicle maintenance positions in the 53rd Troop Command and deployed to Djibouti with the 69th Infantry in 2022 and 2023.

His military awards include the Bronze Star Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Combat Action Badge, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the New York State Counterdrug Service Ribbon, and the NYS Defense of Liberty Medal with World Trade Center device. **gt**



Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Solmo, command chief warrant officer of the New York National Guard, receives a Sabre from Brig. Gen. Raymond Shields, the adjutant general of New York, during a ceremony at New York National Guard Headquarters in Latham, N.Y. on Dec. 19, 2024. Photo by Stephanie Butler, Guard Times staff.

369th Sustainment Brigade Supports Warfighter 2025



Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

(Left Top) FORT INDIANTOWN GAP, PA — New York Army National Guard Spc. Adrian Baez, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with the 369th Sustainment Brigade, supports the 42nd Infantry Division during Warfighter 25-3, between January 24 and February 7, 2025, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa.



(Right) FORT INDIANTOWN GAP, PA — New York Army National Guard Soldiers with the 187th Brigade Signal Company, 369th Sustainment Brigade, support the 42nd Infantry Division during Warfighter Exercise 25-3, between January 24 and February 7, 2025, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. The Soldiers are setting up a high-capacity-line-of-sight system for communications.

(Left Below) FORT INDIANTOWN GAP, PA — New York Army National Guard Spcs. Irshad Khan and Yanming Jing, wheeled vehicle mechanics with the 369th Sustainment Brigade, support the 42nd Infantry Division during Warfighter 25-3, between January 24 and February 7, 2025, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa.



206th Military Police Company Departure Ceremony

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Matthew Gunther, Joint Force Headquarters



Soldiers of the 206th Military Police Company participate in a departure ceremony at Shaker High School, in Latham, N.Y., on Jan. 25, 2025. The unit will be deploying to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the nation's only active strategic level detention facility, to perform detention operations.

LATHAM, N.Y.—Hundreds of friends and family members said a formal farewell to 111 Soldiers of the New York National Guard's 206th Military Police Company, who are deploying to Guantanamo Bay, on Saturday, Jan. 25.

Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, and other Guard leaders, attended the ceremony held at Shaker High School in Latham, New York.

The purpose of the ceremony, said 1st Lt. Olano Gayle, the company executive officer, was to thank the Soldiers for their hard work in preparing for the deployment.

The ceremony also allowed Guard leaders to assure the families that they and their Soldiers were being taken care of.

"Deployments are never easy, and for some this may be your first time away from your loved ones, but remember, you're not alone. You carry with you the support and love of your families, friends, leadership, and this entire community," said Brig. Gen. Isabel

Rivera Smith, the commander of the 53rd Troop Command.

The Soldiers will be helping to secure the Guantanamo Bay detention facility.

The Soldiers have been training for the deployment for the past year and will conduct three weeks of additional training at Fort Bliss, Texas, before heading to Guantanamo Bay.

"These soldiers have spent countless hours training, preparing, and building the skills required for this mission; in the coming months, they will lean on those skills, as well as relying on their courage, determination, and resilience," Gayle said.

Shields spoke to the Soldiers and recognized some with challenge coins for their work in getting ready for the deployment.

Capt. Daniel Hill, the 206th commander, had been expected to preside over the farewell event.

But Hill's first child was born that morning so he had other things to attend to, Gayle explained.

Gayle thanked the Soldiers



Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, presents a challenge coin to a Soldier assigned to the New York Army National Guard's 206th Military Police Company during a unit farewell ceremony at Shaker High School in Latham, N.Y., on Saturday, Jan. 25.

families for being understanding about the additional time away from home the company's pre-mobilization training has taken up.

"Your unwavering support, love, and sacrifice make it possible for

our Soldiers to serve with confidence and focus," Gayle said.

The Soldiers are expected to return from their deployment in November. **gt**

69th Soldiers Lead the way for St. Patrick's Day Once Again



Lt. Col. Adam Bojarski, the commander of the 69th Infantry, left, joins Pipe Major Sean Dalgauer, in leading the 69th Infantry Soldiers down Fifth Avenue on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 2025. The Soldiers of the "Fighting 69th" have led the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the largest in the world, since 1851. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jordan Sutton, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

NEW YORK — Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry led the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade for the 174th time on Monday, March 17, 2025.

Although the bulk of the battalion—nicknamed “The Fighting 69th”—was on state active duty helping to secure New York state prisons in northern New York, thirty Soldiers represented the battalion in the world's biggest St. Patrick's Day Parade.

The 69th, which was formed as an Irish-American militia regiment, began leading what was then a Catholic event in 1851 to fend off Protestants attending the parade.

Following a special mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral, the Soldiers fall in at the front of the parade. When the parade organizers ask: “Is the 69th ready?”, the response from the commander is “The 69th is always ready.”

“It's a great camaraderie event for the Soldiers that not only ties them to the regiment but also to the New York National Guard and the wider community,” said Lt. Col. Adam Bojarski, the battalion's commander.

“New York City loves the 69th and the support we got here today was wonderful and it's an honor to represent the unit,” he said.

It's not the first time a small contingent has represented the 69th Infantry in the parade. In 2023, with the battalion deployed to the Horn of Africa, the rear detachment marched in place, while the other Soldiers staged a parade at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. **gt**



Soldiers of the 69th Infantry march down Fifth Avenue on St. Patrick's Day March 17, 2025, accompanied by one of two Irish Wolfhounds which accompany the battalion each year. The Irish Wolfhound is the mascot of the 69th Infantry and are represented on the unit crest. The Soldiers of the "Fighting 69th" have led the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the largest in the world, since 1851. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Pietrantoni, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

NY Army Guard Engineers Heading to Horn of Africa

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

BUFFALO, N.Y.— One hundred and forty-five New York Army National Guard Soldiers on duty in the Horn of Africa, were sent off with a formal ceremony at the Connecticut Street Armory in Buffalo, New York on Thursday, January 2.

The Soldiers, members of the 152nd Engineer Support Company, will be assigned to Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, for ten months.

They trained at Fort Bliss, Texas for four weeks before deploying to Africa. They are expected home in November of 2025.

Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, told the Soldiers they could be proud of their unit and themselves, during the ceremony. He also emphasized teamwork, comradery, and situational awareness.

"You are deploying as part of the greatest team our nation has: the U.S. Army," Shields said.

"While overseas you are representing not just yourself, but our country as a whole and the New York Army National Guard," he said. "Deploying as a unit is a team sport."

The 152nd, is based in Buffalo and is an element of the 204th Engineer Battalion. The Soldiers have been training for this mission for the past six months at Fort Drum and other military training area, according to Capt. Daniel Roche, the company command.

For many of the Soldier this is their first deployment, and they said they were looking forward to it.

"I feel like the people I've met that have deployed or gone over-

seas carry themselves differently than those who haven't," said Sgt. Nathaniel Romero, a New York City resident. "I'm really excited about how it's going to influence me as a senior enlisted member when I get back." Specialist Haley Holmes, from Fillmore, New York said she agreed and felt an added sense of pride in her service.

"As a Guardsman it makes me feel proud, because I feel a lot of people underestimate the Guard," she said. "Now that I'm deploying it changes their perspective a bit, like 'oh you're actually in the Army.'"

While deployed the company will work on base security improvements and buildings related to Soldier welfare and operations, according to Roche.

**"You are deploying
as part of the greatest
team our nation has:
the U.S. Army,"**

*—Maj. Gen. Raymond Shield, the
adjutant general of New York*

Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa has a strength of about 2,000 personnel from across the U.S. military operates in Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Seychelles and Kenya.

In 2002 and 2023, the New York Army National Guard deployed 1,100 Soldiers as Task Force Wolfhound to provide security forces at Camp Lemonnier as well as U.S. based in Kenya and Somalia. 



Soldiers assigned to the 152nd Engineer Support Company stand in formation in front of friends and family during a farewell ceremony held in the drill hall of Connecticut Street Armory, Buffalo, N.Y., January 2, 2025. After completing initial training in Texas, the 152nd will be assigned to Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa until November 2025.



The Adjutant General of the New York National Guard Maj. Gen. Raymond Shields addresses Soldiers assigned to the 152nd Engineer Support Company during a farewell ceremony, Connecticut Street Armory, Buffalo, N.Y., January 2, 2025.



Soldiers assigned to the 152nd Engineer Support Company stand in formation in front of friends and family during their farewell ceremony, Connecticut Street Armory, Buffalo, N.Y. January 2, 2025. The unit will first train in Texas, before heading to Africa, supporting Joint Task Force Horn of Africa.



New York National Guard Helps Fight Long Island Blaze

Story by Capt. Cheran Campbell, 106th Rescue Wing



Members of the New York Air National Guard's 106th Rescue Wing Fire Department, along with other local fire departments, respond to the Pine Barrens Fire off Sunrise Highway in New York, March 8, 2025. Photo by Staff Sgt. Sarah McKernan, 106th Rescue Wing.

WESTHAMPTON BEACH, N.Y. — When a massive wildfire threatened Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base March 8, the New York Air National Guard's 106th Rescue Wing went into action to defend its home.

The wing's fire department mobilized four trucks and crews to fight the fire.

Meanwhile, the wing deployed two HC-130J Combat King II search and rescue aircraft to provide overhead command and control and an HH-60W Jolly Green II search and rescue

helicopter to dump water onto the flames.

Eventually, they were joined by three New York Army National Guard UH-60M Black Hawks belonging to the 3rd Battalion, 142nd Assault Helicopter Battalion, based at Long Island's MacArthur Airport in Ronkonkoma.

At the beginning of the fire, one 106th fire truck and personnel, along with additional fire departments, were dispatched to contain the blaze.

"Upon arrival, we quickly realized it was

a significant brush fire and immediately dispatched a rapid intervention vehicle, a structural fire engine, a 4,000-gallon water tanker, and two command vehicles," said Senior Master Sgt. Michael Gadman, 106th Rescue Wing fire protection superintendent.

The HC-130J Combat King II was about to take off for a training mission when it was redirected to assess the size of the blaze and its proxim-

ity to the base.

"There were four or five fires that started along the highway, and the biggest one was north of the [air] field with the wind blowing in our direction," said Maj. Steven Turner, an HC-130J instructor pilot of the wing's 102nd Rescue Squadron.

Turner said the immediate observation of the fire by the HC-130J enabled 106th Rescue Wing leaders to decide how to evacuate base personnel.

"Our priority is always the safety of our Airmen and the surrounding community," said Col. Jeffery Cannet, 106th Rescue Wing commander.

The HC-130 crew monitored the area as the members left the base, flying for approximately nine hours and informing first responders about the fire, its direction, and any other fires.

The HH-60W from the 106th and the three Army Guard UH-60M Black Hawks coordinated with the HC-130 to dump water onto the fire.

"Once we got all the other Army birds integrated as a joint effort and all four of us were dropping water, you could really start to see some progress being made," said Lt. Col. James "Sunny" Liston, the HH-60W pilot from the 101st Rescue Squadron, assigned to the 106th Rescue Wing. "Between us dropping from the air and all the firefighters on the ground, you



U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Michael Gadman, 106th Rescue Wing Fire Department Superintendent and Master Sgt. Joshua Lebenns, a 106th firefighter, respond to the Pine Barren Fire off Sunrise Highway on March 8, 2025. Photo by Staff Sgt. Sarah McKernan, 106th Rescue Wing.

started seeing the fires start to dissipate.”

The 106th HH-60W made 28 bucket drops in five hours, dumping approximately 14,100 gallons of water on the blaze. The three UH-60Ms made 43 bucket drops, with each crew flying for three hours and dropping a total of 28,380 gallons of water.

Cannet said the 103rd Rescue Squadron Tactical Air Control Party, assigned to the 106th Rescue Wing, was also instrumental in coordinating between ground and air fire crews.

“The tremendous efforts by the base, local fire departments, and the Army were nothing short of heroic,” said Cannet.

“Their swift and coordinated response prevented this fire from reaching our flight line, safeguarding our mission and the surrounding community. This is a true testament to the strength of our partnerships and the dedication of our first responders,” he said.

As a new firefighter, Airman 1st Class Nicholas Passarella said he was glad to be a part of defending the base.

“Serving as an Air Force firefighter gives me tremendous pride because it’s a career that truly makes a difference every day. Knowing my actions directly helped save lives and protect property during yesterday’s brush fire reinforced that I’ve chosen exactly the right path,” said Passarella.

Suffolk County Executive Ed Romaine said eight fire departments and 20 emergency management agencies from across Long Island responded to the blaze.

Suffolk County officials declared the fire



Overhead view of the Pine Barrens Fire from the HC-130J Combat King II search and rescue aircraft, assigned to the 102nd Rescue Squadron based out of Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base, Westhampton Beach, N.Y., March 8, 2025. Two HC-130Js performed command and control to support both air and ground firefighting efforts. Photo by Maj. Steven Turner, 106th Rescue Wing.

contained on March 9.

Investigators determined that 600 acres of the protected Pine Barrens were accidentally set ablaze by a resident making s’mores. **gt**



Air National Guard Arctic Training



CAMP RIPLEY, MN—Maj. Brian Ibbs, assigned to the 105th Base Defense Squadron, 105th Airlift Wing, New York National Guard, helps build a thermal shelter with his team using limited supplies and materials found in nature during the Air National Guard’s Cold Weather Operations Course at Camp Ripley Training Center, Minn., Feb. 5, 2025. 70 class participants representing 37 wings from 27 states traveled on foot in subzero temperatures, to build camps featuring either a 10-man Arctic tent or thermal shelters made from materials found in nature. Students were mostly Security Forces specialists, but also included a Maintenance Group Commander, Physician Assistant, Cyber Communications Specialist, and a Public Affairs Specialist. The course taught service members to conduct mission-essential tasking in extreme cold environments. Photo by Audra Flanagan, 148th Fighter Wing.

174th Attack Wing Airmen Attend Enlisted Field Advisory Council in Washington

Story and photo by Senior Airman Dylan McCrink, 174th Attack Wing

WASHINGTON — Fourteen New York Air National Guard Airmen from the 174th Attack Wing attended an Enlisted Field Advisory Council (EFAC) in Washington, Dec. 9 – 13, 2024.

The trip, which was led by Command Chief Sonja Williams, the 174th Attack Wing's senior enlisted leader, was designed to educate first-term Airmen on how their role in the New York Air National Guard supports the overarching mission of the Air Force and the United States Military.

"In my interactions with Airmen at the 174th, I realized that we had Airmen making the decision to leave the Air National Guard who didn't have the complete picture of the benefits of wearing the uniform," Williams said.

EFACs serve as a crucial forum for enlisted leaders across the force to discuss the concerns of their service members and aims to support warfighting efforts, partnerships, homeland security, and the development of modern Air National Guardsman.

"When I first joined, I had no idea what being in the military was about," said Senior Airman Angel Onyenobi, a Logistics Airman assigned to the 174th Logistics Readiness Squadron.

"I just focused on my job, but being out there during the conference gave me a better perspective on how my job impacts the mission," Onyenobi said.

Attending the EFAC allowed 174th Airmen the opportunity to understand how their position in the unit impacts the Air Force mission to fly, fight & win, he said. "It's like they showed you how everything you do at home base affects everything at the top" Onyenobi



New York Air National Guard Airmen assigned to the 174th Attack Wing pose for a photo while attending an enlisted field advisory council in Washington, Dec. 11, 2024. During the event the Airmen networked with Air National Guard leaders and shared their experiences in uniform. (Courtesy photo)

said.

Williams organized the trip primarily to allow first-term Airmen and junior noncommissioned officers to see what goes on at the higher/strategic enlisted levels of the Air National Guard and to provide mentoring opportunities and discussions as to why one should continue their careers in the Air Guard.

"While in the EFAC meeting, our Airmen were able to see and hear firsthand the interactions of the command chiefs throughout the 54 states and 90 wings as they came together to discuss and resolve issues and concerns facing the ANG enterprise," Williams said. "They, along with the entire body of members, were introduced to our 14th Air National Guard Chief Master Sergeant, Joshua Moore."

Joining the enlisted members on the trip was a junior 174th Attack Wing officer who used the experience to learn more about the Air National Guard. "I went into the trip with no knowledge of the readiness center and National Guard Bureau and it really opened my eyes to make me a more effective and professional officer," said 2nd Lt. Alexander Lotito.

"Being able to explain to others what actu-

ally occurs at NGB helps to put into perspective why things take time and what they are doing to try to improve our lives," he added.

They also spoke with Col. Timothy Martin, a former 174th member and current deputy commander of the Air National Guard Readiness Center.

"I was able to meet people from different squadrons and network with other people," said Senior Airman Mark Carpenter, an administrative specialist assigned to the 174th Force Support Squadron.

The trip also allowed Airmen to strengthen relationships between unit members and network with 174th Attack Wing leaders. "I was able to get to know Chief Master Sgt. Dooley on a personal level which was really good," Carpenter said.

Following the conference, the Airmen toured the capital region and visited key governmental buildings and historic landmarks such as the United States Capitol, White House, National Guard Museum and the Gettysburg National Military Park. **gt**

107th Attack Wing Celebrates High Enlistment Numbers for 2024

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

NIAGARA FALLS AIR RESERVE STATION, N.Y. — The 107th Attack Wing recently enlisted its 108th recruit of 2024 (between fresh recruits and prior service) just before the close of the year.

This is an achievement that has only been accomplished twice before in the past 20 years.

This string of enlistments marks a considerable increase from 2023.

Thanks to 107th recruiting efforts the wing currently stands at 740 of 779 authorized personnel. The lowest the wing has ever been since being assigned the MQ-9 Reaper in 2014 was 708, only 90%.

Tech Sgt's Ken Chudoba and Thomas Viau, the 107th Recruiting Flight Chief and Production Recruiter respectively, cite medical waivers, and a general lack of public awareness of Guard opportunities, as common obstacles to recruitment.

"A lot of people we talk to, including active-duty personnel, don't even realize the Air National Guard was even an option," Chudoba said. "Once they hear of the benefits of local service, they get super intrigued. It's our job as recruiters to break down those information barriers and let people

"The team is energized, and laser focused on exceeding 2024's efforts"

- Lt. Col. Kiley Hand, 107th Force Support Squadron commander.

know they can do this."

"The vast majority of applicants I speak with have a positive attitude towards the military and military service. I struggle with getting them qualified to join," Viau added.

Each state is responsible for

meeting its own recruiting quota. As of February 2024 the Tennessee Air National Guard maintains the highest end strength in the country at 107%, while DC held the lowest at 82%.

The recruitment pool for the seven Airmen assigned to 107th Recruiting is from their backyard in Niagara Falls to Rochester, and south to Jamestown.

According to Viau, some of the most challenging careers to recruit into are public affairs, largely because the field requires a comparatively high initial entrance testing score and medical officers, where professional degrees are required before the applicant is even considered qualified.

"In my experience the easiest posts to recruit to are in Civil Engineering, because they are mostly construction trade and have a lot of on and off base application, or

security forces," Viau said.

Despite challenging recruiting times, only the Marine Corps and the Air National Guard met or exceeded their recruiting goals, according to a January 2023 Department of Defense press release.

"Bonus Incentives- Having the option of giving out bonuses from \$50,000 for National Bonuses and \$25,000 for Local Bonuses greatly assisted us with closing enlistments," said Chudoba. "We've also changed our marketing strategies, focusing on new markets and messaging and long-term return on investment."

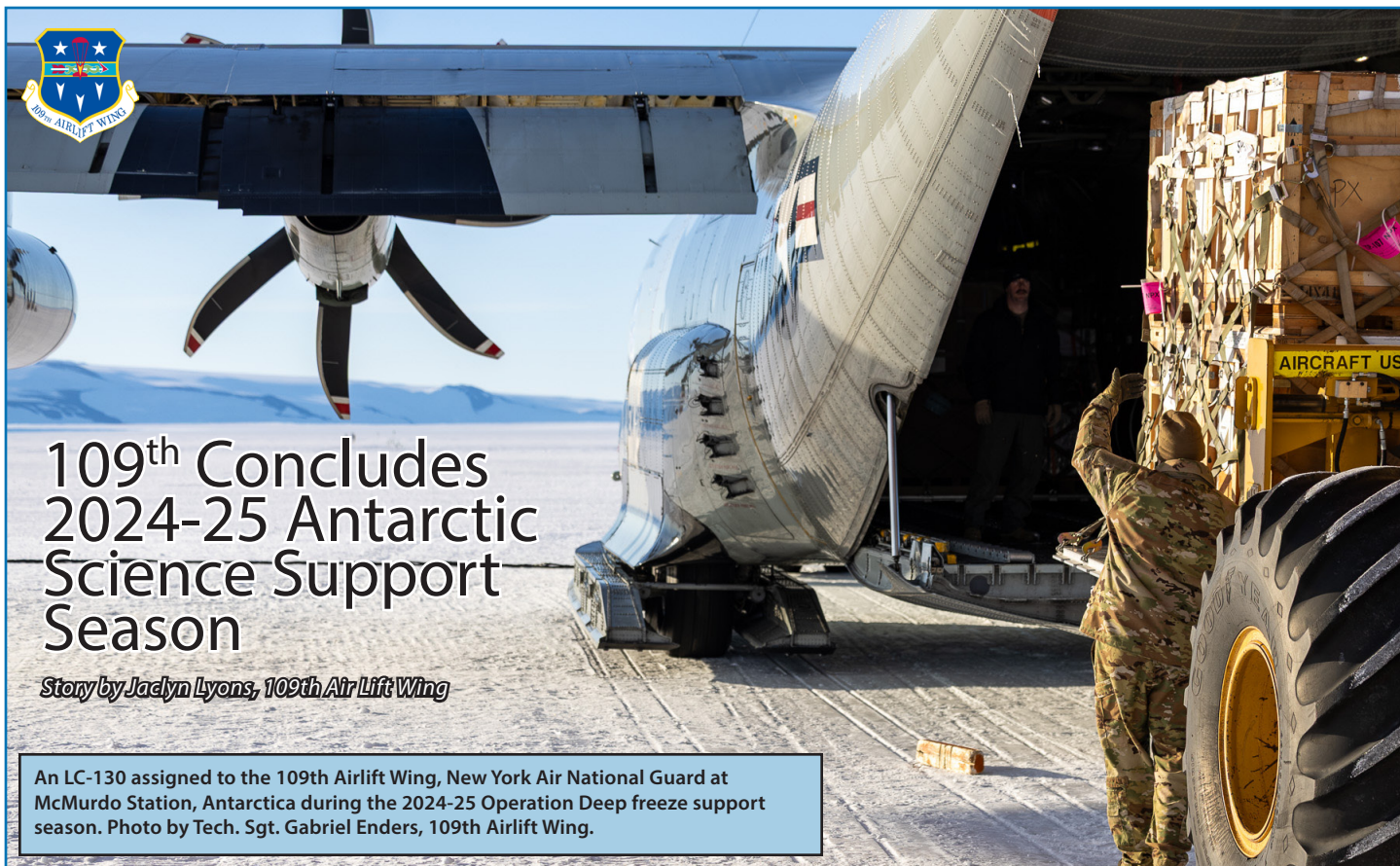
The 107th Recruiting Team remains positive they can keep their momentum into 2025.

"The team is energized, and laser focused on exceeding 2024's efforts", said Lt. Col. Kiley Hand, 107th Force Support Squadron commander.

"We were able to gain an additional \$88,000 this year to upgrading and outfitting our trailer, we're all excited show it off," Viau added. **gt**



A Buffalo Bills themed morale flag that currently hangs in Recruiting Flight Chief Tech. Sgt. Ken Chudoba's office, January 12, 2025 in Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station. All 108 recruits that joined the 107th in 2024 started their journey by signing the flag, becoming a tradition for the 107th Recruiters.



109th Concludes 2024-25 Antarctic Science Support Season

Story by Jaclyn Lyons, 109th Air Lift Wing

An LC-130 assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing, New York Air National Guard at McMurdo Station, Antarctica during the 2024-25 Operation Deep freeze support season. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Gabriel Enders, 109th Airlift Wing.

STRATTON AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, SCOTIA, N.Y. — The Airmen of the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing moved 1,076 passengers, carried 900 tons of cargo, and transported 120,000 gallons of fuel during their annual support for science in Antarctica from October 2024 to February 2025.

The 109th executed 79 missions using its ski-equipped LC-130 Hercules aircraft, transporting personnel, cargo, and fuel to key research sites across the continent, including the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station and a research station on the West Antarctic Ice Sheet.

The wing's mission is part of Operation Deep Freeze, the Department of Defense's annual mission to provide logistical support to the National Science Foundation in Antarctica.

Five aircraft and 400 deployed to McMurdo Station, the hub of U.S. operations in Antarctica, during the course of the five month support season.

The unit accomplished nine medical evacuations throughout the season.

One of these missions included a civilian logistics specialist who suffered a myocardial

infarction. He was transported to Christchurch New Zealand, where he was discharged and sent home to recover a week later.

The partnership between the National Science Foundation and the military was key to ensuring rapid medical care and evacuation of the patient, said Maj. Thomas Powell, the McMurdo Station flight surgeon.

The 109th faced challenging weather conditions and complex logistical demands this season but completed missions safely and efficiently, said Col. Rob Donaldson, Commander of the 109th Airlift Wing.

The 109th Airmen's efforts supported the NSF's ongoing studies in climate science, glaciology, and environmental research.

"The dedication and professionalism of our mission-ready Airmen continue to be the backbone of this mission," Donaldson said.

"From our pilots and aircrew to our maintainers and support personnel, every member of this team plays a crucial role in ensuring safe and effective operations in one of the most demanding environments on the planet," Donaldson added.

As the Antarctic summer comes to an end,

the unit's personnel and aircraft have returned Stratton Air National Guard Base.

The wing will begin preparations for future missions, including science support missions in Greenland, which begins in April.

The wing also supports military operations. Aircraft and Airmen from the 109th recently took part in Canadian Forces exercise Operation Nanook-Nunavut, where they built an ice runway and landed a C-130 on a frozen lake.

The 109th Airlift Wing is the only unit in the U.S. military equipped with ski-equipped LC-130s. **gt**



An LC-130 assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing, New York Air National Guard at McMurdo Station, Antarctica during the 2024-25 Operation Deep freeze support season. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Gabriel Enders, 109th Airlift Wing.

109th Makes History, Landing the LC-130 on Fresh Water Ice

Story and photo by Jocelyn Tuller, 109th Air Lift Wing

INUVIK, CANADA — Airmen from the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing landed a LC-130 Hercules on fresh water ice for the first time in the wing's history during Operation Nanook-Nunaliut, in Inuvik, Canada, on March 5, 2025.

The ski landing control officer, Maj. Joseph Shanahan, and a team initially searched over 25,000 miles of ice along the coast of the Northwest Territories, but none of it met the requirements needed for the LC-130 Hercules to land.

The team expanded their search to lakes throughout the area of operations in Inuvik. There, they found Parsons Lake.

The Polar Camp Skiway Team or PCST, made up of 109th Airlift Wing members and members from the 123rd and 133rd Airlift Wings,

set up their Arctic Camp and got to work building the ski landing area on Parsons lake.

"With the 123rd Kentucky and 133rd Minnesota Contingency Response Team bringing expertise in flagging and surveying, and the 109th PCST contributing specialized Arctic skills, we were able to build the ski landing area in one day," said Master Sgt. Nick Cross.

"We were grooming the ski landing area from sunrise to sunset everyday to ensure it was ready for the LC-130 to land," explained Master Sgt. Casey Preyer-Blakney.

The PCST set up their camp and built a ski landing area, with the assistance of the Canadian CC-138 Twin Otter from the 440 Transport Squadron, CH-147F Chinook helicopters from the 450 Tactical

Helicopter Squadron, and CH-146 Griffon helicopters from the 430 Tactical Helicopter Squadron and 417th Combat Support Squadron.

The aircraft from the Canadian Forces landed on the ice to deliver supplies and airmen to the Arctic Camp.

It took 17 flights utilizing the Canadian aircraft to drop 23,000 pounds of cargo and personnel at the Arctic Camp.

The 109th flew eight missions during the operation and provided rapid resupply, transporting parts for the CC-138 Twin Otter from Yellowknife back to Inuvik.

"The service members participating in this operation excel in the toughest conditions, adapting quickly to changing plans and unpredictable weather," said Lt. Col. Matthew Sala, the 109th deployed commander. "From repairing planes in freezing temperatures to testing ice under relentless pressure, they push forward with determination—no mission is left incomplete."

"We come together and oper-

ate, to learn from each other's abilities to find ways to combine our knowledge to make a stronger force," said Lt. Col. Steve Thompson, 440 Transport Squadron, the Air Task Force Commander of Operation Nanook-Nunaliut. "The interoperability between the Twin Otter and LC-130 Hercules in the past has proven to be a very successful combination and we look forward to working together again in the future."

Landing LC-130s on fresh water ice opens up significant tactical and strategic opportunities, especially in remote and Arctic regions. By utilizing lakes as landing zones, the military gains access to areas otherwise inaccessible by conventional aircraft, enhancing operational flexibility, explained Sala.

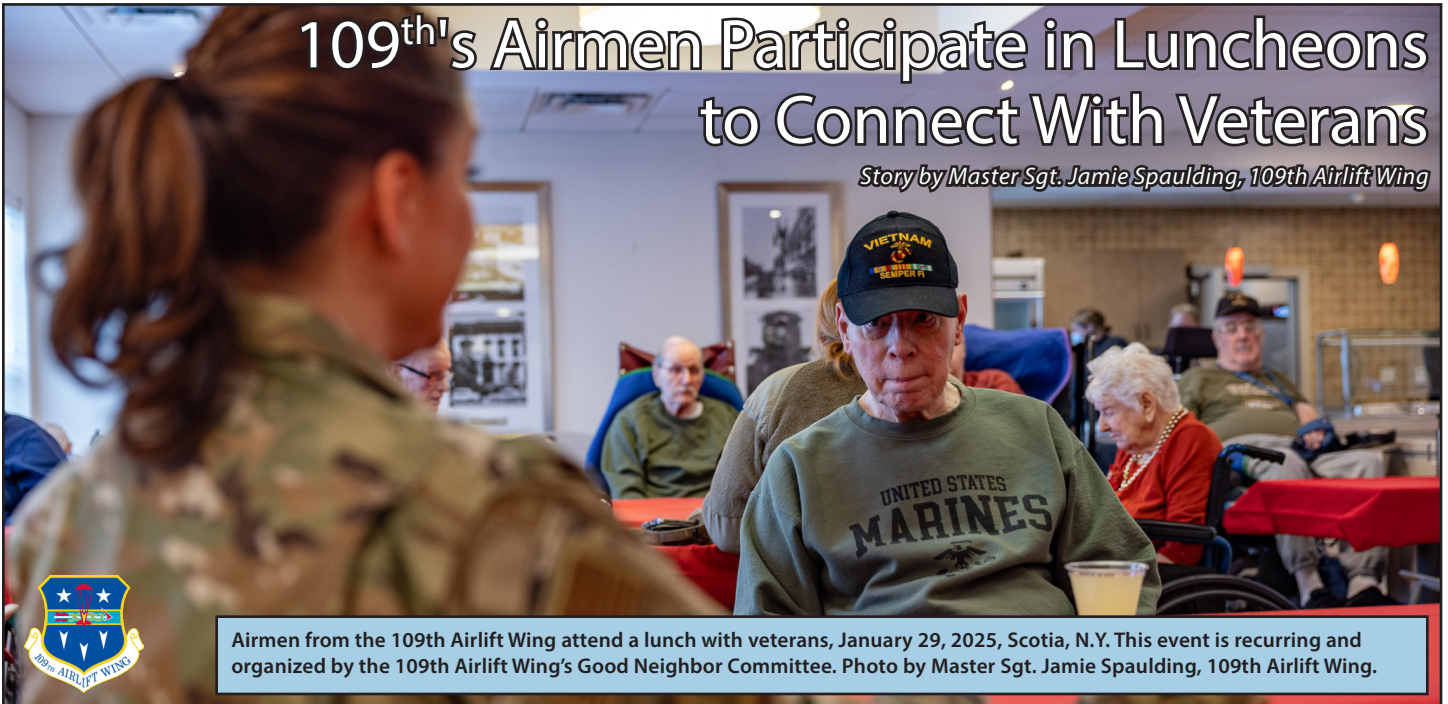
Having this capability allows for rapid deployment of personnel, equipment, and supplies to critical locations, in regions where traditional runways are unavailable, Sala said. 🇺🇸



A LC-130 Hercules assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing retrieves cargo from Parsons Lake, Northwest Territories, Canada, March 5. The LC-130's flown by the 109th Airlift Wing are the largest tactical aircraft in the world with the ability to land on snow and ice using skis. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jocelyn Tuller, 109th Airlift Wing.

109th's Airmen Participate in Luncheons to Connect With Veterans

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



Airmen from the 109th Airlift Wing attend a lunch with veterans, January 29, 2025, Scotia, N.Y. This event is recurring and organized by the 109th Airlift Wing's Good Neighbor Committee. Photo by Master Sgt. Jamie Spaulding, 109th Airlift Wing.

SCOTIA, N.Y. — Airmen assigned to the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing have been making a meaningful impact on the local community, by sharing lunch with local veterans every other month.

The Good Neighbor Committee, composed of airmen dedicated to giving back, has hosted luncheons at Schenectady County Glendale Nursing Home, located a few miles from the base, since July 2024, where they sit down with veterans to share meals, listen to their stories, and build personal connections.

The program offers veterans an opportunity to reminisce about their experiences while allowing younger service members to hear firsthand accounts of military service.

"The residents are always excited weeks before the lunch," said Staff Sgt. Mackenzie Grayson, the previous head of the committee. "They see it written on their calendars and look forward to it each time. It's a chance for them to feel valued and recognized."

The "Lunch with a Veteran"

program has been a particularly humbling experience for airmen like him, said Airman 1st Class Roko Jelavic, a participant, who reflected on the impact of the stories shared by veterans.

"Every time we have lunch with a veteran, I am always left with something one of them said that stays with me," Jelavic said. "It makes me think and apply new concepts to my own life."

The veterans also express gratitude for the companionship. Many find it difficult to open up, but the presence of the service members creates a comfortable environment for sharing memories, according to Grayson.

"Staff Sgt. Grayson contacted me about a luncheon and we were happy to have this program," said Tracy Denny, the director of activities at Glendale Nursing Home. "It means so much to the men and women who have served our country. They love to share their stories, as they have something in common with service members. I know the residents look forward to having the 109th members join

them and I hope we can continue this tradition."

As the program grows, the 109th Airlift Wing remains committed to its mission of strengthening community bonds and honoring those who have served.

Airman 1st Class Anton Konev and Airman Faria Yassem have taken ownership of the program to continue setting up similar opportunities for service members.

Building relationships in the

community and developing camaraderie with fellow wingmen is good for everyone, Konev said.

This program is part of the larger mission of the Good Neighbor Committee, which organizes two events each month, ranging from volunteering at local nonprofits like the City Mission of Schenectady to hosting programs that support veterans, children, and other community members. **gt**



Airmen from the 109th Airlift Wing attend a lunch with veterans, January 29, 2025, Scotia, N.Y. This event is recurring and organized by the 109th Airlift Wing's Good Neighbor Committee. Photo by Master Sgt. Jamie Spaulding, 109th Airlift Wing.

Guard's 107th Attack Wing Commemorates 13th U.S. President's 225th Birthday

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



Lt. Col. William Gourlay, 107th Mission Support Group commander, lays the presidential wreath on Millard Fillmore's grave, Jan. 7, 2025, in Buffalo, N.Y.

BUFFALO, N.Y.— The New York Air Guard's 107th Attack Wing honored Millard Fillmore, the nation's 13th president, on January 7, as the wing's mission support group commander laid a wreath at his Buffalo gravesite.

Lt. Col. William Gourlay placed a wreath from President Joe Biden at Fillmore's grave in Forest Lawn

Cemetery.

Since 1967, when Lyndon B. Johnson was president, military officers have maintained the tradition of placing a wreath sent by the current occupant of the White House at the graves of former presidents on their birthdays.

"I love Buffalo history, and it

was my honor to make the wreath presentation on behalf of the White House and our nation," Gourlay said.

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

Descendants of Fillmore, who served from 1850 to 1853, members of the Buffalo Presidential Center, and local American Legion members looked on as Gourlay presented the wreath.

Fillmore had a profound, positive impact on the Buffalo community and Forest Lawn continues to help commemorate his legacy, according to Julie Snyder, chief executive officer of Forest Lawn Cemetery.

"We are honored to receive the wreath, every year, and keep it here for the community to pay their respects and honor him this time every year," Snyder said. "We're very honored to be one of the 40 cemeteries across the country to have a home for a past president."

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



Members of the Buffalo Chapter of the American Legion play taps at the conclusion of the annual wreath-laying ceremony on Millard Fillmore's gravesite, Jan. 7, 2025, in Buffalo, N.Y.

Buffalo's Forest Lawn Cemetery was established in 1849 and has over 175,000 burials.

Fillmore, was born in Summerhill, New York in 1800 and in 1874 of a stroke.

He became a lawyer in 1823 and went on to serve as a member of Congress and then the Comptroller of New York State. He was elected vice president in 1848 when Zachary Taylor ran for president.

He was also a founder of the University of Buffalo and was a trustee of the university until his death.

When Taylor died in 1850, Fillmore assumed the presidency. He was the last member of the Whig party to serve as president. **gt**

Bi-national Operations Help NORAD

EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, A.K. — North American Aerospace Defense Command CF-18 Hornets and F-16 Fighting Falcons escort a New York Air National Guard LC-130 Hercules assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing over the North Slope of Alaska, February 26, 2025. The F-16 and CF-18 exercised tracking and intercepting the LC-130 over the arctic. Bi-national operations help NORAD fulfill requirements for timely and accurate information across all domains. The on-going adaptation of NORAD's mission and capabilities to meet the challenges posed by ever-changing threats testifies to the strength of the NORAD Agreement and the close cooperation between Canada and the United States. Photo by Airman 1st Class Spencer Hanson, 354th Fighter Wing.



88th Company Marches in Two St. Patrick's Day Parades

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

NEW YORK — The New York Guard's 88th Company paid tribute to its lineage as an Irish-American unit by marching in the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade and the Queens County St. Patrick's Day Parade in March.

During the Civil War the 88th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, which was raised in New York City, was part of the "Irish Brigade." The brigade also included the 69th Infantry Regiment.

Fifty-two volunteers took part in the two-mile Queens County parade on March 1 in Rockaway Beach.

"Marching through the streets of Rockaway Beach is like marching through the 'Alley of Heroes.' This is a very patriotic town which always cheers us on," said Sgt William Howe, one of the company's squad leaders.

The Queens County parade's committee honored New York Guard 2nd Lt. Melissa Farrell by naming her Deputy Grand Marshall.

Farrell leads the 1st Platoon of the 88th



Soldiers of the 88th Company, New York Guard gather in New York City's Grand Central Terminal on St Patrick's Day 2025. The 88th Company marched in the 264th Annual New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade. Photo by 1st Lt. James Chin, New York Guard.

Company and serves as a New York City Police Officer in her civilian career.

"Marching in the 50th Annual Queens St. Patrick's Day Parade was such a proud moment, especially given the 88th's deep history with New York City," Farrell said.

The company was awarded first place in the military marching unit category by the parade judges.

The company was presented with the Sgt. 1st Class James Rodriguez Trophy. The trophy is named for a member of the 88th who died a day after marching in the 2015 parade.

On March 17, 64 New York Guard volunteers, from New York Guard headquarters turned out for the 264th New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade.

In 2024 the unit garnered 3rd place honors for best military marching unit in the parade. This moved the company up in order of marching stepping off at 1215 p.m.

"Marching up 5th Avenue on St. Patrick's Day was truly awe-inspiring. You could hear the volume of the cheers increasing as we drew

nearer," said Officer Candidate Mark Farrow, one of the headquarters company marchers.

"Our unit's participation in the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade is in keeping with the 88th's history and heritage. Remembering our unit's forebears enhances our esprit de corps," said Capt. David Tsin, the commander of the 88th Company.

The 88th Company is the largest unit in the New York Guard with 160 volunteers in its ranks. **gt**



The 88th Company's Color Guard marching past St Patrick's Cathedral on St. Patrick's Day 2025. The 88th Company of the New York Guard marched in the 264th Annual St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York City. Photo by 1st Lt. Ed Shevlin, New York Guard.



Deputy Grand Marshall, 2LT Melissa Farrell leading the 88th Company past the reviewing stand during the 50th Annual Queens County St. Patrick's Day Parade in Rockaway Beach, N.Y. The 88th Company was judged to be the "First Place Military Marching Unit" of this parade. Photo by New York Guard 1st Lt. Ed Shevlin, New York Guard.

New York Naval Militia Takes to the Sky

Story by Stephanie Butler, *Guard Times* staff and 1st Lt. Ed Shevlin, *New York Guard*

CAMP SMITH, N.Y. — The New York Naval Militia's six-member Unmanned Aerial Surveillance Unit took to the sky for the first time during an exercise at the Camp Smith Training site on Feb. 10, 2025.

This was the final step in completing the training required to fly the Vesper ISR drones, known as UAS in military language, according to Maj. Michael Golden, the officer in charge.

The unit formed in the summer of 2023. The first drone was purchased in 2024, marking the official start-up of the unit, Golden explained.

The unit flies the Vesper ISR, made by Vantage Robotics, because this drone specifically meets the Department of Defense guidelines, Golden said.

Shortly after the unit was formed, the six members began crafting the

Staff Sgt. Christopher Vega from the unit is now officially an "unmanned remote pilot in command," Golden said.

During the Camp Smith training, Golden administered the PQS test to Vega and he is now able to instruct other pilots, Golden said.

Vega has been part of the organization from the beginning, he said.

"I served as part of the development team and as the training staff non-commissioned officer in charge since July of 2023," Vega said.

"I have been instrumental in developing the unit's infrastructure and training programs."

"With the increasing prevalence of drone technology in civilian and military applications, the Naval Militia UAS unit is poised to become a valuable asset for the state of New York," Vega said.

The Vesper ISR has a range of 27 miles and can fly for up to 50 minutes with a top speed of 45mph. It is only 2.2 pounds, making it extremely easy to transport, and it can be launched in 90 seconds.

The drone is equipped with a low light, thermal camera with 48x zoom capability and a 3-axis stabilizing gimbal. The UAS can transmit streaming video to a distance of five miles.

The Vesper also can be programmed to conduct autonomous flight when required.

The cost per system is about \$7,700 according to the company.

"With adequate funding and personnel, we can expand our capabilities to provide, overwatch for sensitive locations, disaster response and recovery support, search and rescue assistance, enhanced support for local, state and county law enforcement and fire organizations," Vega added.

The Naval Militia's experience responding to storms in the past led the leadership to believe a drone capability will be useful in the future, Golden said.

"Since Hurricane Irene in 2011, there were instances identified when having readily available aerial reconnaissance capability would have improved New York's military forces," Golden said.

"That was the concept of why we needed the drone. With the drone, we can get common operating pictures anywhere we're sent and relay that back to higher headquarters, which is something we don't have as a state active duty asset right now," Golden said.

The goal is to acquire more drone systems and to have two-man UAS detachments located across the state, Golden said.

Golden said he expects to exercise the UAS in June, during the New York Naval Militia and New York Guard's Empire Challenge exercise. **gt**



The New York Naval Militia's Vesper ISR drone in flight, being piloted by Staff Sgt. Christopher Vega during a Personal Qualification Standard test, at Camp Smith Training site, in Cortlandt Manor, N.Y. on Feb. 10. The New York Naval Militia's Unmanned Aerial Surveillance unit was organized in 2024.



New York Naval Militia Staff Sgt. Christopher Vega (left) and Maj. Michael Golden prepare to launch a Vesper ISR drone as part of a flight certification exercise, at Camp Smith Training site, Cortlandt Manor, N.Y. on Feb. 11, 2025. The two are part of the New York Naval Militia's Unmanned Aerial Surveillance Unit which was organized in 2024. Photo by 1st Lt. Ed Shevlin, *New York Guard*.

personnel qualification standards – PQS for short – for the Unmanned Aerial Surveillance unit, Golden said.

"Once the PQS was created, we could start onboarding pilots and getting them qualified, making sure they are following all of the DMNA (Division of Military and Naval Affairs) regulations," Golden said.

There are two stages of training, Golden explained.

Initially, they have to complete part 107, the remote pilot certification from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Then they complete an online course or take an in-person class at the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services.

Once they completed part 107, the prospective UAS pilots passed a 60-question FAA test. That certificate is required to become a pilot.

The next step for the UAS pilots was to complete the PQS hands on training.

This required an additional two hours of flight time, supervised by one of the UAS coordinators.

After all this, they are officially able to pilot the aircraft for missions, Golden explained.

