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Winston-Salem Journal, Dec. 4, 2025

Honoring the Life and Sacrifice of Staff Sgt. Henry E. Irizarry Today & Everyday.:

Connecticut Veterans Bulletin, Dec. 4, 2025

Yankees legend CC Sabathia helps NYC transform 'dilapidated' field into \$11M

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New York Post, Dec. 2, 2025

### **New York National Guard**

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Department of War, Dec. 2, 2025

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## **New York Air National Guard**

## New York Air Guard, Police Department Sharpen Rescue Skills in Exercise

NationalGuard.mil, by Capt. Cheran Campbell, 106th Rescue Wing, Dec. 2, 2025 :

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

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

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

Master Sgt. Corey Ketelsen, a 103rd Rescue Squadron team chief, said the joint exercises held Oct. 23-24 provided Airmen with a valuable opportunity to refine their expertise in a new environment.

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

On Oct. 23, about 10 Airmen practiced rappelling from a helicopter onto a three-story building to simulate the rescue of wounded counter-snipers from a rooftop during a terrorist attack. Counter-snipers are teams trained to locate and neutralize enemy snipers.

The team of Airmen secured the simulated patients, ascended back to the roof and prepared the injured for airlift to Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base for continued medical care, Ketelsen said.

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

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

According to Ketelsen, the scenario was designed to mimic real-world situations in which the Emergency Services Unit might call upon the specialized abilities of the 103rd to augment its capabilities during complex operations.

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

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

The training expanded the medics' expertise and strengthened collaborative ties with the New York Police Department, showcasing the 103rd's versatility, Ketelsen said.

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

https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/4345871/new-york-air-guard-police-department-sharpen-rescue-skills-in-exercise/

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# MQ-9 Reaper Gains Smart Surveillance Boost in Breakthrough Flight

### The Defense Post, Dec. 4, 2025:

A breakthrough MQ-9 Reaper flight with NUAIR's surveillance network has signaled a new chapter in how the US monitors and secures its airspace.

The system delivers real-time airspace awareness by fusing multiple sensors, giving operators a unified view of everything flying nearby — from transponder-equipped aircraft to signal-dark drones.

By creating a shared operating picture for military units, the network enables instant data exchange during complex or high-risk airspace operations.

"As the country prepares for major international events and faces evolving security challenges, NUAIR's technology offers a proven solution for counter-UAS (unmanned aerial system) operations that has become a top federal priority," the company stated.

The breakthrough flight took place at Syracuse Hancock International Airport and was facilitated by the 174th Attack Wing of the New York Air National Guard.

"The 174th has a long-standing history in the Central New York region and is proud to be a part of the innovation legacy here," said Brigadier General John O'Connor, Commander of the 174th Attack Wing. "We look forward to working together with NUAIR to keep Syracuse's airspace safe."

# **US Airspace Modernization**

The successful flight illustrates how rapidly deployable sensor networks can secure critical sites while also supporting commercial operations.

It also showed how third-party providers can expand Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) capabilities, strengthening security and enabling advanced air mobility.

"This demonstration directly addresses the White House mandate to restore American airspace sovereignty," said Ken Stewart, President and CEO of NUAIR.

"Our surveillance network doesn't just integrate unmanned aircraft — it actively identifies and tracks both cooperative and non-cooperative aircraft, providing the comprehensive domain awareness that national security demands."

https://thedefensepost.com/2025/12/04/mg9-reaper-smart-surveillance/

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# CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP : Manlius man to take command of 174th Attack Wing

Rome Sentinel, Dec. 4, 2025:

SYRACUSE — New York Air National Guard Col. Brett Batick, of Manlius, will take command of the New York Air National Guard's 174th Attack Wing during a ceremony at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base on Saturday, Dec. 6.

Batick will replace Brig. Gen. John O'Connor, of Rochester, who has led the wing since 2023, according to an announcement by New York Air National Guard officials. O'Connor has accepted a position to serve as the chief of staff at the New York Air National Guard headquarters in Latham.

Maj. Gen. Michael Bank, the commander of the New York Air National Guard, all be the presiding officer for the ceremony — which will feature the traditional passing of the guidon of the wing will be transferred from O'Connor to Bank and then to Batick.

## Education and experience

Batick is a graduate of the University of Florida, where he earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering in 1998. He also earned a master's degree in environmental engineering from Vanderbilt University in 2011.

He previously served in the Marine Corps as an F/A-18 pilot, two-plane and fourplane flight lead, and airframes maintenance division officer in Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251, Beaufort, South Carolina.

He went on to be an advanced jet flight instructor in Training Squadron 9 in Meridian, Mississippi.

After transitioning to the New York Air National Guard at Hancock Field, Batick qualified as an evaluator pilot in the MQ-9 and served as the commander, 174th Maintenance Group, Commander, 174th Operational Support Squadron, and Commander, 138th Attack Squadron.

As a command pilot, he has more than 3,500 hours of experience and has flown more than 170 combat missions and 190 combat support missions in Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, Inherent Resolve, and Freedom's Sentinel.

His awards include the Meritorious Service Medal with oak leaf cluster, Air Medal, Aerial Achievement Medal with two silver and two oak leaf clusters, Air Force Achievement Medal with bronze 'R' device, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Selected Marine Corps Reserve Medal, Iraqi Campaign Medal with bronze star, and the Remote Combat Effects Medal with bronze star.

#### Former leader

O'Connor graduated from the State University of New York College at Plattsburgh in 1988. He was commissioned through the Air Force Officer Training School at Lackland AFB, Texas in 1989 and earned his master's degree in human resource management from Troy University in Alabama in 1991.

O'Connor served on active duty for nine years holding leadership positions in supply operations, logistics management and as an assistant professor of aerospace studies in the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps. He joined the New York Air National Guard in 1998 and held squadron and group command positions in both the maintenance and mission support groups.

Additionally, O'Connor served as the principal deputy director of logistics, engineering and force protection at the National Guard Bureau Air National Guard Readiness Center. He has deployed in support of combat operations in Operation Desert Storm/Southern Watch and Operation Enduring Freedom.

His awards include the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal with four oak leaf clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal with three oak leaf clusters, Air Force Achievement Medal, Meritorious Unit Award, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with four oak leaf clusters, National Defense Service Medal with bronze star, Southwest Asia Service Medal with bronze star, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Air Force Longevity Service Ribbon with eight oak leaf clusters, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with 3 'M' devices, and the Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon with bronze star.

## 174th Attack Wing

The primary mission of the 174th Attack Wing is to operate the MQ-9 Reaper remotely piloted aircraft. In addition to operationally deploying the MQ-9 system, the wing hosts a formal training unit that provides MQ-9 aircrew training and certification to MQ-9 pilots and sensor operators.

The 174th Attack Wing additionally oversees a field training detachment that provides MQ-9 maintenance training for U.S. and allied servicemembers.

https://www.romesentinel.com/news/manlius-man-to-take-command-of-174th-attack-wing/article 8a32268c-c9ee-4094-b87a-46a073bb434b.html

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# New York Air Guard, Police Department Sharpen Rescue Skills in Exercise

NationalGuard.mil, by Capt. Cheran Campbell, 106th Rescue Wing, Dec. 2, 2025 ::

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https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/4345871/new-york-air-guard-police-department-sharpen-rescue-skills-in-exercise/

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# Stony Brook veteran to be honored at New York Jets game

## **TBR News Media, Nov. 26, 2025 ::**

When Master Sergeant Jorge Washington Garcia walked into the Setauket Village Diner, he did not expect to learn he was chosen as the New York Jets Veteran of the Game for their Dec. 28 face-off against the New England Patriots.

The National Guard and Air Force veteran from Stony Brook was simply expecting to be interviewed for the honor to be nominated. Instead, he was greeted with the news he was one of eight chosen people out of over a thousand applicants.

"It's truly an honor to get to celebrate you in this way, not just locally here in our community, but truly on a national stage because you have helped make this nation what it is today and protected our freedoms, and we're just so honored to help," Garcia was told by Steve Castleton, the military and law enforcement liaison for the New York Jets.

He will be brought out onto the field at Metlife Stadium at the end of the first quarter, with a photo montage playing.

"I'm really stunned. I'm surprised, I'm shocked, I'm speechless. It's a great honor," Garcia said.

"I feel like I don't really deserve something like this; I was just doing what I wanted to do," he said of his military career.

His wife, Eireann Garcia, found out he was selected about two months ago, saying she was excited, "but I had to keep it from him."

"I said [to him] there's only eight games, so it's probably not going to be for this year," she explained.

"But it was fun messing with him a little bit too," she added.

Castleton described Garcia as someone who was not "a shoulder separator," meaning he did not get hurt trying to give himself a pat on the back for his own accomplishments.

Garcia also received a proclamation from Assemblywoman Rebecca Kassay (D, Port Jefferson) in recognition of his service.

"[Steve Castleton said] one of your constituents is receiving this honor, and we said 'can we please help honor everything that the major surgeon has done' because...we want to celebrate the veterans who do not ask to be celebrated," she said.

### A life of service

Garcia's military career began in 1990. He served four years of active duty with the 101st Airborne Division in Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

From 1999 to 2003, Garcia joined the New York Army National Guard 258th Field Artillery in Jamaia, Queens, as an automated logistic specialist.

In 2003, MSgt Garcia joined the Air Force Reserve and was assigned to the 514th Services Squadron at McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey.

His time in the Air Force included six deployments, ranging from five to 18 months each, in places such as Ground Zero, Kuwait, Afghanistan and the Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations site at the Dover Air Force Base, and participated in and supported multiple operations, including Enduring Freedom, New Dawn, Freedom's Sentinel and Inherent Resolve.

After his time in the military, he served in the New York Police Department.

Castleton said he was "impressed" by Garcia, describing him as "a prime example of how you leave the service in a sense, but you never stop serving," referencing his work done within veterans groups and the community.

"He went from serving in the military to a policeman and he's still serving, helping other veterans." he said.

"A couple of times when his wife and I were talking, he was out helping other veterans at his [VFW] post," Castleton added.

In a statement provided by his wife on his behalf, Garcia acknowledged the organizations he works with, including Disabled American Veterans Chapter 90 Suffolk County, American Legion Post 833 and Harbor Post 417, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3054, American Veterans Post 48 and Catholic War Veterans St. Anne's Post 1979, stating "they are very active in the community and among helping other veterans."

https://tbrnewsmedia.com/stony-brook-veteran-to-be-honored-at-new-york-jets-game/

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# Military news: Ryan Dannemann of New Paltz promoted to brigadier general in N.Y. Air National Guard

# Daily Freeman, Nov. 30,2025::

The following members of the New York Air National Guard were promoted:

- \* Ryan Dannemann of New Paltz, assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, to the rank of brigadier general on Saturday, Oct. 4.
- \* Jevaughn Hastings of Saugerties, assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, to the rank of senior airman on Wednesday, Oct. 1.
- \* Alina Zanetti of Pine Bush, and assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, to the rank of airman on Wednesday, Oct. 1.

German police use water cannons on protesters against far-right AfD

\* Nicholas Rider of Accord, assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, to the rank of technical sergeant on Monday, Sept. 1.

The following members of the New York Army National Guard were promoted:

- \* Cristhian Hernandez Rojas of Highland, serving with Bravo Company, Second Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, to the rank of specialist on Monday, Oct. 27.
- \* Parish Duarte of Wallkil, assigned to Company C, 119th Division Sustainment Support Battalion, to the rank of sergeant on Friday, Sept. 5.

https://www.dailyfreeman.com/2025/11/30/military-news-ryan-dannemann-of-new-paltz-promoted-to-brigadier-general-in-n-y-air-national-guard/

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## New York Army National Guard

New York Army National Guard recruiters are No. 1 — again

Times Union, Dec. 1, 2025 ::

New York Army National Guard recruiters are No. 1 in recruiting and retention of citizen-soldiers in the nation for the fourth year in a row.

The numbers reflect higher national recruiting numbers overall, not just for regional National Guards but all five military services during the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, according to the Department of Defense. The Pentagon had its strongest recruiting performance in 30 years as fiscal year-to-date accessions reached 106% of active-duty targets.

The New York Army National Guard recruited and retained a larger percentage of soldiers than 53 other state and territorial National Guards, according to Eric Durr, New York National Guard spokesman.

The territorial Guards are in Washington, D.C., Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The New York Army National Guard's assigned strength was 11,700 on Sept. 30. That is 113% of the Pentagon's authorized strength of 10,342, Durr said. For comparison, the assigned strength at the end of 2024's fiscal year was 11,339 soldiers, or 109% of the authorized strength of 10,340 soldiers.

The authorized strength number is based on the number and type of military units, he noted.

The Army National Guard Bureau assigns annual recruiting scores based on the recruitment of enlisted and officer personnel, retention of soldiers in the ranks, and the number of soldiers who leave each state's Army National Guard.

The New York Army National Guard recruiters achieved a score of 134.29, Durr said. Rhode Island Army National Guard achieved the next-highest score of 132.73.

"Recruiting and retention are central to the culture of the New York Army National Guard," said Maj. Gen. Michel Natali, assistant state adjutant general. "Recruiting and retaining our soldiers are a commonly understood priority at every echelon of our organization. To perform a wide variety of state and federal missions we respond to, we would be unable to do so without our most essential resource — our people."

New York Army National Guard recruited 1,878 enlisted soldiers, 32 warrant officers and 155 officers for a total of 2,065 personnel, according to Durr. This number includes soldiers who transferred from other states.

Also, during the past fiscal year, New York Army National Guard reenlisted 1,819 soldiers whose enlistments would have expired, he added.

The figures reflect that the New York Army National Guard has been consistently increasing its strength, according to Durr.

Lt. Col. John Harder, who commands New York's 303-soldier recruiting and retention battalion, credits the unit's 130 production recruiters for the battalion's success.

"Our partnerships with local high schools, colleges and organizations, along with the professionalism of our recruiting force, truly make the difference," Harder said. "The Army Guard is just as much part of the community as your local fire department or high school. Our recruiters are typically from the towns or cities they recruit from and personify the citizens-soldiers in all they do. This allows them to connect at a level that other services cannot."

The recruiters provide new soldiers for the New York Army National Guard's units, including the 42nd Infantry Division, an infantry brigade, an Army division headquarters, the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade, a logistics support sustainment brigade, and a brigade troop command, which encompasses many combat support and military police elements.

## More recruitment gains

The New York Air National Guard's 33 airmen recruiting force also did well. They finished second in overall Air National Guard recruiting this past fiscal year, according to Durr.

The New York Air National Guard signed up 671 airmen. The Ohio Air National Guard recruited 675 airmen. California came in third, with 491 recruits.

The New York Air National Guard recruiters enlisted airmen for the state's five wings, including the 109th Airlift Wing in Scotia and the 105th Airlift Wing in Newburgh, as well as the Eastern Air Defense Sector, which is responsible for the defense of the Eastern United States. The New York Air National Guard is the largest Air Guard in the nation.

At the end of fiscal year 2025, the New York Air National Guard had a strength of 5,901 airmen, which was 100.99% of authorized strength. At the end of fiscal year 2024, the New York Air National Guard's strength was 5,764, or 99% of authorized strength.

"Young Americans are eager to serve," said Air Force Gen. Steve Nordhaus, National Guard bureau chief. "Today's recruits are seeking long-term value, and the National Guard delivers through career training and hands-on, practical experience in more than 200 career specialties. The guard provides a path to service that offers balance with civilian careers and allows our soldiers and airmen to live locally and serve globally. We're not just preparing new recruits to serve; we're preparing them to lead and succeed."

### Wreath ceremony

Hundreds of volunteers will place more than 17,000 wreaths right after a national Wreaths Across America ceremony at 11 a.m. on Dec. 13 at the Gerald B. H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery.

For the past nine years, every veteran interred at the Schuylerville cemetery has been honored with a wreath on their grave.

There is still time to sponsor a wreath at \$17 today by going to wreathsacrossamerica.org, where you can designate your donation for a specific location, such as the Gerald B. H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery, located at 200 Duell Road.

The cemetery's director, William Lamb, advised attendees to arrive early. Heavy traffic is expected for this event. A general parking area will be open. Only accessible parking will be allowed on cemetery roads. Follow signs and cemetery staff directions for parking.

"There is no rush to lay your given wreaths," said Nancy O'Donnell, cemetery support group spokeswoman. "Take your time, teach your children. Honor our veterans by saying their names out loud so they are remembered at this time of year. Many no longer have a visitor able to come. You are their visitor, and we thank you for that!"

For information, contact William Lamb at 518-581-9128, extension 22207, or email <a href="mailto:william.lamb2@va.gov">william.lamb2@va.gov</a>.

News of your troops and units can be sent to Times Union, Duty Calls, Terry Brown, Box 15000, Albany, NY 12212 or <a href="mailto:brownt@timesunion.com">brownt@timesunion.com</a>

https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/new-york-army-national-guard-recruiters-best-21213991.php

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## Mountain Top National Guard soldier receives new rank

Wilks-Barre Times Leader, Nov. 30, 2025 ::

Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general for the state of New York, announced the promotion of members of the New York Army National Guard. Richard Naperkowski, Mountain Top, assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 501st Ordnance Battalion (EOD), received a promotion to the rank of captain on July 17, 2025.

Army National Guard promotions are based on a soldier's overall performance, demonstrated leadership abilities, professionalism, and future development potential. These promotions recognize the best-qualified soldiers for a career in the New York Army National Guard.

<u>times-leader-563611/4373721551526-local-students-recognized-at-colleges-universities</u>

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# Trees for Troops initiative returning to Capital Region

News10, Nov. 28, 2025:

BALLSTON SPA, N.Y. (<u>NEWS10</u>) — Members of the New York Army National Guard will be in Ballston Spa on December 1 to volunteer for the Trees for Troops program. They will be at <u>Ellms Tree Farm</u> to help load Christmas trees that are being donated to military bases.

Volunteers are expected to load around 125 Christmas trees from Ellms Tree Farm. All of the trees are being donated to service members and their families around the country and around the world.

This is the 21st year for Trees for Troops. In 2024, they picked up 16,629 trees from 51 different locations and delivered them to 93 bases in the U.S. across five branches of service. This year, trees will be delivered to Fort Drum, West Point, the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station and the U.S. Coast Guard Sector in New York City, along with 88 other military sites around the country.

Since 2005, Trees for Troops has provided 326,273 Christmas Trees to military families and troops to offer support during the holiday season.

https://www.news10.com/holidays/trees-for-troops-initiative-returning-to-capital-region/

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No National Guard members from NYS deployed in Washington, D.C., official says

Newsday, Nov. 26, 2025 ::

Across Long Island, members of the New York Army National Guard and the New York Air National Guard wait for orders to leave their day jobs to airlift civilians trapped on roofs above hurricane floodwaters or rescue troops from active war zones.

None of those assigned to National Guard facilities across the state are currently deployed in the nation's capital, according to Eric Durr, a spokesman for the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs, which oversees local National Guard outfits. That includes about 1,500 members across Long Island.

Two West Virginia National Guard members were shot in Washington Wednesday in what the mayor there said was a targeted attack. Durr declined to comment on the shooting.

Long Island MacArthur Airport in Ronkonkoma is home to the New York Army National Guard's 3rd Battalion, 142nd Assault Helicopter Battalion, Durr said. The facility boasts UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters, generally used to transport either troops or cargo. The Farmingdale Armed Forces Reserve Center houses elements of the Ronkonkoma-based battalion, as well as a company of the Manhattan-based 1st Battalion 69th Infantry.

Among other missions, National Guard troops based in Ronkonkoma have been deployed to Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria in 2017, Newsday previously reported. Several troops served a year of active duty during Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2008 to 2009.

At Gabreski Airport in Westhampton Beach, members of the 106th Rescue Wing of the New York Air National Guard train for missions using HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopters and HC-130J Combat King II fixed-wing aircraft. In addition to fighting a March 8 blaze near their facility, troops based there flew to New Orleans to rescue survivors of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, saved three injured soldiers under enemy fire in Afghanistan in 2012 and evacuated Americans trapped in St. Martin after Hurricane Irma decimated the island's airport in 2017, Newsday has reported.

Gov. Kathy Hochul and President Donald Trump both hold the power to activate Long Island's National Guard troops, most of whom serve in a part-time capacity.

Long Island's elected representatives in the capital reacted Wednesday to the shooting of the two National Guardsmen, only blocks from the White House.

Rep. Andrew Garbarino (R-Bayport) called the shooting "a heartbreaking and unacceptable tragedy for our nation" in a statement emailed to Newsday via a spokesperson. Garbarino, who chairs the House Homeland Security Committee, said Wednesday afternoon he was in "close contact" with the Department of Homeland Security "regarding the ongoing investigation."

"This incident is a reminder of the increasing threats facing those who stand on the front lines keeping our country safe," Garbarino said.

In a text message to Newsday via a spokesperson, Rep. Tom Suozzi (D-Glen Cove) said "all of us, especially those in elected leadership, need to tone down the inflammatory rhetoric and make an effort to build relationships with those we might disagree with."

Rep. Nick LaLota (R-Amityville) said the incident calls for federal authorities to "redouble their efforts to safeguard our nation's capital."

"While we anxiously await more details about the condition of the two Guardsmen, our prayers are with these brave service members, who embody the very best of our nation," LaLota said.

By Nicholas Grasso

Nicholas Grasso covers breaking news for Newsday. A Long Island native, he previously worked at several community newspapers and lifestyle magazines based on the East End.

https://www.newsday.com/news/nation/national-guard-long-island-washington-shooting-sy9fxugn

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**Local News In Brief: New York Army National Guard Promotions** 

Daily Gazette, Nov. 26,2025::

LATHAM — Major General Ray Shields, the Adjutant General for the State of New York, announces the promotion of members of the New York Army National Guard in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Nataleigh Vanheusen of Amsterdam, and assigned to the Company B, NY Recruiting & Retention Battalion, received a promotion August 12, to the rank of private 1st class.

Octavio Bernard of Amsterdam, and assigned to the Company B, NY Recruiting & Retention Battalion, received a promotion August 27, to the rank of private 1st class.

Army National Guard promotions are based on a Soldier's overall performance, demonstrated leadership abilities, professionalism and future development potential.

These promotions recognize the best qualified Soldiers for a career in the New York Army National Guard.

Army National Guard Citizen Soldiers who serve our state and nation are eligible for monthly pay, educational benefits (from the state and federal government), travel across the globe, technical and leadership training, health and dental insurance and contributions towards retirement programs similar to a 401(k).

For more information about the New York Army National Guard, visit <a href="https://www.dmna.ny.gov">www.1800goguard.com</a>

**New York Army National Guard Promotions** 

LATHAM — Major General Ray Shields, the Adjutant General for the State of New York, announces the promotion of members of the New York Army National Guard in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Gary Bishop of Amsterdam, and assigned to the 827th Engineer Company, received a promotion July 14, to the rank of sergeant.

Nathaniel Breedon of Johnstown, and assigned to the Company C, 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, received a promotion July 17, to the rank of 1st lieutenant.

Zachary Lavoie of Fultonville, and assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, received a promotion July 9, to the rank of specialist.

Army National Guard promotions are based on a Soldier's overall performance, demonstrated leadership abilities, professionalism and future development potential.

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**New York Army National Guard Promotions** 

LATHAM — Major General Ray Shields, the Adjutant General for the State of New York, announces the promotion of members of the New York Army National Guard in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

David Colliton from Amsterdam, and assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 101st Expeditionary Signal Battalion, received a promotion September 24, 2025 to the rank of command sergeant major.

Nature Conyne from Gloversville, and assigned to the Bravo Company, New York Army National Guard Recruiting & Retention Battalion, received a promotion September 26, 2025 to the rank of staff sergeant.

Joshua Diamond from Esperance, and assigned to the Golf Company, 427th Brigade Support Battalion, received a promotion October 2, 2025 to the rank of sergeant 1st class.

Justin Rivera from Amsterdam, and assigned to the 1427th Transportation Company, received a promotion October 1, 2025 to the rank of private 1st class.

Army National Guard promotions are based on a Soldier's overall performance, demonstrated leadership abilities, professionalism and future development potential.

These promotions recognize the best qualified Soldiers for a career in the New York Army National Guard.

Army National Guard Citizen Soldiers who serve our state and nation are eligible for monthly pay, educational benefits (from the state and federal government), travel across the globe, technical and leadership training, health and dental insurance and contributions towards retirement programs similar to a 401(k).

For more information about the New York Army National Guard, visit www.dmna.ny.gov or www.1800goguard.com

https://www.dailygazette.com/ar-local-news-in-brief/article\_ebdcb106-bbd8-439c-9aad-4d5c742e2b01.html

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St Johnsville National Guard Soldier Receives New Rank, New Responsibilities

Daily Gazette, Dec. 3, 2025 :

LATHAM — Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general for the state of New York, announces the recent promotion of members of the New York Army National Guard in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Trace Keba from St Johnsville, and assigned to the Headquarters and Support Company, 42nd Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, received a promotion September 10, to the rank of specialist.

Army National Guard promotions are based on a Soldier's overall performance, demonstrated leadership abilities, professionalism and future development potential.

These promotions recognize the best qualified Soldiers for a career in the New York Army National Guard.

Army National Guard Citizen Soldiers who serve our state and nation are eligible for monthly pay, educational benefits (from the state and federal government), travel across the globe, technical and leadership training, health and dental insurance and contributions towards retirement programs similar to a 401(k).

For more information about the New York Army National Guard, visit www.dmna.ny.gov or www.1800goguard.com

New York Air National Guard Promotions

LATHAM — Air Force Major General Michael Bank, the commander of the New York Air National Guard, announces the recent promotion of members of the New York Air National Guard in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Emma Charboneau of Fultonville, and assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing, received a promotion August 1, to the rank of airman 1st class.

Elijah Hill of Johnstown, and assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing, received a promotion August 1, to the rank of master sergeant.

Air National Guard promotions are based on a Airman's overall performance, demonstrated leadership abilities, professionalism and future development potential.

"The New York Air National Guard is built on a foundation of talented and motivated Airmen, and this month's promotions are a shining example of that excellence," Bank said. "I am honored to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of our Airmen, and I look forward to seeing their continued growth and contributions to our organization."

These promotions recognize the best qualified Airmen for a career in the New York Air National Guard.

Air National Guard Citizen Airmen who serve our state and nation are eligible for monthly pay, educational benefits (from the state and federal government), travel

across the globe, technical and leadership training, health and dental insurance and contributions towards retirement programs similar to a 401(k).

For more information about the New York Air National Guard or contact a recruiter, visit https://dmna.ny.gov/ang/.

https://www.dailygazette.com/lh-news-in-brief/article\_0ac2ad26-4640-43d5-942b-7926f4fbaeb0.html

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Yankees legend CC Sabathia helps NYC transform 'dilapidated' field into \$11M complex

New York Post, Dec. 2, 2025 ::

Note: This event was hosted for the NYC Mayor's office in the Harlem Armory by the 369<sup>th</sup> Sustainment Brigade. Brig. Gen. Charles Young was a distinguished Black military officer who graduated from West Point, served in the Spanish-American War and served as a military attache. The park is near the Harlem Armory.

CC came through in the clutch — even in retirement.

New York Yankees great CC Sabathia joined with city leaders Tuesday to unveil an \$11 million sport complex in Manhattan — at the site of a formerly "dilapidated" Harlem park.

A gargantuan \$11 million multi-sport complex slated to offer free youth programming was unveiled Tuesday at the site of a former "dilapidated" Manhattan park.

The former lefty ace was on hand with Mayor Eric Adams and others at the previously neglected field at Brigadier Gen. Charles Young Playground, which has been converted into a 150,000-square-foot "Field of Dreams" with synthetic turf thanks to funding secured by the city and other groups, including Sabathia's PitCCh In Foundation.

"Giving back has always been at the heart of everything I do," the Hall of Famer and World Series winner said in a statement about the dedication for the field, set to open in spring.

"This field represents opportunity, resilience, and community—values that shaped me growing up and continue to inspire me today," the California native added. "New York has become my second home, and I'm honored to help build brighter futures right here."

More than \$7 million of the project's funding was secured through the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program, as well as the Manhattan Borough President's Office and the New York City Council.

Additional cash was funneled from Sabathia's PitCCh In Foundation, Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players' Association Youth Development Fund as well as some private donors.

A Parks rep confirmed the prior field was a "heavily used natural turf, and had drainage issues."

The mayor said the complex would be a game changer for area kids to stay out of trouble, with a City Hall rep saying it will be one of the largest athletic fields in the five boroughs.

"So many young people are going to use this opportunity, not only to play professional sports, but to receive scholarships to prestigious institutions and to learn the discipline that's associated with playing a sport," Adams said.

Other upgrades to the former dirt field include improved drainage, a new synthetic turf surface, drinking fountains, fencing, backstops, benches, dugouts and a cooling mist system.

The multi-purpose complex, expected to keep about 800 children out of trouble through organized sports, will be among the largest athletic fields in the boroughs, a City Hall rep said.

The massive renovation, first announced at Adams' State of the City address earlier this year, is a key step to overhauling public safety with free programming for young people outside of school activities, Hizzoner said.

Notably, free clinics will be offered on the new field through the city's Saturday Night Lights youth activities program.

"Having no place to go and nothing to do, it is a recipe for disaster," Adams said. "It was probably one of the well-known sayings: 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop.' Well, we're closing down the devil's workshop by giving these children a Field of Dreams."

The overhaul builds on new asphalt for the main basketball court and the conversion of a basketball into a soccer pitch completed in 2023, City Hall said.

The field house bathrooms are set to be upgraded later with \$2.5 million in funding from City Hall, City Council and the Manhattan Borough President's Office.

"We know the power of sport and recreation," Adams added. "It brings us together, it can change lives, it is universal, and having recreational spaces for our children to play brings stronger communities."

https://nypost.com/2025/12/02/us-news/yankees-legend-cc-sabathia-helps-nyc-transform-dilapidated-field-into-11m-complex/

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# NY National Guard volunteers give lift to Trees for Troops

Army.mil, dec. 2, 2025 ::

BALLSTON SPA, N.Y. – Seven New York Army National Guard Soldiers and Airmen joined local veterans to load 150 Christmas trees earmarked for military bases around the country onto a truck at Ellms Tree Farm in Ballston Spa on Dec. 1.

This was the 21st year tree farmers in the area donated to the Trees for Troops program. The donated trees are destined for service members and their families around the country.

This year, Soldiers of the New York Army National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters, based in Troy, and the Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing pitched in to help load up the trees.

Five hundred and fifty members of the 42nd Division are deployed to the Middle East, and 200 Airmen from the 109th are deployed in support of Operation Deep Freeze, the National Science Foundation's support to research in Antarctica.

The volunteers make loading the trees easy, said Garth Ellms, owner of Ellms Family Farms.

"It goes very quick," Ellms said. "We have a lot of troops that come in, and so they work fast. FedEx rolls in, FedEx handles actually all the trucking of the trees for free throughout the entire country."

For some of the volunteers, showing up was a way to give back after receiving trees during past deployments.

"The first time I did it, it was in 2021, and it was a great experience," said New York Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Mitchell Mihalko, a recruiter assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing. "How could I say no to an opportunity like this?"

"In 2022, the winter of that holiday season, I was deployed. I received a tree while I was deployed," Mihalko said. "So to be on both ends of the spectrum, to see the start and the finished product, it made me feel like I had a duty to come back and return the favor."

In New York, trees will be delivered in December to military families at Fort Drum, West Point, the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, and the U.S. Coast Guard Sector in New York City, along with other deliveries to 88 military sites around the country.

Fresh-cut Christmas trees are gathered at regional farms and retail lots before pickup by FedEx and routed through distribution centers for delivery to military bases.

The movement and the morning loadout of trees included members of the FedEx shipping team who volunteered to be part of the Trees for Troops event.

Getting an opportunity to sign up for the event was easy for Mark Burby from FedEx, who said he has volunteered to be on the loadout team five times.

"I'm a veteran and I'm the senior guy," Burby said, noting he ensures he has a role in the event.

"It's about helping out other vets," Burby said about his motivation. "I'm a vet, and that's what you think when you help out other vets."

Since 2005, Trees for Troops has provided 326,273 Christmas trees to military families and troops in the United States and overseas.

Military volunteers from the National Guard turn out each year to load and unload the trees, knowing they will be delivered to other military families around the country.

It is a very satisfying feeling to be part of that, said Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Elizabeth Felix.

"I'm happy to be here, it's such an honor," Felix said. "This is great support for the troops, and that's why I'm here to give my time, supporting you guys supporting us."

"It's a great thing you guys are doing, so I want to support you guys," she said.

Trees are expected to be delivered next week for distribution to troops and families.

https://www.army.mil/articleamp/289304/ny national guard volunteers give lift to trees for troops

# **Capitol Region Christmas Tree farms donate 150 trees for Trees for Troops program**

## Troy Record/Saratogian, Dec. 1 ,2025 ::

BALLSTON SPA, N.Y. — For more than 20 years now, several local Christmas Tree farms in the Capital Region have been joining together to provide trees for the national Trees For Troops program, which sends trees to military bases around the country to support troops and military families during the holiday season.

Since its inception, the program has delivered 326,273 trees, according to the Christmas Spirit Foundation website, with last year's Trees for Troops providing 16,629 trees from 51 different locations across the nation and delivering them to 93 bases and 5 branches of service, plus one National Guard Center.

On Monday, National Guard Troops, veterans and volunteers gathered at Ellms Family Tree Farm to load approximately 150 Christmas trees into a FedEx Truck to be shipped to service members and their families around the country and around the world.

"We look forward to this every year," Dave Stack, owner of Goode Trees, shared. "It's a great way to give back to the military and thank them for their sacrifice."

The Local Farms that helped provide Christmas Trees included Avery's Trees, Bailey's Tree Farm, Bob's Trees, Brookside Nursery, Elms Christmas Trees, Goderie's Tree Farm, Goode Trees, Hewitt's Garden Center, Herba's Tree Farm, Kulak's Nursery, McDonough's Tree Farm and Olsen's Tree Farm. There were also paper ornaments made and donated by Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake elementary students.

"The idea was brought to us in 2005, and we thought it was a great idea," Garth Ellms, owner of Ellms Tree Farm, shared. "We didn't know (what) it would turn out to be and just with the collection of other Christmas tree farmers throughout the nation and FedEx jumping in to transport it, we continue.

We get to communicate with our fellow Christmas tree farmers...it's always the Monday morning, after our busiest weekend, and it's great to catch up with our fellow Christmas tree farmers and discuss how their weekend went. Most of us open Black Friday, and then you have Small Business Saturday, and then we're right into it on Sunday, so Monday morning we're bright-eyed and bushy-tailed."

Staff Sgt. Mitchell Mihalko was deployed overseas to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, which received a donated Christmas Tree while he was there from 2022 to 2023. He noted the tree was really uplifting during the Holidays, so far from home, and once he returned, he wanted to be able to help provide that for others.

"Being the desert, the hot, dry climate that it is, there's no snow, there's no ice, and there's definitely no pine trees around. Getting a tree delivered from the United States to our overseas location really boosted morale, it brings up the Christmas spirit, and overall, it just lightens the mood during the holidays, as we're all away from family and just doing our jobs in our deployed environment," Mihalko shared.

"The first time I participated in a Trees for Troops event was in 2021, and that I deployed the next year, and being back here, I just wanted to complete that circle. I gave a tree, I got a tree, and I wanted to give a tree again. This is something I hope will be able to do every year from here on out. It's just a great way to give back to my fellow airmen, soldiers, Marines, sailors."

Another volunteer, retired Col. Richard Goldenberg, shared he has been participating in Trees for Troops efforts since 2006, and noted that his favorite part, coming back year after year, is seeing new and younger people volunteering, highlighting in particular the younger soldiers who are just joining military forces in the New York National Guard, volunteering on their own.

He added that for Veterans like him, it's also a chance to pay respects during the holidays and honor people in their communities who are currently serving and not with their families this holiday season.

"It's just an amazing accomplishment year after year. As someone who's been coming out and volunteering to support the Ellms family farm for more than 20 years, to see new faces, younger soldiers, younger airmen that volunteer their time to come out, the older veterans like myself who come out, it's great," Goldenberg said. "It's about community. It's about all parts of the Capital Region recognizing that this is important, and volunteering their time. This is our way for the community and the tree farmers to recognize and volunteer our time and effort, so they're (servicemen and women) remembered.

"I was in Kuwait during the in the holiday season of 2004, on my way into Iraq, and I talked with many of my fellow soldiers about how how weird it is to see a Christmas tree or holiday decorations in Kuwait, which is a very sandy brown place, but it's also a reminder that there's a connection still back home...it's reaching back from hometown America to remind us when we're from when deployed, that someone's thinking about us, and that is the most important thing."

This holiday season, more than 90 bases across all five branches of the U.S. Military will receive donated trees. For more information about Trees for Troops, visit https://www.christmasspiritfoundation.org/trees-for-troops.

This was the 21st year that local farms participated in the Trees for Troops Program. (Emma Ralls – Medianews Group)

https://www.saratogian.com/2025/12/01/capital-region-christmas-tree-farms-donate-150-trees-for-trees-for-troops-program/

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# Trees for Troops delivers holiday spirit to troops from Ballston Spa

WAMC, Dec. 1, 2025 ::

Trees for Troops began in 2005 as a collaboration between FedEx and the Christmas SPIRIT Foundation, the charitable branch of the National Christmas Tree Association. Since 2005, the program has donated more than 300,000 trees to bases in the U.S. and overseas. The Ellms Tree Farm has been a part of the effort since its inception, and owner Garth Ellms says that the program is a way to give back to troops for their service.

"We're here enjoying our freedoms, and they're out there protecting our freedoms," he said. "So to give them a Christmas tree, to give them that sense of home, selfishly, means a lot, and we'll continue to do it forever."

According to Ellms, 17 farms, nurseries, and garden centers have donated trees and more than 25,000 have been donated nationwide per year.

Retired Colonel Richard Goldenberg, a member of the New York National Guard, has been a volunteer for Trees for Troops since 2006, and said that he was glad to see how much it has grown since then.

"It's been sustained for well over 20 years, 21 years now, and it's really an indication of just how much community support there really is here in the Capital Region," he said. "All of our communities have some ties to the military. Schenectady has the 109th Airlift Wing that flies to the South Pole every winter. The 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters, which is over in Troy, they're currently deployed, and that was the unit I deployed with over 20 years ago."

Air National Guard member Elizabeth Felix is a first-time volunteer who said she was excited for the opportunity to contribute to the program, knowing how her friends who have been deployed miss home during the holidays.

"It's such a hard time," she said. "I have friends who have been deployed and Thanksgiving time, Christmas time is such a difficult time for them, being away from

the family, and it's such a good thing to have this organization helping them, let them know that somebody is thinking of them."

Goldenberg also said that the program was a meaningful way to make service members deployed abroad feel at home.

"The holiday season means so many things to so many different people, but showing our support for those military families is probably the most important thing we can do," he said.

This year's event comes days after the shooting of two West Virginia National Guard members in Washington, D.C. on Nov. 26, which killed 20-year-old U.S. Army Specialist Sarah Beckstrom, and injured 24-year-old Sergeant Andrew Wolfe.

The volunteers with Trees for Troops include veterans, retirees, and current service members from the Capital Region, and even including those who received trees when they were deployed.

Staff Sergeant Mitchell Mihalko, also a member of the Air National Guard, first participated in the program in 2021, and then received a tree when he was deployed overseas in Qatar.

"Seeing both ends of it, being able to give one then being able to receive one, I just thought it was really cool to know that not only can I help out my fellow service members, but knowing that they also care about me," he said.

Mihalko said that getting the gift of the Christmas tree meant a lot to him and his fellow service members.

"When I received it, it really just made me feel at home," he said. "Of course, being in the desert without any snow or trees, you don't really feel a Christmas spirit. But when you walk into that workplace and you see a tree there all decorated up, it really means a lot to us."

https://www.wamc.org/news/2025-12-01/trees-for-troops-delivers-holiday-spirit-to-troops-from-ballston-spa

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Trees for Troops receives northeastern NY trees (video)

WTEN, Dec. 1, 2025 ::

BALLSTON SPA, N.Y. (NEWS10) –Ellms Family Farm participated in the 21st Trees for Troops on Monday morning. Acting as the pickup point, volunteers loaded about 150 Christmas trees donated from a variety of organizations onto a FedEx truck. They are being delivered to military bases nationwide.

Since 2005, Garth Ellms and his family has helped distribute well over 300,000 Christmas trees including this year's. "It goes very quick. We have a lot of troops that come in and so they work fast. FedEx rolls in, FedEx handles actually all the trucking of the trees for free throughout the entire country." Included with each tree are paper ornaments made by Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake students.

Some evergreens even journey overseas for the holidays. A volunteer this year, Sargent Mitchell Mihalko and his fellow service members received a tree three seasons ago while in the desert of Qatar. "We had a little area to form up and just to have a tree from home there really meant a lot to us. Y'know, it gives us a little feeling like we're at home, keeps the season alive, y'know just keeps our spirits up."

https://www.news10.com/news/trees-for-troops-receives-northeastern-ny-trees/

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## History maker William Henry Johnson was black World War I hero

Winston-Salem Journal, Dec. 4, 2025 :

Born: July 15, 1892, Winston Died: July 1, 1929, Albany, N.Y.

Known as: A highly decorated Black American World War I soldier who fought off a German advance in brutal hand-to-hand combat on May 15, 1918, when he and his partner were outnumbered 10 to one.

Privates Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts heard the distinct sound of wire cutters from No Man's Land, shrouded by the early morning darkness and the relentless rain of 1918 France. It was 2 a.m., and someone was snipping through the tangled coils of concertina wire covering the muddy ground in front of their sentry post.

"I figured myself as good a man as any of (the advancing Germans), and I says to my partner, 'We're going to stick right here,'" Johnson told an Army journalist in August 1918. "He says, 'I'm with you to the end.' So instead of retreating to our lines, we cut loose grenades and fired away all our ammunition."

What followed was a brief, brutal, life-or-death skirmish between the two Americans and a superior force of German soldiers. Johnson ran out of ammunition and used

his rifle as a club to save Roberts from being taken prisoner. Both men received multiple critical injuries, with Roberts unable to stand or hold a gun, but he handed grenades to his comrade until they were gone. Johnson finally resorted to using his bolo knife.

By the time French and American troops from Johnson's company arrived a few minutes later, the Huns had fled, both Americans were severely injured, and the attack, which the newspapers of the day called "the Battle of Henry Johnson," was over.

While the engagement was a vital win for the Allied forces and a costly loss for the Germans, the details of the encounter, much like the details of Johnson's life, are difficult to pin down.

Henry was born in 1892 in Winston (before the towns merged), the first child of Isaac "Ike" and Maggie (Carter) Johnson. His sister, Edna, came along in 1899. All four would work in the tobacco industry. Some records list his name as William Henry while others have it as Henry Lincoln. He married in 1915 in Winston-Salem. At some point, he moved to Albany, N.Y., where he worked as a chauffeur, coal delivery driver, soda jerk and, finally, as a porter at the train station.

In June 1917, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and was assigned to the 15th New York Colored Regiment, which became the 369th Infantry Regiment. U.S. military leadership -- including commander of the American Expeditionary Forces Gen. J. J. Pershing -- didn't believe Black troops had a role in combat, so the men were assigned to clear rubble, dig latrines and load trucks. The French command had no such reservations. After four years of relentless war, they needed men.

The 369th were given guns, basic combat training, taught enough French to understand orders and attached to the Fourth French Army. The Germans were told by their officers that the Black troops were poor soldiers who would run from the fight. Johnson's battle was, apparently, an early test of that theory.

The German raiding party that night was estimated to number between 18 and 30. Johnson is credited with four deaths outright and at least 10 severely wounded among those who retreated. The encounter earned him the nickname "Black Death" as well as the highest military award from the French army, the Croix de Guerre (Cross of War) with Palm indicating his extraordinary valor. Johnson is said to have been the first American soldier to earn the honor.

The 369th, better known as the Harlem Hellfighters, the moniker the Germans gave them, earned a unit citation and at least 170 individual Croix de Guerre awards during their 191 cays in combat.

Americans were hungry for battlefield success a,nd Johnson's story fit the bill. He was promoted to sergeant before his discharge, and the men were given a ticker tape parade on Fifth Avenue. Johnson was part of the Victory Stamp campaign, but the support ended there.

His injuries from that morning left him severely debilitated, and he was unable to hold a job after his return. His military records didn't qualify him for disability pay. He turned to alcohol, his family fell apart and he wandered from town to town, sometimes in Albany, sometimes in Winston-Salem.

He died impoverished in Albany in 1929 but was buried in Arlington with full military honors.

Decades after his death, he began to receive the military recognition he so richly deserved: 1996, the Purple Heart; 2002, the Distinguished Service Cross; and in 2015, the Medal of Honor.

Johnson maintained there was nothing special about the battle. "There wasn't anything so fine about it," he said in a newspaper interview. "I just fought for my life. A rabbit would have done that."

In his book "Rank and File: True Stories of the Great War," Theodore Roosevelt III (the president's grandson) disagreed. He called Johnson "one of the five bravest American soldiers in the war."

https://journalnow.com/winstonsalemmonthly/article 82087d98-89a6-4222-9960-5a29ea7586ad.html

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Honoring the Life and Sacrifice of Staff Sgt. Henry E. Irizarry Today & Everyday.

### Connecticut Veterans Bulletin, Dec. 4, 2025 :

Army Staff Sergeant Henry E. Irizarry, born on June 5, 1966, in Puerto Rico, dedicated his life to serving his country and his family. His story is one of courage, commitment, and love. As we remember him, we honor his legacy and the ultimate sacrifice he made for his nation.

Early Life and Family

Henry moved with his family to the Bronx, New York, as a teenager. He attended and graduated from William H. Taft High School. His journey from Puerto Rico to New York City shaped him into a determined and resilient individual.

In his early years, Henry was known for his persistence and charm. After a brief meeting with Jessica, his future wife, he was relentless in his pursuit to see her again. Finally, after weeks of persuading a mutual friend to pass on his number, Jessica agreed to a dinner date. It was during this time that Jessica became captivated by Henry's striking green eyes. Their relationship blossomed, and Henry transitioned into a devoted family man, a change noted by his longtime friend, Sgt. 1st Class Raul Colon Jr.

In 1997, seeking a better life for their growing family, Henry and Jessica moved to Waterbury, Connecticut. They were married for seven years and had four children and a stepdaughter. Henry was known for his deep love for his wife and children, balancing his role as a family man with his responsibilities as a soldier.

## Military Service

Henry E. Irizarry served in the U.S. Army for nearly two decades, from 1985 to 2004. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, New York Army National Guard. His primary Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) was 19D30, Cavalry Scout, a role in which he excelled. His service spanned several critical periods, including Operation Iraqi Freedom.

As a member of the scout platoon, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, Henry's unit was responsible for reconnaissance and information gathering. This vital work often placed them in dangerous situations, requiring the highest levels of skill and bravery.

### The Tragic Day

On December 3, 2004, while patrolling in Taji, Iraq, Staff Sgt. Henry Irizarry's Humvee was struck by an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated by Ziyad Hassin Ali Hammadi. The explosion tragically claimed Henry's life and severely wounded three other soldiers in the vehicle. This attack was a harsh reminder of the perils faced by those serving in conflict zones. On May 26, in an Iraqi court of law, Ziyad was convicted of murder and sentenced to 15 years in prison for his actions.

### Legacy and Remembrance

Henry's death was a significant loss to his family, friends, and fellow soldiers. His friend, Sgt. 1st Class Raul Colon Jr., who had known Henry for 15 years, fondly recalled their times together, catching baseball games and attending parties early in their friendship. Henry was not just a soldier; he was a cherished friend and a dedicated family man who looked forward to his retirement and spending more time with his loved ones.

In his final letter from Iraq, Henry expressed his anticipation of returning home for Christmas, urging Jessica to prepare for a family celebration. This letter now serves as a poignant reminder of the plans and dreams that were left unfulfilled.

#### Conclusion

Staff Sgt. Henry E. Irizarry's life was marked by dedication, bravery, and love. Born in Puerto Rico, raised in the Bronx, and settled in Waterbury, Connecticut, his journey was one of commitment to his family and his country. As we commemorate his service and sacrifice, we are reminded of the profound impact he had on those who knew him and the ultimate price he paid for our freedom.

Henry's story is a testament to the courage and resilience of our service members. His sacrifice will never be forgotten, and his legacy will continue to inspire those who serve and those who remember. Today, we honor Staff Sgt. Henry E. Irizarry, a true American hero.

https://ctvetsbulletin.org/2025/12/03/honoring-the-life-and-sacrifice-of-staff-sgt-henry-e-irizarry-today-everyday/

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Yankees legend CC Sabathia helps NYC transform 'dilapidated' field into \$11M complex

New York Post, Dec. 2, 2025:

CC came through in the clutch — even in retirement.

New York Yankees great CC Sabathia joined with city leaders Tuesday to unveil an \$11 million sport complex in Manhattan — at the site of a formerly "dilapidated" Harlem park.

A gargantuan \$11 million multi-sport complex slated to offer free youth programming was unveiled Tuesday at the site of a former "dilapidated" Manhattan park.

The former lefty ace was on hand with Mayor Eric Adams and others at the previously neglected field at Brigadier Gen. Charles Young Playground, which has been converted into a 150,000-square-foot "Field of Dreams" with synthetic turf thanks to funding secured by the city and other groups, including Sabathia's PitCCh In Foundation.

"Giving back has always been at the heart of everything I do," the Hall of Famer and World Series winner said in a statement about the dedication for the field, set to open in spring.

"This field represents opportunity, resilience, and community—values that shaped me growing up and continue to inspire me today," the California native added. "New York has become my second home, and I'm honored to help build brighter futures right here."

More than \$7 million of the project's funding was secured through the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program, as well as the Manhattan Borough President's Office and the New York City Council.

Additional cash was funneled from Sabathia's PitCCh In Foundation, Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players' Association Youth Development Fund as well as some private donors.

A Parks rep confirmed the prior field was a "heavily used natural turf, and had drainage issues."

The mayor said the complex would be a game changer for area kids to stay out of trouble, with a City Hall rep saying it will be one of the largest athletic fields in the five boroughs.

"So many young people are going to use this opportunity, not only to play professional sports, but to receive scholarships to prestigious institutions and to learn the discipline that's associated with playing a sport," Adams said.

Other upgrades to the former dirt field include improved drainage, a new synthetic turf surface, drinking fountains, fencing, backstops, benches, dugouts and a cooling mist system.

The multi-purpose complex, expected to keep about 800 children out of trouble through organized sports, will be among the largest athletic fields in the boroughs, a City Hall rep said.

The massive renovation, first announced at Adams' State of the City address earlier this year, is a key step to overhauling public safety with free programming for young people outside of school activities, Hizzoner said.

Notably, free clinics will be offered on the new field through the city's Saturday Night Lights youth activities program.

"Having no place to go and nothing to do, it is a recipe for disaster," Adams said. "It was probably one of the well-known sayings: 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop.'

Well, we're closing down the devil's workshop by giving these children a Field of Dreams."

The overhaul builds on new asphalt for the main basketball court and the conversion of a basketball into a soccer pitch completed in 2023, City Hall said.

The field house bathrooms are set to be upgraded later with \$2.5 million in funding from City Hall, City Council and the Manhattan Borough President's Office.

"We know the power of sport and recreation," Adams added. "It brings us together, it can change lives, it is universal, and having recreational spaces for our children to play brings stronger communities."

https://nypost.com/2025/12/02/us-news/yankees-legend-cc-sabathia-helps-nyc-transform-dilapidated-field-into-11m-complex/

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## **New York National Guard**

### NY National Guard Volunteers Give Lift to Trees for Troops

Department of War, Dec. 2, 2025:

Seven New York National Guard soldiers and airmen joined local veterans Dec. 1 to load 150 Christmas trees onto a truck at Ellms Family Christmas Tree Farm in Ballston Spa, New York.

A man, standing in the back of a delivery truck, hands a tree to another man.

This was the 21st year that tree farmers in the area donated to the Trees for Troops program. The donated trees are destined for service members and their families around the country.

This year, soldiers of the New York Army National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters, based in Troy, New York, and the Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing, Stratton Air National Guard Base, Scotia, New York, pitched in to help load the trees.

Five hundred and fifty members of the 42nd Infantry Division are deployed to the Middle East and 200 airmen assigned to the 109th are deployed in support of Operation Deep Freeze, a National Science Foundation research mission in Antarctica.

The volunteers made loading the trees easy, said Garth Ellms, owner of the Ellms Family Farm.

Two men unload a tree from a delivery truck.

"We have a lot of troops that come in and so they work fast," Ellms said. "FedEx handles actually all the trucking of the trees for free throughout the entire country."

For some volunteers, showing up was a way to pay back for receiving trees in the past.

"The first time I did it, it was in 2021, and it was a great experience," said New York Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Mitchell Mihalko, a recruiter assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing. "How could I say no to an opportunity like this?"

"2022, the winter of that holiday season, I was deployed, [and] I received a tree while I was deployed," Mihalko said. "So, to be on both ends of the spectrum, to see the start and the finished product, it made me feel like I had a duty to come back and to return the favor."

Three men unload trees from a delivery truck.

In New York, trees will be delivered in December to military families at Fort Drum, West Point, the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station and the U.S. Coast Guard Sector in New York City, along with other deliveries to 88 other military sites around the country.

Fresh-cut Christmas trees are gathered at regional farms and retail lots, then picked up and processed through distribution centers for delivery to military bases.

The movement and the morning load out of trees included members of the FedEx shipping team who volunteered to be part of the Trees for Troops event.

Getting an opportunity to sign up for the event was easy for Mark Burby, a FedEx employee who said he has volunteered to be on the load-out team five times.

"I'm a veteran, and I'm the senior guy," Burby said. "It's about helping out other vets."

A man, standing in the back of a delivery truck, hands a small tree to a woman.

Since 2005, Trees for Troops has provided 326,273 Christmas trees to military families and troops in the United States and overseas.

Military volunteers from the National Guard turn out each year to load and unload the trees, knowing they will be delivered to other military families.

It is a very satisfying feeling to be part of that, said Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Elizabeth Felix.

"I'm happy to be here; it's such an honor," Felix said. "This is great support for the troops and that's why I'm here to give my time."

Trees are expected to be delivered to military bases next week for distribution.

https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4346024/ny-national-guard-volunteers-give-lift-to-trees-for-troops/

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# **Upstate NY Farm Sending Special Xmas Gift to Troops Across US & Overseas**

104.5FM, Dec. 2, 2025 ::

Sometimes it is the little things that mean the most to our troops overseas. And while so many of our brave men and women won't make it home for the holidays, one Upstate New York farm made sure a small but powerful piece of Christmas found its way to them.

On December 1st, members of the New York Army National Guard gathered at Ellms Tree Farm in Ballston Spa for something that had become a tradition with a lot of heart: the Trees for Troops program.

The mission was simple but meaningful. Volunteers came together to load about 125 Christmas trees that would soon be shipped out to military bases across the country and around the world.

It wasn't just one group lending a hand, either. People from all corners of the military community stepped in, including members of the Air National Guard, the New York Army, and plenty of Capital Region families and friends.

Everyone showed up with the same goal in mind: to send a little comfort, a little home, and a little holiday spirit to those serving far away.

Ellms Tree Farm had been part of this effort since 2005, and this year marked the twenty-first year of the Trees for Troops program. The scale of it was incredible.

In 2024 alone, more than sixteen thousand trees were picked up from fifty one different locations and delivered to ninety-three military bases across all five branches of service.

This year's deliveries were headed to places like Fort Drum, West Point, the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, the U.S. Coast Guard Sector in New York City, and dozens more bases nationwide.

Since it all began, Trees for Troops has delivered more than three hundred twentysix thousand Christmas trees to service members and their families. Each one was a reminder that no matter where they were stationed, they weren't forgotten, especially during the holidays.

https://1045theteam.com/ixp/81/p/christmas-trees-military-initiative/

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# Trees for Troops (video)

News 10, Dec. 1, 2025 ::

Trees for troops video

https://www.news10.com/video/trees-for-troops/11307614/

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# State Partnership Program

# **Hegseth Hosts Swedish Counterpart at Pentagon**

## Pentagon News, Dec. 4, 2025:

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth welcomed Pål Jonson, Sweden's minister of defense, to the Pentagon today for a bilateral engagement.

At the meeting's outset, both leaders spoke highly of the U.S. and Sweden's mutually beneficial military relationship, as well as the progress that Sweden has made since officially becoming a member of NATO, March 7, 2024.

"The military relationship between the U.S. and Sweden, of course, is incredibly important; and we very much appreciate Sweden's increased leadership in defense and security issues in Europe ... as well as the rapid integration into NATO in just over a year," Hegseth told Jonson and his delegation.

During his brief remarks, Jonson acknowledged U.S. support for Sweden's integration into the organization.

"Thank you, also, for the support for us being integrated into NATO, because we really tried to hit the ground running by not coming into NATO just by consuming security, but actually producing security," Jonson explained.

Jonson said Sweden aims to deliver security and hard power, making sure that the country can deter and defend "every inch of allied territory."

Hegseth also praised Sweden and other NATO countries' commitment to spend 5% of their gross domestic product on defense by 2035.

"Sweden has already led the charge and responded to this call for action to increase defense spending, which is quite meaningful to [the War Department] and President [Donald J.] Trump," Hegseth said.

In addition to Sweden's strong progress with NATO, Hegseth and Jonson also discussed both countries' efforts to mutually ramp up their defense industrial bases.

"I think it's going to be critical between our two countries that cooperation helps us build the strong forces, the hard power," Hegseth said.

"That's what it comes down to: hard power needed to preserve peace," he continued.

"I think, sir, that this is an area where we both punch above our weight," Jonson said, regarding defense production between the two countries.

"Right now, we are at the stage where we need more defense. We need to scale up production. We need to transform economic clout into combat power as well," he continued, adding that he agrees there are many ways the U.S. and Sweden can work to mutually build up their defense industrial bases.

Jonson had praise for Sweden's participation in the National Guard's State Partnership Program that began in 2024. In the program, the National Guard pairs up U.S. states with allied countries for military-to-military engagements in support of mutual defense security goals.

"Working with your National Guard in the state of New York has exceeded even our expectations, and [it] has been very rewarding for us, as well," he said.

Before ending the public portion of the bilateral exchange, both leaders shared pleasantries.

"Mr. Secretary ... it's great to see you here at the Pentagon, and we look forward to our discussions," Jonson told Hegseth.

"We're grateful to have you at the Pentagon; thanks for being here," Hegseth told Jonson.

https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4350032/hegseth-hosts-swedish-counterpart-at-pentagon/

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