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DOCCS Support

NY prisons addressing contraband crisis

News10, Sept. 25, 2025 :

ALBANY, N.Y. (NEXSTAR) — The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision handed down new safety and security measures. That's because, according to a DOCCS spokesperson, an intoxicated incarcerated person bit a staff member during a use of force incident at Otisville Correctional Facility in Orange County on September 23.

The measures are responding to a "crisis situation" involving a "spate of illnesses to corrections officers and inmates alike from unknown substances." Department spokesperson Nicole March confirmed that three corrections officers and one National Guard member felt light-headed and experienced other symptoms after the bite.

That's why DOCCS Commissioner Daniel Martuscello III issued memos to staff and the incarcerated population outlining a new package room procedure effective as of September 23. In it, Martuscello said new measures would intercept "illicit substances from coming into our correctional facilities, which have resulted in overdoses, deaths, anxiety, and violent behaviors against staff and/or other incarcerated individuals within our facilities."

Now, packages of printed material and tobacco products will be held for up to six days for extra screening. The memo said DOCCS will work with incarcerated people and experts to develop more long-term contraband strategies, including with district attorneys on prosecutions for illicit substances.

DOCCS will be using police dogs from OSI to perform checks to prevent contraband. They said canine operations led to 395 visitor arrests in 2024 and 160 visitor arrests so far this year.

Martuscello said that if the drug issue persists, DOCCS will consider eliminating tobacco deliveries altogether. In that case, they'd only be available through the commissary.

All packages for incarcerated people must be bought from and delivered by a vendor. No packages may be brought in during visits.

This adds to screening for legal mail—correspondence with lawyers, legal counsel, or the court. All general mail is photocopied, and the copies are delivered to the people who are incarcerated. Every correctional facility has installed body image scanners for staff, volunteers, visitors, and incarcerated people. Anyone can decline a body scan, but a refusal results in a non-contact visit.

There are some exceptions to the body scanner requirement. According to the DOCCS website, pregnant individuals and those under 18 don't have to undergo a scan. Those with medical conditions can apply for an exemption in advance by submitting forms signed by their health care provider. Lawyers and other legal visitors are also supposed to be exempt.

The four staff members were evaluated and treated at an outside hospital, March said. She added that the Office of Special Investigations was dispatched to the facility and that their investigation is ongoing.

The department handed down the new policies to package room staff, the incarcerated population, and all facility superintendents to post in staff areas on September 23. DOCCS posted the new policies publicly on social media on September 24.

March said DOCCS has no plans to reverse the policies, noting that the changes have been implemented over time to help improve safety for both staff and incarcerated people.

<https://www.news10.com/news/north-country/otisville-correctional-incident-response/amp/>

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Federal Government

Pentagon says troops can only be exempt from shaving their facial hair for a year

Associated Press, Sept. 23, 2025 :

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered that troops who need an exemption from shaving their facial hair for longer than a year should get kicked out of the service.

While commanders are still able to issue service members exemptions from shaving — a policy that has existed for decades — they will now have to come with a medical treatment plan, Hegseth said in an Aug. 20 memo made public Monday. Troops who still need treatment after a year will be separated from service, the memo says.

“The Department must remain vigilant in maintaining the grooming standards which underpin the warrior ethos,” Hegseth wrote in his memo.

The announcement applies to all the military services and is the latest in a series of restrictions after years of military services loosening the rules on how troops can look, often at the request of service members themselves.

Most shaving waivers are for troops diagnosed with pseudofolliculitis barbae, or PFB, a condition in which hair curls back into the skin after shaving and causes irritation. It is a condition that disproportionately affects Black men.

The memo is silent on what treatments the military would offer for troops affected by the new policy or if it will front the cost for those treatments. The document, which declares that “the grooming standard set by the U.S. military is to be clean shaven and neat in presentation,” doesn’t specify if service members will still be allowed to sport mustaches.

It is also unclear if policies like broad exemptions from shaving for special forces troops who are in operational settings or soldiers stationed in the Arctic climates of Alaska where shaving can pose a medical hazard in the extreme cold will be affected by the change.

The Army this week announced its own grooming standard update, which significantly changes acceptable appearance standards for soldiers, especially for women, including revisions for nails, hairstyles, earrings and makeup.

In January, the Air Force rolled out a new policy that significantly limits the kinds of nail polish those in the service could wear to just three — one of which is clear — reversing a previous rule that allowed 60 colors.

<https://apnews.com/article/pentagon-facial-hair-grooming-beards-hegseth-e87c41e311089db0da4c4f2b5de93d1f>

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Hegseth terminates women’s advisory group, slams ‘divisive agenda’

Military Times, Sept. 23, 2025 :

The Pentagon has announced plans to terminate a 75-year-old advisory committee serving female service members, citing a “divisive” and harmful agenda — days after a previous memo established plans for reactivating it.

A Sept. 17 memo signed by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and reviewed by Military Times directs the “formal disestablishment” of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services.

“After further review, I have determined that the reinstatement of the Defense Advisory Committee for Women in the Services (DACOWITS) should not proceed,” Hegseth wrote in the memo, addressed to the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness and the director of administration and management. “The Department’s Advisory Committee Management Officer will terminate the DACOWITS in accordance with the requirements of [the Federal Advisory Committee Act]. In addition, the DACOWITS Sponsor will take appropriate action to realign

resources associated with the DACOWITS, such as the reassignment of personnel, conclusion of contracts, and the archiving of DACOWITS' records."

A Sept. 8 memo also signed by Hegseth and reviewed by Military Times had directed the phased return to service of DACOWITS and 39 other advisory groups placed on hiatus, including the women's advisory committee that an internal email had previously recommended for closure.

Earlier this month, the Pentagon did not respond to a request for comment about the move to keep the committee. But on Tuesday, officials provided a statement about Hegseth's termination decision that called DACOWITS "divisive" and criticized its "agenda."

"After further review, Secretary Hegseth has decided to terminate the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services," Pentagon Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson said in the statement. "The Committee is focused on advancing a divisive feminist agenda that hurts combat readiness, while Secretary Hegseth has focused on advancing uniform, sex-neutral standards across the Department."

A senior staff member with the office of Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, D-Penn., a former Air Force officer who has advocated for DACOWITS and service-level groups supporting efforts to develop policies and equipment that account for women, said the office had submitted numerous questions to the Pentagon about the termination memo.

The agenda of the most recent public DACOWITS meeting, held in December 2024 before quarterly meetings were paused, addressed recruiting and service propensity statistics; flexibility and permeability for transfers between services; the integration status of women serving on submarines; data on eating disorders and physical fitness, issues regarding menopause, perimenopause and hormonal imbalances; and the reintegration to service of troops who'd given birth.

A 70-year report on the committee's work, published in 2020, highlighted how more than 1,000 DACOWITS recommendations made since 1967 had informed Defense Department policy, with a 97% full or partial adoption rate as of 2019. Major themes since the 2010s, according to a data analysis, have been prevention of sexual assault and harassment, gender equality and integration, career progression and women's health and wellbeing.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2025/09/23/hegseth-terminates-womens-advisory-group-slams-divisive-agenda/>

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Pentagon adds exemptions to requirement for all troops to get the flu shot

Associated Press, Sept. 24,2025 :

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon has stepped back from the policy that requires all troops to get the flu shot every year by introducing exemptions for reservists and proclaiming that the shot is only necessary in some circumstances for all service members, according to a document obtained by The Associated Press.

The memo, written by Deputy Defense Secretary Steve Feinberg on May 29 and sent to all the military services, says reserve troops now will need to be on active duty for 30 days or more before being required to get an annual flu shot. It also says the military will no longer be paying for reservists or National Guard members to get the vaccine on their own time.

News of the policy change, which has not been publicly announced by the Pentagon, comes as the Trump administration and its advisers have suggested changes to other vaccination guidance. An influential immunization panel that the administration updated to include anti-vaccine figures decided to not recommend the COVID-19 shot to anyone, while President Donald Trump used his platform to promote unproven and, in some cases, discredited ties between the pain reliever Tylenol, vaccines and autism.

At the Pentagon, the flu shot memo declared that “going forward, the Department will conserve its resources by requiring seasonal flu vaccination for Service members only when doing so most directly contributes to readiness.” However, the document is not clear about the changes because it later says the annual requirement for active-duty troops is still in effect.

While the memo was quietly sent months ago, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth drew attention to it Wednesday when he reposted a comment from an anonymous account that claimed they “won’t be forced to get a flu shot this fall for the privilege of serving my state and country in the National Guard.”

Officials in Hegseth’s office did not answer questions on the conflicting nature of the memo or comment on the post he amplified.

The Trump administration also has offered back pay to former service members who refused the COVID-19 vaccine and were kicked out of the military under the Biden administration. Those who declined the vaccination have been able to return to service since 2023, but only 113 of the more than 8,000 discharged service members had chosen to do so.

The back pay offer was intended to encourage more to reenlist but met with limited success. Two months later, Pentagon officials said only 13 people — all Army soldiers — had rejoined the military.

<https://apnews.com/article/flu-shots-military-pentagon-reserves-6116040f7ad97bab081f04903d2549c2>

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Hegseth orders rare, urgent meeting of hundreds of generals, admirals

Washington Post, Sept. 25, 2025 :

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered hundreds of the U.S. military's generals and admirals to gather on short notice — and without a stated reason — at a Marine Corps base in Virginia next week, sowing confusion and alarm after the Trump administration's firing of numerous senior leaders this year.

The highly unusual directive was sent to virtually all of the military's top commanders worldwide, according to more than a dozen people familiar with the matter. The directive was issued earlier this week, as a government shutdown looms, and months after Hegseth's team at the Pentagon announced plans to undertake a sweeping consolidation of top military commands.

In a statement Thursday, Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell affirmed that Hegseth "will be addressing his senior military leaders early next week," but he offered no additional details. Parnell, a senior adviser to the defense secretary, voiced no concerns about The Washington Post reporting on the meeting, scheduled for Tuesday in Quantico, Virginia.

The Washington Post wants to hear from Defense Department civilians and service members about changes within the Pentagon and throughout the U.S. military. You can contact our reporters by email or Signal encrypted message:

There are about 800 generals and admirals spread across the United States and dozens of other countries and time zones. Hegseth's order, people familiar with the matter said, applies to all senior officers with the rank of brigadier general or above, or their Navy equivalent, serving in command positions and their top enlisted advisers. Typically, these officers each oversee hundreds or thousands of rank-and-file troops.

Top commanders in conflict zones and senior military leaders stationed throughout Europe, the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific region are among those expected to attend Hegseth's meeting, said people familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to publicly discuss the issue. The order does not apply to top military officers who hold staff positions.

None of the people who spoke with The Post could recall a defense secretary ever ordering so many of the military's generals and admirals to assemble like this. Several said it raised security concerns.

"People are very concerned. They have no idea what it means," one person said.

Two others expressed frustration that even many commanders stationed overseas will be required to attend. One said, this is "not how this is done."

"You don't call GOFOs leading their people and the global force into an auditorium outside D.C. and not tell them why/what the topic or agenda is," this person said, using an abbreviation for general officer or flag officer.

"Are we taking every general and flag officer out of the Pacific right now?" one U.S. official said. "All of it is weird."

The orders come as Hegseth has unilaterally directed massive recent changes at the Pentagon — including directing that the number of general officers be reduced by 20 percent, firing senior leaders without cause and a high-profile new order to rebrand the Defense Department as the Department of War.

Top administration officials also have been preparing a new national defense strategy that is expected to make homeland defense the nation's top concern, after several years of China being identified as the top national security risk to the United States. Some officials familiar with the order to travel said they thought that may come up.

Hegseth's directive in May to slash about 100 generals and admirals also has generated concern among top military leaders. He called then for a "minimum" 20 percent cut to the number of four-star officers — the military's top rank — on active duty and a corresponding number of generals in the National Guard. There also will be another 10 percent reduction, at least, to the total number of generals and admirals across the force.

Last month, Hegseth fired Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Kruse, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency; Vice Adm. Nancy Lacore, the chief of the Navy Reserve; and Rear Adm. Milton Sands, a Navy SEAL officer who oversaw Naval Special Warfare Command. No specific reason was given in those cases.

The firings were the latest in a wider purge of national security agencies' top ranks. Since entering office, the Trump administration also has fired the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr.; the chief of naval operations, Adm. Lisa Franchetti; the commandant of the Coast Guard, Adm. Linda Fagan; and the Air Force vice chief of staff, Gen. James Slife among others. The list includes a disproportionate number of women.

Gen. David Allvin, the chief of staff of the Air Force, announced last month he will step down in November, after he was asked to retire.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/09/25/hegseth-generals-quantico-meeting/>

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Trump bills Hegseth's unusual meeting with generals as a friendly meet-up

Politico, Sept. 25, 2025 :

President Donald Trump on Thursday hailed his Defense secretary's unusual order that hundreds of top officials meet in person next week as a kumbaya moment, even as some defense officials feared it would prove little more than a photo op.

"It's great when generals and top people want to come to the United States to be with a now-called secretary of War," Trump said during a signing of executive orders, referring to his new rebrand of the Defense Department.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has not said why he wants generals and admirals serving around the globe to show up for a meeting at the Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia, according to three defense officials, who said they and their colleagues were floored by the move.

The sudden meeting has led to frantic travel plans and concerns from some defense officials, who worry about the disruption it will cause to their schedules and the security aspects of having most of the military's top officers in one place.

"Whatever it is can be communicated through secure emails, phone calls and video links," said one of the officials, who like others, was granted anonymity to discuss internal decisions.

The other two officials said they didn't know what to expect from the meeting, which falls on the same day the government will shut down if Congress can't reach an agreement to fund it. Any shutdown would put a stop to non-urgent travel.

The second official wondered if the event was largely an opportunity for Hegseth and Trump to generate appealing visuals of themselves speaking in front of a room of generals and admirals.

Pentagon spokesperson Sean Parnell confirmed that Hegseth "will be addressing his senior military leaders early next week," but did not add further details.

The Washington Post first reported on the planned meeting.

The Pentagon's policy office recently wrapped up two hotly anticipated reviews, the National Defense Strategy and Global Posture Review which are expected to be released next month. But there is no indication yet that Hegseth is using this opportunity to brief the assembled officers on their findings.

POLITICO has reported that the strategy will shift the military's focus from deterring China to the Western Hemisphere and within the United States. The posture review will likely call for troop reductions in Europe and elsewhere.

The Pentagon has also been working to consolidate global commands as a way to cut four and three-star generals and reduce headquarters. Hegseth has said the moves will reduce bureaucratic bloat and limit overall costs.

Trump outlined the meeting as more of a meet-and-greet than a deep dive into generational changes within the department.

"We're selling the equipment to others, other countries, and a lot of generals want to be here," he said. "And they want to look at the — they're also going to be touring equipment sites. They're going to be talking about the newest weapons, etc."

<https://www.politico.com/news/2025/09/25/trump-hegseth-meeting-generals-00581413>

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Trump Is Expanding the National Guard's Role. Some Former Generals Worry.

New York Times, Sept. 21, 2025::

Responding to crises at home is part of the Guard's mission. Helping crack down on crime in U.S. cities isn't, say some former leaders, who fear this shift could hurt the force.

Note: This item is provided for your situational awareness.

In the past quarter-century, National Guard troops have hoisted desperate survivors from rooftops in Hurricane Katrina. Fought the flames of devastating wildfires in Maui and Los Angeles. Searched for survivors and secured the skies after Sept. 11. And deployed in the hundreds of thousands to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Delivering relief and maintaining order in times of great need is a well-established part of the Guard's mission. But as the Guard fulfills a different kind of role

envisioned by President Trump, supporting a crackdown on crime in Washington, D.C., that he now aims to expand to Memphis and other cities, several generals who have led Guard troops fear that shift will damage the force.

That includes, they say, hurting morale, weakening recruiting and retention, and straining the Guard's relationship with the American public.

"The thing that supports the morale of the National Guard is that, for decades, we've been the good guys," said Brig. Gen. Paul G. Smith, the former assistant adjutant general of Massachusetts whose command included responding to Hurricanes Sandy and Irene and the Boston Marathon bombings. "We fish families out of flood waters. We shovel ambulances through the snow to get to women delivering babies."

But, he added, "patrolling the monuments, creating this sort of military net that's descended on these urban areas — that's not something a lot of people signed up for."

The five generals who spoke to The Times included retired senior leaders at the National Guard Bureau, the agency in Washington, D.C., that oversees the Army and Air National Guard. Two were former top-ranking officers of the Massachusetts and Illinois National Guard, both appointed by Democratic governors. One was an Army general who oversaw one of the largest domestic Guard deployments in modern history. All of them served for decades under both Democratic and Republican administrations.

It is unclear whether their views are shared by a broader group of their peers. Several other former leaders who were appointed by Republicans to top Guard positions or who became Republican members of Congress declined or did not respond to requests for comment.

Last week, Mr. Trump authorized Guard troops to be deployed in Memphis next, saying that violent crime there had overwhelmed the local government, though the city's mayor has said that crime had decreased in the city. That order came after weeks in which the president publicly mulled similar deployments to cities like Chicago, New Orleans and Baltimore, drawing backlash from local leaders.

And in late August, he took another step to expand the Guard's domestic law enforcement role, ordering the establishment of a unit within each state's ranks dedicated to "quelling civil disturbances" and "ensuring the public safety and order," deployable at a moment's notice to anywhere the country.

The president has many supporters in that effort, who see crime in Washington and other urban areas as a dire problem that requires federal intervention because, they say, cities have not done enough to address it, even though violent crime rates in many of them have been on the decline.

That approach has received the backing of defense secretary Pete Hegseth, a former infantry officer in the Minnesota National Guard, several former Guard troops in Congress and seven Republican governors who have agreed to send troops to assist units in Washington.

“It doesn’t matter if you’re from a blue city or a red state, you want to live in a place where it’s safe,” Representative Scott Perry, Republican of Pennsylvania and retired brigadier general in the National Guard, said in an interview with Fox Business in late August.

Several of the generals who were interviewed expressed support for Mr. Trump’s overall goal of tamping down crime in major cities. But they contended he should pursue those goals by leveraging local resources and dedicated law enforcement agencies in cooperation with local leaders, not with the National Guard.

The Guard “is not a law enforcement agency,” said Maj. Gen. William Enyart, a former adjutant general of Illinois — the Guard’s top officer in the state — and former Democratic congressman.

He added: “The military is designed to fight external enemies, not citizens.”

Maj. Gen. Randy E. Manner, former acting vice chief of the National Guard Bureau, said Mr. Trump’s decision to deploy the Guard to D.C. represented an attempt to “intimidate the local population,” politicizing the force and misusing its limited resources. He added that using the military to police American citizens “is the beginning of a divide between our military and our citizens, and that is absolutely detestable.”

He also noted that soldiers on deployment cannot train for another part of their mission: serving as a reserve force to support the active-duty U.S. military abroad.

General Enyart said that the risks to morale were especially high given the personal cost that deployments impose on troops

Unlike service members in the other military branches, most Guard troops serve part time. While deployed, they leave behind jobs, families and businesses, General Enyart said. They often make less income than they would in their civilian jobs, and many are college students for whom a deployment can mean missing weeks or months of school.

“These are all really disincentives for retention, for morale, for recruiting,” General Enyart said. “It’s one thing when you’re out there sandbagging to prevent the Mississippi River from washing the town away. It’s another thing when you’re fulfilling a president’s political desires.”

On recent weekends in Washington, Guard troops were mostly seen taking up posts in subway stations and meandering among crowds on the waterfront. Their mission has included patrolling tourist areas, landscaping and cleaning up trash and graffiti.

Many troops, approached in public places, said their job was to follow orders regardless of personal opinions. Two troops said that they had deployed before for hurricane recovery and acknowledged that this mission felt different. Both also expressed a desire to go home. One of them, a carpenter in his civilian life, said he told his mother not to post on Facebook about his mission, because he feared a backlash.

Representative Barry Moore, Republican of Alabama, who served six years in the state's National Guard, said that in his experience Guard members are eager to serve on any mission they're called for. He contended that Mr. Trump's use of the Guard was unlikely to damage the Guard's ability to attract new soldiers.

"When we sign up, we don't necessarily have a specific job description," he said. "Ultimately, it's to protect the American people — whatever that looks like."

Several of the former generals also cautioned that maneuvering the Guard into domestic law enforcement against the wishes of state governors veered into legally dubious territory.

Mr. Trump is not the only leader to have summoned the National Guard to cities troubled by crime. The Democratic governors of both New York and New Mexico deployed the Guard in recent years for just that purpose, but those deployments were limited in scope.

An 1878 law called the Posse Comitatus Act forbids the active-duty military, with narrow exceptions, from carrying out law enforcement functions on U.S. soil. The National Guard, on the other hand, can perform those duties, but only when they are called into action at the request of a state governor.

Brig. Gen. David L. McGinnis, former chief of staff for the National Guard Association of the United States, which works as an advocate for the force on Capitol Hill, described any move to deploy the Guard over governors' wishes as being firmly "outside the constitutional box."

Washington, D.C., where local law grants the president greater authority to deploy the National Guard, is an exception to that rule. And in Los Angeles, where Mr. Trump deployed Guard troops in response to protests this year over the objections of Gov. Gavin Newsom of California, the president claimed an exemption by arguing that protesters were impeding the enforcement of federal immigration law.

A federal judge ruled that the president had overstepped his authority in deploying the Guard to Los Angeles. The administration has appealed the ruling.

Lt. Gen. Russel L. Honoré, a retired Army general who commanded the federal government's response to Hurricane Katrina, which included tens of thousands of Guard members, said he was not just concerned about how Mr. Trump's contentious deployments might politicize the Guard. He also worries about putting Guard troops in a situation where they could be the focus of hostility from unreceptive citizens.

"Because when it goes bad — like Kent State — it goes bad," General Honoré said, referencing the day in 1970 when Ohio National Guard troops opened fire on anti-Vietnam War protesters at Kent State University, killing four students.

"We want to make sure we're on the side of saving lives, not taking lives in America."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/21/us/national-guard-crime-washington-cities.html>

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Pentagon Expands Its Restrictions on Reporter Access

New York Times, Sept. 20., 2025 ::

The Department of Defense will force reporters to pledge not to gather or use any information that had not been formally authorized for release, or risk losing their credential to cover the military.

Note: This item is provided for your information.

The Pentagon said Friday it would impose new restrictions on reporters covering the Department of Defense, requiring them to pledge not to gather or use any information that had not been formally authorized for release or risk losing their credentials to cover the military.

The new mandate, described in a memorandum circulated to the press on Friday, was the latest in a series of actions by the Trump administration to limit the ability of the media to cover the federal government without interference.

The Department of Defense said in the 17-page memo that it "remains committed to transparency to promote accountability and public trust." But it added that "information must be approved for public release by an appropriate authorizing official before it is released, even if it is unclassified."

In addition, the document constrains the movements of the media within the Pentagon itself, designating large areas of the building off limits without escorts for

the roughly 90 reporters credentialed to cover the agency. Although many offices and meeting rooms in the Pentagon are restricted, the Pentagon press corps had previously been given unescorted access throughout much of the building and its hallways.

The move could drastically restrict the flow of information about the U.S. military to the public. The National Press Club called the policy “a direct assault on independent journalism” and called for it to be immediately rescinded.

Sean Parnell, the chief Pentagon spokesman, said in a statement that the guidelines were “already in line with every other military base in the country,” adding that they were “basic, common-sense guidelines to protect sensitive information.”

The Pentagon said it would forbid reporters from gathering any information that had not been authorized for release, and would revoke press passes from any journalists who did not obey.

The Pentagon’s tense relationship with the news media reflects a pervasive attitude throughout the Trump administration. The White House has repeatedly limited access to outlets because of coverage it doesn’t like, and President Trump has sued multiple news organizations, including The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, over their coverage.

Following the assassination of the conservative activist Charlie Kirk last week, the head of the Federal Communications Commission, Brendan Carr, threatened television stations with “fines or license revocation” if they continued carrying Jimmy Kimmel’s late-night show on ABC after the comedian made comments that some interpreted as critical of the Make America Great Again movement and Mr. Kirk. ABC indefinitely suspended the show.

The Defense Department has been a focal point of press scrutiny this year, with media outlets revealing that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth had disclosed classified war plans in a private group chat that included a reporter and that the secretary had invited the billionaire Elon Musk to a briefing on the government’s top-secret plans if war broke out with China. Recently, news coverage has raised questions about the legality of two military strikes on Venezuelan boats that killed 14 people. On Friday, Mr. Trump said a third Venezuelan boat had been destroyed by the government, with three additional people killed.

Under the watch of Mr. Hegseth, the Pentagon has placed a series of restraints on the news media’s ability to cover the military, beginning with the decision in late January to remove four outlets from their work spaces in the Pentagon in favor of news sources, such as Breitbart News, that have provided coverage seen by the administration as more favorable.

Mr. Hegseth, a former Fox News host, has taken an increasingly adversarial position with the press, repeatedly accusing journalists of attempting to “sabotage” Mr. Trump’s agenda by publishing information leaked by “disgruntled former employees.” He has held only a handful of press briefings.

“The ‘press’ does not run the Pentagon — the people do,” Mr. Hegseth wrote on X on Friday.

Mr. Trump, for his part, suggested to reporters on Thursday that news outlets should be punished for negative coverage of his presidency.

“They give me only bad publicity or press,” he said. “I mean, they’re getting a license, I would think maybe their license should be taken away.”

Mr. Parnell, the Pentagon spokesman, did not respond to a query about why the guidelines were issued now or whether the White House was involved in the decision to implement them. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the development.

The new pledge asks journalists to acknowledge in writing that acquiring or using unauthorized information would be grounds for “immediate suspension” of Pentagon access. It defined off-limits information to include both classified materials and “controlled unclassified information,” a broadly defined category that includes materials that could pose a risk to national security if released to the public.

It is not clear whether the prohibition would include soliciting information from Defense Department staff or seeking confirmation or comment on materials gathered through other means.

The Pentagon Press Association said in a statement that it was “aware of today’s new directive regarding badge access to the Pentagon and is reviewing it.”

Seth Stern, director of advocacy at Freedom of the Press Foundation, said that the government is legally prohibited from requiring journalists to surrender their right to investigate the government in exchange for access or credentials.

“This policy operates as a prior restraint on publication which is considered the most serious of First Amendment violations,” Mr. Stern said. “The government cannot prohibit journalists from public information merely by claiming it’s a secret or even a national security threat.”

A correction was made on Sept. 21, 2025: An earlier version of this article misstated the number of press briefings Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has held. He has held a handful of briefings, not one.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/20/business/media/pentagon-restrictions-reporters-hegseth-trump.html>

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History

Henry Johnson served in the first Black U.S. Army unit to see combat in World War I and solidified his place in history by saving another soldier's life

War History Online, Sept. 23, 2025 :

Countless acts of heroism earn medals and accolades, yet some individuals remain unacknowledged for decades due to racial prejudice, political circumstances, or international boundaries. A striking example is William Henry Johnson, who served in the first African-American U.S. Army unit to see combat in World War I.

Referred to as Henry Johnson, he displayed remarkable valor one night on the front, protecting a wounded fellow soldier while single-handedly repelling a German raiding team. Even while severely wounded and vastly outnumbered, he held his ground, embodying extraordinary courage and unwavering dedication to others.

Little is definitively known about Henry Johnson's early years—even he was uncertain about his exact birthdate. He believed he was born on July 15, 1892, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, but official records list varying dates. As a teenager, he found work as a railway porter, hauling baggage and freight.

In the summer of 1917, Johnson enlisted in the U.S. Army after hearing that the 15th Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard—an all-Black regiment—needed volunteers. Alongside his fellow soldiers, he deployed to France, arriving in January 1918 to join the fight on the Western Front.

From the get-go, the eager regiment - at that point renamed the 369th Infantry Regiment and later becoming known as the "Harlem Hellfighters" - was relegated to menial tasks, such as cleaning and moving goods. They were temporarily assigned to the 161st Division of the French Army by Gen. John J. Pershing. It's believed the reason was that Pershing wanted to give African-American soldiers a chance to advance in leadership, which they couldn't do in the segregated US Army.

The French Army had no such issue and gladly accepted the men as reinforcements, kitting them out with equipment. Johnson and his regiment were deployed to Outpost 20, near the Argonne Forest.

A nighttime raid was Henry Johnson's chance to be a hero

On the night of May 14, 1918, Henry Johnson had no idea he was about to face the battle that would define his legacy. He and fellow soldier Needham Roberts were stationed on guard duty at the edge of a forest, with their shift scheduled to end at midnight.

Two replacement troops arrived, but Johnson quickly realized they were too inexperienced to handle the post. Instead of clocking out, he chose to stay and back them up. Roberts returned to the trench to get some rest, leaving Johnson to keep watch. Not long after, he began hearing troubling sounds coming from the woods—the rustle of movement and the distinct click of wire cutters slicing through barbed wire in the dark.

German troops attack

Without warning, Henry Johnson and Pvt. Robert S. Roberts were attacked by a squad of German soldiers under the cover of night. As the assailants advanced, Roberts was struck by shrapnel while calling for help, leaving him unable to continue the fight. Despite his own injuries, Johnson refused to surrender, keeping the battle alive by passing hand grenades to Roberts, who courageously lobbed them at the approaching enemy.

Once the grenades were expended, Johnson seized his rifle and continued defending against the attackers, enduring further wounds to his side, head, and hand. When the rifle jammed, he wielded it as a club, striking at anyone who came near.

During the chaotic fight, a severe blow to his head left Johnson momentarily stunned. He quickly recovered, drawing his 14-inch bolo knife and striking with lethal precision, killing one German instantly. Noticing the enemy trying to carry off the wounded Roberts, Johnson surged forward, injuring another soldier and forcing the remaining attackers to retreat in fear.

Johnson saved him and Roberts' lives

After an hour of fierce fighting, reinforcements showed up, forcing the Germans to pull back. Johnson's extraordinary courage guaranteed that both he and Roberts made it through, with quick medical care provided for their injuries.

As the first light of dawn lit up the scene, the aftermath of the clash became visible: their wounds, their gear, and four fallen German soldiers. Johnson is said to have

wounded another 25 to 30. His heroic stand quickly became the talk of the town, earning him a promotion to sergeant and the moniker "the Black Death."

Awarded the Medal of Honor nearly a century later

For his efforts, the French awarded Henry Johnson the Croix de Guerre, one of their highest awards, before sending him back to the US. At the end of the First World War, the Harlem Hellfighters participated in a victory parade, with Johnson upfront. Still, they were not allowed to parade alongside the White troops.

After such an ordeal, many soldiers would return home to a hero's welcome, which Johnson did, to an extent, but it was a bittersweet achievement. Many publications quickly glossed over his race, or avoided mentioning it at all. He gave his all and returned to a country celebrating his efforts while still regarding him as an inferior citizen.

The final years of Johnson's life mirrored the first, slipping into obscurity after the war, while receiving disability payments from the US government. It remains unclear how much his injuries affected his later life and job opportunities. He passed away on July 1, 1929 of myocarditis. The full extent of his actions weren't appreciated until he was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart in 1996 and the Medal of Honor by then-US President Barack Obama in 2015.

<https://www.newsbreak.com/war-history-online-1745274/4252740946481-henry-johnson-served-in-the-first-black-u-s-army-unit-to-see-combat-in-world-war-i-and-solidified-his-place-in-history-by-saving-another-soldier-s-life>

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La. Guard's Tiger Brigade Marks 20th Anniversary of Task Force Bandit

KATC, Sept. 25, 2025:

Note: This news items includes New York National Guard mention.

NEW ORLEANS – This November, the Louisiana National Guard's 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, known as the Tiger Brigade, will mark 20 years since returning from its historic deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom III. One of its core battalions, the 3rd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, was initially left out of the mobilization.

Due to Army organizational processes at the time, the 3-156th was not officially included when the brigade first mobilized; however, Brig. Gen. John Basilica, commander of the 256th, ensured that 3rd Battalion personnel were included.

Initially, the 3-156th Soldiers were cross-leveled into other battalions. During the train-up phase, about 20 Soldiers from the 3-156th formed an ad hoc task force called Task Force Bandit. By the time the brigade reached Iraq, Task Force Bandit had grown to about 400 Soldiers. While smaller than the other battalions, its impact was undeniable.

On May 29, 2005, Task Force Bandit was engaged in the Battle of Al Quabasey Mosque. Insurgents operating from the mosque and a nearby swimming pool complex opened fire on the unit with small arms. A car bomb exploded nearby, adding to the chaos. Despite the attacks, the Bandits persevered. After the firefight, a search of the mosque and pool complex resulted in the detention of two enemy snipers and the seizure of a large weapons cache, including bomb-making materials and military uniforms. The operation successfully dismantled an enemy stronghold that had been supporting attacks on U.S. military personnel and Iraqi civilians. Two of the captured uniforms are now on display at the Louisiana National Guard Museum in Jackson Barracks, New Orleans.

Another significant event during the deployment occurred when Specialist Steven Tschiderer, a medic with E Troop, 101st Cavalry of the New York National Guard, was shot by a sniper. E Troop was attached to Task Force Bandit in Iraq. During a routine patrol, the unit came under fire. As the Soldiers formed a perimeter and began searching nearby buildings for the sniper, Tschiderer, while relaying the unit's status to higher command, was struck in the chest. His body armor saved his life. He quickly took cover, then pointed in the direction of the sniper's location. "The only thing that was going through my mind was to take cover and locate the sniper's position," Tschiderer said.

The attackers were in a van, and after a vehicle pursuit through Baghdad, Task Force Bandit disabled the vehicle and captured the insurgents. The sniper who shot Tschiderer was injured during the chase and required medical attention. As a medic, Tschiderer was tasked with treating the man who had just shot him. Thanks to evidence collected by the unit, along with witness testimony from local civilians, the 256th's legal team was able to ensure the insurgents were prosecuted in the Iraqi Criminal Court system.

In addition to the operations described above, Task Force Bandit secured critical infrastructure sites, including a bridge over the Grand Canal and a major Iraqi government compound. The unit also played a key role in providing security for Iraq's national elections in 2005. Eventually, Brig. Gen. Basilica succeeded in getting the 3-156th officially added to the order of battle, ensuring the Bandits received proper campaign credit for their service. "Their flag was present, and there were Soldiers who died under that flag," Basilica said in 2007. "It was only right that they be recognized."

<https://www.katc.com/news/covering-louisiana/la-guards-tiger-brigade-marks-20th-anniversary-of-task-force-bandit>

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New York Air National Guard

Stafford resident in New York Air National Guard receives promotion to staff sergeant

The Batavian, Sept. 19, 2025 ::

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.

Wyatt Sando from Stafford, N.Y., and assigned to the 107th Attack Wing, received a promotion August 9, 2025 to the rank of staff 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.

<https://www.thebatavian.com/press-release/stafford-resident-in-new-york-air-national-guard-receives-promotion-to-staff-sergeant>

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Coxsackie, Hudson Airmen promoted

Daily Gazette, Sept. 19, 2025 ::

Air Force Maj. Gen. Michael Bank, the commander of the New York Air National Guard, has announced the recent promotion of Alexander Princiotta, of Coxsackie, assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing, to the rank of senior airman.

Simon Alom, of Hudson, assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing, also received a promotion to the rank of airman first class.

https://www.dailygazette.com/hv360/coxsackie-hudson-airmen-promoted/article_3533ff7d-7f8c-4204-92da-29f019710c73.html

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Electra completes participation in AFRL test event

Aerospace Manufacturing and Design, Sept. 26, 2025:

Multiple government-directed tests evaluated how Ultra-STOL and hybrid-electric technologies can support the military.

Electra.aero Inc. participated in the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) Future Flag 25-3 test event in Rome, New York, which took place in late August to early September. Future Flag is an experimentation series that aims to accelerate the development, demonstration, and fielding of innovative capabilities for the U.S Air Force. Future Flag 25-3 consisted of government-directed tests (GDT) and operational scenarios to evaluate Electra's ultra-short takeoff and landing (Ultra-STOL) and hybrid-electric power generation capabilities.

Future Flag featured multiple Air Force units including the New York Air National Guard's 174th Attack Wing, which supported the GDTs with critical personnel and technology resources. Electra was the only industry participant to support the test event.

The GDTs marked the latest milestone under the Strategic Funding Increase (STRATFI) awarded to Electra by the U.S. Air Force's AFWERX to develop, test and demonstrate hybrid-electric aircraft. Electra's EL2 Ultra-STOL prototype aircraft participated in Future Flag. The tests highlighted the novel operational capabilities of hybrid-electric aircraft and potential military utility of Electra's EL9, a nine-passenger Ultra-STOL aircraft currently in development.

"Future Flag was a prime opportunity to test and evaluate the practical and transformative capabilities developed with the support of AFRL and AFWERX," said Donn Yates, Electra's vice president of Government Programs. "From ground-based power to medical transport to forward resupply, our Ultra-STOL aircraft delivers an array of multi-mission applications that our warfighters need. We were thrilled to showcase them with our government partners during Future Flag 25-3."

Additionally, Electra's Ultra-STOL aircraft flew alongside the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing and the Connecticut Air National Guard's 103rd Airlift Wing as part of an operational scenario. Electra demonstrated tactical airlift capabilities overlaid by the operational scenario to inform the concept of operations for the EL9.

"Working with our Air National Guard partners, the scenarios we executed are a concrete demonstration of how Ultra-STOL aircraft can augment existing platforms and fill an important gap in existing tactical airlift capabilities," Yates said.

AFRL is the primary scientific research and development center for the Department of the Air Force (DAF) and plays an integral role in leading the discovery, development, and integration of affordable technologies for our air, space, and cyberspace forces.

As the innovation arm of the DAF and a directorate within the AFRL, AFWERX brings American ingenuity from small businesses and start-ups to address the most pressing challenges of the DAF. Since 2019, AFWERX has awarded over 10,400 contracts worth more than \$7.24 billion to strengthen the U.S. defense industrial base and drive faster technology transition to operational capability.

Electra's team includes some of the most respected and successful entrepreneurs and engineers in novel aircraft design, with over 40 prior aircraft successfully developed and/or certified. Electra's contracted customers include NASA, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Army, and the U.S. Navy, along with over 2,200 aircraft under Letters of Intent from 50+ commercial customers, including airlines and helicopter operators.

<https://www.aerospacemanufacturinganddesign.com/news/electra-completes-participation-afrl-test-event/>

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Is the Air National Guard America's Most Important Military Branch?

The National Interest, Sept. 21, 2025 ::

ANG fighters, tasked with defending our borders and airspace, are at the forefront of American security in its strictest definition.

Note: this item is provided for your situational awareness.

The fighter aircraft of the Air National Guard (ANG) serve what, in fundamental terms, may be the military's most important role: maintaining America's territorial integrity. Serving a dual purpose, to both their state governors and the federal

government, ANG fighters occupy a unique space in the national security scheme, the closest thing to a community war-fighting asset. Indeed, ANG fighters, tasked with defending our borders and airspace, are at the forefront of American security in its strictest definition.

Defending the Homefront

For decades, the US military has taken an expeditionary posture, committing immense resources toward foreign conflict and nation-building. Under such circumstances, it can be easy to lose sight of the core strategic interests that all nations share: regime preservation, enhancing economic opportunity, and maintaining territorial integrity. For most of the militaries on Earth, their sole purpose is to maintain their nation's territorial integrity, to defend the borders and the regime. Only a fraction of the world's militaries has the might to project power beyond their borders, the United States being the most extreme example. Yes, although US warfighting capabilities have been calibrated toward expeditionary missions, there remains a domestic component that is dedicated primarily to the upholding of US territorial integrity: the Air National Guard.

While the fighter aircraft is often considered an offensive weapon (and certainly can be configured for offense), the fighter's core mission is about controlling the skies—vital for maintaining territorial integrity of the homeland. Territorial integrity begins with the guarantee that hostile aircraft cannot violate US airspace.

ANG fighters execute the Aerospace Control Alert mission, a 24/7 posture that demands air crews to stand ready and launch at a moment's notice. The task is simple: ANG pilots scramble to intercept unidentified aircraft, wayward civilian aircraft, or shadow foreign bombers (mostly Russian) probing the limits of American air defense identification zones. The ANG's immediate responsiveness deters adversaries while reassuring the public—and demonstrating that US sovereignty is not an abstract construct but a border with tangible defensive measures.

ANG fighters also contribute to deterrence. Accordingly, ANG McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagles and General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcons are often used to conduct visible patrols, escort high-value assets, or deploy forward alongside allies—all of which serve to hammer a consistent point: American air power is vigilant and present. The impact of the point, in theory, is to dissuade opportunistic actors from testing US air defense systems.

The ANG mission is not simply about reaction, however; ANG units train to achieve air superiority, which allows friendly forces to operate without prohibitive interference from the enemy. And ANG units are not confined to domestic activities. Each unit can be federalized and deployed forward, where the territorial integrity mission is modified, expanded beyond US borders to provide collective defense under NATO or coalition obligations.

The ANG missions are also adaptive, with units contributing to homeland defense exercises with the North American Aerospace Defense Command, integrating with space and cyber domains, and preparing for threats that range from drones to hypersonic systems. Yet, despite the adaptability, the ANG core principle remains the same: ensuring that hostile forces cannot penetrate US skies without challenge.

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/is-the-air-national-guard-americas-most-important-military-branch-hk-092125>

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New York Air Guard's 109th Airlift Wing Ends Successful Greenland Season

National Guard.mil, By Staff Sgt. Jocelyn Tuller, Sept., 22, 2025 ::

STRATTON AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. – The New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing has wrapped up its 2025 support season for National Science Foundation research in Greenland.

The season began in April and concluded at the end of August, with the 109th conducting essential airlift missions to support scientific research on the Greenland ice cap. The unit's primary responsibilities included transporting personnel, equipment and supplies to remote locations.

The wing's Airmen flew more than 360 hours and transported one million pounds of cargo, 80,000 gallons of fuel and 630 passengers in support of Arctic operations.

Their work ensured the continued flow of supplies and personnel, enabling operations and research in one of the world's most challenging environments.

The close of the Greenland support season also marks the start of preparations for the next operational cycle.

The 109th will begin its annual Operation Deep Freeze support season in October, providing supplies to U.S. scientific facilities in Antarctica.

"The 109th's success in completing this year's Greenland mission proves our aircrew and support staff have unwavering dedication and exceptional skill, even in the harshest conditions," said Col. Steven Slosek, commander of the 109th Airlift Wing. "Now, as we transition to Antarctica, that same spirit will drive us as we support U.S. interests. This adaptability is the heart of the wing's success."

The Antarctic support season runs from October through February 2026.

The LC-130 Hercules aircraft flown by the 109th is the largest ski-equipped aircraft in the world, capable of landing on snow and ice.

<https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/4311089/new-york-air-guards-109th-airlift-wing-ends-successful-greenland-season/>

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New York Army National Guard

More officers expected to plead guilty in beating death of Robert Brooks

Times Union, Sept. 19, 2025 ::

Note: this story involving NYS DOCCS includes a mention of the New York National Guard.

ALBANY — Several former state correction officers implicated in the beating death of Robert L. Brooks at Marcy Correctional Facility in Oneida County are expected to plead guilty Monday to charges that will carry hefty prison sentences, according to two people briefed on the matter.

Many of the eight former officers whose cases are pending were still discussing the plea deals over the weekend with their attorneys, weighing the potential consequences of a jury trial that, for five of them, could result in murder convictions and sentences of up to 25 years to life in prison. For those former officers, the plea offers being discussed ranged from sentences of 16 years to life to determinate sentences of 22 years in prison.

The defendants who physically assaulted Brooks, and are facing murder charges, are being offered the higher prison sentences in exchange for pleading guilty.

Three additional former officers facing manslaughter and other lesser charges were also considering plea deals that included sentences of three to nine years in prison. Two officers have already pleaded guilty and three others have agreed to plead guilty.

The additional guilty pleas are expected as a final pre-trial conference in the case is set to take place Monday morning in Oneida County Court. The trial for any of the former correction officers who do not plead guilty is scheduled to begin Oct. 6.

The death of Brooks in December at the hands of multiple correction officers ignited renewed attention on long-standing allegations of unprovoked physical violence committed by correction officers against inmates in state prisons. It also exposed gaping holes in the body camera policies of the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.

The Times Union first reported in December that the body cameras worn by four correction officers, including a sergeant, were passively recording portions of the beating of Brooks even though their devices had not been activated to record. Investigators were able to retrieve that footage from those four devices because of a function on the Axon cameras — unknown to the officers at the time — that the devices are recording when they are turned on, even if they have not been activated.

In May, Christopher R. Walrath became the first officer in the case to plead guilty. He was one of six officers facing murder charges but agreed to plead guilty to manslaughter. On Aug. 4, he was sentenced by County Court Judge Robert L. Bauer to 15 years in prison.

Nicholas Gentile, another correction officer, pleaded guilty to attempted tampering of physical evidence, a misdemeanor. He admitted to cleaning up Brooks' blood and was sentenced to a one-year conditional discharge.

At least three of the officers whose cases are still pending recently filed a writ of prohibition seeking a stay in the case as they challenge charges in the indictment that allege they had “a legal duty to intervene to prevent or halt their fellow (officers') use of excessive force” against Brooks. But an appellate court judge declined to issue a stay that would have delayed their trial pending the outcome of that motion.

The officers who have pleaded not guilty to murder and manslaughter charges are Nicholas Anzalone, Matthew Galliher, Nicholas Kieffer and Anthony Farina, who resigned from the department days after the killing. Three others — Michael Fisher, Sgt. Michael Mashaw and David Walters — each face a manslaughter charge, while David Kingsley II has been charged with murder.

Onondaga County District Attorney William J. Fitzpatrick is a special prosecutor handling the case.

Brooks' son, Robert L. Brooks Jr., issued a statement in May saying the guilty plea of Walrath was “one important but modest step on the long road to justice for my father.”

“Everyone who participated in my father’s killing, and everyone who allowed it to happen, needs to be held fully responsible,” Brooks had said.

Walrath admitted that he and other officers beat Brooks three times on Dec. 9, after he had been transferred to Marcy from nearby Mohawk Correctional Facility. Fitzpatrick has said that Brooks, 43, was beaten “within minutes of his arrival at Marcy.”

The fatal beating of Brooks is one of two pending cases in which multiple correction officers have been accused of murder or manslaughter since December.

In late May, a grand jury handed up criminal indictments against 10 current and former state correction officers in connection with the March 1 beating death of 22-year-old Messiah Nantwi at Mid-State Correctional Facility, which is next to Marcy prison in Oneida County.

In February, the department's policies governing body cameras were updated to make it more clear they must be worn and activated at the prison facilities where they're in use. It's unclear why the emergency response team members or other officers who allegedly used physical force on Nantwi did not record their actions — or that supervisors did not order them to do so as required.

Nantwi's death took place as the operations at more than 30 prisons across New York were hobbled by an unsanctioned strike that began on Feb. 17 involving thousands of correction officers. More than 6,500 New York National Guard troops were deployed to the facilities during the 22-day strike to assist with security and operations. There are still about 2,000 troops assisting with security in certain facilities.

The incident preceding Nantwi's beating began when he was acting out and a National Guard member called for assistance from an emergency response team. Nantwi had mental health issues, they said, and may not have been getting medication due to the strike conditions.

[times-union-306124320/4247067253801-more-officers-expected-to-plead-guilty-in-beating-death-of-robert-brooks](https://www.times-union.com/story/news/crime/2025/09/19/more-officers-expected-to-plead-guilty-in-beating-death-of-robert-brooks/1243204247067253801)

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NY Army Guard officer is there as his former Iraqi interpreter finishes U.S. Army basic training

Army.mil, Sept. 19, 2025 :

NY Army Guard officer attends basic training graduation of his Iraq War interpreter

FORT JACKSON, South Carolina --In 2008, when New York Army National Guard Lt. Col. Brian Napier was a lieutenant running an ad hoc route clearance platoon north of Baghdad, he developed a bond with Zeyad Al Mifrij, his Arabic interpreter.

Al Mifrij rode with Napier on 210 missions, and they worked together every day, Napier recalled. And not only did he speak to the locals for Napier, Al Mifrij helped develop intelligence that identified IED locations and saved lives.

“In order to be effective, and rather than just waiting for the bombs to show up, we tried to get ahead of it by maintaining and building relationships with the locals,” Napier recalled.

So, when U.S. Army Reserve Pfc. Zeyad Al Mifrij graduated from basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina on Sept. 11, 2025, Napier made sure he was there.

“I just had to be there,” said Napier, who now serves as the executive officer of the 42nd Infantry Division Artillery.

His visit to Fort Jackson to be there with Al Mifrij, his wife Sarab, and children Hussein, Abdalhafiz, Yasir and Iris, is just the latest installment in a relationship that began 17 years ago, Napier said.

Napier met Al Mifrij when he was told that his firing platoon in the 2nd Battalion, 11th Field Artillery Regiment, a part of the 2nd Stryker Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division, was to be converted into a route clearance platoon.

“There were too many bombs, not enough route clearance platoons, so they gave my platoon of cannoneers a crash course and off we went,” he said.

The platoon was equipped with MRAPS —the mine resistant ambush protected vehicles— and Huskey vehicle mounted mine detection systems. And, they had Zeyad Al Mifrij.

“Zeyad was my trusted link to not only communicate with locals, but determine what information was likely not true,” Napier recalled.

Mifrij, who had degrees in computer science and graphic design, always talked about how much he loved the United States,” Napier said.

And unlike some Arabic interpreters, he liked the Army and the work and wanted the team to succeed, Napier recalled. He also talked about being in the American Army, Napier said.

As Napier got ready to rotate home at the end of his 15-month deployment, Al Mifrij, asked his lieutenant to write an endorsement to help him immigrate to the United States. The interpreter wanted to take advantage of a program which allowed Iraqis who helped U.S. forces immigrate to America.

It took time, and more letters and endorsements from other American officers. And there were bureaucratic hang ups when the birth of Yasir in 2012 required the family to start the visa process all over again, Napier recalled.

But in 2017 the family finally arrived in the United States and settled outside of Cleveland, Ohio.

Al Mafrij turned out to be good at making money in America, Napier said.

He got a job and within six months he was buying, renovating and selling small houses.

Eventually, he became the manager of a Walmart store and completed a degree in cyber security. But he never forgot that dream of joining the U.S. Army and giving back to his adopted country, Napier said.

But with one son in college, Al Mifrij was no longer a young man. He also had to make sure he had the time to leave his job for basic and advanced training.

But his computer background allowed him to get an age waiver to enlist as a signal support specialist working in computer security Napier said. And, he added, he was happy to write an endorsement for Al Mifrij security clearance.

So, on Sept. 11 —on the 24th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks— Al Mifrij became a 45-year-old private first class heading to Fort Stewart, Georgia for his advanced individual training.

He's happy that he could be there for Al Mifrij and help him and his family along their American journey, Napier said.

"I am just incredibly proud of him," Napier said.

"I mean he had had so many struggles along the way, and he had said he was going to find a way to join the Army, and he did it," he said.

https://www.army.mil/article/288635/ny_army_guard_officer_is_there_as_his_former_iraqi_interpreter_finishes_u_s_army_basic_training

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NY Army Guard officer is there as his former Iraqi interpreter finishes U.S. Army basic training

South Carolina State News Net, Sept. 23, 2025 :

FORT JACKSON, South Carolina --In 2008, when New York Army National Guard Lt. Col. Brian Napier was a lieutenant running an ad hoc route clearance platoon north of Baghdad, he developed a bond with Zeyad Al Mifrij, his Arabic interpreter.

Al Mifrij rode with Napier on 210 missions, and they worked together every day, Napier recalled. And not only did he speak to the locals for Napier, Al Mifrij helped develop intelligence that identified IED locations and saved lives.

"In order to be effective, and rather than just waiting for the bombs to show up, we tried to get ahead of it by maintaining and building relationships with the locals," Napier recalled.

So, when U.S. Army Reserve Pfc. Zeyad Al Mifrij graduated from basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina on Sept. 11, 2025, Napier made sure he was there.

"I just had to be there," said Napier, who now serves as the executive officer of the 42nd Infantry Division Artillery.

His visit to Fort Jackson to be there with Al Mifrij, his wife Sarab, and children Hussein, Abdalhafiz, Yasir and Iris, is just the latest installment in a relationship that began 17 years ago, Napier said.

Napier met Al Mifrij when he was told that his firing platoon in the 2nd Battalion, 11th Field Artillery Regiment, a part of the 2nd Stryker Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division, was to be converted into a route clearance platoon.

"There were too many bombs, not enough route clearance platoons, so they gave my platoon of cannoneers a crash course and off we went," he said.

The platoon was equipped with MRAPS -the mine resistant ambush protected vehicles- and Huskey vehicle mounted mine detection systems. And, they had Zeyad Al Mifrij.

"Zeyad was my trusted link to not only communicate with locals, but determine what information was likely not true," Napier recalled.

Mifrij, who had degrees in computer science and graphic design, always talked about how much he loved the United States," Napier said.

And unlike some Arabic interpreters, he liked the Army and the work and wanted the team to succeed, Napier recalled. He also talked about being in the American Army, Napier said.

As Napier got ready to rotate home at the end of his 15-month deployment, Al Mifrij, asked his lieutenant to write an endorsement to help him immigrate to the United States. The interpreter wanted to take advantage of a program which allowed Iraqis who helped U.S. forces immigrate to America.

It took time, and more letters and endorsements from other American officers. And there were bureaucratic hang ups when the birth of Yasir in 2012 required the family to start the visa process all over again, Napier recalled.

But in 2017 the family finally arrived in the United States and settled outside of Cleveland, Ohio.

Al Mafrij turned out to be good at making money in America, Napier said.

He got a job and within six months he was buying, renovating and selling small houses.

Eventually, he became the manager of a Walmart store and completed a degree in cyber security. But he never forgot that dream of joining the U.S. Army and giving back to his adopted country, Napier said.

But with one son in college, Al Mifrij was no longer a young man. He also had to make sure he had the time to leave his job for basic and advanced training.

But his computer background allowed him to get an age waiver to enlist as a signal support specialist working in computer security Napier said. And, he added, he was happy to write an endorsement for Al Mifrij security clearance.

So, on Sept. 11 -on the 24th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks- Al Mifrij became a 45-year-old private first class heading to Fort Stewart, Georgia for his advanced individual training.

He's happy that he could be there for Al Mifrij and help him and his family along their American journey, Napier said.

"I am just incredibly proud of him," Napier said.

"I mean he had had so many struggles along the way, and he had said he was going to find a way to join the Army, and he did it," he said.

<https://southcarolina.statenews.net/news/278593562/ny-army-guard-officer-is-there-as-his-former-iraqi-interpreter-finishes-us-army-basic-training>

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National Guard 42nd Infantry Division gathers for 1st time to mark 20th anniversary of Iraq deployment

Spectrum News, Sept. 20, 2025::

For the first time since they served in war, members of the New York National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division are gathering to celebrate their time serving in Iraq.

"I remember that passion," said Major General John Andonie. "That feeling of pride and service. I remember a great sense of purpose."

Andonie is took a trip down memory lane as he visited the exhibit dedicated to his division at the New York State Military Museum.

"Many of them are close friends of mine," said Andonie. "We served together after 9/11 and remember what happened and then we ended up deploying together four years later to Iraq."

Andonie and his division were training in Kansas when they realized America was under attack.

"When we saw the images on TV, we knew that we had to return as soon as possible," said Andonie. "We closed down our operations. We moved back to New York. We went immediately into the city to begin recovery operations."

Following recovery operations, Andonie and members of his division deployed to the Middle East in Jan. 2005. They would later return in November of that year.

The first reserve component division to go into combat since the Korean War.

"Amazingly, when you go through an experience like this, you tend to stay in touch with those individuals," said Andonie.

In addition to tours and dinners, Andonie says some big announcements are expected to be unveiled in the future to further cement the division's legacy.

Since World War I, the 42nd Division has been nicknamed "The Rainbow Division."

It's a name given to the division because, since it's made up of National Guard units from many states, it stretches across the country like a rainbow.

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/news/2025/09/20/42nd-infantry-division-national-guard>

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42nd Infantry Division headquarters celebrates 108 years of service while deployed

Army.mil, By Capt. Stephanie Sylvain, Sept. 18, 2025 ::

CAMP ARIFJAN, KUWAIT – Soldiers of the 42nd Infantry Division commemorated their 108th birthday, September 5, 2025, marking over a century of dedicated service to the nation.

Despite being deployed in support of Operation Spartan Shield (OSS) as part of Task Force Spartan, the Division took time to honor its rich history and the Soldiers who continue to uphold its legacy.

The celebration, organized by Lt. Col. Katie Schin, Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion commander, and her staff, featured a full day of events.

The day began with a spirited two-mile victory run, followed by a luncheon at 1200 hours. The celebration culminated in an awards ceremony recognizing the outstanding contributions of soldiers within the unit and cake cutting.

A highlight of the ceremony was the reenlistment of 11 Soldiers, reaffirming their commitment to serve the Army for years to come.

Lt. Col. Schin presided over the oath of enlistment, underscoring the Division's continued strength through the dedication of its personnel.

The 42nd Infantry Division's origins date back to August 1917, when it was organized at Camp Mills, Long Island, New York, following America's entry into World War I.

Recognizing the potential strain of wartime losses on individual states, the government strategically assembled the Division from National Guard units representing 26 states and the District of Columbia.

Shortly after its formation, Col. Douglas MacArthur famously dubbed the unit the "Rainbow Division," noting its diverse composition stretched "like a Rainbow from one end of America to the other."

This moniker reflects the Division's enduring spirit of unity and national representation.

Throughout its history, the 42nd ID has distinguished itself in both World Wars, enduring the trench warfare of World War I and bravely liberating the infamous Dachau concentration camp during World War II in 1946.

The Division's commitment extends beyond overseas conflicts.

Following its return from WWII, the 42nd ID continued to serve domestically, responding to emergencies and natural disasters.

The “Rainbow” battalions played a critical role in the recovery and security operations following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center.

Today, the 42nd ID continues to serve, currently deployed to Kuwait in support of Operation Spartan Shield.

Through OSS, Task Force Spartan maintains a vital U.S. military presence in Southwest Asia, strengthening defense relationships and building partner capacity.

Spc. Steven Diakite, a Signal Soldier with the 42nd ID, expressed hope for the future, stating, “I hope next year when we get home, that we will have the opportunity to make this a bigger celebration and bring friends and family for the 109th anniversary.”

The 108th birthday celebration served as a powerful reminder of the 42nd Infantry Division’s enduring legacy of service, sacrifice, and commitment to the defense of the nation.

https://www.army.mil/article/288609/42nd_infantry_division_headquarters_celebrates_108_years_of_service_while_deployed

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Mohawk Valley Health System Appoints New President, CEO

WKTV, Sept. 18, 2025 ::

Note: Dr. William LeCates serves in NYARNG

UTICA, N.Y. -- Mohawk Valley Health System has a new president and CEO.

William W. LeCates, MD, is set to assume the role of president and CEO on Monday, Oct. 20.

Dr. LeCates will succeed Darlene Stromstad, who is retiring after nearly seven years of service.

The MVHS Board of Directors conducted a national search before selecting LeCates, who has been the chief operating officer for the past 14 months at MVHS.

LeCates has over 25 years of experience in healthcare, including roles at Bassett Healthcare Network and JPMorgan Chase.

He holds degrees from Amherst College and The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

LeCates is board certified in internal medicine and nephrology.

In addition to his healthcare career, Dr. LeCates serves as a colonel in the New York Army National Guard, with tours in Afghanistan, Iraq and Liberia.

https://www.wktv.com/news/health/mohawk-valley-health-system-appoints-new-president-ceo/article_e393687b-0f66-474a-87f7-b72006a8f998.html

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Duty Calls: New York soldiers, airman advising Swedish Army

Times Union, Sept. 22, 2025 ::

Six New York Army National Guard officers and a New York Air National Guard master sergeant are helping the Swedish Army conduct its first division-level Command Post Exercise, according to Eric Durr, spokesman for the New York National Guard.

They began their mission helping the Swedish Army's 1st Division conduct the training exercise on Sept. 13. Previously, Sweden's highest command post training was at the brigade level.

The New York National Guard and Swedish Army initiated the training following a U.S. Department of Defense National Guard Bureau State Partnership Program agreement signed in July 2024.

"Since then, Swedish military personnel have visited New York regularly to learn from the New York Army and Air National Guard and New York's Naval Militia," said Durr.

The Swedish military then requested that the New York Army Guard provide staff officers to offer advice and support during its division-level Command Post Exercise, according to Lt. Col. Melanie Padilla, the New York National Guard's State Partnership Program director.

In February, the Swedish Army sent a delegation to observe the New York Army National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division conduct a Warfighter Exercise at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. Warfighter tests the ability of division staff personnel to operate in a simulated combat environment.

The 42nd Infantry Division soldiers were conducting the Command Post Exercise to prepare for their current deployment to the Central Command area, where they are serving as the headquarters for Task Force Spartan in the Middle East.

At the time, Swedish Lt. Col. Fredrik Mansson, the chief of operations for the Swedish 1st Division, said the purpose of the visit was to observe and learn from a division staff in action.

Afterward, the New York Army Guard received a request to send experts in operations and planning, targeting, running a joint air-ground operations center, logistics and rear-area support, force protection and division operations, according to Padilla. The Swedish 1st Division recently reorganized its staff and is still developing internal standard operating procedures.

The American soldiers and airman are now working with their Swedish counterparts to help refine the division SOPs and discuss staff processes, Padilla said.

During the CPX, which is being held at Swedish Ground Combat School in Enköping, the Americans are serving as observers and advisors to their Swedish counterparts.

The actual CPX kicked off Sept. 19 and is scheduled to run through Wednesday.

The State Partnership Program pairs state National Guards with other countries' militaries for joint training and exchange programs, Durr said. The New York National Guard has had a State Partnership Program training and exchange relationship with Brazil since 2019 and with South Africa since 2003.

New York also has a bilateral training agreement with the Israeli Homefront Command and the Danish Joint Arctic Command, which operates in Greenland.

The New York National Guard and Swedish military entered into a joint training agreement on July 12, as part of the National Guard's State Partnership Program, during a ceremony held in New York City's Freedom Tower, said Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Stephanie Butler, a New York National Guard and Naval Militia spokeswoman.

Maj. Gen. Raymond Shields, state adjutant general, and Marcos Soler, New York's deputy secretary for public safety, signed the document formalizing the agreement with Sweden's Defence Minister Pal Jonson and Maj. Gen. Johan Pekkari, chief of the Swedish Defence Staff's Strategy Unit.

As part of the partnership, the New York National Guard and Sweden are conducting joint training missions and military exchanges to improve readiness within their respective forces, according to Butler.

The agreement is the latest program that pairs state National Guards with the militaries of foreign countries, including some NATO allies.

“On March 7, 2024, Sweden became the 32nd member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization — NATO,” Shields said. “Allies, friends and partners are stronger together than they are individually — especially against those who want to destroy freedom and independence.”

“This partnership will not only enhance operational abilities, it will also strengthen the bonds of friendship and a new understanding between our forces and our countries,” Jonson said.

For more than 30 years, National Guardsmen have built enduring connections with foreign counterparts through the State Partnership Program, said Gen. Daniel Hokanson, the chief of the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C. The program is one of the most productive, cost-effective security cooperation programs the United States has to offer, he said.

“We are hoping that being a part of the State Partnership Program, that it will open doors to new venues that will benefit both of our militaries and civil defense authorities,” said Pekkari.

The program originally began after the collapse of the Soviet Union, according to Butler. The Guard was chosen to help former Soviet states reform their militaries and move toward civilian control of their armed forces as newly emerging democracies.

In 1993, the National Guard State Partnership Program started with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as they emerged from the breakup of the Soviet Union. Since then, the program has grown to 89 partnerships across 106 nations and every continent.

In recent years, Guardsmen have conducted about 1,000 training exchanges with their foreign counterparts annually, focusing on everything from peacekeeping operations to leadership development, lifesaving techniques and cyber defense, according to Hokanson.

Dine for a cause

A second annual “22 a Day” Stop Soldier Suicide dining event, held in memory of Marine Sgt. Scott Wenger, will take place from 4 to 10 p.m. on Sept. 22 at Buona Sera Italian restaurant, located at 113 Route 9P in Malta. The event will benefit the Malta Veteran Appreciation Program that aids needy veterans.

To make a reservation for the event or to order a gift card, call 518-306-4386 or visit buonoseraonthelake.com.

Twenty-two percent of proceeds will help finance an emergency fund that provides food, clothing, furniture, household goods, handicap ramps, transportation, and homes for needy Malta area veterans, according to Renee Farley, president of the Malta Veterans Appreciation Program.

Also, the organization teams with Malta Mobile Acres Park to provide homes for needy veterans' families.

Donations payable to MVAP or Malta Veterans Appreciation Program can be mailed to MVAP, 4158A Silverbeach Road, Malta, NY 12020.

Volunteers are often needed for home repairs and renovations. If interested, contact Renee Farley at 518-577-8863. If you are a veteran with a need or want to volunteer, contact Farley.

News of your troops and units can be sent to brownt@timesunion.com or Times Union, Duty Calls, Terry Brown, Box 15000, Albany, NY 12212.

<https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/duty-calls-ny-soldiers-airman-help-swedish-army-21058792.php>

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Baldwinsville National Guard soldiers receive new rank

Eagle News Online, Sept. 22, 2025::

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

– Justin Vanderberg from Baldwinsville, and assigned to the Company A, 427th Brigade Support Battalion, received a promotion to the rank of chief warrant officer 2.

– Elijah Haynes from Baldwinsville, and assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2nd Squadron, 101st Cavalry Regiment, received a promotion to the rank of sergeant.

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.

<https://eaglenewsonline.com/publications/baldwinsville-messenger/2025/09/22/baldwinsville-national-guard-soldiers-receive-new-rank/>

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