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## **DOCCS Support**

### **National Guard member at area state prison assaulted by inmate**

**MidHudsonNews.com, May 6, 2026 :**

COXSACKIE – A National Guardsman was assaulted by a prisoner at the Coxsackie State Correctional Facility on Tuesday morning when the inmate tossed a cup of unknown liquid on the pants and boot of the guardsman, prison officials told Mid-Hudson News.

A spokesman for the State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision said the guardsman was escorting medical staff through the Residential Mental Health Unit at about 9:15 a.m. when the inmate through the substance.

The guardsman was taken to the medical unit for decontamination and evaluation. He was not injured and remained on duty, the state prison official said.

The inmate was issued a misbehavior report pending disciplinary action.

The state spokesman said, "The safety and well-being of staff and incarcerated individuals is our top priority. The department has zero tolerance for violent acts within our facilities, and anyone engaged in misconduct will be disciplined, and if warranted, incidents will be referred for outside prosecution."

<https://midhudsonnews.com/2026/05/06/national-guard-member-at-area-state-prison-assaulted-by-inmate/>

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## Emergency Response

### **Albany Showdown Could Finally Deliver 9/11 Benefits To NY Guard**

**Hoodline.com, May 7, 2026 :**

Albany lawmakers are moving on a long-simmering fix that could finally let New York National Guard members who were ordered into state service at Ground Zero after Sept. 11, 2001 file for workers' compensation tied to certified 9/11 illnesses. Backers say the proposal would close a long-criticized gap that left troops on state active duty outside the same presumptions that many civilian rescue and recovery workers already receive.

#### What The Bill Would Change

The measure, S6832 in the Senate and A5087 in the Assembly, would amend both Military Law and the workers' compensation law so that organized-militia members ordered into active state service for World Trade Center rescue, recovery or cleanup are treated as employees for the purposes of filing claims. In the bill's own language, it would "shall qualify such member of the organized militia as an employee under article eight-A of the workers' compensation law," which would let those troops tap the World Trade Center presumptions when they apply for benefits.

According to the New York State Senate, the organized-militia language covers the New York Army National Guard, the New York Air National Guard, the New York Naval Militia and the New York Guard.

#### Where It Stands In Albany

Legislative records show the Senate overwhelmingly approved the measure in a prior session, but it failed to become law last year after stalling in the Assembly. FastDemocracy logs a unanimous Senate floor vote in June 2025 and notes the bill was reported and committed to the Senate Finance Committee in late April 2026, while the Assembly companion remains parked in the Assembly Labor Committee.

#### Who Would Benefit And How

Supporters say the bill would finally let Guard members and other organized-militia troops who were previously excluded file new claims or revive ones that were blocked. The text spells out a two-year refiling window tied to the law's effective date.

The Assembly companion, A5087, is carried by Assemblymember Kwani O'Pharrow and mirrors the Senate language. It also lets the Division of Military and Naval Affairs accept alternative proof of service, including third-party verification or witness statements, to qualify someone's World Trade Center service for a claim. Advocates say that line was written with veterans in mind who lack formal deployment paperwork but did the work anyway.

#### Supporters Press The Case

Lawmakers and veterans rallied in Albany this week to push for passage, arguing that a 2022 expansion that helped many rescue and recovery workers left National Guard members on the sidelines. As reported by News10 ABC, Sen. Brian Kavanaugh labeled the Guard's exclusion "unacceptable," while Sen. Monica Martinez called the bill a chance to correct an "injustice."

The News10 reporting also highlights veterans such as Patrick Kelley, a former member of the 204th Engineer Battalion who worked at the Twin Towers site, using his story to underline why supporters argue the fix is long overdue.

#### How Many People Could Be Affected

Estimates vary for how many Guard and militia members served at Ground Zero. Spectrum News reports that roughly 12,000 New York Guard, Naval Militia and National Guard members responded between Sept. 11, 2001 and Sept. 11, 2002, while advocates cited in the News10 coverage point to a higher tally.

The state Division of Military and Naval Affairs maintains a World Trade Center benefits page that offers registration and filing guidance for former service members and notes deadlines for pensions and other benefits tied to World Trade Center service.

#### What Happens Next

With the bill moving through committees, advocates are pressing for firm dates on floor votes and a governor's signature that would put the changes into effect. Legislative trackers show the measure reported to Senate Finance in late April, while it is still listed in Assembly Labor. If both chambers pass it and the governor signs off, the bill's language says it would take effect immediately and open the two-year refiling window supporters describe.

Backers argue that would finally give thousands of former guardsmen and their families a clearer, less tangled path to long-sought benefits.

#### Legal Note

The proposal reshapes how the Workers' Compensation Law treats organized militia members for World Trade Center claims by creating a statutory presumption and a limited refiling period. That would change how the Workers' Compensation Board evaluates eligibility for certified World Trade Center conditions and could expose the state to a wave of newly filed claims. Claimants would still need medical certification of qualifying conditions under existing state rules.

[https://hoodline.com/2026/05/albany-showdown-could-finally-deliver-9-11-benefits-to-ny-guard/#google\\_vignette](https://hoodline.com/2026/05/albany-showdown-could-finally-deliver-9-11-benefits-to-ny-guard/#google_vignette)

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**NY National Guard could finally get 9/11 workers' comp**

**WTEN , May 6, 2026 :**

ALBANY, N.Y. (NEXSTAR) — New York lawmakers want to give workers' compensation benefits to members of the National Guard who responded to Ground Zero on September 11, 2001. Democratic State Senator Lea Webb and Assemblymember Kwani O'Pharrow held a press conference on Wednesday to rally support for a bill that could finally close a loophole that denied care to those 9/11 responders, 25 years later.

In the video above, the speaker is Patrick Kelley, who served in the 204th National Guard Engineers, responded to the site of the Twin Towers, and put the issue on the radar of Webb, his state senator. In the video above, he explained the importance of the bill and shared a story of a fellow 9/11 first responder who died from 9/11-related cancer in February.

The legislation, S6832/A5087, would redefine organized militia members as state employees under state military law. That would let members of the New York Army National Guard, the New York Air National Guard, the New York naval militia, and the New York guard file claims for specific certified illnesses—like cancer or Parkinson's—related to clearing rubble and breathing dust at the site of the World Trade Center.

Evidence like witness statements would be used to verify service, if necessary. And the law would take effect immediately upon being signed.

In 2022, New York expanded workers' compensation for WTC rescue and recovery workers, accepting claims from workers with certified illnesses. But the state excluded National Guard members from that expansion, since they served under state orders, not federal.

Indeed, "The fact that, in 2022, we made an injustice by leaving out this one specific group, the first responders, was wrong," according to Democratic State Senator Monica Martinez. "This bill will correct that injustice."

O'Pharrow and Webb's bill would give those excluded service members a two-year window to refile claims. Webb pointed out that they've already spent years fighting a broken system, and that they deserve support from the state. "Many of them worked through smoke, debris, toxic dust, and unimaginable trauma without hesitation or question," she said.

Democratic State Senator Brian Kavanagh, whose district includes the WTC site, said that excluding the National Guard was unacceptable. "The simple fact is it took us way too long to begin the process," he said. "This issue that we're dealing with today is one example of how we have not moved quickly enough."

Democratic State Senator Jeremy Zellner of Western New York tallied over 14,000 National Guard members who were mobilized to respond to the site. "If you showed up for this country, your country should be showing up for you," he said.

The State Senate passed the bill unanimously in 2025, but it died in the Assembly. It's currently in the Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Labor Committee, and maintains bipartisan support.

<https://www.news10.com/capitol/911-responders-workers-comp-bill/>

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## **Bill calls for extending Sept. 11 workers' compensation to National Guard members**

**Spectrum News, May 6, 2026 :**

The images from the devastation on Sept. 11, 2001, are burned into our minds.

Now, there's a push to give the citizen-soldiers who stepped up on one of the nation's darkest days more benefits.

The bill would amend both New York state's military law and workers' compensation law to extend benefits to National Guard members who helped with rescue, recovery and clean-up efforts at the World Trade Center in Manhattan.

Advocates of the bill say the members did not receive compensation from the federal government because they were deployed on state orders rather than federal orders.

One of the advocates says he knows how hard it can be to get the benefits.

"it's not an easy process, it's a difficult process to get through," said Patrick Kelley, who responded to the 9/11 attacks. "So to me personally, it was very important knowing many people have already died, either through their illness or suicide."

According to the National Guard, almost 1,300 New York National Guard members were part of the response to the World Trade Center by the end of 2001.

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/news/2026/05/06/bill-calls-for-extending-sept--11-workers--comp-to-national-guard-members>

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## **NY National Guard could finally get 9/11 workers' comp (video)**

**NewsNation, May 6, 2026 :**

**New York lawmakers are seeking to provide workers' compensation benefits to members of the National Guard who responded to Ground Zero on September 11, 2001. The proposed legislation, S6832/A5087, would redefine organized militia members as state employees under state military law, allowing them to file claims for specific certified illnesses related to their service at the site of the World Trade Center. The bill would give those excluded service members a two-year window to refile claims and has bipartisan support.**

ALBANY, N.Y. (NEXSTAR) — New York lawmakers want to give workers' compensation benefits to members of the National Guard who responded to Ground Zero on September 11, 2001. Democratic State Senator Lea Webb and Assemblymember Kwani O'Pharrow held

a press conference on Wednesday to rally support for a bill that could finally close a loophole that denied care to those 9/11 responders, 25 years later.

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<https://www.newsnationnow.com/us-news/military/ny-national-guard-could-finally-get-9-11-workers-comp/>

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## **For Information**

### **The U.S. Army's 'Big Experiment' in the Arctic Cold**

**The New York Times, April :**

**How would soldiers from places like Florida, Texas and Georgia fight and persevere in temperatures as low as minus 40 degrees?**

*Note: This item is provided for your information.*

The soldiers heaved the 300-pound plastic sleds down the hallway of their headquarters building. Packed inside were the things they would need to survive when the temperature at their Alaska training area plunged to 40 below or colder.

Each sled carried a tent with enough room for 10 soldiers if they curled their legs. There were gasoline containers to fuel a small metal stove that would keep them warm. There were shovels to clear the snow and hammers, stakes and rope to keep their tents standing when the winds howled.

There were fire extinguishers in case the whole thing caught ablaze.

"Make room!" the soldiers screamed.

The white sleds screeched across the linoleum floor.

In Washington and other world capitals, the Arctic is cast as a new frontier for military competition, a region where rising temperatures are opening new sea lanes and creating new access to valuable rare earth minerals. Pentagon strategy papers have repeatedly called for closer cooperation with Arctic allies and the construction of new bases to ward off rivals like Russia and China. President Trump has expressed his interest in more atavistic terms, vowing to buy or, if necessary, conquer Greenland by force.

"I would like to make a deal the easy way," Mr. Trump said earlier this year of his ambitions for the semiautonomous Danish territory. "But if we don't do it the easy way, we're going to do it the hard way."

Absent from all of the strategy documents and Oval Office threats is any sense of how U.S. troops might fight in the brutal conditions.

The Arctic has been cast as a new frontier for military competition.

In February, the Iran war was looming and tens of thousands of U.S. troops were gathering in the Middle East, the region that has been the Pentagon's focus for the last 25 years. But in Alaska, the Army was preparing for a new kind of war.

The setting was the Yukon Training Center, a 400-mile expanse of snow and ice near Fairbanks and the Arctic Circle.

At minus 40 degrees and below, weapons fail, batteries quickly lose their charge, and fuel turns into a viscous jelly. Army officials wanted to learn how their equipment would perform in the extreme cold.

But their biggest questions were about the soldiers who came from places like Alabama, Texas, Florida and California. How far could these troops go before exhaustion set in and they started to lose focus, make mistakes or simply quit?

About 4,000 soldiers from the Army's 11th Airborne Division, including 107 from the division's Able Company, were taking part in the training battle, which pitted two similarly sized forces against each other.

In this fight, the ammunition was fake; blanks and lasers replaced bullets and artillery shells. But the cold was unsparingly real.

Capt. Trung Duon Vo had been in command of Able Company for almost a year, enough time to understand the dangers his soldiers faced from frostbite. The coldest nights, he knew, could take fingers and toes. If soldiers got sloppy, it could cost them their lives.

Captain Vo called the company's leaders together inside their small headquarters building to update them on the latest intelligence on the enemy, which consisted of about 1,000 paratroopers positioned along two ridgelines.

Soldiers in camouflage gear are seen at twilight with green lights on their helmets.

About 4,000 soldiers took part in the exercise at the Yukon Training Center, a 400-mile expanse of snow and ice near Fairbanks and the Arctic Circle.

Outside, it was a relatively balmy minus 3 degrees. A light snow was falling.

Captain Vo's most immediate worry was the company's movement across a frozen river into the training area and the possibility that someone might break through the ice. He stressed the importance of quickly alerting him and other leaders to "real world issues" like frostbite or hypothermia.

Heads nodded.

"The Arctic always puts a little fear into me as a leader," Captain Vo confessed. "If you don't do the right things, you will die."

The troops' eagerness to get moving mixed with dread at the prospect of 10 days in the bitter cold. A few minutes later they were streaming onto buses that would drop them off in the icy, dark wilderness.

The Able Company soldiers said they often felt as if they were participants in a "big experiment."

Some of the soldiers had volunteered to serve in Alaska, in search of adventure or because the Army had offered them a cash bonus. Others were there purely by chance; someone in the Pentagon's vast bureaucracy needed to fill an open spot in an infantry platoon.

The troops climbed off the buses and spent the next several hours searching for their rucksacks and other equipment in the dark. The soldiers knew they were at higher risk for frostbite and other weather-related injuries when they were not moving. So, they flapped their arms and stomped their feet to keep their blood flowing.

"If you're cold, put on your Level 7s," a sergeant screamed, referring to their heaviest jackets.

For most soldiers, the 10-day exercise was their first experience with extreme cold.

Captain Vo expected that his company's lead element — about two dozen troops from its first platoon — would push across the frozen river and march about three miles through knee-deep snow with their tents and equipment.

Around 2 a.m. Captain Vo's lieutenant and first sergeant quietly approached. The 10-day exercise had barely begun and some of the troops already looked miserable. The snowfall was growing heavier.

The lieutenant and first sergeant suggested that they modify the plan and cut the first platoon's movement that night down to one mile.

Captain Vo's normally upbeat demeanor shifted quickly to disgust. "I'm so sick of whiny infantrymen!" he yelled.

Capt. Trung Duon Vo had been in command of the Able Company for almost a year, enough time to understand the dangers his soldiers faced from frostbite.

He was a relative newcomer to Alaska and still learning how to fight and survive in the extreme cold. His uncertainty about his new environment, though, was balanced against a powerful belief in "the human capacity to endure difficult things," he said.

As a child, he had endured six years in a Malaysian refugee camp. Hundreds of displaced Vietnamese families, including his own, were packed into a space not much larger than a football field.

A chain-link fence surrounded the facility, with armed men at every gate.

Eventually, his family was granted political asylum and a new chance at life in the Atlanta suburbs, where they opened a nail salon.

Now, he was a 35-year-old Army officer who needed to get his infantry company motivated and moving.

"It's Day 1 and you already sound like you're tired," he shouted. A string of profanities followed, along with a shared understanding that the first platoon soldiers were going to

march the full three miles as planned through the snow before they broke for the night and set up their tents.

By 2:24 a.m. the soldiers had strapped their snowshoes to their boots. Bent under the weight of their 60-pound rucksacks, they made their way across the frozen river and disappeared into the darkness.

The soldiers knew they were at higher risk for frostbite and other weather-related injuries when they were not moving.

They arrived at their objective as the sun was rising and started digging out a clearing in the snow to put up their tents. After about 30 minutes of shoveling in search of solid permafrost, they realized that they were digging in frozen muskeg, a deep bog common in the Alaska wilderness.

Instead of looking for a better spot, they decided to temporarily lay out their sleeping bags in the open snow. They squeezed each other's fingertips and earlobes, a regular check to ensure that blood was still flowing through their capillaries and they were not at risk for frostbite.

They boiled water, using portable gas heaters, and poured it into plastic bottles that they stuffed into their sleeping bags for extra warmth.

After a couple of hours in their cold bags, they resumed their search for solid ground. Captain Vo arrived just as they were scraping the permafrost and staking their tents.

"You look demoralized," he told First Lt. Jordan Lofgren, the platoon leader.

"That was an ass kick," replied Lieutenant Lofgren, 26. "Without some rest we can't move the way we just did."

The platoon had about six hours before they would have to head out again.

A soldier looks at a mobile phone while other soldiers lay on the ground inside a tent.

Inside the tents, the soldiers talked about the parties they were going to throw when they got back to the base and the high cost of plane tickets home.

They climbed inside their dark, cramped tents. As the heat from small metal stoves spread, the soldiers sprang back to life. They talked about the parties they were going to throw when they got back to the base and the high cost of plane tickets home. They showed affection in the macabre ways of the infantry. Specialist Zooey Adams, a 20-year-old from Texas, told Lieutenant Lofgren that she had seen him running on post and debated hitting him with her car.

"Like a light nudge or a real hit?" he asked.

"In my mind, I'm taking you out, sir," she replied.

Soon the only sounds in the tent were snoring and the occasional rustle of a soldier rising to do a shift as fireguard.

Senior leaders knew that their frontline troops cared about two things more than anything else. “They want to know when they are going to get warm, and they want to know when they are going to eat their next hot meal,” said Col. Christopher Brawley, who oversaw about 2,700 troops, including Captain Vo’s Able Company.

Colonel Brawley built his strategy around this harsh reality. If he could cut off the enemy’s access to food and fuel, Colonel Brawley believed that he could rapidly break their will to fight.

The Able Company troops were part of a big force moving to cut off the enemy’s northern supply routes. A smaller force, made up of several hundred Canadian soldiers, was pushing across more than 10 miles of heavy snow and muskeg — a multiday slog — to close off the harder-to-reach southern routes.

“The Canadians have a horrifying task,” Colonel Brawley said.

But they also had some advantages. They had three times as many snowmobiles as the U.S. battalions in the Arctic. Their soldiers were accustomed to operating in the extreme cold.

As the Canadians drove south, Captain Vo and his troops trudged toward their objectives in the north.

Col. Christopher Brawley, who oversaw about 2,700 troops, built his strategy around the harsh reality of the Arctic conditions.

“The Arctic always puts a little fear into me as a leader,” Captain Vo said.

The days blurred together. The troops longed for the moment when they would sneak up on the enemy and test their soldier skills in a simulated firefight with lasers, smoke and the loud pop of blank rounds. But the actual gun battles were few and far between.

Most days they simply marched.

The lower the temperatures fell, the louder the snow crunched under their boots. “The worst sound you can hear,” Sgt. First Class Stephen Bowers said.

When the temperature plunged below minus 30, the soldiers said they could feel a cold ache in their lungs. Exposed skin prickled and turned red in a matter of seconds. At minus 40 and below, the soldiers retreated to their tents and shifted into survival mode. Sergeants had to force their reluctant troops to keep drinking water. No one wanted to leave their tent to pee.

On Day 5, heavy snows forced a six-hour pause so that the Army could plow the roads leading into and out of the training area. It was a relatively warm morning, with temperatures hovering around 10 degrees.

A dozen of the Able Company soldiers grabbed their weapons and strapped on their skis so they could practice being pulled by a snowmobile. The tactic, known as skijoring, was supposed to help them move faster while carrying a heavy load. But many of the troops were still wobbly on the snow.

The snowmobile made a big circle, pulling five soldiers who clung to a rope. On one of the passes, Specialist Zaurion Caldwell's M240 machine-gun barrel caught in the snow, sending him flying and taking out several soldiers behind him. Everyone was laughing and smiling.

"Anyone wanna do it one more time?" the platoon sergeant asked.

"Yeah, me!" someone yelled.

The skijoring soldiers did another loop, hitting 22 miles per hour before letting go and gliding to a gentle stop.

"The Arctic is a hell of a place," said Sgt. John Wolf, 26, of Selma, Ala.

An hour later, the pause was lifted. And with that, Able Company returned to the endless march.

### Lessons From the Cold

The soldiers' warm tents stood out in the extreme cold and could be easily spotted by drones carrying thermal cameras.

A big question that hung over the entire Arctic training exercise, now in its fifth year, was whether the U.S. Army could really fight a war this way.

One problem was the warm tents, which stood out in the extreme cold and could be easily spotted by drones carrying thermal sensors. "They glow like Christmas trees," said Sgt. Marcus Soto-Simmons, one of the Able Company drone operators.

A few days into the training center battle, Captain Vo launched a surveillance drone and, using its thermal sensor, quickly found an enemy platoon in its tents.

He then sent out a second killer drone carrying a mock explosive. The opposition soldiers heard its whirring engine as it sped toward them at 80 miles per hour and tried to scramble out of their tents to safety. But it was too late.

The judges overseeing the exercise concluded that Captain Vo had killed most of the enemy platoon. "What would happen if drones took out a string of American tents?" Captain Vo wondered. How would the American people react? How would he?

The Army had been using the same heavy canvas tents for decades. Senior Army leaders were looking for tent fabrics that radiated less heat.

The Army was realizing it needed more Arctic vehicles, like snowmobiles or big, tracked troop carriers. The Swedish-made machines cost \$1 million each, carry a dozen soldiers and can move swiftly through deep snow.

Swedish-made troop carriers suited to the Arctic can carry a dozen soldiers and move swiftly through deep snow. They cost \$1 million each.

The exercise also showed the value of Arctic expertise. The Canadians had weighed every piece of equipment that they brought to Alaska and meticulously planned how far their troops would be able to move each day. “The American technique is go, go, go until you can’t anymore,” Colonel Brawley said. The Canadian approach, he concluded, was more effective.

By the ninth day of the exercise, the American and Canadian troops under Colonel Brawley’s command had cut the opposition’s supply lines. They were running low on fuel. “You have the enemy in checkmate,” one of the Army officers overseeing the exercise texted him.

The exercise also showed the value of Arctic expertise.

For the Able Company soldiers, though, the combat never felt as real as the cold.

A handful of soldiers were forced out of the exercise by cold weather injuries, twisted knees, broken ribs or wrenched backs. But the vast majority endured and were now taking turns digging out spots for their tents. Most preferred shoveling, which got their blood pumping and warmed their bodies, to standing around.

They struggled to hammer tent stakes into the permafrost. The smell of smoke, from metal pounding metal, hung in the air.

Two hours passed before they had raised the tent.

Specialist Abdul Mare, 25, who emigrated from the Ivory Coast, threaded the Yukon stove’s metal chimney through a hole in the canvas.

“I don’t like the cold,” he said. “But, here I am.”

Everyone was moving slower than normal. Everyone’s muscles ached. In the morning, they would head home and finally escape the cold.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/04/us/politics/us-army-arctic-cold.html>

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**Class action case challenges DOD benefits restrictions for Reserve and National Guard members**

**Stars and Stripes, May 4, 2026 :**

WASHINGTON — A class action lawsuit in federal court is challenging a Defense Department policy that limits transition benefits for health care to only those National Guard and Reserve members whose activation orders were categorized as supporting “a contingency operation.”

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, claims that qualifying National Guard and Reserve members are being unlawfully denied transitional assistance management program (TAMP) benefits when their orders are not coded with that specific language in the department’s personnel management system.

The case was filed on April 24 on behalf of Anthony Gontarz, a lieutenant commander in the Navy Reserve, along with current and former National Guard and reserve members in similar situations, according to attorneys for Gontarz.

Defendants named in the lawsuit are the secretaries of the Defense, Army, Navy, Air Force and Homeland Security.

The lawsuit is asking the court to declare the Defense Department practice illegal, as well as approve TAMP benefits for Gontarz and other class members, according to the complaint.

The federal government has 60 days from the court filing to respond to the complaint. No hearing is currently scheduled.

“As a matter of policy, the Department does not comment on ongoing litigation,” the Defense Department said in an email Monday.

TAMP provides six months of premium-free medical and dental coverage following the end of a qualifying period of active duty, according to Defense Department regulations. Beneficiaries enroll in Tricare, the military health insurance program for uniformed members, retirees and their families.

The Defense Department “conditions eligibility for TAMP on whether a service member’s orders are coded as ‘in support of a contingency operation’ in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, the DOD’s internal system for tracking personnel status and benefits eligibility,” according to the lawsuit.

“That requirement does not appear in the statute. Instead, it is imposed through DOD’s implementing regulation,” according to the lawsuit.

Congress defined qualifying service to include activation of more than 30 days during a national emergency declared by the president or Congress without regard to the type of active-duty service, according to the lawsuit.

“TAMP reduces financial strain, prevents gaps in treatment, and protects both individual welfare and overall military readiness. It further reflects Congress’s judgment that those who answer the call to serve should not be left vulnerable when their active-duty orders end,” according to the complaint.

The class action lawsuit stands to affect thousands of current and former National Guard and Reserve members and their families, attorneys said.

“Mr. Gontarz has served his country for over two decades, and he has done so with distinction,” said Jay Jurata, a Navy veteran and one of the attorneys representing him.

The lawsuit states that more than 770,000 men and women serve in a reserve component of the armed forces — the Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard and Coast Guard Reserve.

Since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, these service members “have been mobilized at historically unprecedented levels, serving in roles indistinguishable from their active-duty counterparts and evolving into an operational force that the nation relies on for sustained global and domestic missions,” according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit argues that the Defense Department’s actions represent a “contrary, extra-statutory policy” that denies benefits to otherwise eligible service members based on an internal administrative coding requirement.

The complaint refers to technical information in the military’s Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, also known as DEERS.

The system processes, tracks and manages data about a service member’s activation orders, duty status and separation, according to the military.

Plaintiffs’ attorneys are the National Veterans Legal Services Program, a nonprofit based in Virginia, and Dechert LLP, a global law firm specializing in complex legal cases involving financial and regulatory matters.

“Congress made a clear promise to reserve service members: If you are called to serve your country during a national emergency, you will not be left without health care when you return home,” said Esther Leibfarth, a senior managing attorney with the National Veterans Legal Services Program.

“The Department of Defense cannot rewrite that promise through internal coding rules that have no basis in law. This case is about enforcing the law and ensuring that those who serve are not left without the benefits they earned,” Leibfarth said.

The complaint notes that the Defense Department is referred to as the Department of War as a secondary title, per executive order by President Donald Trump.

But the department’s official, legal name remains the “Department of Defense until modified by Congress,” according to the lawsuit.

<https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2026-05-04/lawsuit-tamp-benefits-guard-reserve-21574997.html>

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## Hegseth falsely claimed Biden sent troops to polling stations in 15 states during 2024 election

**Snopes.com, May 5, 2026 :**

**May 08, 2026***Note: This item is provided for your information*

Claim: During the 2024 election, U.S. President Joe Biden deployed troops to polling locations in 15 different states.

Rating: False (About this rating?)

Context: In 15 different states, governors activated members of the National Guard to provide "cybersecurity and general support." The governors of those states, not Biden, activated the National Guard.

During a congressional hearing on April 29, 2026, U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth claimed that then-President Joe Biden sent troops to polling stations in 15 states during the 2024 election:

I will note that in 2024, troops were depl— that was Joe Biden by the way, Joe Biden — were deployed to polling locations in 15 states. 2024, Joe Biden, troops deployed to polling locations in 15 states. Explain that one to me.

In a Senate hearing the following day, Michigan Sen. Elissa Slotkin claimed Hegseth's assertion was false and asked him whether he would deploy federal troops to seize voter rolls. Hegseth later repeated a slightly rephrased version of the claim, saying that "under Joe Biden's administration, 15 states deployed" troops to polling stations.

Posts on social media in the following days, sometimes citing a report from CNN, suggested that Hegseth's claim was false.

[https://www.facebook.com/joshhelfgott1/posts/pfbid024uPa4dzMGFRAt4dLYMcio3FgrgGoS q2Jpq6x5fKL9QWzYKyEqtd2JpzVufumzoGI?\\_\\_cft\\_\\_\[0\]=AZbXTIbJFWMEVmWvHfyL7rLZA xaS1eh4hmV2dbMb7PCOdHFuyhp5a4rMGVFurgA3IRCmQStNmvmD- ikkPSCR24267FcGQsdP792NXqKO6hYO- psrXgs8x9P39ecAmvzSF\\_JKsHfSHmSNX0h0HHvC5yK1mH0zu1S0jqNsgkubZB17w&\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/joshhelfgott1/posts/pfbid024uPa4dzMGFRAt4dLYMcio3FgrgGoS q2Jpq6x5fKL9QWzYKyEqtd2JpzVufumzoGI?__cft__[0]=AZbXTIbJFWMEVmWvHfyL7rLZA xaS1eh4hmV2dbMb7PCOdHFuyhp5a4rMGVFurgA3IRCmQStNmvmD- ikkPSCR24267FcGQsdP792NXqKO6hYO- psrXgs8x9P39ecAmvzSF_JKsHfSHmSNX0h0HHvC5yK1mH0zu1S0jqNsgkubZB17w&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R)

Snopes readers also wrote in looking for more information about the claim.

We found Hegseth's assertion was false: Biden did not send troops to polling stations in 15 states during the 2024 election. It is a federal crime to send federal troops to voting locations, "unless such force be necessary to repel armed enemies of the United States."

Instead, Hegseth appeared to be stretching the truth — that governors in 15 states activated their National Guard on Election Day, mainly for cybersecurity assistance. Snopes found no evidence that any of those personnel were ever present at a polling station as part of their responsibilities.

According to reporting from The Hill and the military publication Stars and Stripes, the following states activated their National Guard to assist with "general support" and cybersecurity:

Alabama

Arizona

Delaware

Hawaii

Iowa

Illinois

North Carolina

New Mexico

Oregon

Pennsylvania

Tennessee

Texas

Washington

Wisconsin

West Virginia

Three additional states — Colorado, Florida and Nevada — as well as Washington, D.C., placed National Guard personnel on standby, meaning they were awaiting activation but had not been asked to assist.

Snopes contacted the National Guard Bureau for comment on this story. A National Guard spokesperson confirmed via an emailed statement that Guard personnel were activated in the listed states to provide "cybersecurity and general support," but noted that Biden had nothing to do with their activation.

"Guard members were activated under state authority under the control of their governors and adjutants general in support of civilian partners. It is important to note the Guard's role in domestic operations is always one of support to civilian authorities," the statement read.

The National Guard also pointed us to a Nov. 4, 2024 Pentagon news conference in which Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder emphasized that the National Guard "has ongoing and long-standing

relationships with local, state and federal agency partners and has assisted with national special security events like Election Day and Inauguration Day for many years."

#### State responses

Seeing as the National Guard said personnel had been activated at the request of governors, Snopes also contacted the governor's offices in the states where troops were activated or placed on standby to ask what duties the Guard members had performed and whether they were present at polling places.

We received responses from Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington and West Virginia, all of which said that no members of the National Guard were present at polling stations.

Florida, Nevada, North Carolina and Texas acknowledged receipt of our message or forwarded our request for comment, but had not yet replied to our questions.

Jonah Anderson, a spokesperson for Delaware Gov. Matt Meyer, said that 15 personnel, working remotely or at the state's Department of Technology and Information, performed cybersecurity support.

Retired Maj. Jeff Hickman, the public affairs director for Hawaii's state defense department, said the governor did not "'deploy' or activate the Hawai'i National Guard to support the 2024 elections."

Matt Dietrich, a spokesperson for the Illinois State Board of Elections, said the state has had Illinois National Guard cybersecurity personnel "available in the event of a cybersecurity incident on Election Day and the Monday preceding Election Day" at every federal election since 2018. Dietrich also noted that the Illinois State Board of Elections requested use of the National Guard, not Gov. JB Pritzker.

Michael Coleman, a spokesperson for New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, said the state's National Guard provided cybersecurity assistance and a "secure building at their Santa Fe HQ for the Secretary of State to monitor operations on Election Day." He also pointed to a recently passed state law prohibiting a person from ordering federal troops or armed federal agents to polling places or ballot drop box locations.

Luke Harkins, press secretary for Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek, noted that the state doesn't have traditional polling sites: "Secretary Hegseth's information is incorrect. The notion that the Oregon National Guard was activated at polling locations is simply false. Oregon is a 100% vote-by-mail state and has been for over two decades."

Wayne Hall, a public affairs officer for the Pennsylvania National Guard, said that its personnel helped the state and the city of Philadelphia's emergency management agencies with "interagency coordination and information flow."

Karina Shagren, a spokesperson for the state of Washington's military department, said it "had some WA National Guard troops on standby to support any civil unrest response if necessary," but did not deploy them.

Ariana Shuemaker, a spokesperson for the West Virginia National Guard, said the National Guard provided "cyber security support."

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/hegseth-falsely-claimed-biden-sent-troops-to-polling-stations-in-15-states-during-2024-election/ar-AA22tdO2?ocid=BingNewsVerp>

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## **Funeral Honors**

### **New York Guard Welcomes Remains of WWII Airman Home**

**NationalGuard.mil, May 6, 2026 :**

LATHAM, N.Y. – When Army Air Corps 2nd Lt. Joseph Burke came home to Troy, New York, on May 1 – 84 years after he left – New York Army National Guard Soldiers welcomed him at the airport.

Joseph Leroy "Roy" Burke was captured by the Japanese in May 1942 in the Philippines and held prisoner for more than two years. He was killed inadvertently by U.S. forces in January 1945, as he was being transported to Japan on an unmarked prison ship. His remains were never identified, and he was interred with 431 other unknowns at the National Military Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii.

In 2025, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency used DNA donated by the son of Burke's sister to identify his remains. The family elected to bring him home to Troy, New York, where he had grown up, gone to college and first learned to fly.

New York Army National Guard Lt. Col. Michael Squires, the executive officer of the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade, served as the casualty assistance officer and worked with the family to coordinate the shipment of Burke's remains to Albany International Airport. His role is to help the family negotiate the military casualty process, Squires said.

He was happy to help bring closure to the Burke family, Squires said.

"His parents weren't able to have that closure; his brother and sisters weren't. But now, knowing his brothers and sister and parents, see from up above what we're doing to honor Roy in this time," Squires said.

When the casket arrived at the Albany airport at 4:35 p.m. on board a Southwest Airlines flight, 10 members of the New York Army National Guard's Honor Guard were there. They conducted a dignified transfer, moving the casket containing Burke's remains from the airplane to a waiting hearse as TV cameras filmed and family members, escorted by Squires, stood nearby and watched.

The event, which is not considered a ceremony, took about one minute, but the planning and preparation took a week, said Staff Sgt. Ryan Gosse, the non-commissioned officer in charge of the state Honor Guard.

Gosse, who has served on New York's Army Guard Honor Guard since 2018, said a lot of coordination is involved. Normally, Honor Guard members work in teams of two, so getting 10 Soldiers together means making sure schedules mesh, he said. It also means coordinating with the airport to get the team onto the tarmac in a timely manner and working with the baggage.

Three Soldiers in Army combat uniforms wearing white gloves arrived at the aircraft first. Their job was to go into the cargo hold, ensure that no baggage was around the casket and remove the cardboard shipping carton, Gosse explained. They also made sure that Burke's dog tags hung from the front of the casket and that the flag on the casket was secure.

They assisted airport baggage handlers in moving the casket onto a luggage truck. At that point, the seven-member honor guard, clad in dress blue uniforms, moved forward in formation. They picked up the casket, turned and briskly transported Burke's remains to the waiting hearse.

Watching it was very emotional, according to John Burke, one of Joseph Burke's nephews and the family spokesman.

"To see the coffin come off, the Honor Guard go out, his dog tags hanging from the front, it's just, it's a lot," he said.

On May 7, the New York National Guard will be there again for the Burke family. Following a memorial service at Siena University, where he went to college just outside Albany, he will be interred at the Gerald B. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery. The cemetery is located near the historic Revolutionary War battlefield.

The New York National Guard will render funeral honors, with Gosse once more overseeing the team. Burke will get the full honors due to a Soldier killed in action. These include a firing party, the playing of taps and a "six-man fold" of the American flag, Gosse said.

"It's one of the highest honors we can give anybody," Gosse said. "And since he was, unfortunately KIA, we want to give him as much respect as possible."

<https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/News-Features/Article/4478775/new-york-guard-welcomes-remains-of-wwii-airman-home/>

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**Remains of WWII veteran return home to New York after 84 years**

**Stars and Stripes, May 6, 2026 :**

After 84 years, the remains of a World War II veteran have finally returned to his hometown of Troy, N.Y., where a memorial service will be held on Thursday.

Army Air Corps 2nd Lt. Joseph Leroy "Roy" Burke was received by members of the New York National Guard, who performed a dignified transfer of his casket at Albany International Airport on May 1, according to a service news release.

The soldiers will also render funeral honors during the memorial service at Siena University where Burke went to college. He will then be interred at the Gerald B. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery.

"It's one of the highest honors we can give anybody," said Staff Sgt. Ryan Gosse, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the state's honor guard. "We want to give him as much respect as possible."

With no immediate family members still alive to witness his return, the homecoming serves as a long-awaited moment of closure.

"To see the coffin come off, the honor guard go out, his dog tags hanging from the front, it's just, it's a lot," said John Burke, a nephew.

Burke was captured by Japanese forces in the Philippines in May 1942 and held as a prisoner for over two years.

He was killed inadvertently by U.S. forces in January 1945 as he was being transported to Japan on an unmarked ship, the release said. His remains went unidentified and were buried with other unknowns at the National Military Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii. In 2025, DNA from a relative helped the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency confirm his identity, the release said.

<https://www.stripes.com/veterans/2026-05-06/wwii-veteran-remains-ny-national-guard-21593675.html>

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## **Troy: WWII Hero Comes Home: Remains Of Troy Airman Returned After 80 Years**

**Daily Voice, May 4, 2026 :**

The remains of a New York man killed in World War II have been returned to his hometown, and funeral services are scheduled for later this week.

Joseph Leroy "Roy" Burke, of Troy, was killed on Jan. 9, 1945, while being held as a prisoner of war by the Japanese army on Taiw

For decades, his remains were buried as an unknown soldier at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. They were identified using DNA from his family members in 2025.

More than 80 years after his death, Burke's remains arrived back in the Capital Region on Friday, May 1 on a Southwest Airlines plane at Albany International Airport. The New York National Guard conducted a dignified transfer on the runway.

A funeral service will be held Thursday, May 7 at Siena College. Afterward, Burke will be buried at Gerald B.H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery in Schuylerville.

"The family is overjoyed and relieved that our Uncle Roy is finally coming home, and an 81-year mystery is solved," said Burke's nephew, John. "We are eternally grateful to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency for making his recovery and identification possible."

Burke was born Feb. 6, 1914, and graduated from Catholic Central High School in Troy in 1932, according to his obituary from Bryce Funeral Home. He began attending classes at Siena in 1938 but enrolled in the Civilian Pilot Training Program after it was created in 1939.

In 1940, Burke joined the Army Air Corps as a cadet pilot, and he was deployed to the Philippines in 1941 as part of the 3rd Pursuit Squadron of the 24th Pursuit Group.

After the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, Burke was captured in May 1942 and held as a prisoner of war into 1944. With American forces closing in on Manila, the Japanese put POWs on their naval ships for transportation to Japan.

Burke ended up on one of those ships, the Enoura Maru, which arrived in Taiwan. But on Jan. 9, 1945, U.S. planes bombed the ship — which was indistinguishable from other Japanese navy targets — unknowingly killing the POWs onboard.

To view the full obituary from Bryce Funeral Home, click here.

<https://www.newsbreak.com/daily-voice-525087/4631281421559-wwii-hero-comes-home-remains-of-troy-airman-returned-after-80-years>

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## **Troy WWII pilot identified after 80 years, to be buried (Video)**

**WNYT, May 4, 2025 :**

LOUDONVILLE, N.Y. (WNYT)- A Troy military pilot who died in World War II is being laid to rest after his remains were identified decades after he was lost at sea.

Lt. Joseph "Roy" Burke was a graduate of Catholic Central High School. He was captured by the Japanese and held as a prisoner of war for more than two and a half years.

In 1944, as American forces were closing in, the Japanese loaded Burke and other POWs onto unmarked ships to send them to Japan. Burke survived when the first ship sank and he swam to shore.

A few weeks later, he was loaded onto another unmarked ship, and that ship was sunk by allied forces. The military listed Burke as killed in action and unrecoverable after he died with hundreds of others and could not be identified.

DNA from family members helped identify Burke nearly 80 years later. On Friday, his flag-draped coffin returned to Albany Airport, where family members gathered on the tarmac for the dignified transfer of his remains.

A P-40 Warhawk, the plane Burke flew, was brought in for the occasion. It also did a flyover above the hearse carrying Burke.

<https://wnyt.com/top-stories/troy-wwii-pilot-identified-after-80-years-to-be-buried-may-8/>

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## **NY Army National Guard Honor Guard welcomes home remains of World War II Airman after 84 years**

**Army.mil, May 5, 2026 :**

LATHAM, New York--When Army Air Corps 2nd Lt. Joseph Burke came home to Troy, New York on May 1, 2026-- 84 years after he left-- New York Army National Guard Soldiers welcomed him at the airport.

Joseph Leroy "Roy" Burke was captured by the Japanese in May 1942 in the Philippines and held prisoner for over two years. He was killed inadvertently by U.S. forces in January 1945, as he was being transported to Japan on an unmarked prison ship.

His remains were never identified, and he was interred with 431 other unknowns at the National Military Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii.

But in 2025, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency used DNA donated by the son of Burke's sister to identify his remains.

The family elected to bring him home to Troy, New York, where he had grown up, gone to college and first learned to fly.

New York Army National Guard Lt. Col. Michael Squires, the executive officer of the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade, served as the casualty assistance officer and worked with the family to coordinate the shipment of Burke's remains to Albany International Airport.

His role, Squires said, is to help the family negotiate the military casualty process. In this case, he was happy to help bring closure to the Burke family, Squires said.

“His parents weren’t able to have that closure; his brother and sisters weren’t. But now, knowing his brothers and sister and parents, see from up above what we’re doing to honor Roy in this time,” Squires said.

When the casket arrived at the Albany airport at 4:35 p.m. on board a Southwest Airlines flight, ten members of the New York Army National Guard’s Honor Guard were there.

They conducted a dignified transfer, moving the casket containing the remains of 2nd Lt. Burke from the airplane to a waiting hearse as TV camera filmed and family members, escorted by Squires, stood nearby and watched.

The event, which is not considered a ceremony, took about a minute, but took a week to plan and prepare for, said Staff Sgt. Ryan Gosse, the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of the state Honor Guard.

Gosse, who has served on New York’s Army Guard Honor Guard since 2018, said a lot of coordination is involved.

Normally, Honor Guard members work in teams of two, so getting ten Soldiers together means making sure schedules mesh, he said.

It also means coordinating with the airport to get the team onto the tarmac in a timely manner and working with the baggage.

Three Soldiers in Army combat uniforms wearing white gloves arrived at the aircraft first. Their job was to go into the cargo hold and ensure that no baggage was around the casket and remove the cardboard shipping carton, Gosse explained.

They also made sure that dog tags for Burke were hanging from the front of the casket and that the flag on the casket was secured.

They assisted airport baggage handlers in moving the casket onto a luggage truck. At that point the seven-member honor guard, clad in dress blue uniforms, moved forward in formation. They picked up the casket, turned, and briskly transported Burkes remains to the waiting hearse.

Watching it was very emotional, according to John Burke, one of Joseph Burke’s nephews and the spokesman for the family.

“To see the coffin come off, the honor guard go out, his dog tags hanging from the front, it’s just, it’s a lot.” he said.

On May 7, the New York National Guard will be there again for the Burke family.

Following a memorial service at Siena University where he went to college just outside Albany, he will be interred at the Gerald B. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery. The cemetery is located near the historic Revolutionary War battlefield.

The New York National Guard will be there to render funeral honors, with Gosse once more overseeing the team.

Burke will get the full honors due to a Soldier killed in action. These include a firing party, the playing of taps, and a “six-man fold” of the American flag, Gosse said.

“It’s one of the highest honors we can give anybody,” Gosse said. “And since he was, unfortunately KIA, we want to give him as much respect as possible.”

[https://www.army.mil/article-amp/292207/ny\\_army\\_national\\_guard\\_honor\\_guard\\_welcomes\\_home\\_remains\\_of\\_world\\_war\\_ii\\_airman\\_after\\_84\\_years](https://www.army.mil/article-amp/292207/ny_army_national_guard_honor_guard_welcomes_home_remains_of_world_war_ii_airman_after_84_years)

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## **After 84 years, an Upstate NY family finally welcomes home the WWII hero they never got to bury**

**New YorkUpstate.com, May 5, 2026 :**

The remains of 2nd Lt. Joseph Leroy “Roy” Burke arrived at Albany Airport on Thursday, more than eight decades after the World War II airman went missing in the Pacific Theater.

Burke, a Troy native who served in the U.S. Army Air Corps, was among 432 unidentified prisoners of war buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. His remains were disinterred and identified in 2025 using DNA samples provided by his family.

A five-star honor guard conducted a dignified transfer of Burke’s remains upon arrival at the airport where he once trained as a pilot in a federal learn-to-fly program.

“It is a great honor to welcome home a New Yorker who fought and died for our country and the freedom and rights we have today,” Gov. Kathy Hochul said. “A member of the greatest generation, Lt. Burke defended our country and fought off fascism and tyranny to ensure a better life for the generations that would follow.”

Burke will be laid to rest at Gerald B.H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery in Schuylerville following services at Siena College on May 7.

Born in February 1914, Burke attended Siena College in 1938 before joining the Army Air Corps as a cadet pilot in the fall of 1940. He trained at the Chicago School of Aeronautics and Maxwell Field in Alabama, graduating as a pursuit pilot and earning his commission as second lieutenant in April 1941.

The Army deployed Burke to the Philippines, where he joined the 24th Pursuit Group’s 3rd Pursuit Squadron on Luzon. He later transferred to Corregidor Island, serving with the 60th

Coast Artillery Regiment. When Japanese forces invaded Corregidor on May 5, 1942, Burke was among 11,000 Americans and Filipinos who surrendered the following day.

While held as a prisoner of war, Burke was placed aboard an unmarked transport ship in December 1944 with 1,600 other prisoners. The Japanese were moving captives to Japan as American forces closed in on Luzon. U.S. Navy planes, unaware of the prisoners on board, sank the vessel.

In 1946, the American Graves Registration Service disinterred remains from a mass POW grave. The remains of 432 unidentified POWs were transported to Hawaii and interred as unknowns.

“The family is overjoyed and relieved that our Uncle Roy is finally coming home, and an 81-year mystery is solved,” said John Burke, the airman’s nephew. “We are eternally grateful to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency for making his recovery and identification possible.”

Burke was one of roughly 1.5 million New Yorkers who served in the U.S. armed forces during World War II. New York contributed more personnel to the war effort than any other state. By war’s end, roughly 37,000 New Yorkers died during the conflict.

The New York Army National Guard Honor Guard provides military funeral honors for veterans. In 2025, the Honor Guard attended services for 5,051 military veterans.

Burke is memorialized on the Wall of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery on Luzon in the Philippines.

<https://www.newyorkupstate.com/news/2026/05/after-84-years-an-upstate-ny-family-finally-welcomes-home-the-wwii-hero-they-never-got-to-bury.html>

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## **Duty Calls: Graveside services this week for World War II POW's remains**

**Times Union, May 4, 2026 :**

### **Remains of Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Joseph Burke, killed just before war ended, to be transported in a horse-drawn caisson at Schuylerville cemetery**

Graveside services for Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Joseph Burke, a World War II prisoner of war killed just before the war ended, will be at 2 p.m. Thursday, May 7, at the Gerald B.H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery in Schuylerville.

His remains will be transported in a horse-drawn caisson to the Committal Shelter as restored World War II aircraft do a flyover, according to Candace Eaton, cemetery spokeswoman.

“Through modern DNA and the help of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, his remains were identified,” said Scott Lamb, cemetery director.

Burke was listed as missing in action after he was captured by Japanese forces in 1942 in the Philippines until his remains were identified by the Indo-Pacific Directorate through genetic testing on June 10, 2025.

The 30-year-old officer was killed when American planes attacked the ship Enoura Maru, which was transporting hundreds of American prisoners of war to the port of Takao, Formosa (now Taiwan), on Jan. 9, 1945, according to Lamb.

He was the son of the late William James Burke and Kathryn A. Dorr Burke of Troy. His survivors include nephews John Burke and Bill Comiskey.

Joseph Burke graduated from Catholic Central High School in Troy in 1932. He enrolled at what was then Siena College in 1938, attending through 1940. During this time, he learned to fly in a federal Civilian Pilot Training Program at the Albany Airport. The program helped develop pilots for the Army and the Navy. He then became a cadet pilot at the Chicago School of Aeronautics and graduated from the Army Advanced Flying School at Maxwell Airfield, Ala., in the Army Air Corps. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant upon graduating flight school as a pursuit pilot.

Burke learned to fly a P-40E Warhawk fighter plane before he was assigned to the 3rd Pursuit Squadron, 24th Pursuit Group at Luzon in the Philippines.

After Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, the Japanese destroyed his unit’s aircraft as they invaded the Philippines.

Without aircraft, Burke and other airmen fought as infantrymen.

By spring of 1942, Burke and 11,000 other Americans and Filipinos, who defended the island until they ran out of food, were captured by the Japanese.

Burke remained a prisoner of war in the Philippines until Dec. 13, 1944, when the enemy decided to ship the POWs to Japan for use as laborers.

Approximately 1,600 POWs were put on three ships.

Unaware of the POWs on board, aircraft from the USS Hornet aircraft carrier attacked the first ship, the Oryoku Maru, in Subic Bay in the Philippines. Burke and other survivors of the bombing were put on two other ships, the Enoura Maru and the Brazil Maru, to continue to Japan. Burke was aboard the Enoura Maru that was sunk by American planes on Jan. 9, 1945. He didn’t survive that attack. His and the remains of more than 432 other POWs were buried on a beach in a mass grave.

An American Graves Registration Command Search and Recovery Team exhumed 411 bodies, including Burke. At that time, the remains couldn’t be identified and were transported and placed in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, also known as the “Punchbowl,” in Honolulu.

Between October 2022 and July 2023, DPAA disinterred unknowns from the cemetery linked to the Enoura Maru. The remains were accessioned into the DPAA Laboratory for further study and scientific analysis. The laboratory analysis and the total circumstantial evidence available identified one set of the remains as those of Burke.

Burke had been memorialized on the Walls of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial in the Philippines.

He earned a World War II Victory Medal, a Prisoner of War Medal, a Purple Heart, an American Campaign Medal, an Army Presidential Unit Citation, an Army Good Conduct Medal, and an Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal.

Joseph's two other brothers also served in the military.

The late William J. Burke served in the New York Army National Guard. He earned a Purple Heart when he was wounded in combat in France. After the war, he worked for the Federal Aviation Administration at the then Albany County Airport.

Clay Burke served in the Navy during the 1930s and then enlisted in the Army in 1940. He was assigned to a boat detachment that participated in the D-Day Invasion in Normandy.

#### Movies for veterans

The Albany County Veterans Service Bureau is hosting two movies for veterans and their families at Regal Theaters, Crossgates, 120 B. Washington Ave. Ext. in Guilderland.

Veterans are invited for a special evening to see the movie, "Here Is Better," at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday.

This is more than just a movie night. It is a chance to get out, connect with fellow veterans, enjoy a great documentary that showcases veterans coping with PTSD, and spend an evening with people who understand the value of service, community, and showing up for one another.

"Zero Dark Thirty," a docudrama depicting the hunt for Osama bin Laden after the 911 terror attacks, will be shown at noon Saturday, May 16.

A Red Robin lunch will be free for both movies.

Registration is required. Register at [albanycountyny.gov/veterans/events](http://albanycountyny.gov/veterans/events).

#### Veterans' breakfasts

The Lois Wilson Memorial Breakfast Club will meet at two locations. Wilson, of Schodack, a veteran's advocate, founded the club.

The club will meet from 8 to 10 a.m. Thursdays at the Melvin Roads American Legion Post, located at 200 Columbia Turnpike in East Greenbush.

The club will also meet from 8 to 11 a.m. Fridays at the Gateway Diner, located at 899 Central Ave. in Albany.

World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan War, Iraq War, Cold War, and other veterans, as well as their spouses and friends, are welcome.

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

<https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/duty-calls-world-war-ii-pow-remains-returned-22238053.php>

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## **WWII veteran Lt. Joseph Burke is returned to his family (video)**

**WNYT, May 1, 2026 :**

TROY, N.Y. (WNYT)- Lt. Roy Burke, a Troy native missing since World War II, is returning home after military investigators identified his remains decades after his death.

Burke, whose family called him Roy, grew up in Troy, went to Catholic Central and was part of Siena College's second class in 1938. As the U.S. expanded pilot training before World War II, he joined the Civilian Pilot Training program.

At Albany airport, Burke learned to fly the P-40 Warhawk. In 1941, he was sent to the Philippines, then a U.S. territory, and wrote home about what he found there.

"They arrived in a gardenia-scented paradise," said Burke's nephew, John Burke. "That all changed December 8th."

After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Japanese forces also hit Burke's squadron in the Philippines and destroyed their planes. Without an aircraft, Burke was reassigned to ground troops on Corregidor.

On May 5, 1942, Burke was among 11,000 Americans and Filipinos captured by Japanese forces as prisoners of war. His nephew said conditions were severe as prisoners ran out of food and medicine.

"They ran out of food and they ran out of medicine. It kept getting worse, they were in the most beleaguered conditions," John said.

Burke survived for two and a half years. In December 1944, as American troops moved closer, the Japanese began moving American prisoners to Japan on unmarked transport ships later known as hellships.

“The Army basically said, we think he died on the 15th,” John said. “There was a there was an obituary that I have a copy of it in the Troy paper saying, you know what? Lieutenant Burke died on the 15th of December, 1944.”

But Burke survived that sinking by swimming to shore, unknown to the Army and his family in Troy. The next month, he was placed on another unmarked Japanese hellship.

“It sustained a direct hit from Allied planes and he died. And, so subsequently, we know now he was buried in a mass grave,” John said. “I have a letter my grandfather wrote to the quartermaster general saying, I’m confused by all this. Where’s his remains? And if you find them, I want him brought home.”

“In 1949, the Army finally said he’s not recoverable. He’s listed as KIA non-recoverable, it means never to be found,” John said.

Burke’s nephew said earlier generations of the family died without answers. But the government kept the remains of the servicemen, and the search continued for decades.

In 2021, the military asked the Burke family for DNA and John’s cousin provided a sample. In 2024, the family was asked again and John also gave DNA. Another year passed before John got a call from his cousin.

“Then he calls me and he says ‘Oh my god’ they found Uncle Roy,” said Burke.

Now Burke is returning to the airport where he earned his civilian pilot license. His nephew said the timing is especially meaningful for the family.

“Almost 85 years to the day he was deployed and left Troy in May of 1941,” said John. “His wheels are touching down in the very airport where he got his civilian pilot license right 85 years later, on the 1st of May. So 85 years after leaving, he’s back, he’s being returned.”

“It’s a story that starts in hope. It travels through just, horrible, horrible grief and tragedy, but ends in remembrance and honor. As it should,” John said.

<https://wnyt.com/top-stories/troy-wwii-pilot-identified-by-dna-after-80-years-coming-home/>

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## **Remains of WWII airman to return home after 80 years**

**Staten Island Advance, May 2, 2026 :**

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Gov. Kathy Hochul announced on Friday that the remains of World War II Airman Lt. Joseph L. Burke have returned home to New York after more than 80 years.

Lt. Burke, who served in the U.S. Army Air Corps, had been listed as missing in action and presumed dead, according to a press release from Hochul's office.

The release states Burke was buried as an unknown soldier alongside 431 other prisoners of war at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. However, in 2025, his remains were disinterred and identified through DNA testing provided by his family.

State Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton, a Democrat who represents Staten Island's North Shore and parts of Brooklyn, and serves as chair of the Senate Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee, praised the effort to bring Lt. Burke home.

"I am grateful for Governor Hochul's work to return the remains of World War II Airman Joseph L. Burke to New York," said Senator Scarcella-Spanton. "He gave the ultimate sacrifice to our nation and deserves to rest with dignity."

"It is a great honor to welcome home a New Yorker who fought and died for our country and the freedoms we enjoy today," Hochul expressed. "A member of the Greatest Generation, Lt. Burke helped defend our nation against fascism and tyranny, securing a better future for generations to come. Today, we honor his service as he returns home."

Upon his return home to Troy, New York, a five-star honor guard conducted a dignified transfer of his remains.

New York State Adjutant General Major General Ray Shields said, "The Soldiers of the New York Army National Guard Honor Guard take great pride in providing funeral honors for our veterans. It is especially meaningful to honor a soldier who was missing in action for so many years and has now been returned to his family."

Burke's nephew, John Burke, said, "Our family is overjoyed and relieved that our Uncle Roy is finally coming home, bringing closure to an 81-year mystery. We are deeply grateful to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency for making his recovery and identification possible."

The New York Army National Guard provides military funeral honors for all who have served. In 2025, the Honor Guard participated in 5,051 veteran services.

Lt. Burke will be laid to rest at Saratoga National Cemetery on May 7, the release states.

<https://www.silive.com/news/2026/05/remains-of-wwii-airman-to-return-home-after-80-years.html>

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## **Churchill: After 85 years away, a fallen POW returns**

**Times Union, May 2, 2026 :**

TROY — At long last, Roy is home.

U.S. Army Air Corps 2nd Lt. Joseph LeRoy Burke, who died during World War II, was away for 85 years. He was a prisoner of war. He was twice on Japanese ships that were bombed by U.S. forces. He was buried two times, once in a mass grave, and twice disinterred. It was assumed that his remains would never be identified.

But on Friday, his family gathered to meet his arrival at Albany International Airport.

Let's start at the beginning. Born in 1914, Burke was a Lansingburgh kid who grew up with three siblings — two brothers and a sister — in a house on Third Avenue, near 109th Street. Roy, as he was nicknamed, graduated from the old Catholic Central High School. He swam at Saratoga Lake in the summers.

In photos, he seems confident, with an easy smile.

"He was a handsome young guy who enjoyed life," said his nephew, John Burke, 66, who grew up hearing admiring talk of his fallen uncle, even though the pain of his death was so raw among older family members that they could hardly bear to discuss him.

Burke was a Siena College student when he started learning to fly. In 1940, the Troy Record announced to its readers that Burke had been accepted as an Army flying cadet and would "be an aviator for Uncle Sam."

A year later, in 1941, he was deployed to the Philippines, part of a large American military buildup intended to project overwhelming strength and deter Japanese military aggression.

At first, it was an easy gig. It was like he'd been sent to enjoy the sun, the palm trees and the beach. But soon enough, Burke's paradise would turn into a living hell.

After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Burke was transferred to Corregidor, an island at the entrance to Manila Bay that was the headquarters for the U.S. Army forces in the Philippines. When Japan's forces invaded the island, Burke was among the 11,000 soldiers who surrendered.

"3 Area Men Held by Japanese," read a 1943 Times Union headline, adding that Burke was "at an unstated camp in the Philippines."

That camp was Cabanatuan, notorious for its brutality and suffering.

There, behind 8-foot fences topped with barbed wire, malaria and dysentery were common, and prisoners starved. Barracks designed to hold eight were jammed with as many as 120 prisoners. Outside under brutal heat, prisoners were subjected to hard physical labor and tortured by guards. Many prisoners didn't survive.

For Burke's family back in Troy, it was a desperate and confusing time, John Burke said. They could only pray that he would live. That he would come home. That they would see him again. That he would be allowed to fulfill his immense promise, maybe have a family of his own.

Burke spent two long years at Cabanatuan. But as American forces closed in, the Japanese began shipping prisoners to Japan, apparently hoping to use them as bargaining chips for a potential negotiated end to the war.

Burke and 1,600 prisoners were on the unmarked Oryoku Maru when it was attacked and sunk by U.S. Navy planes. Most of the passengers perished, and it was assumed that Burke had, too.

He hadn't. Instead, he was loaded onto a second Japanese "hell ship," the Enoura Maru, which was soon struck by American forces as it sat docked in a harbor near present-day Taiwan.

The Japanese military listed Burke as one of 406 prisoners killed in that early 1945 attack. He was dumped in a mass grave.

And that's where this story could have ended.

But after the war, the American Graves Registration Service disinterred the remains of Burke and the others buried with him. When their bodies couldn't be identified, they were taken to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, where they were buried as unknown soldiers.

That's also where this story could have ended.

But about a decade ago, the families of missing service members who had served in the Pacific during World War II were asked for DNA samples. In 2022, the remains of the Enoura Maru and Oryko Maru dead were disinterred and tested, leading to the announcement of Joseph Burke's identification about a year ago.

Roy was 27 when he left home for the final time. He was gone for nearly nine decades. Until Friday.

In the afternoon, a plane carrying Burke's remains arrived at the Albany airport, the very place he'd learned to fly so many years ago. Eight nieces and nephews and the New York Army National Guard were there to meet him.

John Burke said his uncle's return provides relief and closure for the family, an end to a story marked by questions, confusion and grief. There's somberness as nieces and nephews consider the uncle they never knew and what could have been. Yet the return is also a commemoration of Joseph Burke's life and wartime bravery, certainly, but also the military's dogged determination to identify his remains and bring him back.

No soldier left behind. John Burke told me the phrase gives him goosebumps.

Next Thursday, Joseph Burke's life and death will be marked with a funeral Mass at Siena University, before a procession carries his remains 30 miles to Saratoga National Cemetery.

Burke could have been buried at Arlington National Cemetery. But the family never questioned that he should return to upstate New York.

John Burke said this is where his uncle belongs. "It's home."

<https://www.timesunion.com/churchill/article/churchill-85-years-away-fallen-pow-returns-22236166.php>

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## Remains of World War II airman return home to the Capital Region

**Spectrum News, May 3, 2026 :**

State leaders and officials across the Capital Region saluted a World War II airman on Friday who returned home more than 80 years after his death.

A five-star honor guard presided over the dignified transfer of Second Lt. Joseph Burke's remains at the Albany International Airport on Friday.

Better known as Joseph "Roy" Burke, the Troy native was among 1,600 American prisoners onboard an unmarked Japanese ship when the vessel was sunk by U.S. Navy planes.

Burke was buried at the National Memorial Cemetery in Honolulu until his remains were identified last year.

"The family is overjoyed and relieved that our Uncle Roy is finally coming home, and an 81-year mystery is solved," Joseph Burke's nephew, John Burke, said in a statement. "We are eternally grateful to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency for making his recovery and identification possible."

"It is a great honor to welcome home a New Yorker who fought and died for our country and the freedom and rights we have today," Gov. Kathy Hochul said in a statement. "A member of the greatest generation, Lt. Burke defended our country and fought off fascism and tyranny to ensure a better life for the generations that would follow. Today we honor these sacrifices as Lt. Burke returns to the place he called home."

The Siena College grad is set to be buried at the Saratoga National Cemetery in Schuylerville following services at his alma mater on Thursday.

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/capital-region/news/2026/05/03/remains-of-world-war-ii-airman-return-home-to-the-capital-region>

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## Troy airman welcomed home after 80 years (video)

**WRGB, May 1, 2026 :**

COLONIE, N.Y. (WRGB) — A Troy airman who learned to fly at Albany International Airport finally came home on Friday.

The New York Army National Guard was on the runway at Albany International Airport for a dignified transfer of the remains of United States Army Air Corps Second Lieutenant Joseph Burke.

Burke was born and raised in Troy. He graduated from Catholic Central High School in 1932 before enrolling at Siena College. Very little else was known after Burke enlisted.

Burke served our country during World War II. He was deployed to the Philippines, where his squadron was attacked by Japanese pilots on the day of Pearl Harbor. Five months later, 11,000 Americans and Filipinos were forced to surrender after Japan bombarded the island.

Burke was eventually loaded onto a ship called Enoura Maru headed toward Taiwan, which was a Japanese colony at the time. The ship was sunk by U.S. planes on January 9, 1945. Burke was named one of 406 prisoners killed in that attack.

His remains were transported to the National Memorial Cemetery in Honolulu, Hawaii, along with other U.S. service members who could not be identified. This is where he remained until four years ago, when remains from the Enoura Maru were unearthed so their DNA could be tested for identification.

The remains of Second Lieutenant Joseph Burke were identified on May 12, 2025. After being reunited with his family, he will be laid to rest at the Saratoga National Cemetery next Thursday.

<https://cbs6albany.com/news/local/troy-airman-finally-being-welcomed-home-after-80-years-new-york-army-national-guard-world-war-ii-wrgb>

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## **WWII soldier Joseph Burke laid to rest at Saratoga National Cemetery**

**WNYT, May 7, 2026 :**

SCHUYLERVILLE, N.Y. (WNYT)- Second Lt. Joseph Burke was laid to rest with military honors after his remains were identified decades after he died as a prisoner of war.

The funeral ceremony wrapped up a couple of hours ago at Saratoga National Cemetery. It included full military honors, the playing of taps, a flyover and the presentation of the American flag to Burke's family.

Burke deployed to the Philippines in 1941 as part of the Army Air Forces before the United States officially entered World War II. After Japanese forces took control of the region, he was captured and held as a prisoner of war.

Officials said he later died aboard a Japanese “hell ship” in January 1945. For decades, his remains were listed as unknown until they were identified last year.

Last Friday, Burke was flown to Albany International Airport. People who spoke at the ceremony said the homecoming had been long awaited by his family and the community.

“After more than 8 decades. We are here to witness once that may have seen beyond reach, his return home,” funeral director Scott Lamb said. “The return home long awaited by family, history, and by a grateful nation that has never forgotten his sacrifice.”

“Though many years have passed, today he is not lost,” said Maj. Robert Volk, chaplain, New York Army National Guard. “He is found. He is not forgotten. He is home at last.”

Speakers also remembered Burke as more than a soldier, honoring him as a son, friend and Capital Region native.

<https://wnyt.com/top-stories/wwii-soldier-joseph-burke-laid-to-rest-at-saratoga-national-cemetery/>

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## **Troy World War II airman laid to rest more than 80 years after his death**

**Spectrum News, May 7, 2026:**

U.S. Army Air Corps 2nd Lt. Joseph Burke was laid to rest at Saratoga National Cemetery on Thursday.

Burke grew up in Troy and died in January 1945.

His remains hadn't been identified until last year and they were brought home last week.

A funeral Mass was held Thursday morning at Siena, where Burke went to college.

Burke was among 1,600 American prisoners onboard an unmarked Japanese ship when the vessel was sunk by U.S. Navy planes.

"Lt. Burke and his classmates left their studies and went off to war, sadly not to return, so it also brings a great sense of sadness," said Fr. Mark Reamer, vice president for Mission at Siena University.

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/capital-region/news/2026/05/07/world-war-ii-airman-from-troy-laid-to-rest-more-than-80-years-after-his-death>

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## **WWII Troy airman, former POW Joseph L. Burke laid to rest after 80 years (video)**

**WRGB, May 7, 2026 :**

SCHUYLERVILLE, NY (WRGB) -- For the Burke family, it was the end of an 80-year wait — and the fulfillment of a promise first put into writing generations ago.

Troy airman and World War II prisoner of war 2nd Lt. Joseph L. Burke was laid to rest at Saratoga National Cemetery, finally returning home after decades being deemed killed in action. The moment carried special weight for relatives who have long held onto a request Burke's father made to the military years ago: "If you find him, bring him home."

On the day of the service, Burke received full military funeral honors. During the ceremony, a speaker underscored the significance of the homecoming:

"He is not lost. He is found. He is not forgotten. He is home at last. Welcome home lieutenant Burke," he said

Before arriving at the cemetery, Burke returned to Siena University — the school he attended before enlisting in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Father Mark Reamer, Siena's vice president for mission and a veteran, said the return brought meaning not only to the campus but especially to Burke's loved ones.

"I imagine for his family, it's a welcome homecoming and bringing some closure in terms of the unknown of now knowing," Reamer said.

Reamer also reflected on the broader cost of war.

"It's a way to remember his sacrifice and his service, recognizing that every life lost in war represents a heavy price paid," he said.

Burke was brought to Saratoga National Cemetery in a horse-drawn carriage. Surrounded by family, he was laid to rest in a marked grave near a lifelong friend.

"In a remarkable and fitting symmetry, he will rest at Saratoga National Cemetery, not far from where his friend Alex now lies," a speaker said. "Two young men who endured captivity together, reunited and rest."

Burke's hometown will also honor him in the weeks ahead. Troy Mayor Carmella Mantello said a hometown hero banner is being made for Burke and will soon wave alongside banners recognizing other Troy veterans.

"While no amount of time can erase the pain of loss, we hope his return brings a measure of peace and closure to the Burke family. On behalf of the City of Troy, we extend our deepest gratitude to Lt. Burke for his service and sacrifice, and we honor his memory as a hero whose legacy will live on for generations to come," Mantello said.

<https://cbs6albany.com/news/local/wwii-troy-airman-former-pow-joseph-l-burke-laid-to-rest-after-80-year-wait>

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## **After more than 80 years, WWII POW is interred at home (video)**

**WRGB, May 7, 2026 :**

The interment was for 2nd Lt. Joseph L. Burke, known as “Roy,” who grew up in Troy. He was inadvertently killed by American forces while being transported from the Philippines to Japan with other American Prisoners of War in January 1945.

His remains were not identified until 2025 and were brought back to the Capital Region on May 1. Before the interment ceremony was a Mass of Christian Burial at the Siena University Chapel for Burke, and then a funeral procession to Saratoga National Cemetery.

He was interred with full military honors. Lieutenant Burke arrived on a horse-drawn caisson, followed by a rifle volley, taps, and a military flyover. The Patriot Guard Riders and Ladies of Saratoga also presented tributes after a folded American flag was handed to his family.

A pilot during the war, Lt. Burke was captured in the Philippines and held as a POW at a Japanese prison camp. In 1945, he survived an attack on a Japanese POW ship before being transferred to another ship, the Enoura Maru. It was attacked by US planes off Taiwan, killing Lt. Burke and hundreds of others.

“Roy was a young man from Troy, a student of Siena, who dreamed of flight and answered his country’s call,” said Ret. U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Michael Papadopoulous during the ceremony. He continued, “Though many years have passed. Today he is not lost. He is found. He is not forgotten. He is home at last.”

Burke was laid to rest in the same cemetery as his friend and fellow Siena student, Alex Benishek. The two endured captivity together, but only Alex had survived the war. “He will rest at Saratoga National Cemetery, not far from where his friend Alex now lies. Two young men who endured captivity together reunited in rest,” said Ret. Lieutenant Colonel Papadopoulous.

“May we never forget the cost and the humanity of that generation. Welcome home, Roy,” he concluded.

<https://www.news10.com/news/saratoga-county/watch-interment-ceremony-for-wwii-pow-from-troy/amp/>

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## **A POW's final rest (video)**

**WRGB, May 7, 2026 :**

Troy airman and World War II prisoner of war 2nd Lt. Joseph L. Burke was laid to rest at Saratoga National Cemetery Thursday, finally returning home after decades being deemed killed in action. The moment carried special weight for relatives who have long held onto a request Burke's father made to the military years ago: "If you find him, bring him home."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ej4IJVTmOic>

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## **Military Museum**

### **Library Seeks to Preserve 'Stunning' Collection of WWII Veterans' Photos**

**Saratoga Today, May 7, 2026 :**

The National WW II Museum in New Orleans is home to about 250,000 artifacts, including more than 100,000 photographs ranging from battlefield pictures captured by military and press photographers to individual albums full of wartime snapshots donated by veterans and their families.

The New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center located at the former National Guard armory on Lake Avenue in Saratoga Springs, is the repository of more than 16,000 photographs and photographic collections from multiple wars.

However, nowhere in those vast collection of images is there anything comparable to what currently resides in the local history room at the Mechanicville District Public Library: 600-plus photos of individual local World War II veterans in uniform, all of them taken by the same photographer in the same spot inside the same location — Siciliano's Restaurant.

"The photographs are beautiful. This is a stunning collection," Kimberly Guise, senior curator and director for curatorial affairs at The National WWII Museum, said in a recent phone interview.

"The faces of the men and women of Mechanicville and nearby towns and cities who went to war is a touching reminder of the service and sacrifice of all our New York communities," said Richard Goldenberg, Director of Military History for the New York State Division of Military & Naval Affairs, which operates the Saratoga Springs museum. "As the Second World War and Korean War pass into written history with fewer and fewer living voices, these images give us context and perspective of the many young faces of service."

The approximately 700 original black-and-white photographs that make up the Charles Siciliano Sr. WWII and Korean War Veterans Photo Collection are currently housed in eight

large, handmade frames fashioned more than 40 years ago out of paneling and a backing material not conducive to preservation. Each 3-inch-by-3-inch photo and the accompanying name, typewritten by Siciliano on slips of paper, were glued to the matting.

After 60-plus years of being displayed at several local restaurants and more than 20 years in the library's Col. Elmer E. Elsworth history room, the Siciliano collection is in need of attention. Some of the photos have taken on a sepia tone, others have become brittle. A couple of the frames are falling apart, and the glass on one is broken.

The library is planning to launch a campaign to raise the funds needed to properly remount the photos in museum-quality frames with glass that will protect the images from further light damage. While the final cost hasn't been estimated, the campaign is a vital first step toward preserving a collection the National WWII Museum's Guide referred to as "completely unique" in a story I wrote about the Siciliano photographs for The Associated Press in August 2015.

The collection started out as a hobby for Charles Siciliano, Sr., a photography buff known to everyone as Charlie, soon after the U.S. entered WWII following Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. As more local residents went into military service, Siciliano would ask the ones in uniform who came into his restaurant at 30 Warsaw Ave. to sit in the well-lit corner of the bar to have their photo taken.

Siciliano developed and printed his own photos, typically giving a copy to the servicemember or their family, then framing the pictures in groups of 25 that he hung inside the restaurant.

The majority of the approximately 700 photos in the collection were taken during WWII, which formally ended with Japan's surrender on Sept. 2, 1945. Some were taken in 1946 as veterans continued to return from overseas.

All the U.S. military branches during WWII are represented in the collection: Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Air Force (then part of the Army). Some of the men fought in the biggest and bloodiest battles of the war, from D-Day in Normandy to Iwo Jima in the Pacific.

Most of the men in the photographs hailed from Mechanicville, and about half of those identified have Italian American last names, a reflection of the influx of Italian immigrants to the city starting in the late 19th century and continuing into the early 1900s, including Siciliano's parents. Men from nearby communities in Saratoga County – Stillwater, Waterford, Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa – also were photographed, as were several from Schaghticoke and Troy in neighboring Rensselaer County.

The collection includes the photos of four women WWII veterans from Mechanicville: Lucille Ennelo Marcelle, Doris Lazott Noonan, Mary DiBello West and Anna Cefalo. West and Cefalo were in the Women's Army Corps (WACs), while Marcelle (Pacific Theater) and Noonan (Pacific and European Theaters) served in the Army Nurses Corps.

At least three men whose photos are in the collection are known to have died during WWII, including Army Pfc. Henry A. “Rocky” Marcelle, of Mechanicville, who died of wounds suffered in combat in Europe in March 1945.

Charlie Sr., who died in 1982, kept the framed photos on the walls of his tavern until he sold the business in the late 1970s to Frank Costanzo, who had the snapshots rearranged alphabetically in eight large frames. The collection went with Costanzo when he relocated his business to the town of Waterford. The photographs and negatives were eventually donated to the Mechanicville library.

Siciliano’s Restaurant was torn down years ago to make way for new apartments.

Starting in 2001, through an effort led by the late Michael Sullvian of Mechanicville, names were attached to more than 500 of the photographs when the collection was digitized on the library’s website (<https://meclib.sals.edu/>).

It’s not known if any of the WWII veterans in the Siciliano collection are still living. Anthony “Tony” Fortune, an Air Force veteran who died in December 2024, two weeks shy of his 101st birthday, may have been the last.

As part of the fundraising effort, at 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 7, at the Arts Center on the Hudson in Mechanicville, I’ll be doing the first in a series of free presentations on the Siciliano photo collection. Others are planned for 7 p.m. Thursday, June 18, at the Saratoga County History Center at Brookside Museum in Ballston Spa, and at the Saratoga Springs Public Library at 12 p.m. Sept. 10.

The talks are free. Registration is recommended to reserve a seat. For the Mechanicville talk, register here: <https://forms.gle/8BAPY3J5dgo3Nwzx9>. For the Saratoga County History Center talk, register at Charlie’s Heroes – Saratoga County History Center. Registration information for the Saratoga Springs library talk will be posted on its website.

<https://saratogatodaynewspaper.com/library-seeks-to-preserve-stunning-collection-of-wwii-veterans-photos/>

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## **Naval Militia**

### **Ovid to host Memorial Day parade and ceremony on May 25**

**Fingerlakes1.com, May 6, 2026 :**

The Town of Ovid will honor fallen service members later this month with its annual Memorial Day parade and ceremony featuring military leaders, elected officials, and local community representatives.

The parade is scheduled for Sunday, May 25, beginning at 11 a.m. Organizers say participants will march down Main Street from South Seneca Middle/High School to the Ovid Fire Department before the community gathers at Three Bears Park for a memorial ceremony.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6200 announced that Rear Adm. Michael Perry, an Ovid native serving with the New York Naval Militia and the United States Navy, will deliver the keynote address.

Other scheduled participants include Tom O'Mara, Phil Palmesano, Ovid Town Supervisor Joseph Borst, and Ovid Village Mayor Aaron Roisen.

Organizers said the ceremony will commemorate the men and women who died serving the United States during times of war.

<https://www.fingerlakes1.com/2026/05/06/ovid-to-host-memorial-day-parade-and-ceremony-on-may-25/>

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## **New York Air National Guard**

### **Five local airmen receive promotions**

**Rome Sentinel, May 5, 2026 :**

LATHAM — Five area residents have received promotions with the New York Air National Guard in recognition of their capacity for additional responsibility and leadership, according to an announcement by Air Force Major Gen. Gary Charlton, the commander of the New York Air National Guard.

They are:

Tyler Harrington, of Munnsville, 224th Support Squadron, promoted to master sergeant;

Zachary Houle, of Rome, 224th Air Defense Squadron, promoted to technical sergeant;

Anthony Jusino, of Rome, 224th Air Defense Squadron, promoted to staff sergeant; and

Robert Kraeger, of Rome, 224th Support Squadron, promoted to technical sergeant; and

Joe Rappold, of Rome, 224th Support Squadron, promoted to first lieutenant.

Air National Guard promotions are based on an airman's overall performance, demonstrated leadership abilities, professionalism and future development potential, the announcement

said, adding that additional information on the New York Air National Guard is available online at <https://dmna.ny.gov/ang/>.

[https://www.romesentinel.com/entertainment-life/notices/advancements/five-local-airmen-receive-promotions/article\\_2ae5c409-99ae-4147-9dd3-af0596ede55e.html](https://www.romesentinel.com/entertainment-life/notices/advancements/five-local-airmen-receive-promotions/article_2ae5c409-99ae-4147-9dd3-af0596ede55e.html)

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## **New York Army National Guard**

### **NY Army Guard's 53rd Troop Command leader gets brigadier general's star**

**Army.mil, May 4, 2026 :**

LATHAM, New York --Niskayuna resident Jason Lefton, the Commander of the New York Army National Guard's 53rd Troop Command, was promoted to brigadier general during a Friday, May 1 ceremony at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham.

Lefton, a veteran of two deployments to Iraq—in 2004 and 2008—has led the 5,050 Soldiers of the 53rd Troop Command since January.

Lefton is an Army aviator with over 2,200 flying hours with the UH-60 Black Hawk and CH-47 Chinook helicopters, and C-12 transport airplane.

He previously served as the commander of the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade and the 3rd Assault Helicopter Battalion, 142nd Aviation Regiment.

Prior to taking over the 53rd Troop Command, Lefton had been a full-time National Guard officer, serving as the State Army Aviation Officer. He now serves as a traditional part-time National Guard officer.

Major General Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, praised Lefton as a highly competent officer.

Very few officers rise to the rank of General, Shields said. In the 12,000-Soldier New York Army National Guard there are 1,135 officers, but only three brigadier general officers, he pointed out.

"The pyramid gets very small, very rapidly," Shields said.

He charged Lefton to always take care of the Soldiers in his command.

"We can talk until we are blue in the face, but without the support and commitment of our people, we are powerless," Shields said. "Always remember that our job is to think strategically and to ensure our most valuable asset—our people—are always our highest priority".

In his remarks Lefton said he is proud to serve as the commander of the 53rd Troop Command.

The command includes combat support and combat service support units located across New York.

Lefton thanked those who he has worked for and with throughout his career for their support and the things he learned from them. This kind of teamwork, he emphasized, is vital.

"I loved flying all those airframes, but I was also blessed with excellent maintainers who always ensured operations and that everything was safe," Lefton said.

He emphasized that the new rank belongs to his support system as much as himself.

"This promotion isn't just for me. It's all of us," Lefton said. "Our whole family, the stars are ours".

He also thanked his wife Heather and his sons Mack and Seth for their support of his career, who were in attendance along with his mother, Lisa, sister, Shannon, and other family.

Lefton's father, Barry Lefton, a retired Navy Petty officer, his brother Army National Guard Lt. Col. Aaron Lefton, his brother Scott Lefton, a retired Army Major, and his brother Travis Lefton, a Navy veteran, were also present.

During the ceremony, Command Sergeant Major Anthony Giamberdino and Sergeant Major Gregory Martin unfurled Lefton's personal one-star general officer flag.

The red flag with a single white star signifies the general's authority and will be displayed at official military functions he attends.

Lefton's 30-year military career began in 1996, when he earned his commission from the Marion Military Institute. He initially served as a field artillery officer with the 1st Battalion, 156th Field Artillery before transitioning to Army aviation in 2000.

Lefton is a veteran of four overseas deployments, serving in Bosnia in 2002, Iraq in 2004 and 2008, and Kuwait in 2013. While in command of the 3rd Battalion, 142nd Aviation he led disaster response efforts following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico.

In his civilian life, Lefton serves as the director of Real Property and Facilities Management for the New York State Office of General Services, better known as OGS.

OGS Commissioner Jeanette Moy was also present at the promotion ceremony.

Lefton is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College and holds a Master of Business Administration from the University of Phoenix, and a Bachelor of Arts in Rhetoric and Communication from SUNY, Albany.

His awards include the Legion of Merit, two Bronze Star Medals, four Meritorious Service Medals, the Iraq Campaign Medal with three service stars, the Combat Action Badge, and the Air Assault Badge.

[https://www.army.mil/article/292190/ny\\_army\\_guards\\_53rd\\_troop\\_command\\_leader\\_gets\\_brigadier\\_generals\\_star](https://www.army.mil/article/292190/ny_army_guards_53rd_troop_command_leader_gets_brigadier_generals_star)

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## **New York Guard**

### **Brian Peck will deliver JCC's keynote address**

**WWTI, May 5, 2026:**

WATERTOWN, N.Y. (WWTI) – Jefferson Community College (JCC) will have its 62nd Commencement Ceremony for December 2025, May 2026, and August 2026 graduating students on Friday, May 15, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. Brian Peck, Class of 1998 and Jefferson County Treasurer, will deliver the keynote address.

Peck, a lifelong resident of Northern New York and raised on an eighth-generation dairy farm, has a strong commitment to community service and leadership. At 25, he founded Coughlin Printing, expanding it to 18 employees before entering public service. His government career includes roles such as Director of Operations for State Senator Patty Ritchie and Town Supervisor for Champion. As a Second Lieutenant in the New York Guard, he also serves as Executive Officer for the 56th Company. Peck previously worked as Associate Dean at Davis College and volunteered with various organizations, including teaching English in China and helping build a school in Bolivia.

Peck has an associate's degree from Jefferson, a bachelor's in earth science from SUNY Brockport, and a master's in counseling from Summit University.

The Commencement Ceremony will commence at 7 p.m. in the McVean Student Center Gymnasium and will be video-streamed live on the College's website beginning at 6:45 p.m. Commencement information for graduates and guests is available online. You can contact JCC at 315-786-2404 with any questions.

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<https://local.newsbreak.com/informnny-abc50-1590551/4633418110230-brian-peck-will-deliver-jcc-s-keynote-address>

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## **New York National Guard**

## **Military news: Area residents serving in NY Army National Guard, Air National Guard promoted**

**Kingston Daily Freeman, May 3, 2026 :**

Promoted

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

\* Timothy Agosta of Saugerties, assigned to 206th Military Police Company, to the rank of specialist on Monday, Feb. 9.

\* Eliot Diaz of Ellenville, N.Y., assigned to Bravo Company, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, to the rank of specialist on Wednesday, March 4.

\* Caden Marquez of Kingston, N.Y., assigned to Bravo Company, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, to the rank of private second class on Wednesday, March 18.

\* Shamar Delgado Vergara of Pine Bush, N.Y., assigned to Bravo Company, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, to the rank of private second class on Wednesday, March 4.

The following area residents serving in the New York Air National Guard were promoted:

\* Michelle Couser of Pine Bush, assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, to the rank of captain on Wednesday, March 11.

\* Andrew Horton of Wallkill, assigned to the 106th Rescue Wing, to the rank of staff sergeant on Sunday, Feb. 1.

\* Bradford Jollie of Hurley, assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, to the rank of master sergeant on Sunday, Feb. 1.

\* Kevonie Black of Kingston, assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing, to the rank of airman on Wednesday, Aug. 13, 2025.

\* Andrea Guevara of Marlboro, assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, to the rank of senior airman on Wednesday, Aug. 27, 2025.

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<https://www.dailyfreeman.com/2026/05/03/military-news-area-residents-serving-in-n-y-army-national-guard-air-national-guard-promoted/>

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**State Partnership Program**

## **Swedish Armed Forces, New York National Guard Train Together in Aurora 26 Exercise (video)**

Sweden's Swedish Armed Forces conducted joint drills with the New York National Guard near Stockholm as part of the Aurora 26 exercise. Around 1,500 Swedish troops and 80 U.S. soldiers trained in forest reconnaissance and coordinated operations to enhance interoperability. Brigade commander Colonel Martin Johansson said the drills aim to strengthen NATO deterrence amid rising regional threats. The large-scale exercise involves 18,000 personnel from 13 countries and focuses on readiness to respond to potential crises. Both forces highlighted the value of shared training and adapting to different terrain and operational conditions.

Transcript:

Video shows

KUNGSANGEN, SWEDEN (APRIL 30, 2026)(REUTERS)

VARIOUS OF SWEDISH ARMOURED VEHICLES DRIVING THROUGH A FOREST

SWEDISH SOLDIER WATCHING AS SOLDIERS REMOVE CAMOUFLAGE FROM AN ARMOURED VEHICLE

VARIOUS OF SWEDISH SOLDIERS REMOVING CAMOUFLAGE NETTING FROM AN ARMOURED VEHICLE IN A FOREST

(SOUNDBITE)(English) COMMANDER OF THE SWEDISH FIRST INFANTRY BRIGADE, COLONEL MARTIN JOHANSSON, SAYING:

"We are part of this Aurora exercise, and the scenario (in the exercise) is that there has been an increased threat along the eastern border of NATO territory and also some hybrid attacks in Northern Europe. And therefore, we have activated and mobilized part of our wartime organization and part of the First Infantry Brigade. And our task is to strengthen our capability in this area and to deter within NATO and, if necessary, defend Swedish and NATO territory."

SWEDISH ARMOURED VEHICLE IN THE WOODS

SOLDIER ON TOP OF THE ARMOURED VEHICLE

SOLDIERS STANDING NEAR THE ARMOURED VEHICLE

ARMOURED VEHICLE DRIVING PAST

(SOUNDBITE)(English) COMMANDER OF THE SWEDISH FIRST INFANTRY BRIGADE, COLONEL MARTIN JOHANSSON, SAYING:

“We have a good capability in the Swedish Armed Forces and within NATO, and we are strong and ready to deter and defend. But of course the situation is worsening, and our main effort is to succeed with the deterrence, not to be able to need to defend the territory.”

VARIOUS OF U.S. SOLDIERS FROM THE NEW YORK NATIONAL GUARD IN A FOREST

NEW YORK NATIONAL GUARDSMAN HOLDING A RIFLE

NATIONAL GUARDSMAN CONSULTING A MAP

(SOUNDBITE) (English) SWEDISH SOLDIER WITH A RECONNAISSANCE PLATOON, ANDERSSON, FIRST NAME NOT SUPPLIED, SAYING:

“We're training for reconnaissance here in the Swedish forest. As my experience of talking to them (the members of the New York National Guard), it's a bit different from what they're used to, with the terrain being different and all helping each other out as well.”

VARIOUS OF NEW YORK NATIONAL GUARD MEMBERS IN A FOREST

(SOUNDBITE) (English) PLATOON LEADER IN THE NEW YORK NATIONAL GUARD, LIEUTENANT CROSTON, FIRST NAME NOT SUPPLIED, SAYING :

“It's useful for us to come out and do this training because Sweden is New York's newest state partner, and coming to do this training will help us develop a shared understanding and common picture of operations.”

NEW YORK NATIONAL GUARDS TROOPS WITH SWEDISH SOLDIER

VARIOUS OF NEW YORK NATIONAL GUARDS TROOPS WALKING THROUGH A FOREST

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyUo-fffO0o>

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