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# FROM THE LEADERSHIP

## Troops Learn to Balance COVID and Training

Greetings. I am Brig. Gen. Jack James, Commander of the 53rd Troop Command, and it is my honor to provide this quarter's edition of From the Leadership.

I'm grateful to our adjutant general, Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, for this opportunity to communicate directly with you, the men and women of our New York Military Forces.

As General Shields has noted, 2020 has shaped up to be a year like no other.

We are now over six months into the COVID-19 pandemic which has changed just about everything about how we live and work. The widespread civil unrest we've experienced across the country in the aftermath of the tragic death of George Floyd, and the economic downturn have posed generational challenges which are still unfolding.

And yet, even in these troubling times, we find inspiration and hope. The greatest thing I've seen in 2020 is the truly incredible response of the members of our Army and Air National Guard, Naval Militia and New York Guard to the call of our fellow citizens at a time when they needed us most.

Our Soldiers, Airmen, Naval Militia and New York Guardsmen responded in force to the myriad of challenges posed by COVID-19: manning test sites across the state; managing warehouses jammed with supplies and moving them where they were needed; distributing meals and hand sanitizer to our fellow citizens; creating a field hospital at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center; and leading efforts to recover our deceased fellow Americans in a dignified manner.

To each of you who played a role in these and other important missions, I thank you and your families. I am truly in awe of your dedication and commitment. Each of you stared an invisible enemy in the face, and answered the call when the people of New York needed you most.

But the mission is not yet over. Even today, we have over 1,100 service members on duty providing manning test sites, providing physical security, providing warehouse support, and other missions. This important work will

continue at least through the end of 2020.

I am proud to be a member of a responsive, learning organization that not only met

the challenge of COVID-19 head on, but also adapted quickly to a "new normal" to sustain and build readiness. At the height of the crisis, we instituted "virtual" drills weekends.

By July we returned to physical drill weekends and annual training by employing safety measures that include social distancing, wearing of masks, and enhanced emphasis on sanitization and hygiene.

While the changes may have taken some getting used to, they are foundational to keeping our members safe and healthy as we return to individual and collective training.

Our ability to continue to generate combat power and deploy formations in this new environment was vividly demonstrated by the outstanding pre-mobilization training of the 466th Area Support Medical Company under the leadership of Maj. Jason Cossey and 1st Sgt. Scott Kyle.

The Soldiers of the 466th literally wrote the book on training in a socially distanced environment. After mobilizing and moving to Fort Hood, these great Soldiers are now deployed overseas performing their wartime mission in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. We look forward to their progress on this mission, and welcoming them home in 2021.

The New York National Guard leadership team is counting on each of you to stay healthy.

We cannot perform our wartime or domestic missions if we are not well. This means we each of us must continue to follow COVID-19 health guidelines; avoiding large crowds, staying home when you feel sick and above all wearing a protective face mask.

A Soldier or Airman can't train and can't deploy when he or she is sick. I ask each of you to be a battle buddy for your fellow service members, and to continue to follow health guidance at all times.

As we navigate through these challenges, our command teams will increasingly

pivot our efforts to returning to individual and collective training.

Given the extended COVID-19 response, I ask all leaders to re-emphasize safety and risk management.

It is critical that we follow a crawl-walk-run approach to all training.

This is particularly important in operating our tactical vehicles. Leaders: let's make sure that we provide our Soldiers and Airmen with the drivers training and time behind the wheel they need, and the supervision they deserve, to build their skill and confidence in a risk managed environment.

Thanks again to each of you for all you do! Please extend my thanks and best wishes for continued good health to your families as well.

Mission First! Soldiers Always!



Brig. Gen. Jack James



Governor Andrew M. Cuomo holds a press conference in front of members of the New York National Guard at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York City, March 27, 2020. Guardsmen turned the convention center into an alternate care site as part of New York's multi-agency response to COVID-19. Cuomo praised the courage, skill and dedication of Guard members in their pandemic response. Photo by Senior Airman Sean Madden, 106th Rescue Wing.





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Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, COMMANDER IN CHIEF  
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**New York Army National Guard Sgt. Thalia Santos from Yonkers, N.Y., carries boxed meals to a waiting vehicle at a food distribution site in the Bronx, August 5, 2020. New York National Guard members are supporting the multi-agency response to COVID-19 and delivered more than 52 million meals to city residents. Photo by Senior Airman Sean Madden, 106th Rescue Wing.**



FRONT COVER: 2nd Lt. Joseph Murray, a platoon leader assigned to Bravo Company, 427th Brigade Support Battalion, participates in a container delivery system exercise at Fort Drum, N.Y., July 23rd, 2020. During the training, a C-130J Hercules from the Air Guard's 109th Airlift Wing airdropped pallets of supplies. Photo by Sgt. Alexander Rector, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.  
BACK COVER: New York Army National Guard Cpl. Troy Perez, an infantryman assigned to Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, and winner of the enlisted category in the state Best Warrior competition, performs the sprint, drag and carry portion of the Army Combat Fitness Test at Camp Smith, N.Y., July 25, 2020. Photo by Sgt. Matthew Gunther, Joint Force Headquarters.

## New Soldier Crams Career of Experience in her First Year

Story by Spc. Marla Ogden, 138th Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP SMITH TRAINING SITE, N.Y. — Within less than a year, Spc. Olivia Mannetti, became a Soldier, helped New York State in the fight against COVID-19 and deployed to the Middle East in the midst of a global pandemic.

Mannetti, age 22 and a Schenectady resident, is a combat medic in the New York Army National Guard's 466th Medical Company, Area Support. The company mobilized and deployed in August.

As a child, Mannetti was raised in a military household. Her father was a Marine and her mother's side of the family was Navy. She decided that she too wanted to serve.

"Ever since I was little and saw my dad in uniform I knew I wanted to be in the military," she said.

After graduating from college in Colorado, Mannetti decided she should not ignore that calling any longer and joined the Army National Guard.

"I called my mom and told her I was moving home for two weeks and then going to basic training," she said. "I drove back across the country with my stuff, a week later I met with my recruiter, and a week after that I enlisted."

Mannetti graduated from Advanced Individual

Training in early November of 2019, and only attended three drills with her unit before COVID-19 struck the nation.

Even though she was new to the unit, Mannetti volunteered to serve as part of the New York National Guard's response to the COVID-19 crisis.

"I jumped right on it," Mannetti said. "It was awesome to immediately start doing my job as a combat medic."

Along with other combat medics from the 466th, Mannetti operated in a clinic at Camp Smith Training Site, responsible for in-processing and caring for Guardsmen coming onto the mission.

Outside of the military, Mannetti works as an emergency medical technician. She enjoys being a combat medic because she has acquired new skills in the medical field that most EMTs do not have exposure to on the civilian side.

In addition, Mannetti works as a Ski Patrolter during the winter months, providing emergency medical care to skiers.

"Her history of being part of the ski patrol here in New York and Colorado helps bring a different set of skills to our company," said 466th 1st Sgt. Scott Kyle.

"She's a fantastic Soldier.

She's motivated to progress at her specialty," Kyle added.

Mannetti said she first discovered her interest in emergency medicine as a counselor at a camp for children with disabilities.

"I wanted to better understand their cases and disabilities," she explained.

Her biggest motivator, Mannetti said, was the fact that her younger brother, Daniel, who attended the camp, wrestled with medical issues.

When Daniel was 11 years old, he was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease.

"He's pretty much been in and out of the hospital for the last ten years," she said.

The day prior to graduating from AIT, she was informed that he had been diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

"It was an overwhelming day, and I think I pushed it aside at that time and just told him 'hey, we got this,'" she said.

Because Daniel is immunocompromised, Mannetti has been unable to visit her brother during the pandemic. Instead, she said, she continued to stay focused and hoped that by doing her part in the fight against COVID, the two would be reunited soon.

She had to quickly switch gears however, as the 466th began preparing to deploy.

"I'm absolutely looking forward to this deployment, it's what I signed up for,"

-- Spc. Olivia Mannetti, 466th Area Support Medical Company



Spc. Olivia Mannetti, assigned to the 466th Area Support Medical Company, takes a break while training for deployment to the Middle East at Camp Smith Training Site, near Peekskill, N.Y. on June 12, 2020. Mannetti is a new Soldier to the company who served in the pandemic response prior to her mobilization for deployment August 1. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantoni, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

Pre-mobilization training is especially mentally and physically demanding for combat medics, Kyle said. They are entrusted with providing initial emergency medical treatment and resuscitative trauma care in combat environments.

"The training we're conducting here is essential to our mission," said Kyle.

The need to deal with social distancing restrictions to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus required 466th leaders to revise their training plans and find new ways to accomplish their mission, Kyle explained.

This made ordinary pre-deployment training events more demanding, but Mannetti and the other Soldiers

did well anyway, he added.

With training over, the Soldiers have some time at home with family before they deploy.

The timeline couldn't have worked any better for her, Mannetti said. Her brother just finished chemotherapy.

Mannetti said she is looking forward to putting her combat medic skills into action on deployment.

She believes that the time spent working in the clinic at Camp Smith Training Site was a helpful introduction to part of her job as a combat medic.

"I'm absolutely looking forward to this deployment, it's what I signed up for," she said. **gt**

# 107<sup>th</sup> Attack Wing Member Receives NAACP Award

Story by 2nd Lt. Jason Carr, 107th Attack Wing

NIAGARA FALLS AIR RESERVE STATION, N.Y. — Senior Master Sgt. Venita Smith, assigned to the 107th Attack Wing, has been selected as the Air National Guard recipient of the NAACP Roy Wilkins Renown Service Award 2020.

She was chosen from across the Air Force for emphasizing those who serve their community and are dedicated to improving society.



Senior Master Sgt. Venita Smith received the NAACP Roy Wilkins Renown Service Award for 2020. The annual award recognizes service members for their efforts in their communities. Courtesy photo.

"Senior Master Sgt. Smith exemplifies what a candidate for the Roy Wilkins Award should aspire to be," said Col. Gary Charlton, commander of the 107th. "She is committed to helping anyone she comes in contact with, all Airmen and members of our communities. She is the Airmen's Airman. Senior Master Sgt. Smith makes us all want to stand a little bit taller!"

Smith enlisted in the Air Force in medical administration in 1990. She served on active duty and in 2002 transferred to the New York Air National Guard.

As a surprise to Smith, her commander, Col. Todd Guay, commander of the 107th Operations Group, nominated her for the award in September of 2019.

"I immediately thought of Senior Master Sgt. Smith," Guay said. "Having hired Smith as my operations squadron first sergeant four years ago, I have never seen a more compassionate, caring, and selfless leader in the Air Force."

"Smith not only cares deeply about her military family, she shows that same caring attitude towards

her community," he said.

When she received the award, Smith remarked on community and service as her motivation.

"Winning this award, it's not about me. It's about showing that the Air National Guard here in New York can be a model, especially at this wing. I was allowed to shine and be me," Smith said. "Anything less than ownership is not an option, take care of yourself and others".

The Roy Wilkins Renown Service Award is presented annually to members of the armed forces in recognition of their efforts in promoting civil rights and the qualities and core values of their service. The award is so named in honor of Roy Wilkins, who led the NAACP for more than 20 years.

Coworkers describe Smith as exemplifying "leading by example" in both civilian and military communities. One such example comes from her time with Pillars of Hope in her hometown of Rochester, N.Y.

Pillars of Hope, supported by the City of Rochester volunteers, Smith says, "are local African-American and Hispanic professionals who

work with adopted city schools to provide personal experiences and positive support to elementary and middle school aged students."

Smith describes her most emotional experience, "I remember asking the person who got me involved what to wear, and they said my uniform. When I got to the classroom, the teacher asked the children how many had seen a woman of color in a uniform. None of them had ever seen that. That's when I was thankful I did wear it; they need to see things to envision it [for themselves]...this is what I'm going to wear every time. That was important to me."

Smith credits her parents with influencing the community work of herself and her two sisters.

"My mother and father said you three are the best of us; you reflect us. It was never just about us, we reflect them," she said. "We were always active in the community because this is our community."

As she takes on new responsibilities at the 107th, she has one reminder for fellow Airmen.

"Just be open. There is more out there than we even know." **gt**

## EADS Airman Tops in NORAD

Story by Timothy Jones, 224th Air Defense Squadron

ROME, N.Y. — Staff Sgt. Gary Gillespie is the North American Aerospace Defense Command's Outstanding Junior Enlisted Airman for 2019.

A New York Air National Guardsman stationed at the Eastern Air Defense Sector (EADS), Gillespie is an intelligence analyst with the 224th Air Defense Squadron. He received the NORAD award for his outstanding training and instruction contributions and his work on the unit's cyber intelligence team.

The NORAD award also recognized Gillespie's superb performance during four major NORAD and U.S. Northern Command exercises and his volunteer efforts in the community.

The selection begins with submissions to NORAD, with a board then evaluating each nomination and

ranking them based on leadership, job performance, self improvement and base and community involvement.

This is the third Outstanding Airman award Gillespie has won this year. He received the Continental NORAD Region-1st Air Force award in March and EADS' Outstanding Airman award in January.

The 224th Air Defense Group is composed of the 224th Air Defense Squadron and 224th Support Squadron, located in Rome, and Detachment 1 and Detachment 2 that serve in the Washington, D.C. area. The group provides the forces to conduct the Eastern Air Defense Sector's mission.

Part of the North American Aerospace Defense Command, the Sector is responsible for the air defense of the eastern United States. **gt**



Staff Sgt. Gary Gillespie, an intelligence analyst with the 224th Air Defense Squadron at the Eastern Air Defense Sector, is the North American Aerospace Defense Command's Outstanding Junior Enlisted Airman for 2019. Courtesy photo.

# Army Guard Leader Receives Second Star

## Major General Natali now the fourth two-star leader in NY

Story by Col. Richard Goldenberg, Joint Force Headquarters

LATHAM, N.Y. — New York Army National Guard Brigadier General Michel Natali, a Halfmoon, New York, resident, received his second star during his promotion to the rank of major general during a ceremony on Friday, August 14, at the New York National Guard headquarters in Latham.

Major General Ray Shields, the Adjutant General of New York, and Natali's wife Barbara pinned his new stars in front of a socially distant audience of 40 New York National Guard leaders and staff. A live-stream was provided for Natali's family, including his parents in Watertown, N.Y.

"Today is a great day," Shields said in his remarks. "A great day for Mike Natali, a great day for Mike's family and friends and a great day for the New York Army National Guard."

Natali, a retired New York State Police Investigator, is a veteran of the Iraq War and deployed to Somalia and Haiti while assigned to the 10th Mountain Division in the 1990s.

He is now the fourth two-star general in the New York National Guard.

Natali serves as the Assistant Adjutant General, Army for the New York National Guard. He is responsible for the training and organization of the 10,300-members of the New York Army National Guard.

"Achieving this rank is a huge accomplishment," Shields said. "Mike, you are a great leader, with huge amounts of experience leading complex organizations and fixing problems. Promotion to major general demonstrates your potential for continued service at the strategic levels of our Army."

Natali also serves as the Deputy Commanding General, Army National Guard, for the United States Army Cyber Center of Excellence at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

During the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Natali served as the Dual Status Commander-New York, responsible for commanding both National Guard and Active Duty federal forces assigned to the response in New York City.

"I am truly appreciative of the opportunity to continue service to our state and nation, and most of all I am grateful to continue to serve



Brigadier General Michel Natali receives his second star from his wife Barbara and Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the Adjutant General of New York, during his promotion to the rank of major general on August 14 in Latham, N.Y. Below, Natali reviews his general officer's flag unfurling from Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Ciampolillo and Staff Sgt. Steven Waite following his promotion. Photos by William Albrecht, Guard Times Staff.

alongside our great Soldiers, Airmen, Naval Militia, New York Guard and civilian work force," Natali said. "I am always impressed by the performance of our organization and our units, whether it be on deployment overseas or here in New York."

Natali thanked leaders, Soldiers and their families for their continued trust.

"Our formations are comprised of the best New York and our nation has to offer," he said. "New York's families endure countless sacrifices in order to support their Guard Soldier or Airmen. To lead and care for them is a serious commitment we not only owe the Soldier but one we owe to our families as well. We can't do anything without them."

Natali is a Watertown native and 1983 graduate of Immaculate Heart Central High School, who served in the 10th Mountain Division before becoming a New York State Trooper after leaving the active Army.

Natali retired from the New York State Police as an investigator after 20 years. He spent his first years in the New York State Police patrol-



ling Jefferson County. He was assigned to the New York State Intelligence Center at the time of his retirement.

Natali has served as Assistant Adjutant General as a full-time National Guard officer since 2017. Prior to that he commanded the 53rd Troop Command. **gt**



## 42<sup>nd</sup> Band Adapts to COVID-19 to Keep Playing

*Story and photo by Ryan Campbell, Guard Times Staff*

More than 30 Soldiers of the 42nd Infantry Division Band perform at Joint Force Headquarters in Latham, N.Y., July 17, 2020. With all regular public performances cancelled this summer due to COVID-19, the band arranged this one event to meet their annual training requirements.

LATHAM, N.Y. — Summer for the 42nd Infantry Division band usually means a schedule of touring with performances all across the state.

With the COVID-19 pandemic however, all plans for touring had to be cancelled. This left the band to improvise a way to perform and meet training requirements.

A performance at the state headquarters July 17 was the sole event to certify the band as mission capable, explained 1st Sgt. Leslie Saroka, the 42nd Division Band first sergeant.

“Due to COVID, all of our missions were cancelled and we arranged to come up here. Since we are a band our ultimate mission is to perform,” Saroka said.

Saroka said that during a normal year, the band will conduct at least 15 to 20 performances, between their annual training and various other events such as recruiting events and formal, military dining in events.

“I was really, really looking forward to it,” said Sgt. Emily Perkins, a piano player and vocalist in the band.

Perkins spent more than four years in active

Army bands before transferring to the New York Army National Guard in November 2019. This would have been her first tour with the 42nd Division Band.

“I was excited to go on the road for a number of days with my new bandmates,” Perkins said. “But now we are at our homestation everyday instead of going out and playing for the public.”

The downtime has been good for morale however, Perkins explained. It has allowed her and other new band members to get to know everyone, having not performed since January.

“We’re all having fun anyway no matter what,” Perkins said. “The last performance we did was before the lock down at a military ball in Saratoga. It was to celebrate the division going on a deployment. It was a lot of fun.”

Musicians like Perkins come into the band as established musicians, having to pass what Saroka described as a tough audition process.

“I’ve been a musician for most of my life, I studied music in college,” Perkins said.

The opportunity to serve as a musician has attracted people from very diverse back-

grounds. Spc. Lei Han, a saxophone and piano player, is originally from China, having lived in the U.S. for only eight years now, spending the last year and a half in the 42nd Band.

“I’ve played keyboard since I was 6 years old,” Han said. “I’ve played saxophone since I was 13 or 14.”

Being such a small group, Saroka said that it feels like everyone is family with so many people staying in the band and making a career of it until retirement. Saroka himself, after serving in the Army’s Ranger Regiment in the 1980s, returned to playing clarinet like he did in high school and has been with the band since 1998.

With COVID-19 having put a temporary halt to live performances, the band members said they look forward to being in front of audiences again in the future. Until then, their goal is to adapt to the changes, maintain their proficiency and be ready for whenever they are called upon.

“If you have a talent no matter what it is, you should be using it serve the community, that’s always been part of me,” Perkins said. “Doing things for others with my talents.” **gt**

## Henry Johnson's Story Told in Digital Comic

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

LATHAM, N.Y. — Sgt. Henry Johnson, the Albany resident whose World War I service in the New York National Guard's 369th Infantry Regiment was finally recognized with the Medal of Honor in 2015, is now the subject of a digital comic issued by the Association of the United States Army.

The 11-page comic, which the association is calling a "digital graphic novel," retells the story of Johnson's actions on May 14, 1918.

Johnson and Pvt. Needham Roberts were on outpost duty when a German raiding party attacked their position out in front of the trenches. The two Americans fought back with grenades and rifle fire. When Roberts was knocked unconscious and Germans tried to carry him away, Johnson attacked them with his remaining weapon, a bolo knife.

The 369th had been fighting with the French army and Johnson was the first American to receive the French Croix de Guerre with a golden palm, France's highest award for bravery. But the Medal of Honor eluded him until 2015 when it was presented posthumously by

President Barack Obama.

The 369th Infantry was an African-American regiment in a segregated Army. The unit fought under French command because no American commander wanted them.

They went on to become one of the most decorated units in World War I.

The Henry Johnson digital comic is the sixth produced by the Association of the United States Army, known as AUSA for short, which focuses on recipients of the Medal of Honor.

Other comics deal with the late Senator Daniel Inouye, who earned the Medal of Honor serving with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a Japanese-American unit, during World War II and Lt. Audie Murphy the most decorated Soldier in American history who also served in World War II.

The other online books tell the stories of Sgt. Alvin York from World War I, Staff Sgt. Roy Benavidez, a Vietnam War veteran, and Staff Sgt. Sal Giunta who fought in Afghanistan.

The online comics, which can also be downloaded as pdf files are being released as part of AUSA's effort to educate the public about the Army.

Johnson is the only National Guard Soldier to be documented so far by the series.

The next two comics will feature Dr. Mary Walker, a Civil War surgeon and only woman to receive the Medal of Honor; and Cpl. Tibor Rubin, a Holocaust survivor who fought in Korea.

The Henry Johnson book was produced by a team of professionals whose other products have included Spiderman, Superman, Batman, Wolverine and X-Men titles.

The short book focuses on the incident for which Johnson was eventually awarded the Medal of Honor, but also includes summaries of his life before the war when he worked as a porter at the train station in Albany, N.Y. and his speaking tour after World War I.

The final panel depicts former New York Army National Guard Command Sgt. Major Louis Wilson receiving the medal on behalf of Johnson, from President Obama at the White House on June 2, 2015. **gt**



Sgt. Henry Johnson a New York National Guard Soldier who was awarded the Medal of Honor Posthumously for his actions during World War I attacks a German Soldier in these panels from a "digital graphic novel" about Johnson released by the Association of the United States Army.







## Soldiers Restore Regimental Doughboy Headstone

*Story by Sgt. Alexander Rector, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team*

Soldiers assigned to the Headquarters Company of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry work to repair the headstone of World War I Soldier Pvt. Laurence Uebelacker on May 26, 2020. Uebelacker was killed while storming the Hindenburg Line as part of the 108th Infantry in WWI. His gravestone had fallen over and the Soldiers repaired it. Courtesy photo.

ONEIDA, N.Y. — The gravestone of a New York National Guard Soldier who died more than 100 years ago, was set right after Memorial Day, 2020 by present-day members of the regiment he served with during World War I.

Ten members of Headquarters Company of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry, volunteered May 26 to restore the headstone marking the resting place of Pvt. Laurence Uebelacker in a small cemetery near Oneida, N.Y.

According to historical records, Uebelacker was living in Oneida when he enlisted in Company F of the regiment, New York National Guard on June 27, 1917. The regiment was federalized and renamed the 108th Infantry, a part of the 27th Division on October 1, 1917.

The 27th Division was one of two American divisions that served with the British army in Flanders during World War I. In the closing weeks of the war the 27th was assigned the mission of cracking the line of German fortifications named after General Hindenburg, the German army commander.

The 20-year old Uebelacker was killed in that assault on Sept. 29, 1918.

According to Craig Burleigh, a former Soldier of the 108th, division records indicate Uebelacker was buried near Bellicourt, Belgium following his death. The family apparently had his remains returned to the U.S. in 1921.

It was Burleigh who discovered the grave.

"I was at the cemetery visiting my mother's grave and I saw this gravestone about 10 meters behind it," he said. "The ground around the grave had settled unevenly and the headstone had tipped over."

He could tell it was the grave of a Soldier who had served in the 108th Infantry.

"I tried to move it, but it must have weighed 200 to 300 pounds," Burleigh recalled.

So he posted a photo on Facebook, saying it was too heavy for him to move by himself.

Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Markle, the battalion's senior enlisted Soldier, saw the post.

"As I was scrolling through the pages, I found a picture of this gravestone that was tipped over and it said Company F, 108th Infantry, Laurence Uebelacker."

Markle said he knew he had to act.

"When I saw it, I was like, I'm going to have to rally my guys and some of the Soldiers and head out there and fix that," Markle said.

"I went to Lowe's, picked up 30 bucks worth of stuff I would have needed. Using the tools and some muscle we were able to upgrade it and put it right back where it needed," he said.

The Soldiers leveled the earth, remounted the headstone to its base, and scoured the stone clean with a wire brush.

Many hands make light work, and fixing the

gravestone only took a few hours, Markle said.

Everyone was excited to be a part of the restoration project, he said.

"They recognized all of the sacrifices this kid made and when I showed them the pictures of the gravestone toppled over, they were like "Oh, we got to fix it,"" Markle said.

"They wanted to be able to take care of it. And afterwards, to be able to sit back and look at it, there was this great amount of satisfaction in all of them," he added.



World War I Soldier Pvt. Laurence Uebelacker served in the 108th Infantry Regiment in WWI and was killed in action during the historic 27th Division attack on the Hindenburg Line September 29, 1918. Courtesy photo.

**Troops volunteer for Doughboy KIA,  
Continued on Page 20**

# THE JOINT FORCE

## Troops Distribute over 52 Million Meals in NYC

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times Staff, and Capt. Joseph Nolan, 106th Rescue Wing

**NEW YORK** — New York National Guard troops distributed more than 52 million meals to New York City residents between March 21 and August 7.

That's about half of the 100 million meals distributed through the Get Food NYC pandemic response program launched by city officials in March.

New York National Guard Soldiers stepped away from the mission on August 8 as the number of Soldiers and Airmen on the COVID-19 response mission was reduced from over 3,600 at its peak to around 1,100.

The Get Food NYC effort was created to feed people newly out of work, residents who had been relying on food pantries, and families that had counted on school lunches and breakfasts to feed their kids.

In April, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said that city officials estimated that 2 million New York City residents needed food help of some kind.

The meal program, which the National

*"Earlier in the mission, we would actually assemble the meals ourselves into boxed lunches or even brown bags. We were working directly with OEM to hand the meals to the members of the community. It was a very satisfying mission,"*

*-- Spc. Josiah Mena, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry*

Guard assisted, was set up to help using city, state and federal money.

"No one should have to question where their next meal is coming from," the mayor told reporters in April. "As we face this crisis head on, we remain committed to feeding all New Yorkers in need," he said.

As the pandemic shut down school food programs and senior citizens who had volunteered at food banks and pantries stayed home because of health concerns, New York City and state officials tapped the Guard to fill the need.

As of August 6, 118 New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen were working at 11 distribution sites across New York City's five boroughs and also assisting at a food pantry in Queens.

That day 345,186 meals were distributed at the 11 New York National Guard sites, bringing the total number of meals passed out to 52,309,560.

The Soldiers working at the Queens food

bank and other locations had helped package 2,267,407 since the mission started.

More than 150 troops were assigned to the meal distribution mission across New York City at its peak, according to 1st Lt. Daniel Graham, a member of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, and 69th Infantry.

The meal distribution mission evolved since its start in March, Graham said. Initially, members of the Guard were involved in all aspects from food transport and packaging to manning distribution centers within the community, he said.

"Earlier in the mission, we would actually assemble the meals ourselves into boxed lunches or even brown bags," said Spc. Josiah Mena, a member of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry.

"This could be anything from sandwiches we'd make by hand, snacks, canned foods and other items. We were working directly with OEM (New York City's Office of Emergency Management) to hand the meals to the members of the community. It was a very satisfying mission," Mena said.

For the last few months the Guard's role has focused on logistics, warehousing, and ensuring meal packages reach community distribution sites, Graham said.

A key element of the city's food distribution program has been paying taxi drivers and Taxi and Limousine Commission hire car drivers to deliver meals to people who cannot get out to pick them up. The city also hired additional Uber and Lyft drivers to add capacity for the home delivery of meals, especially to seniors.

It puts money in the pockets of drivers who cannot find conventional fares and gets food to those who need it, according to city officials.

New York National Guard troops played



**Spc. Josiah Mena, a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, loads boxed, packaged food, into a waiting vehicle at a food distribution site in The Bronx, N.Y., August 5, 2020. Photo by Senior Airman Sean Madden, 106th Rescue Wing.**



**Prepared meals, set aside for inspection at a food distribution site in the Bronx, N.Y., August 5, 2020. New York National Guard members supported the delivery of more than 52 million meals as part of the multi-agency response to COVID-19 between March and August. Photo by Senior Airman Sean Madden, 106th Rescue Wing.**



Above, members of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, load boxed, packaged food, into a waiting vehicle at a food distribution site in the Bronx, N.Y., August 5, 2020. The New York National Guard response elements in New York City provided more than 52 million meals across distribution sites in all five boroughs of New York City between March and August. Below, Sgt. Thalia Santos (left) and Spc. Kirt Joseph, both with the 442nd Military Police Company, load a vehicle at the Bronx site. Photos by Senior Airman Sean Madden, 106th Rescue Wing.

a key role in this process. As the cabs rolled through the distribution centers, Guardsmen loaded them up with food boxes provided by the city.

At the West Bronx Recreation Center, Spc. Alexander Kulich, another member of the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry's Headquarters Company, worked with New York City OEM on the taxi distribution mission.

"They are responsible for purchasing and assembling the packages. We then load the meal boxes into TLC taxi's and the drivers are provided a distribution list of homes and pantry sites by OEM," Kulich explained.

The meals vary, but a typical box delivered consists of two breakfasts, two lunches, and two dinners. The boxes consist of either prepared meals or non-perishable items. The items can range from prepared meatloaf to boxes of cereal to canned tuna, Graham said.

Options for vegetarian, kosher and halal meals were part of the distribution network. **9t**



# Air Guard Pararescuemen aid Queens Hospital

Story and photos by Maj. Michael O'Hagen, 106th Rescue Wing

NEW YORK — When Elmhurst Hospital Center, the Queens public hospital that became the epicenter of New York's COVID-19 crisis, needed help, the pararescuemen of the New York Air National Guard's 106th Rescue Wing jumped in.

The staff of the 545-bed public hospital performed heroically, but they were eventually "over run by the enemy, the enemy being the virus," said Lt. Col. Stephen "Doc" Rush, the 106th Rescue Wing's Medical Group commander and 103rd Rescue Squadron's pararescue flight surgeon.

Hospital staff—especially the highly trained intensive care staff—needed help and our pararescue team, who are highly trained emergency medical specialists, were able to assist, Rush said.

"Elmhurst was the worst hit and they needed more people to do critical care," Rush said.

The pararescue were the backup, he said. "They were there to give the staff support."

Elmhurst Hospital sits in the center of several Queens neighborhoods, which the New York Times dubbed "epicenter" of the city's COVID-19 outbreak.

The virus spread quickly through the densely populated immigrant neighborhoods.

When the people in the area got sick, they went to Elmhurst. The hospital's intensive care unit normally held 35 patients and was being overwhelmed with hundreds suffering from COVID-19, according to news reports.

So the hospital turned to city emergency managers and the National Guard. The Guard turned to the 106th Rescue Wing's pararescuemen.

Known as PJs, short for pararescue jumper, the pararescuemen are trained to not only rescue personnel, but respond to those in medical need.

Along with being trained in scuba diving, high altitude parachuting, and survival, escape, evasion and resistance, they are also highly trained trauma specialists.

This background made the team from the 106th Rescue Wing the perfect people to send to Elmhurst Hospital, Rush said.

Led by Master Sgt. Matt Zimmer, a decorated veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, 10 PJs went to work at Elmhurst on April 8.

"Things were as bad as everyone was saying," Zimmer recalled. "They were certainly in need of a lot of support."

The Airmen at Elmhurst joined more than 150 medical providers from the Army, Air Force and Navy Reserve, all deployed to New York City to assist in treating the wave of coronavirus patients.

"There were lines around the emergency room with patients that were testing positive for COVID," he said. "So the hospital was already at its maximum when we showed up and the hospital staff had already been working overtime plus; 14, 16, 24 hours a day." "At some points the staff were sleeping in the hospital just to manage the patients that were coming in and doing a tremendous job of it," Zimmer said.

"Medical staff had already been doing this for a month," Rush said. "There were young doctors pronouncing 10 people dead during a shift."

Airmen went to work managing ventilators used to help patients



lungs work and keep the most serious COVID patients alive.

Because the hospital had expanded so quickly to handle COVID patients, there were now five or six different kinds of ventilators for intensive care nurses to use, Rush said.

To make their jobs easier the PJs trained to operate and manage the different kinds of ventilators. They would set up the systems, help intubate patients, and manage the ventilator supply, Rush explained.

The PJs were "force multipliers," Rush said. They helped the doctors and nurses care for more patients by handling basic tasks.

The Airmen "created a mechanism for ventilator management and distribution that helped many of our patients return to their families," said Dr. Alfredo Astua, a pulmonary expert who created the ventilator management program.

The team worked 12-hour shifts with five PJs on at a time.

Initially they were supposed to be on duty for two weeks, but the mission was extended for another two weeks. More members were added bringing the team strength up to 14 PJs on duty.

A key reason for the PJs success are the skills each Airman brings to the mission, Zimmer said.


The team ranged in rank from senior airman to senior master sergeant, Zimmer said, but the most junior member of the team,



At top, pararescue Airmen assigned to 106th Rescue Wing who assisted staff at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, N.Y. during the COVID-19 pandemic, pose for a photograph with members of the hospital staff. Above, Master Sgt. Matt Zimmer, pararescue team leader for the Elmhurst Hospital mission,

Senior Airman Adam Spinner, had recently graduated medical school.

"The amazing part about being in the National Guard at the 106th Rescue Wing is the depth and breadth of knowledge that we not only have as a military force, but as a civilian force," Zimmer said.

"Seeing the staff behind these walls treat their patients with dignity, honor and respect and the pride they have in the job they do and the commitment they have to the patients they treat is outstanding! To be a very small part of the team and giving to them what they need from us has been an amazing experience," Zimmer explained. 



Soldiers and Airmen assigned to Joint Task Force Empire Shield, the New York National Guard's State Active Duty security force in New York City, clear downed trees at near the intersections of the Queens Midtown Expressway and 71st Street in Maspeth, New York on August 8, 2020. Courtesy photo.

## Guard Turns Out for Hurricane Isaias

*Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times Staff*

**CARMEL, N.Y. — New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen delivered water, ice and dry ice to Putnam County residents and removed debris in Queens from August 6-11 after Tropical Storm Isaias moved through New York on August 4, 2020.**

With 703,191 utility customers without power the morning after the storm on August 5, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo declared an emergency in Bronx, Dutchess, Kings, Nassau, New York, Orange, Putnam, Queens, Richmond, Rockland, Suffolk and Westchester.

As part of the state response the governor directed 50 Soldiers and Airmen to assist Putnam County officials.

Another 27 Soldiers and Airmen from Joint Task Force Empire Shield, the security augmentation force in New York City, were directed to assist in clearing debris in Queens County.

Over the course of the mission the team in Putnam County delivered 28,800 bottles of water, 630 bags of dry ice and 260 bags of ice.

The 53rd Troop Command mobilized 20 Soldiers, while the 105th Airlift Wing mobilized 30 Airmen to support the mission and another 10 Airmen to handle headquarters functions.

The personnel were divided into two strike teams and linked up with Putnam County emergency management officials on August 6.

One team conducted five traffic control missions in Putnam Valley. They set up control points on Peekskill Hollow Road, Drewville Road and Church Road. Another team worked on Route 6 in Mahopoc.

The second team conducted four delivery missions. They delivered water, ice and dry ice to several locations. They delivered 16,800 bottles of water, 350 bags of dry ice and 150 bags of ice.

On August 7 the only missions were for water and ice delivery so the 20 Soldiers from the 53rd Troop Command's 101st Expeditionary Signal Brigade came off the mission.

Thirty Airmen from the 105th Airlift Wing delivered an additional 12,000 bottles of water, 280 bags of dry ice and 110 bags of ice to three community locations on August 7th.

Empire Shield's debris clearance team, meanwhile, drew 20 chain saws and began cutting up and removing debris throughout Queens.

Local residents would report information on downed trees to the city's 311 number and the

city parks department would direct Soldiers and Airmen to the site, said 2nd Lt. Peter Morel, a member of the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, who served as officer in charge.

In some instances it would be small trees down across a drive way, Morel said. In other cases the team had to remove big trees across several lanes of road or several cars, he added.

While the Putnam County mission wrapped up on August 8, the debris clearance mission lasted until August 11, Morel said, conducting 206 missions. **gt**



Airmen assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing distribute ice and water to Putnam County residents following Hurricane Isaias that hit New York August 4, 2020. Photo by Master Sgt. Sara Pastorello, 105th Airlift Wing.

# New York Hosts Israelis to Discuss COVID Response

Story and photos by Senior Airman Sean Madden, 106th Rescue Wing

NEW YORK — An officer from Israel's Home Front Command, the branch of Israel's military which handles natural disasters and emergencies, got a first-hand look at how the New York National Guard responded to the COVID-19 response on July 15.

Lt. Col. Hai Rekah, spent the day visiting a COVID-19 testing site in Westchester County and the Javits Convention Center which was turned into a COVID-19 hospital during the peak of the pandemic in New York.

Home Front Command has many of the same duties as the National Guard, Rekah explained. So it made sense for him to speak with New York National guard Soldiers and leaders.

The New York National Guard has a homeland security cooperation partnership with the Home Front Command to share and learn best practices since 2005.

"We have very similar activities like testing, emergency operations center (and) food distribution," Rekah said.

Rekah's visit came as Israel faces its own rise in positive COVID-19 cases since late June.

Israel now has more than 46,500 cases in a nation of 8.8 million. Almost 400 have died as of mid-July.

The delegation first met at the Jakob K. Javits Convention Center in Manhattan, the site of the city's largest alternate care facility.

The New York National Guard provided staffing for the unified command post headquarters, overseeing the logistics, administration and medical operations there of military and civilian agencies.

Rekah met with Army National Guard Cols. Michael Bice, the former incident commander of the Javits New York Medical Station, Todd Bookless, the commander of

the 53rd Digital Liaison Detachment and liaison officer to the New York City Office of Emergency Management and Robert Mitchell, the New York National Guard director of operations.

The three provided a timeline of the pandemic response efforts and the scope of the National Guard response, which peaked at more than 3,600 service members in every corner of the state.

"We have a great relationship with the Home Front Command and have for many years," Mitchell said. "This timely exchange of ideas and procedures will be very beneficial to the Guard and it is our hope that it helps the response in Israel as well."

The Javits New York Medical Station at one time had the capacity for more than 4,000 beds and was staffed by active military force medical providers.

Originally intended as a site for non-COVID cases, the mission shifted to treating COVID-19 patients, Bice said. That shift in missions required significant staff, medical equipment and logistical additions to the original layout.

The treatment site would eventually care for 1,095 patients.

Rekah walked through the Javits Center to discuss the various military missions the National Guard conducted to supervise the day to day operations of the site. New York National Guard forces provided supply warehousing, helped install hospital beds, led interagency staffs and provided access control to the site.

The final patient at Javits left May 29. The convention center is now in a state of standby readiness which can be activated if needed..

"It's very impressive to see what you did here and how you support



the people of New York," Rekah said. "This is one of the examples that we can learn from you."

"I hope we will not need it, but we have to prepare and we can use this as an example if there's a second wave," Rekah said.

The group then visited New Rochelle for a tour of the Glen Island Park drive-thru swab site, where Rekah spoke with state health officials about how the process functioned, from motorist intake to swabbing and exit.

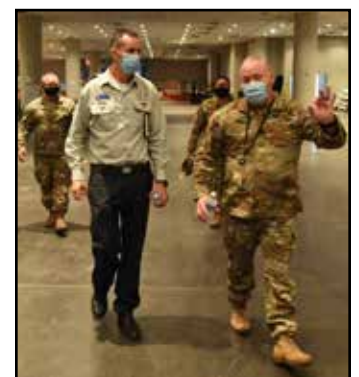
The Glen Island Park test site was established in mid-March to address the cluster COVID-19 cases spreading in New Rochelle.

The site was capable of testing up to 500 residents per day and National Guard forces provided access control, logistics and medical staff to assist with the testing.

In the four months of operations since March 13, the National Guard supported more than 45,712 tests at the site.

Statewide, National Guard Soldiers and Airmen provide support at 15 testing sites with more than a half million tests administered.

"I learned a lot and I'm going to transfer it to the Home Front Command," Rekah said. "This is part of our partnership, our security cooperation and I'm very proud of it."



Top photos, Israeli Lt. Col. Hai Rekah of the Israeli Home Front Command speaks with Soldiers and staff regarding intake procedures at the drive-thru swabbing site at Glen Island Park in New Rochelle. Above, Rekah speaks with Sgt. Maj. Robert Jenks at the Jacob Javits Center in Manhattan. Rekah was in New York July 15 to see New York's multi-agency response to COVID-19 as Israel similarly responds to the pandemic.

A woman, identified as Senior Airman Alyssa Volkner, is shown in full personal protective equipment (PPE). She is wearing a green protective gown, a clear face shield, a teal surgical mask, and blue nitrile gloves. She is standing in what appears to be a medical or laboratory setting, with a window and some equipment visible in the background.

# COVID Responder

*ALBANY, N.Y. -- Senior Airman Alyssa Volkner, assigned to the 139th Air Medical Evacuation Squadron, part of the 109th Airlift Wing, prepares to administer COVID-19 tests at a drive-thru test site at SUNY Albany, New York, July 9, 2020. Photo by 1st Lt. Lauren Warner, 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade.*

## NY Soldiers Win Northeast Best Warrior

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

JERICHO, Vt. — For the third time in three years, two New Yorkers are the best National Guard Soldiers in the northeast.

The two Soldiers won in both the junior enlisted and noncommissioned officer categories of the Army National Guard's Northeast Region Best Warrior Competition.

Staff Sgt. Matthew Ortiz, and Cpl. Troy Perez each bested seven Soldiers from the New England states and New Jersey during the August 13-16 competition run by the Vermont Army National Guard at Camp Ethan Allen in Jericho, Vermont.

They will go on to compete in the nationwide competition set for September 13-16 at Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

Ortiz and Perez are both members of the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, based in Manhattan. Ortiz is assigned to the Headquarters Company, while Perez is a member of Alpha Company.

They're also both emergency medical technicians in the New York City Fire Department, who first met while training at the city's Emergency Medical Services Academy.

Their experience as EMTs, and the bond they share outside of the National Guard helped them do better at the Best Warrior events, Perez and Ortiz both said.

"Being an EMT,

especially someplace like New York City, where the call volume and the work load is very high, it forces you to deal with extreme stress," Perez said. "Other peoples' lives are in your hands so you have to be prepared to come to work and be mentally agile and fit for duty."

New York Army National Guard Soldiers from the 27th Infantry Brigade similarly won the Regional Best Warrior Competition in 2019 and 2018.

"It's a pretty big deal over at the unit right now," Ortiz said.

"We are following in the footsteps of these guys who came before us. It means a lot to us to make them proud of us," he added.

Their route to the national Best Warrior Competition began when they took first place at the New York competition held July 24-26 at Camp Smith.

The event was postponed from May due to the COVID-19 pandemic and there was a chance it would be canceled, but the Joint Force Headquarters NCOs who run it figured out how to do a pandemic-sensitive contest, said New York Army National Guard Command Sgt. Major David Piwowarski.

"The contestants wore masks during events that were not highly physical," Piwowarski said. "And the staff wore masks, disinfected surface areas, worked to maintain social distancing



**Staff Sgt. Matthew Ortiz, an infantryman assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, and winner of the NCO category of the annual Best Warrior competition, disassembles a Mark 19 grenade launcher at Camp Smith, N.Y., July 25, 2020. Photo by Sgt. Amouris Coss, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.**

and thermometers were available."

Four to five days of competition was crammed into 30 hours of activity to lessen exposure to each other and make up for the last minute scheduling, Piwowarski explained.

Ortiz, from Bethpage, on Long Island, and Perez, who lives in Yorktown Heights in the Hudson Valley, trained together to get ready for the New York Best Warrior Competition and then to hone their technique for the regional event at Camp Ethan Allen.

"We stayed motivated and pushed each other

every day," Perez said,

They would also pick different places to run and train for the ruck march part of the competition. To keep things interesting, they said.

"We'd take the American flag and run it across the Brooklyn Bridge," said Ortiz. "It helped keep our morale up."

The regional competition, like the New York Best Warrior, included a fitness test, combat lane, day and night land navigation courses, an appearance board, Army warrior tasks, a written test, an essay and rifle and pistol course and a 12-mile road



**Corporal Troy Perez, a member of the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, finishes up the 12-mile ruck march during the Army National Guard Northeast Region Best Warrior Competition at Camp Ethan Allen in Jericho, Vermont on August 16, 2020. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Alvarez, Vermont Army National Guard.**

march with full pack.

The surprise event, which the two had not been able to train for, was axe throwing.

The event, Ortiz explained, was included as a salute to Vermont's Green Mountain Boys, the state's first militia who took Fort Ticonderoga from the British in 1775.

A tomahawk, or small axe, was part of their equipment and they were expected to keep it sharp and clean and be able to use it to start a fire or kill an enemy scout, he said.

The Soldiers were given a chance to practice, and then threw axes at silhouette targets. Surprisingly, both Ortiz and Perez excelled.

"That was fun," Perez said. "I had never thrown an axe in my life."

"It turned out Ortiz and I both placed first in the axe throwing," he added. **gt**





## Socially Distant Sendoff for Medical Soldiers

*Story by Staff Sgt. Michael Davis, 138th Public Affairs Detachment*



Soldiers assigned to the 466th Area Support Medical Company stand in formation during their deployment ceremony at the Queensbury Armory, Aug. 1, 2020. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantonio, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

QUEENSBURY, N.Y. — Fifty-five Soldiers assigned to the 466th Area Support Medical Company said a virtual goodbye to friends and family via a Facebook Live stream during their deployment ceremony outside of the Queensbury Armory on Aug. 1, 2020.

The 466th Soldiers headed to Fort Hood, Texas to complete the final leg of their pre-mobilization training before deployment to conduct an emergency and primary care mission to Soldiers deployed in the Middle East.

While deployment ceremonies typically have a landscape filled with stoic Soldiers in formations, cell phones held out, cameras flashing, children running around and faces with a range of emotions, this was noticeably different.

This time there were only Soldiers and one cell phone held out to stream the event. This was just one measure of the ongoing safety precautions the unit took to ensure proper social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The company adjusted most of their training plans to keep Soldiers safe and ensure they would be prepared to deploy and support the 11-month overseas mission.

Brig. Gen. Jack James, the commander of the 53rd Troop Command, saw the unit training and praised them during his remarks for implementing new safety protocols and continuing to

complete the mission-essential training.

“I’ve seen your training and it’s excellent,” said James. “Continue to execute your MOS [military occupational specialty], complete your mission and be ready for anything.”

COVID-19 added complexity to nearly every aspect of the year-long, job-related medical and fundamental Soldier training that the company has to complete prior to deploying.

During pre-deployment training, Soldiers wore masks and were divided into groups of ten people who did not interact with others.

They moved and trained together to minimize exposure to COVID-19 and comply with social distancing guidelines.

All Soldiers were given daily temperature screenings and twice-a-day symptom checks.

Maj. Jason Cossey, the commander of the 466th, spoke to his unit about the normal challenges of deploying a unit and how the unit relied on each other to ensure they were ready.

“It takes a village to get a unit out the door in a normal situation,” Cossey said. “COVID has made our training and mobilization unlike any other.”

Cossey advised the unit to embody that unprecedented level of resilience and excellence they’ve already shown as they continue to train

and deploy overseas.

He noted that by continuing to work together they can accomplish his two goals for this deployment: bringing everyone back home safely and providing world-class healthcare to Soldiers overseas.

James, Cossey and all the senior leadership who spoke to the deploying unit shared a common theme: individual and team strength is imperative to overcoming challenges and completing the mission.

Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the Adjutant General of New York, reinforced this theme by reminding the Soldiers that everyone in a uniform is a person as well as a Soldier.

Remembering the person behind the uniform was a message from Shields. He reiterated that Soldiers have a responsibility to check on each other’s mental and physical well being, and that was the key to a strong unit and successful mission.

“You must look out for yourselves, and you must look out for your fellow Soldiers,” Shields said.

The 466th deployed to Iraq in 2006-2007 in a similar mission. During that time, they operated an Army field hospital and three troop medical facilities. **gt**

# NY Aircrews Take Green Berets to New Heights

*Story by 1st Lt. Lauren Warner, 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade*

CAMP DAWSON, W. Va. — Two New York Army National Guard CH-47F Chinook helicopters, crewed by nine Soldiers, took 15 West Virginia Army National Guard Special Forces members to new heights to support paratroop training July 11 at Camp Dawson.

The paratroop mission included a high altitude, low opening (HALO) military free fall jump for the West Virginia Green Beret Soldiers. The jumpers left the helicopter at high altitude, went into a free fall and deployed parachutes around 4,000 feet above the ground.

This style of parachute insertion is ideally suited to the infiltration techniques of the Special Forces Soldiers.

The New York aircrews assigned to Detachment 1, Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion of the 126th Aviation Regiment are based at the flight facility in Rochester. They flew to West Virginia to facilitate the training and train the aircrews on the high altitude techniques.

For the heavy lift aircrews, the opportunity highlights their role as an aviation unit to support ground forces, according to 1st Lt. Jonathan Peralta.

Events like this give exposure to the Chinook aircraft and its capabilities, making coordination with other units possible, Peralta said.

The West Virginia Guardsmen are Special Forces Soldiers assigned to Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion of the 19th Special Forces Group. The jump was a training requirement so they could maintain their airborne proficiency.

The New York aircrews also got valuable training too, Peralta said. They had to work closely with the Green Beret jumpmaster to ensure the safe exit of jumpers at the appropriate altitude and location.

West Virginia Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Vincent Grady, the senior jumpmaster assigned to the Green Beret unit, praised the New York aviators for their assistance and coordination.

“The aircrew was great and was very accommodating to our unit,” Grady said.

The New York crews flew to West Virginia to a pre-determined drop zone. Once on the ground, they were able to conduct inspections, coordinate briefings, and conduct rehearsals prior to departing for the free fall exercise.

Once both units were ready, the Special Forces Soldiers loaded up onto the aircraft. Pilots then took the aircraft to 11,000 feet altitude and made sure that the Chinook was in position for the jumpmaster to view the drop zone.

Once the jumpmaster verified the drop zone and a safe exit, the 15 Soldiers exited the aircraft to execute their jump.

Having passengers on board makes a tremendous difference, making for realistic training with real consequences for aircrew actions, explained pilot 1st Lt. Jeffrey Tampe, who was flying his first paratroop mission.

The Green Berets were extremely professional and motivated to work with, making the flight training run smoothly and safely, Tampe added “We hope to work with them in the future,” Tampe said.

The Chinook detachment from New York takes part in similar missions to support ground forces from other states and even other countries, Peralta said.



Special Forces Soldiers from Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group conduct military free fall training from of a New York National Guard Chinook at Camp Dawson, West Virginia on July 11, 2020. Pilots and crews from Detachment 1, Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 126th Regiment supported the event. Below, a West Virginia Army National Guard Green Beret approaches his landing zone after his jump. Courtesy photos.

Two years ago, Chinook crews supported this same West Virginia unit in a full spectrum mission. Flight crews provided aircraft for helocasting—jumping from a helicopter into a lake-- cargo lifts, static line paratroops and high altitude jumps.

For the past five years, with the exception of this year, the New York Army National Guard provided aircraft to support the annual International Leapfest

Competition located in Rhode Island. The event brings together international parachutists from around the globe for static line jumps.

The 2020 Leapfest had to be cancelled due to COVID-19.

Grady said that he is confident that they will work with the New York crews again.

“The aircrew was awesome and adjusted to our schedule,” Grady said, “They helped us out anyway they could to ensure we could get the jump off.” **gt**



# Soldiers are 'Eye in the Sky' for 27<sup>th</sup> Brigade

Story and photos by Sgt. Alexander Rector, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team



FORT DRUM, N.Y. — When the commander of the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team needs intelligence on the enemy, he turns to the Unmanned Aerial System platoon of Delta Company of the 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion for an eye in the sky.

The platoon operates the RQ-7B Shadow unmanned aerial system, small remotely controlled aircraft which are launched from a towed catapult and land within 170 feet.

The aircraft may be small—just over 11 feet long—but it takes skill to fly, so 12 of Delta's UAS platoon Soldiers honed their skills while getting some long overdue flight and maintenance experience with the Shadow during annual training at Fort Drum in July.

"We need to maintain currency and proficiency so we can be called to any incident," said Staff Sgt. Timothy Strong, a UAS maintenance team leader. "We have simulators, but nothing beats doing the real thing."

Once airborne, the Shadow is capable of up to six hours of flight time providing live imagery directly to the 27<sup>th</sup> brigade Tactical Operations Center.

The arrival of COVID-19 earlier this year threw a wrench in the unit's training plans, Strong said.

Normally the Soldiers are able to fly multiple times per year. But

Delta Company's Shadows have been grounded for months as the unit conducted virtual drills in accordance with the pandemic's social distancing mandates, he explained.

"It's been difficult because people haven't been able to get hands on much this year," Strong said.

"Normally we'll come up to Fort Drum in April, May, June, July and August, for a week or two so people can stay current and maintain their flight proficiency," he added.

In addition to the unforeseen challenges that COVID-19 presented to mission readiness, other variables have prevented the UAS operators from pursuing their required flight time.

The Shadow is a fair-weather aircraft launched from a vehicle-towed pneumatic catapult. As a fair-weather aircraft it is only able to fly in specific conditions. For much of the unit's annual training, strong winds and rainstorms kept the Shadows grounded.

Maintaining operator proficiency is critical for the deployment of the platoon. Though the Shadow was designed with the battlefield as its main focus, there are many domestic situations that benefit from the imagery, Strong said.

"I participated in California where we assisted in forest fire



Above, Soldiers assigned to Delta Company, 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion, move an RQ-7B Shadow Unmanned Aerial Vehicle to its launcher at Fort Drum, New York on July 28, 2020. Below, Staff Sgt. Timothy Strong, at left, and Spc. Alexander Piper, two unmanned aircraft system maintainers, prepare an RQ-7B Shadow for launch.

reconnaissance," he said. "Hopefully in the future we can help with flood damage assessments and stuff like that throughout New York State. So it's important for us to maintain our currency so we can actually do things like that."

"It takes a lot a lot of skill and determination to be able to do this job," said Pvt. Colin Pare, an unmanned aerial systems operator. "You need to focus on a lot of small things you need to just be meticulous and knowledgeable."

Pare, 18 and right out of training, is the unit's newest Soldier.

"My training was about four months long but I got the ropes fairly quickly and realized what I



could do," Pare said.

"This being my first experience the unit, I'd have to say that it's pretty good. Everyone likes each other and everyone knows what they need to do. It's probably one of the best choices I've made," he said. **gt**



# Aviation Troops out for Land Nav

Story and photo by Sgt. Matthew Gunther, Joint Force Headquarters

GUILDERLAND, N.Y. — The Soldiers of the 3rd Battalion, 142nd Aviation prefer to fly when they go someplace, but on July 30 they conducted land navigation as part of their week-long training.

“Being grounded in unfamiliar territory is a very real possibility when conducting aviation missions,” said Sgt. Mitchell Pace, an instructor for the event. “Land navigation is an essential tool for Soldiers to get to safety or regroup with their unit in the event of such an occurrence.”

The land navigation training was part of a focus on basic Soldiers skills, including survival, evasion, resistance and escape (SERE) training, using radio equipment, and combat lifesaver training conducted at the State Police Firearms Range.

The unit originally planned training at Fort Drum. That plan was scrapped due to COVID-19.

Lt. Col. Jason Lefton, the battalion commander, said he refused to view this as a setback and instead saw it as an opportunity.

“This was a chance for us to get back to the fundamental skills of being a Soldier,” Lefton said.

He also pointed out that they are the top unit in New York for retention this year, with four reenlistments in the last week.

“We work hard, we train hard, and the Soldiers want to be here,” he added.



**Soldiers assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 142nd Aviation Regiment find their way during land navigation at the Guilderland Range in Guilderland, N.Y., July 29 2020.**

About 100 Soldiers took part in the training at Guilderland Range, and another 100 from the battalion, who are based on Long Island, took part in the same training on state land at that location.

About 40 Soldiers participated in pandemic response and did not take part in the training.

The range in Guilderland, which is owned by the New York National Guard but managed by the State Police, is close to the Latham flight facility. The Soldiers spent the week sleeping on the range in individual shelter tents.

Land navigation is considered a basic skill that all Soldiers should be proficient in, Pace said.

According to Capt. Devis Ceci, the commander of Alpha Company, it is also a perishable skill.

“It is extremely important that we make time in our annual training schedules to conduct land navigation, and not just the junior Soldiers,” he said. “Everyone from top to



**Pfcs. Britania and Britany Allen, twin sisters assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 142nd Aviation Regiment, take a break during land navigation as part of annual training at the Guilderland Range in Guilderland, N.Y., on July 29 2020.**

bottom should get involved and share their knowledge and experience.”

Pfcs. Britania and Britany Allen, twin sisters in Alpha Company, said they enjoyed the challenge.

“We have only been in the Army a short time but have already conducted this training several times,” said Britania. “Plotting the points, figuring out the best way to reach them, and trying to get finished before the other groups is a blast.”

## Troops volunteer for Doughboy, Cont'd from Page 9

“This guy was a past veteran of our unit, he was killed in combat and there appeared to be nobody able to take care of the grave,” Markle said.

“It's really important I feel, to honor what he did to make sure that this monument is always there, and that it's upright and to carry on that heritage and history of the unit,” he said.

The battalion is just getting started, as the Soldiers' work toward honoring their veterans and preserving their legacy, Markle said.

“That day just kind of led to another project that we want to look into and that's building a database of our fallen veterans that are buried here stateside so we can find them,” Markle said.

The 108th Infantry has 147 Soldiers buried in the Somme battlefield cemetery who passed during WWI and another 74 Soldiers from WWII that are interred in Manila who were killed fighting in the Philippines.

“We have over 300 buried here in the states somewhere and we would like to be able to build a database that identifies where they are and locate them,” Markle said. “It's really important to make sure that those monuments stay preserved so people can see them and recognize what they've done.”

One of his duties is to educate new Soldiers on the history of the regiment, Markle explained. Fixing Uebelacker's gravestone helped connect Soldiers to their unit's past.

“One thing that has always bothered me is when you talk to Soldiers about what our unit has done in the past and they had no idea,” Markle said.

“We're a National Guard unit, but we took part in some incredibly magnificent yet horrible events in American history. And it's something that we shouldn't forget about,” he said. **gt**



**Pfc. Carlos Arroyo, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry cleans the headstone of WWI Soldier Pvt. Laurence Uebelacker May 26, 2020. Uebelacker's gravestone had fallen over and the modern day Soldiers repaired it. Courtesy photo.**

# Engineers get Explosive Training at Fort Drum

Story and photos by Sgt. Alexander Rector, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team

FORT DRUM, N.Y. — Fresh from duty assisting New York in tackling COVID-19, combat engineers hit the ranges at Fort Drum to practice clearing the battlefield of any other obstacles that stand in their way.

Thirty-nine Soldiers from two platoons of Bravo Company, 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion, spent their time at the demolition range as part of their annual training, honing their skills with things that blow up.

Many of the Soldiers had already met the annual training requirement by serving as part of New York's response to COVID-19.

The 152nd is the combat engineer brigade for the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

At the range the engineers trained on the safe preparation and deployment of C4, Bangalore torpedoes and cratering charges.

Bangalore torpedoes consist of an explosive charge in a tube which is pushed under an obstacle like concertina wire to destroy it.

C4, the plastic explosive used by engineers, is deployed to remove obstacles and structures, while cratering charges blow holes in roads or runways to impede an enemy.

Combat engineers have one of the most rigorous jobs in the Army. During war they are tasked with breaching trenches, clearing obstacles, and constructing fortifications to slow the enemy's advance, said Sgt. Kieth Vosburg, a squad leader assigned to Bravo Company.

"It's why I come out here, to train for something like that," said Pfc. Tiger London. "So if we find ourselves in a combat situation we'll be prepared and know what to do."

While training at the range the Soldiers were also able to conduct hands on familiarization with the unit's TALON remotely operated tracked robot.

Commonly used by military and civilian explosive ordinance disposal units, the TALON is a man-portable robot that can identify and eliminate explosive threats while keeping Soldiers out of harms way.

"We use the TALON to inspect and identify unknown explosives," Vosburg said. "If we come across an IED we can use the TALON to place a charge next to it. That way we can detonate the IED without having

to send someone down-range."

Vosburg has been an engineer for the eight years of his Army career. But most of that time was as a "horizontal" engineer, building roads and runways.

He switched over to the combat side of engineering, becoming the leader of, to further his career, Vosburg said. Now he's leading seven engineer Soldiers, often known as "Sappers" who specialize in blowing things up.

U.S. Army combat engineers are often called 12 Bravos, in reference to the alphanumeric designation that is used to identify a Soldier's military occupational specialty.

"My favorite thing about being on the 12 Bravo side would definitely be the explosives," explained Vosburg. "So far, it's been great. Everyone wants to be hands on, they want to learn what to do, they want to pull the pins and blow stuff up."

Aside from blowing stuff up, the Soldiers spent time at the small arms range where they were able to hone their marksmanship skills on both the M4 rifle and M9 pistol.

As a squad leader, Vosburg is tasked with the important job of training and mentoring the junior combat engineers in his squad.

"Eventually they're going to be sitting where I'm sitting and they're going to have to teach other guys," Vosburg said.

"It's important for them to sit down, listen to the training and hone those skills because one day they're going to be teaching somebody.

They're going to have to help other people succeed whether in their squad or outside of their squad. They're going to help the unit readiness as a whole," he added.

"We're like one big family," London said. "We just get the job done." **gt**



Combat engineers with Bravo Company, 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion move to the range for demolition training at Fort Drum, N.Y., July 15. The Soldiers detonated Bangalore Torpedoes to hone their demolition skills.



Pfc. Tiger London, a combat engineer assigned to Bravo Company, 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion, prepares a Bangalore Torpedo at Fort Drum, N.Y., during demolitions training July 15.

# Airdrop Training Keeps Logisticians Looking Up

Story and photos by Sgt. Alexander Rector, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team

FORT DRUM, N.Y. — Food, fuel and ammunition the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team needs to fight would normally flow into the 427th Brigade Support Battalion—the logistics backbone of the brigade—on the ground in trucks.

But if the roads get cut, then the supplies come by air and the Soldiers of the 427th spent four days learning how to collect and load airdropped supplies as part of their Annual Training at Fort Drum, New York.

The Soldiers practiced retrieving and loading the standard packages—known as a container delivery system or CDS— which the Air Force uses to pack and parachute in supplies to troops on the ground.

Their training culminated with an actual airdrop of supplies conducted by a C-130 assigned to the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing.

"I used to do this a lot in the the Airborne. But you don't really see it a lot of the non-airborne units," said Maj. William Hofmann, the 427th Brigade Support Battalion executive officer.

"If the ground lines of communication are

cut off then that would be a situation where we could use the CDS," Hofmann explained.

When a unit is cut off from the road network, Air Force transports drop the CDS packages onto a designated drop zone where they are collected and transported to the units on the ground by the logistics Soldiers.

While this is a routine task in other support units, using the container delivery system was just recently added to the 427th's mission essential task list, Hofmann said.

Training towards the actual airdrop began on July 20. The unit conducted drills and dry runs to make sure the troops were prepared for the event. Many of the battalion's Soldiers were new to the battalion since the last time the unit conducted a CDS airdrop, two years ago, Hofmann said.

"We started off Monday with kind of a crawl phase followed by a couple of dry runs yesterday," Hofmann said. "Then we started adding in more complexity like casualties and equipment breakdowns until we culminated with the actual drop from the aircraft."

Using all-terrain forklifts and flatbed trucks, the Soldiers drilled at collecting the pallets,

loading them onto trucks and transporting the supplies out of the drop zone.

While prepping for the event, some last minute changes needed to be made.


Due to New York State's ongoing response to COVID-19 Hofmann needed to pull Soldiers from across the battalion to find enough people to participate.

Normally more than 350 Soldiers strong, the 427th only had 73 Soldiers attend annual training this year. The other Soldiers had already used their military time in responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

"Normally this would strictly be an Alpha Company mission with maybe some medics attached and recovery assets," Hofmann said.

"But because we are so short this AT this is actually a conglomerate of all of our companies. You have Headquarters Company doing the outer security, Alpha Company is doing the recovery piece, Bravo Company was our quick reaction force and Charlie Company was providing the medical support. Traditionally all four companies have never worked together on a mission like this," he explained.

To increase the complexity of the training



**"You get sold on infantry and combat arms, but just look the diversity of jobs here: from operating heavy equipment to coordinating the actual CDS drop, there's a lot more into being a logisticians than just turning wrenches."**

-- Maj. William Hofmann, 427th Brigade Support Battalion



and make it more realistic, Hofmann incorporated an attacking force into the exercise. Instead of simply retrieving the supplies unchallenged, the 427th Soldiers were tasked with simultaneously securing the drop zone, recovering the supplies, repelling an enemy attack and treating simulated casualties.

Culminating with an actual airdrop made the training better, Hofmann said.

“I reached out to the 109th, and we were fortunate enough to have them come out and do this for the first time back in 2018,” said Hofmann, a Manlius, New York resident. “Since then we have been trying to do it every other year.”

After drilling for three days, the actual airdrop on July 23 went well. After the C-130 roared overhead dropping 10 packages, the logistic Soldiers moved out with tactical forklifts and trucks to retrieve the CDS containers and send the supplies on the road with little wasted effort.

Though often not seen as important as some of the other Army jobs, there is more to being a logistician than meets the eye, explained Hofmann. Keeping the combat units supplied takes a lot of skills.

“You get sold on infantry and combat arms, but just look the diversity of jobs here: from operating heavy equipment to coordinating the actual CDS drop, there’s a lot more into being a logistician than just turning wrenches,” Hofmann said. **gt**



Soldiers assigned to 427th Brigade Support Battalion, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, conduct container delivery system training in conjunction with the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing at Fort Drum, N.Y., July 23rd, 2020. In top photo, a C-130J Hercules transport aircraft airdrops pallets. At center, the pallets of supplies are collected by Pfc. Arelys Torres-Aguirre, an automated logistical specialist, and 2nd Lt. Orion Shea, a platoon leader, both assigned to Alpha Company, 427th Brigade Support Battalion. Above, Soldiers collect container delivery system pallets from the drop zone. At left, medics conduct casualty evacuation training from the drop zone during the training.

## 109<sup>th</sup> Mounts Resupply Mission in Greenland

Story by Master Sgt. Jaclyn Lyons, 109th Airlift Wing

STRATTON AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.Y. — The 109th Airlift Wing launched a three-week mission to carry critical supplies to Summit Station, the only year-round science station that operates on the Greenland ice cap on August 4th.

Three LC-130 Skibirds, supported by 20 crewmembers and 40 maintenance Airmen will deliver 280,000 pounds of fuel, around 40,000 gallons, and 30,000 pounds of food and other supplies in the shortened three week season.

Summit Station is operated by CH2MHill Polar Services for the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Arctic Research Program and hosts scientists conducting climate research.

It is the only high altitude, high latitude, inland, year-round observing station in the arctic, according to the NSF. The station will house five personnel throughout the winter.

"The missions our unit completes are critical to the lifeline of Summit Station and we are honored to continue to provide support," said Col. Michele Kilgore, commander of the 109th.

During the U.S. winter season, the 109th supports Operation Deep Freeze in Antarctica, and in the summer months, the unit normally flies to Greenland to not only continue their support for the NSF but to also train for Antarctic operations.

This year is different due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The unit will not perform any training and will only fly missions to Summit Station to resupply for the winter so they do not run out of fuel and food.

The wing's normal support season has been compressed from a normal five month season. The season usually runs from April to August.

The ski-equipped LC-130 is able to haul much more cargo than smaller ski-equipped aircraft, making it the preferred choice to complete the resupply in a shorter amount of time.

Ski-equipped Twin Otters, made by Viking Air, a Canadian company, are used to swap personnel at the station but cannot deliver large amounts of cargo or fuel.

The fuel is being transported by filling up the planes' fuel tanks completely. Fuel that is not needed for the 836 mile, 4 hour roundtrip from the 109th Airlift Wing's base at Kangerlussuaq, Greenland to Summit Station, is then offloaded into fuel bladders and tanks at the station.

This allows the aircraft to carry both fuel and food at the same time, according to Maj. Daniel Urband, chief of 109th Greenland operations.

This minimizes the amount of trips needs to resupply the station.

The crews plan to complete three round trips a day during the mission, Urband said.

The Summit Station resupply mission demonstrates the key role that the 109th Airlift Wing plays in the arctic, Kilgore said.

A new Air Force Arctic Strategy document released on July 21 makes it clear that the arctic is a key region for U.S. defense and that the Air Force plays a vital role in the region.

The document specifically mentions the 109th Airlift Wing and the LC-130s as being vital in providing access to arctic regions. The strategy also emphasizes that as the operator of the U.S. Department of Defense's only ski-equipped transport and contingency aircraft, a substantial portion of the Department's arctic expertise resides in the wing's Airmen.

The new strategy commits the Air Force to working with partners in the arctic region, and the mission in Greenland, which is part of Denmark, illustrates this, Kilgore said.

The release of the Air Force Arctic Strategy highlights our commitment to partners during these times of uncertainty," she emphasized.

Because of the pandemic, the 109th coordinated with the Danish government to minimize the risk of transmitting the virus. Precautions include quarantining before the trip and COVID testing prior to departure and while in country. 🇺🇸



An LC-130 assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing offloads cargo in Greenland on April 26, 2019. Similar aircraft will be flying missions in Greenland in August 2020 to resupply the only science station on the Greenland ice cap where teams winter over to collect data. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Gabriel Enders, 109th Airlift Wing.



## 274<sup>th</sup> Airmen Direct Steel on Target



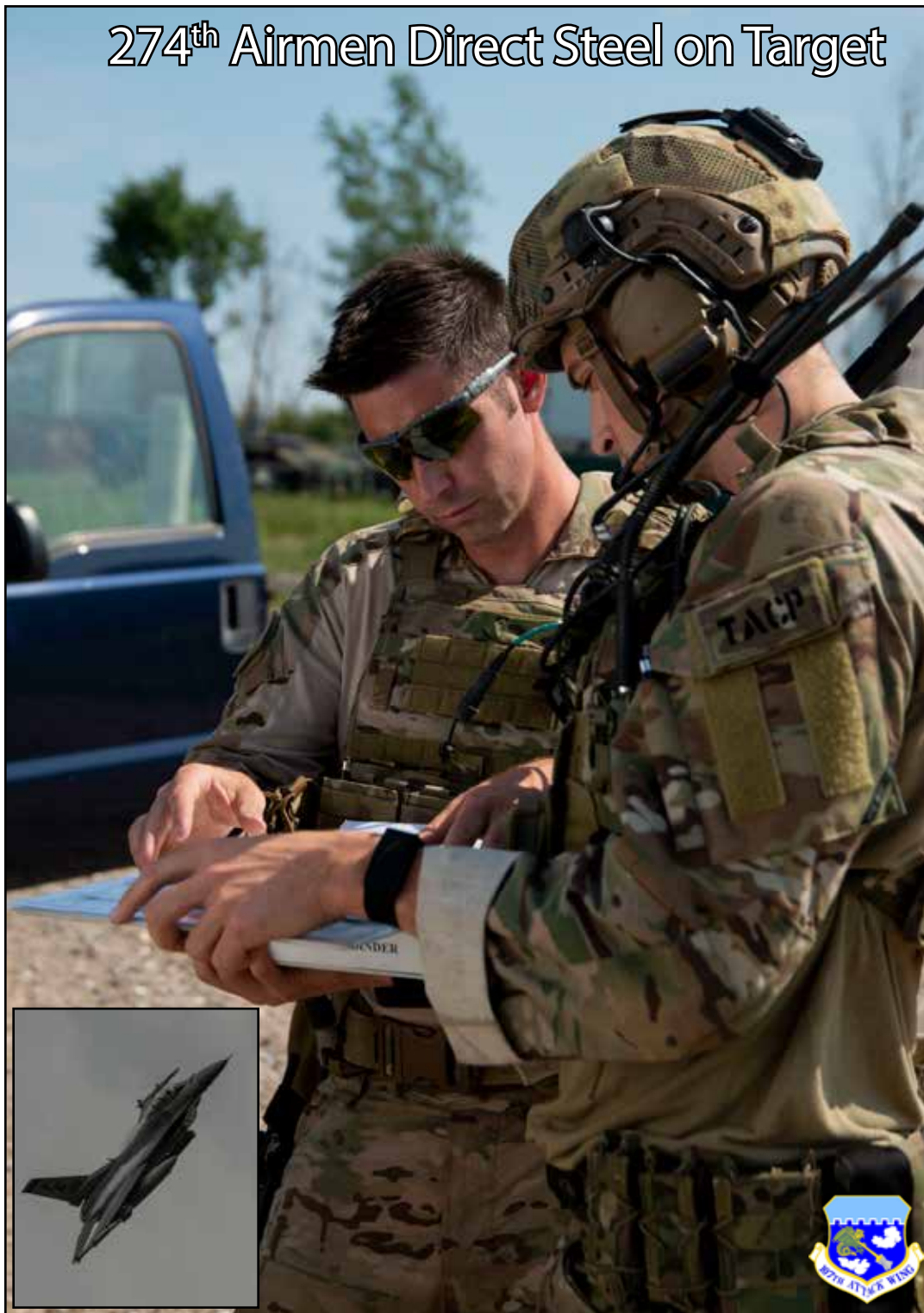
### Honors after 32 years

NIAGARA FALLS AIR RESERVE STATION, N.Y. — Brig. Gen. Michael Bank, Assistant Adjutant General Air for the New York National Guard, left, presents Col. David Warnick with his certificate of retirement during his retirement ceremony here August 8, 2020. Warnick retired after 32 years of service. He was the commander of the 107th Attack Wing's Mission Support Group. Photo by Airman 1st Class Michael Janker, 107th Attack Wing.



### Mask Up for Training

NIAGARA FALLS AIR RESERVE STATION, N.Y. — Tech. Sgt. Alex Adepoju, left, and Senior Airman Mitchell Holtz check equipment in preparation for the 107th Force Support Squadron Emergency Management exercise on August 12th, 2020. Photo by Lt. Col. Jess Traver, 107th Attack Wing.



FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- Tactical Air Control Party specialists with the 274th Air Support Operations Squadron, part of the 107th Operations Group, 107th Attack Wing discuss tactics during a close-air support training exercise here July 7, 2020. The 274th conducts training to coordinate and synchronize air and ground combat operations with fixed wing aircraft. Inset: An F-16C Fighting Falcon from the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing executes a low altitude pass during the close air support exercise with the members of the 274th at Range 48 on July 7. Photos by Airman 1st Class Michael Janker, 107th Attack Wing.



## PJs Jump into Northern Strike

*ALPENA, Mich. -- A pararescue specialist from the 103rd Rescue Squadron, 106th Rescue Wing, approaches landing in a drop zone at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center, part of the National All-Domain Warfighting Center, during Northern Strike 20 on July 20, 2020. Northern Strike is an annual, National Guard Bureau-sponsored exercise that draws in units from active-duty and reserve branches so they can conduct training missions and joint fires integration in a decisive-action environment. Photo by Staff Sgt. Brian Jarvis, 110th Wing.*

# Firefighters Tackle Blaze while Training

Story by Ryan Campbell, *Guard Times Staff*

ALPENA, Mich. — Four firefighters from the 106th Rescue Wing who deployed to Michigan for routine training found themselves in the midst of a real-world fire when the iconic John A. Lau Saloon and Restaurant in Alpena went up in a blaze on the afternoon of July 21.

The Airmen were at the Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena in support of Operation Northern Strike, an annual military readiness exercise including ground and air operations. They were called to help tackle the fire which had engulfed the popular establishment which had stood since the late 1800s.

The four Guardsmen, part of the base Rapid Intervention Team, joined other firefighters from the community after the Alpena fire department putout a call for mutual air to help with the fire. A fire started at the building, which is a multi-use, two-story facility with mixed occupancy, consisting of a restaurant, theater and apartment residences, as a result of a welding accident on the roof.

At one point a first responder ‘mayday’ was called, indicating that a firefighter was down in the interior of the building. A response firetruck dispatched with the 106th Airmen, Staff Sgts. Christopher Clay, Brandon Ehlers, Frank Quesada, and Senior Airmen Kerry Schmitt, who are trained on firefighter rescue.

“The local city asked us for mutual aid, we happened to be on shift and so we went down there as the rapid intervention team,” Clay said.

At the request of the crew chief of the fire engine from the Alpena base, the Airmen also dispatched an air trailer, capable of refilling the air packs firefighters carry, to resupply air to the firefighters on scene.

As 40 total firefighters responded to the fire, Clay explained that the decision was ultimately made to focus on saving the surrounding buildings

as the saloon was seen as a loss.

“The incident commander on the scene, the fire chief, decided that they wanted to protect the surrounding buildings,” Clay said. “The building was pretty much lost, it’s called a surround and drown so we set ourselves on at the back of the building, they positioned a tower ladder out front and a couple of other hand lines were drawn and we just poured copious amounts of water on the fire to protect the surrounding structures.”

After a day-long battle with the fire, crews were able to save the 130-year-old Thunderbay Theater, another locally historic building, as well as surrounding apartments, but the adjacent John A. Lau Saloon and Restaurant was now in ruins.

Alpena Fire Chief Bill Forbush credited the survival of the theater to the 40 firefighters from Alpena, other nearby towns and the training center.

Forbush said they had “set the line in the sand” to keep the blaze from crossing a firewall between the restaurant and the theater.

“It’s not coming over this,” Forbush said of the intent to hold the firewall.

“We were successful,” Clay said. “It was a shame that building burnt down but the theater and other businesses didn’t really sustain any damage.”

“Being asked to help on such a large fire, I’ve never experienced that, I’ve been in since 2006,” Clay said. “It felt good though to help a community that supports the military and supports the firemen like they do here in Alpena.”

The Airmen then returned to their roles in Operation Northern Strike, running to the end of July.

“Accolades and stuff like that are not what it’s about for us, we got a chance to do our job,” Clay said. “We do a lot of training and to be able to go out there and do our job is exciting.” **gt**



Staff Sgt. Christopher Clay, a 106th Rescue Wing firefighter, conducts rope rescue training as part of Northern Strike 20 at the Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center, Alpena, Mich., July 25, 2020. Photo by Staff Sgt. Brian Jarvis, 110th Wing.

# 107<sup>th</sup> Airmen Redeploy after COVID-19 Pandemic Extends Their Tour

Story and photos by Lt. Col. Jess Traver, 107th Attack Wing

NIAGARA FALLS AIR RESERVE STATION, NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. — Redeployed Airmen from the New York Air National Guard's 107th Security Forces Squadron, part of the 107th Attack Wing, say they faced some unique challenges and endured trial and uncertainty throughout their mission to Qatar due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The team was deployed to Qatar October 1st, 2019 of 2019 and returned June 24th, 2020.

Staff Sgt. Christopher Petty and Senior Airman Emily MacCallum, who redeployed at the end of June, say they focused on the opportunities and advantages of the deployment to make the best of a difficult situation.

The two said that a positive attitude made the deployment struggles easier and helped the entire team. The group faced multiple moves for housing, a constant change to security procedures and worst of all, an involuntary extension in theater for an additional three months due to the global pandemic.

The team was made up of nine Airmen, deployed to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. During the deployment the mission included base protection operations and also manning entry gates, ensuring vehicles entering the facility were safe after conducting searches.

Over the nine months deployed, the security forces Airmen conducted security missions as part of Air Force Central Command and the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing. They also participated in multiple training exercises and assisted partner nations in the region to build partner capabilities.

The team overlooked many of the challenges and stayed focused on the positive aspects of the mission, MacCallum said.

"We worked with military members from France, Italy, Canada, Jordan and Turkey, to name a few," she said. "It was great to see how each military operated differently."

"We worked daily with our Qatari counterparts, protecting the air base and personnel," Petty said. "The gate was busy, but we had a great team and leadership."

As March arrived, the Airmen began to train up their replacements and prepare for homecoming reunions. But just two weeks before redeploying home to New York they were told a pandemic stop movement meant staying in Qatar.

"At first we had to adapt to the changes and work with our replacement unit," Petty said. "Since we were extended in country, the replacement unit led the missions. At first we operated a little different but over time we started to work together well as a team."

Working with an entirely new unit had benefits for the team leaders, Petty said.

"As a new NCO, it was a great opportunity to work with experienced NCOs daily, to learn how to be a leader and what my Airmen expect from me," he said. "It was a great advantage that will help me the rest of my career."

The pandemic response also meant all sorts of new procedures to protect the health of everyone on base, Petty said.



Staff Sgt. Christopher Petty, above, and Senior Airman Emily MacCallum, left, returned from deployment June 24, 2020. The two conducted operations as part of a team of nine security forces Airmen in Qatar.

"It was strange with the new rules and requirements to maintain social distancing," he said. "It changed over time and the base was starting to open up before we left. I was very glad to see the gym open here on base."

Petty is no stranger to military careers, with military service part of his father and mother's families. His father was in the Army at Fort Drum and he decided to stay there.

Petty graduated from Watertown High School, joined the Air Force with his assignment at Francis E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming before joining the New York Air National Guard and returning to Watertown.

During his deployment in Qatar, he said he met up with a former mentor and leader he had always looked up to back in Wyoming.

Chief Master Sgt. Shawn Drinkard is now the senior non-commissioned officer for Air Force Central Command and the two caught up in Qatar.

"One of my best memories was seeing Chief Drinkard, who I had served with and know from F.E. Warren Air Force Base," Petty said. "It was great to talk with him and he gave me a coin."

MacCallum was promoted to Senior Airman during the deployment and said she tried to take advantage of all the leadership opportunities on the mission, even with an extra 90 days of duty added on.

"I really enjoyed meeting new people and seeing a different culture," she said. "We were able to go off base a couple of times and I enjoyed seeing the markets and stores. I also got to see how the active duty operates and the different types of missions and units out there."

The team finally received notification that the stop movement was lifted and they would be return at the end of June, the two said. As the peak of COVID-19 passed New York State in May, the team was looking forward to a homecoming where their hometowns were already reopening, they said.

Departing June 23, they still had a 22 hour flight back home with multiple stops, arriving in Buffalo to be greeted by family and friends.

Taking changes in stride and focusing on the positives of the deployment were key to the successful deployment, the two agreed.

"With everything going on, one of our NCOs, Master Sgt. Ball had a saying to 'remember the good times.' We even had a patch made to remind us to look at the positives and the great team we have," Petty said. **gt**

# 109<sup>th</sup> Firefighters Ready for Fast Water Rescues

Story by Master Sgt. Jaclyn Lyons, 109th Airlift Wing

**STRATTON AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, Scotia, N.Y. — New York Air National Guard firefighters assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing are ready at a moment's notice to respond to an aircraft incident or help out a local fire department.**

But the 109th firefighters now also include three Airmen who are specially trained to save lives when flood waters rise.

Master Sgt. Brian Kissinger, Master Sgt. Brian Devlin, and Tech. Sgt. Daniel Marchand have all completed a four day course on shore-line operations and rescue techniques. The course, taught by the New York State Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services at its Swift Water and Flood Training Center in Oriskany, certifies graduates in fast-water flood rescue techniques.

Kissinger, Devlin and Marchand are the first Air Guard firefighters among the state's five wings to get this flood response certification.

"I've been a fireman for almost 30 years and it was the toughest training I've ever been through," Kissinger said.

The Swift Water and Flood Training Center, or just SWIFT for short, is like a water park on steroids.

The training center features a 3 acre pond, a flood simulator that allows for training in flooded streets and buildings, and a swift water channel to simulate currents of a river.

The flood simulator has three pumps that can churn 30,000 gallons of water to create a variety of realistic, high intensity, flooding hazards, according to DHSES. Trainees learn to save drowning or stranded victims and how to maneuver themselves and boats in fast moving currents.

The 109th firefighters trained in how to navigate currents, use rescue rope and high line rope techniques and how to rescue victims from the water.

The three are now part of the New York State Flood Incident Strike Team

Kissinger has been serving at the 109th as a Fireman for 19 years and is also a full time Fireman for Saratoga Springs Fire Department. He became swift water certified two years ago through the 109th Fire Department.

"As a firefighter, you train to save someone's life, all of the training and hours put in pay off

when we are tasked and ready to be there if we are needed," Kissinger said.

The 109th Airlift Wing decided to certify firefighters on swift water rescue skills as part of their mission of providing assets for urban search and rescue, Kissinger explained.

Since New York has plenty of mountain streams, lakes and rivers, flooding is likely to part of any emergency when a hurricane or tropical storm hits, he said.

Kissinger explained there was a need for swift water trained personnel for New York's Task Force 2 urban search and rescue team, so they volunteered to be a part of the team.

Task Force 2 is made up of made up of New York firefighters, State Troopers, Department of Environmental Conservation workers, other 109th Airlift Wing members, and other emergency agencies and is mobilized for incidents in Upstate New York.

The 109th Airmen were the first in the New York Air National Guard to gain this certification. This training is becoming more sought after and the plan is to have 12-16 Airmen certified in the next couple of years.

"Flood rescue is becoming more and more common in New York and local departments don't have the equipment or training that we have to assist them," said Tech. Sgt. Daniel Marchand.

Marchand has spent 13 years as a 109th Airlift Wing firefighter and seven years on the Scotia Fire Department, and serves as urban

search and rescue team lead.

Marchand, Kissinger and Devlin were placed on standby on August 4 when Tropical Storm Isaias threatened New York.

The Department of Emergency Services put Task Force 2 on alert and the three Airmen reported with other swift water rescuers to the Task Force 2 Command center in Guilderland, New York in case of flooding.

It was a good mission and they were excited to be part of the team ready to aid local resident, Marchand said.

"We see a need that the community has and we love to help people," said Marchand. **gt**



Members of the 109th Airlift Wing latest support element for swift water rescue: from left, Master Sgt. Brian Kissinger, Master Sgt. Brian Devlin and Tech. Sgt. Daniel Marchand. Courtesy photo.



The Swift Water and Flood Training Center in Oriskany, N.Y., prepares first responders for flooded streets and buildings, and includes a swift water channel to simulate currents of a river. Trainees learn to maneuver boats in fast moving currents. Courtesy photo.

## Retired Officer Returns for Pandemic Response

*Story by Nathan Morrison, New York Guard*  
SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Eleven years after retiring as a full-time New York Army National Guard officer, Kevin Swab, a combat veteran and veteran of the National Guard response to 9/11, is back in uniform and serving his state once again.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March, Col. Robert Mitchell, the New York National Guard's Director of Operations, reached out to Swab and asked him to join the New York Guard, the state's self-defense force, to help.

The New York National Guard needed experienced operations officers to staff seven joint task forces that were being set up to deal with the pandemic, Mitchell recalled. The statewide scope of the pandemic was tremendous and there had never been a need to staff that many task force headquarters at once, he explained.

So he reached out to retired New York Army and Air Guard officers to see if they could join the New York Guard and come back on duty to help, Mitchell said.

That phone call got him energized, Swab, an Auburn resident, recalled.

"I had been considering joining the New York Guard for a few years but have been busy with work," Swab said.

Now it was clear he was needed.

Swab, who was already teleworking at home from his civilian work as an Enrollment and Scholarship Officer for the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Cornell University, jokingly told Mitchell, "let me ask my wife."

"Leaving my wife and two children wasn't easy, but when after serving most of your life, it would be tough to say no when asked," Swab said.

Swab's wife Lindsay also served as a captain in the New York Army National Guard, including serving at Ground Zero in New York City following 9/11. She was supportive and encouraged his return to service, Swab said.

"She had no issue with me signing," he said.

"I did a quick accession into the New York Guard and on April 8th I was on duty in Scotia working with the 109th Airlift Wing," Swab said.

The New York Guard, the state defense force, is comprised of volunteers who serve the state as an augmentation force to the National Guard

during crisis or disaster, such as severe weather or in this case, a global pandemic.

These volunteers donate their time for training and drill and are available for state active duty response missions in times of need. Many of them, like Swab, have a wealth of private military service while others – ministers, lawyers and medical personnel—have valuable civilian skills.

Ninety members of the New York Guard served in a variety of roles as part of the National Guard response to the pandemic. They provide expertise on joint task force staffs or logistics and warehousing support.

Swab retired after serving in both the active Army and Army Guard starting in 1987.

His career began in the New York Army National Guard as a rifle platoon leader before leaving for active service and deployment to Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm in 1990. In 1994 he deployed again, supporting Operation Restore Democracy in Haiti before returning to the National Guard full time in 2000 in the Active Guard/Reserve program as a battalion operations officer.

Swab planned the deployment of Soldiers for Operation Noble Eagle in 2001, the statewide enhanced homeland security missions for his battalion, providing Soldiers to assist security at commercial airports statewide.

He retired as a major in 2009. Coming back into service felt right, he said.

"It was good to be asked, so I said yes," Swab said.

In that regard, Swab is not alone.

Also returning to the force after retirement was New York Army National Guard Col. Peter Riley who was leading the joint task force handling operations in upstate New York before a reorganization of the force.

Riley retired after a 30-year career of military service in June 2019, which included serving as the full-time State Active Duty commander of Joint Task Force Empire Shield, the New York National Guard security force in New York City. He experienced a similar call to bring his leadership and experience back in a time of need as a member of the New York Guard, Riley said.

The two were working together, as commander and executive officer of a task force that



**New York Guard Lt. Col Kevin Swab was asked to return to service in the state defense force nine years after his retirement, seen outside the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Headquarters in Syracuse, N.Y., on July 30, 2020 while serving with the COVID-19 response task force for upstate New York. Swab volunteered when the pandemic spiked back in March. Photo by 1st Lt. Lauren Warner, 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade.**

stretches from Buffalo to Syracuse to Binghamton and Albany with about 500 Soldiers and Airmen of the New York National Guard.

"Swab's time and service in the military and his time being an ROTC instructor has perfectly groomed him for situations like this," Riley said. "It was great to have him brought on mission as my XO."

Mitchell had an opportunity to thank Swab and recognize his future potential as part of the New York Guard on July 8 during a visit to warehousing operations for state stockpiles of medical supplies in Oriana, New York.

Mitchell pinned on the silver oak leaf of Swab's new rank as a New York Guard lieutenant colonel.

Swab still hasn't completely left behind his full time work with the Cornell Army ROTC program, he said.

Even as he visits mission sites and speaks with Soldiers, he promotes the idea of officer training and the career opportunities as a commissioned officer.

He still hands out ROTC promotional items to Soldiers to spark their interest in an officer's career.

"I plan on staying on duty a while and will see where I can fit in with the New York Guard after this is over," he said. 🇺🇸

# New York Naval Militia

## Sailor Leads Medical Team in COVID Response



Story by Capt. Avery Schneider, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team



U.S. Navy Reserve Master Chief David Schwartz, a member of the Naval Militia, exits a CH-47 in New York City April 16, 2020. Schwartz led 13 National Guard members to provide medical services for 600 personnel in April, May and June. Photo by Senior Airman Sean Madden, 106th Rescue Wing.

LATHAM, N.Y. — Master Chief David Schwartz has worn many hats.

The Lakeview, N.Y., resident is a husband, father, critical care nurse, Navy Reserve corpsman, and member of the Naval Militia. Now, after the COVID-19 response, he can add National Guard team leader to the list.

As a member of the Naval Militia with a force of about 2,800, Schwartz volunteers to serve on state active duty when called by the governor.

Schwartz's mission began in mid-April 2020.

He was assigned to a 369th Sustainment Brigade task force. A day later, he met his team of 12 enlisted medics and one officer – all Army Guard.

The team was tasked to create a mobile medical unit based out of the historic Fifth Avenue Armory in Harlem. Their job was to provide medical care to the more than 600 troops the brigade had on duty.

At first, Schwartz recalled, his rank seemed like a barrier. Sergeant majors, or E-9s in the Army, rarely work at a team level in the field. So when an E-9 from the Navy showed up, expectations were a little high.

“When we got past the expectations, it was game on,” Schwartz said. “We came together as a group and took care of business.”

Three team members would receive calls for medical support and forward requests to Schwartz. They'd go in teams to service members' hotels.

“We dealt with lumps, bumps, sprains, all the way up to diagnosing some individuals with COVID,” Schwartz said.

His path to New York City started more than three decades ago.

Schwartz enlisted as a Navy hospital corpsman out of high school in 1989. He was drawn to health care.

“It's that ability to give back to humanity,” Schwartz explained. “Being able to apply knowledge and intervene...or to save a life – there's just something that's always been noble about that.”

Schwartz spent 13 years on active duty and joined the naval reserve.

On normal reserve weekends, he is the Command Master Chief of Operational Health Support Unit Portsmouth in Virginia. As it's senior NCO, Schwartz manages 650 personnel in 16 units across six states.

Many of them were called to serve aboard the USS Comfort in New York City, while others helped medical staff inside New York City hospitals.

He joined the Naval Militia in 2007. But in more than 10 years, serving in the COVID-19 response was his first mission at home.

Oishei Children's Hospital in Buffalo, where Schwartz works as a critical care float pool nurse, had no COVID patients when the National Guard began deploying forces. Rather than wait to be called to duty, Schwartz volunteered for a leave of absence to get to the front lines.

“I'm one that wants to get into the fight sooner than later,” Schwartz said.

Four weeks into the mission, the team picked up a second job. They were sent to Brooklyn to conduct COVID-19 swab tests for military members and public health staff supporting the chief medical examiner.

The office collects remains of those who died at home. A normal day sees about 25 people, but National Guard teams were helping collect over 200 bodies a day at their peak.

Schwartz and his Army Guard medics worked where the bodies were stored in warehouses and refrigerated trailers before final burial.

“It's like being in a mass casualty situation,” he said. “Knowing there are hundreds and hundreds of bodies coming in – that's really hard.”

It's an experience he said will wear on people's mental health, no matter how strong they are. And that includes Schwartz.

Since returning home in early June, he's begun counseling and doesn't mind people knowing about it – especially his junior military members.

“If they know their senior leadership is willing to do that, maybe they won't be as reluctant,” Schwartz said.

All totaled, he estimates they treated about 100 individuals during sick call, administered nearly 400 COVID swab tests and conducted nearly 800 screenings for COVID symptoms.

“I felt like I contributed in maintaining the force's health,” Schwartz said. “My biggest thing is making sure our people were able to get back out there to continue work on the mission.”



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