

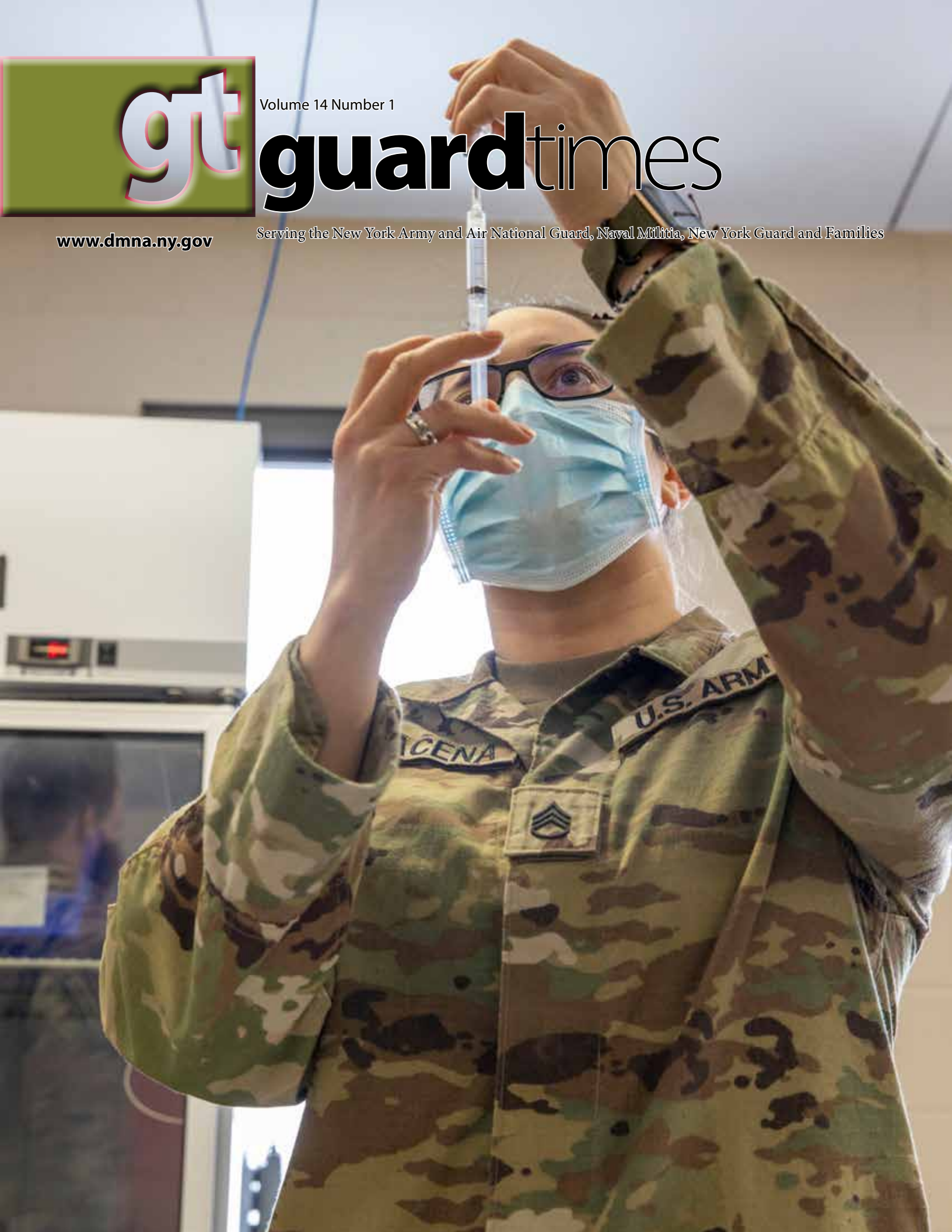
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Serving the New York Army and Air National Guard, Naval Militia, New York Guard and Families



FROM THE LEADERSHIP

Troops Learn to Balance COVID and Training

I am Maj. Gen. Thomas Spencer, the new commander of the 42nd Infantry Division and I'm happy to share some thoughts on leadership and service with the almost 20,000 members of the New York Military Forces.

I was previously the Deputy Commander of Support for the division and it was an honor to serve with the great Soldiers of the 42nd in the Middle East this past year.

Before that, I deployed to Iraq for a year as a member of the New Hampshire Army National Guard and I've had the privilege of commanding at the battalion and brigade level.

As a leader, I like to "walk about" and to just show up where troops are working.

When I do this, I do not expect "special" treatment. I just want to see what is going on and have the opportunity to get speak to leaders and their Soldiers to better understand their jobs.

I "walk about" because when I was a captain getting ready to deploy my aviation company to Somalia, I had a division commander, Maj. Gen. Thomas Schwartz, who had that command philosophy and I have used that ever since.

I advocate that leaders at every level across the Army and Air Force adopt the philosophy of TIPS.

Here is how TIPS translates:

- T = Talk: As leaders, we need to talk and communicate across the chain of command. By talking, we get to learn about and know each other, what motivates us and how to get things done.

- I = Inform: By communicating we are informing each other. Information is useless unless it is shared with those around us and being informed empowers the organization.

- P = Predictability: Leaders owe it to our organizations to be predictable in actions and emotions. We must understand how well or poorly news will be received and not be deterred from sharing. We must be predictable in our expectations of our troops.

If we do not give people time to plan and prepare, they will execute poorly. Our training must be well thought out. This means we need to plan our training and execute the plan. Nothing irritates me more than expecting a Soldier or Airman to conduct training without the proper preparation time.

"Hip Pocket" training is an excuse for either having no, or a poorly planned training plan. I do believe in Sergeant's Time training, but it must be planned and coordinated in order to be effective. NCOs, you should always have a training plan ready to execute. Idle time is a wasted training opportunity.

- S = Sensitivity: We must be sensitive to the needs of our Soldiers and Airmen.

I consider myself to lead with optimism.

I firmly believe that we wake up every day to succeed and not fail. We will not succeed all the time, but from challenges we will develop our potential. As an organization, if our individuals succeed then the organization succeeds.

We, as leaders, must develop our future leaders and show them they have the potential to excel and succeed.

I am a risk adaptive leader and ask all leaders to accept reasonable risks so that we are nimble and agile. We must be able to adapt to a changing environment by accepting new ideas, strategies and options.

Taking risks enables us to learn. As we assess risk, we will mitigate the negatives while ensuring the safety of the force.

Being risk adaptive does not mean accepting unreasonable risks that will bring harm to a Soldier or Airman. Stupidity is not risk adaptive!

I am a leader who accepts the 70-80% solution. Never ask for perfection because nothing gets done that way.

We will face many tough problems. There is always a solution and we just need to figure it out. Challenges present opportunities to grow – think outside the box and share your thoughts.

I have been a Soldier for over 33 years because I enjoy being in the Army and having the opportunity to get to know so many different people, do amazing things and see great places.

Have fun with your time in uniform. We are a select group of Americans who have the opportunity to serve our great country and to give back just a little of what the United States provides us.

I define leadership as the ability to motivate and influence others to accomplish the mission or task.

We must have the ability to lead before we can expect others to follow.

We must be able to motivate others when things get tough.

We must be able to influence others to potentially give their lives in the defense of our nation.



Maj. Gen. Thomas Spencer

And we must be focused on mission accomplishment.

2020 was a tough year and the members of the New York Army National Guard, the New York Air National Guard, the New York Naval Militia and the New York Guard have performed admirably both here at home dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and overseas carrying our nation's flag.

I look forward to being part of the team as we move forward into 2021.



Then-Brig. Gen. Thomas Spencer (right), 42nd Division Deputy Commander, Task Force Spartan, congratulates Sgt. Isaiah Williams, facility maintenance NCO, 311th Expeditionary Sustainment Command, for earning his challenge coin at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Oct. 31, 2020. Photo by Spc. Andrew Figueroa, 311th Sustainment Command.

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"We, as leaders, must develop our future leaders and show them they have the potential to excel and succeed,"

-- Maj. Gen. Thomas Spencer, Commander, 42nd Infantry Division



guardtimes

Volume 14, Number 1

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New York Air National Guard Col. Steven Hefferon, commander of the 107th Mission Support Group, Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, presents a wreath on behalf of the president at the grave of Millard Fillmore, the 13th president, in Buffalo, N.Y., Jan. 7, 2021. The 107th Attack Wing has honored the former president with a wreath each year on his birthday for more than 30 years. Photo by Master Sgt. Brandy Fowler, 107th Attack Wing.



FRONT COVER: Staff Sgt. Jennifer Aracena, assigned to the Medical Command, prepares a dosage of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at Camp Smith on December 18, 2020. The New York National Guard administered 1,000 doses of vaccine as part of a Department of Defense vaccine pilot program. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantonio, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

BACK COVER: New York Air National Guard Capt. Will Boddy, a joint terminal attack controller with the 274th Air Support Operations Squadron, controls aircraft during Exercise Bold Quest 20.2 at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, Oct. 24, 2020. Bold Quest was a multinational exercise that demonstrated joint capabilities. Photo by Staff Sgt. Joel Pfister, 1st Combat Camera Squadron.

Retired Airman is Proud of Career Supporting Soldiers

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

LATHAM, N.Y. — Twenty-nine years after walking into a recruiting office, Chief Master Sgt. Shawn Peno says he probably makes a better Soldier than he does an Airman.

He's proud to be a member of the Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation, the veterans group for the 42nd Infantry Division, and to wear as many Army ribbons as he has Air Force ones.

"I can speak Army and I can speak Air and I can translate between the two," he said.

But Peno, an Air National Guard weatherman who spent most of his career working in Army headquarters, said he's incredibly proud to wear his Air Force blue.

"I walked by the Army recruiter and I walked into the Air Force recruiter's office on purpose," he said.

Peno served as the Senior Enlisted Leader in the New York National Guard's Joint Operations Directorate, before retiring at the end of 2020.

He enlisted to be an Air Force weatherman, and after basic training and weather school, he learned to identify 27 "states of the sky," and was assigned to Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

"I said to the sergeant, 'I didn't know the Air Force had forts.' He said, 'No dummy, you are assigned to the Army.'"

After Fort Belvoir, he

reported to Heidelberg, Germany to support the Seventh U.S. Army.

That took him to Hungary, Croatia and finally Bosnia with the 1st Armored Division in 1995 to end the civil war there.

"We were doing good. We were peacekeepers. We were stopping them from fighting each other," Peno said.

His last active duty station was Fort Bragg, North Carolina, supporting 18th Airborne Corps and the 82nd Airborne Division.

Family issues took him out of the active Air Force, so he joined the Massachusetts Air National Guard's weather flight at Camp Edwards on Cape Cod.

The 202nd Weather Flight's mission was to support the 42nd Infantry Division. That was his introduction to the Army National Guard.

Following the attacks of Sept. 11, Peno provided weather information to Massachusetts' 102nd Fighter Wing flying combat air patrol missions over New York City. Simultaneously, he served as the staff weather officer for the 42nd ID overseeing the state active duty deployment in New York.

When the 42nd deployed to Iraq in 2004, Peno went along.

First he went to Fort Drum for the division's pre-mobilization training. Then to Iraq serving as the

weather expert in Tikrit for seven months.

He also worked for a month in Baghdad supporting Multi-National Corps Iraq and Multi-National Force Transition Command - Iraq.

"I loved what I was doing. I was part of the 42nd," he said. "I found a passion and a skill. I understood what (the Army) guys were asking for and how to take the data and turn it into a functional product."

Back in the U.S., Peno went on duty for a year with the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum.

Then he did a tour at National Guard Bureau in 2007, working hurricane weather prediction and again in 2008.

Next Peno was asked to come work at New York National Guard headquarters.

The operations directorate created a state-of-the-art joint operations center and Peno was asked to be one of the NCOs making it work.

He took an "administrative bust" from E-8 to E-7 to take the job. But it was worth it, Peno said. He liked the challenge and "an AGR E-7 makes more than a part time E-8," he said.

He handled command post and weather duties for Hurricanes Irene and Lee in 2011 and then Superstorm Sandy in 2012. During Sandy he also served as the weather officer for the dual status commander.



Chief Master Sgt. Shawn Peno instructing members of the New York Guard on the use of the computer communications system used by the New York National Guard during disasters at Camp Smith Training Site on June 24, 2017. Courtest photo.

He's also continued to do weather for National Guard Bureau since 2013, while handling his duties in New York. That, Peno said, has been a great job.

In 2016 Peno was tapped to be the top NCO in the operations shop. Traditionally that was an Army job.

But Maj. Gen. John Andonie, was then the operations director, thought having an Air Guard NCO in that role would be good and having Peno there would be even better.

"He is a subject matter expert on the weather, but he brings so much more to the table," Andonie said. "He is a trusted advisor at the highest levels of the National Guard."

His message for new Soldiers and Airmen is to

ignore the old saying about never volunteering, Peno said.

"We're always told never volunteer," Peno said. "And if it is volunteering for latrine cleaning detail, that makes sense," he joked.

"But if the mission is to volunteer to help with disaster relief then go," he said. Stepping up leads to new opportunities, he said.

Being in the National Guard means being a unique kind of warrior, Peno emphasized.

"The same skills we use to fight wars, we use to help people, to be the citizen part of Citizen Airman or Citizen Soldier." **gt**

Soldiers Honor WWII Veteran on his 99th Birthday

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

HASTINGS-ON-THE-HUDSON, N.Y. — Wearing a Dodgers baseball cap and a pin that read “It’s my birthday,” World War II veteran and Purple Heart recipient, Joseph Casaburi, was greeted by four New York Army National Guard Soldiers on his 99th Birthday on Wednesday, Dec. 8.

Casaburi, who served as a private first class in the United States Army Air Force from 1942 to 1946, was saluted by four members of the 53rd Troop Command outside his resident at Andrus on Hudson Senior Care Community. They wished him a happy birthday and thanked him for his service.

Casaburi returned the salute, with tears in his eyes. “You’re all a surprise,”

Casaburi said. “I feel so proud and humbled to see these men and women in uniform show up for me, it’s overwhelming.”

Casaburi, commonly known as “Uncle Joey,” to his family was deployed to Germany on the front lines of World War II.

Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantoni, assigned to 53rd Troop Command, who was one of the Soldiers who rendered a salute to Casaburi, said he was honored to be able to show his support.

“Uncle Joey set the bar, something that we all aspire to,” Pietrantoni said.

Pietrantoni was joined by Sgts. Suhkreet Kaur and Sammie Martinez, and Spc. Marla Ogden.

The Army was invited by the Casaburi family to cel-



Soldiers assigned to the 53rd Troop Command salute WWII veteran Pfc. Joseph Casaburi for his 99th birthday after his three-month long battle with COVID-19, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y., Dec. 8, 2020. Photo by Sgt. Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

ebate this occasion because he holds his time in service dear to his heart.

“He always said that being in the Army was the best years of his life,” said Cora Roman, Casaburi’s daughter.

For his service he received the Purple Heart, the American Service Medal, the European African Middle Eastern Service Medal and the Good Conduct Medal.

He received the Purple Heart for his service in Germany where he was struck in the leg by a mortar fragment while on the front lines. To this day Casaburi still has shrapnel in his body.

“If you wanted to meet Superman, that’s Uncle Joey,” said Andrew Lawrence,

Casaburi’s nephew. “He survived WWII, the Korean War, and survived COVID-19 at 98-years old and is now turning 99 today.”

This year for his birthday, Lawrence wanted to arrange a special surprise for his uncle after having survived his battle with Covid and being away from his family for an extended period.

“It’s hard because when you lose family contact and don’t get to experience daily life, you tend to slip a little,” Lawrence said. “So, this surprise will get him through the last of it and keep him fighting until he can come home.”

The Soldiers were honored to be in attendance.

“It’s inspiring to see him

with a smile on his face after having gone through so much,” Kaur said. “It motivates me to stay positive during these times.”

Martinez was grateful to be a part of the experience.

“It was a rewarding and fulfilling experience to honor such a remarkable person and Soldier,” said Martinez.

Casaburi was not only surprised by the Guardsmen, but also the Hastings-on-Hudson police and fire department, Hastings Mayor and Channel 12 News.

“I love this country and our military, let’s end this virus so I can see everyone next year at my 100th birthday,” Casaburi said. 🇺🇸



Soldiers assigned to the 53rd Troop Command, salute WWII veteran Pfc. Joseph Casaburi for his 99th birthday after his three-month long battle with COVID-19, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y., Dec. 8, 2020. Photo by Sgt. Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

“I feel so proud and humbled to see these men and women in uniform show up for me, it’s overwhelming.”

-- World War II Veteran Joseph Casaburi on the celebration of his 99th birthday

Senior Airman Graduates Brazil's Jungle School

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

MANAUS, Brazil — When Senior Airman Caleb Lapinel showed up to attend Brazil's Jungle Warfare Training School in September, he met special forces soldiers from Spain, Egypt, and Indonesia; paratroopers from Paraguay; amphibious infantrymen from Nigeria and a Kaibil special operator from Guatemala whose motto is: "If I advance follow me, if I stop urge me on, if I retreat, kill me."

"I said, wow I am surrounded by this bunch of paratroopers and special forces; the best of the best from their countries," he recalled.

He, on the other hand, is an intelligence analyst for the 109th Airlift Wing. He was also at least five years younger than the rest of the class.

But seven weeks later, he not only graduated from the demanding course, but was recognized for being the man who was always ready to help somebody else.

"That was awesome. I was not expecting that at all," Lapinel said. "I got the flag that we always carried around during the course."

Each year Brazil's Jungle Warfare Center,

hosts a class for non-Brazilians. Founded in 1964, it is now considered the world's premier jungle training center.

He made it through the Air Force Survival, Resistance, Escape and Evasion course, and he's in good shape, but he knew more about making Power Point Slides than infantry tactics, Lapinel admitted.

Despite Lapinel's lack of infantry experience, New York Air National Guard Command Chief Master Sgt. Denny Richardson, said he was confident the Watervliet, N. Y. resident would do well.

"The first time I met Airman Lapinel I was impressed by his professionalism and ability to perform under pressure without hesitation," Richardson said. "This young man is comfortable being uncomfortable."

And there was plenty of uncomfortable in the Amazon jungle, Lapinel said. He learned to avoid snakes, eat bugs and get used to being wet.

The international course, which is taught in English, is divided into four parts.

The fitness test requires: treading water for 10 minutes wearing a uniform and carrying a rifle,

swimming 400 meters in 15 minutes, running 5 miles in boots in 40 minutes, climbing a 20 foot rope hands only and covering 12 kilometers with a 35 lb load in under three hours.

The students also waterproof all their gear. That's essential because when they were not moving through a wet jungle they were swimming in a silt-laden river, Lapinel said.

The first session of instruction focused on surviving in the jungle. The students learned how to navigate, what the dangers are in the jungle and, most importantly, what to eat.

The coconut grub, for example, is the larvae of the red palm weevil which burrows into coconuts, but is very edible. Lapinel learned how to dig them out of coconuts and chow down.

"The hardest part is mental," Lapinel said. "Once you are chewing it is not too bad."

At the end of that phase the class was dropped into the jungle and tasked to set up camp and survive three days on whatever they could scrounge.

On the last day the Indonesian special forces soldier caught a snake.

"We boiled it up and split it 10 ways. It was the best and the only snake I ever had," Lapinel recalled.

Then the soldiers learned the special techniques for moving and fighting in the jungle.

A key element in that training was using rivers and water to infiltrate, he said.

The soldiers made rafts out of their gear and swam down rivers. It was important to wear clothing that dried quickly—he swapped his Air Force uniform for a Brazilian uniform designed to shed water—and also to keep their Brazilian Imbel A2 rifle clean, Lapinel said.

"The rivers we were swimming, they have a lot of sediment," Lapinel said.

"We were constantly cleaning sand and dirt and dust out of the weapon and then to keep them from rusting we used massive amounts of WD-40 and covered it in gun oil," he added.

The 3.5 kilometer swim down the Puraquequara River with their gear and all 10 students in formation was the toughest thing they had to do, he said.

"We started at maybe midnight or 10 p.m. and we just swam for four or five hours in the middle of the night," Lapinel said. "Two fish



Above - Senior Airman Caleb Lapinel conducts helicopter insertion training during the Brazilian Jungle Warfare Training School in September 2020. At left, Lapinel conducts movement training. The international course, known as CIGS for its Portuguese initials, had Lapinel as the only American in the course of 10 students. Courtesy photos.



Senior Airman Caleb Lapinel, center, assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing, trains on tactical swimming in a Brazilian river while attending the Brazil Jungle Warfare Center. Courtesy photo.

actually jumped and smacked me in the face during the swim. But we were so fatigued that nobody was caring.”

The Brazilian instructors accompanying them in boats shined flashlights along the river bank and the students would see the eyes of the Black Caiman—a Brazilian crocodile—staring at them, he said.

The final phase put everything together in a series of patrols and tactical exercises.

“I was lucky enough to have a lot of people around me who were able to give me the advice

I needed,” he said.

“We all helped each other out,” he added. “If I needed help on shooting or had a question on tactics they helped me. If they needed help carrying the radio or something, I could help them.

Lapinel’s turn to lead came during a mission to set up an ambush. The team infiltrated into the target zone and surprised the simulated enemy force.

At the end of the six weeks, Lapinel and the students were recognized by being awarded the



Lapinel, at left with fellow students of the international jungle warfare course, known as CIGS for its Portugese initials, checks their map for navigation during a training event. Courtesy photo.

CIGS jaguar badge.

They also had the right to purchase their own “facaço, de mateo” a Brazilian version of the Bowie knife with a jaguar headed handle made specifically for the jungle warfare center.

“It really is so cool,” Lapinel said of the knife. “There is just so much mystique surrounding it and so much culture.” **gt**



Above - Senior Airman Caleb Lapinel is presented with a course flag from the Brazil Jungle Warfare Center after being recognized as the student who was always willing to help fellow students during the course. At right, Lapinel, standing at far right, with fellow students of the international course, known as CIGS for its Portugese initials, after they successfully completed the course. Courtesy photos.



AROUND THE STATE

Loading Trees Locally to be Delivered Globally

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



New York State Assemblyman Colin Schmitt loads Christmas trees into a delivery truck for the national Trees for Troops charitable organization at Farmside Acres in Cornwall, N.Y., on December 3, 2020. Trees for Troops provides farm-grown Christmas trees to service members and their families, around the country and across the globe. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantoni, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

CAMP SMITH, N.Y. — Ten volunteers from the New York National Guard joined veterans, fellow service members and community members at Farmside Acres in Cornwall, N.Y., on December 3, 2020 to load 1,200 Christmas trees onto FedEx trucks in support of the Trees for Troops charitable effort.

Trees for Troops is a program of the Christmas SPIRIT Foundation that provides free, farm-grown Christmas trees to United States service members and their families, around the country and across the globe.

This marks 12 years that Farmside Acres, a family-run Christmas tree farm has participated in the holiday event.

The program is made possible each year through donations, grants, scholarships and with the help of warmhearted volunteers.

“My family really believes in the military,” said Leigh Nannini, one of the owners of Farmside Acres. “This is how we choose to give back by supporting the troops.”

New York State Assemblyman, Colin Schmitt, participated in the event at Farmside Acres for the 5th year in a row.

“This is one of the greatest causes that I’ve been blessed to be involved in,” Schmitt said,

who is an active service member in the New York Army National Guard. “It feels great to come together with fellow service members, veterans and the community each year during the holiday season.”

Earlier this year in preparation for the event, the Christmas Tree Association contacted Nannini due to an increase of requests for the trees.

Nannini feels that it’s especially important to send hope and love to military families this holiday season.

“So many families are strapped this year because of the pandemic,” Nannini said. “For myself, knowing how difficult it’s been to deal with schooling for children and everything else that’s going on in the world as a result of the pandemic, we’re only dealing with a small portion of what military families are also going through.”

Heartfelt notes are written on all 1,200 trees, to offer peace, love and support.

“I just want to offer people some peace and hope, to let them know that we’re thinking of them and that they’re in our hearts,” Nannini said.

Army National Guard Maj. Robert Freed, operations officer for the 53rd Troop Command,

volunteered for the event for the first time.

“This was a great experience and opportunity to work with some really generous civilians, as well as fellow service members,” Freed said.

Sgt. 1st Class Johann Lindsey, operations NCO for the 53rd Troop Command, also volunteered in the event alongside Freed. “I really enjoyed volunteering and helping spread holiday cheer to our fellow service members and their families,” he said. **gt**



New York National Guard volunteers help load 1,200 Christmas trees for the Trees for Troops charitable organization at Farmside Acres in Cornwall, N.Y., on December 3, 2020. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantoni, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

Aviation Unit Mourns Loss of Three Pilots

UH-60 Crash of January 20 under investigation

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

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — New York Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 171st General Support Aviation shared stories about, and memories of, three of their own killed in a UH-60 crash in the Town of Mendon on January 20, during a vigil at the Gates Fire District Firehouse on Sunday, January 24.

The Guard Soldiers remembered Chief Warrant Officer 5 Steven Skoda, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Christian Koch and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Daniel Prial. The three were conducting night vision goggle proficiency training.

The event acknowledged the company's collective loss and gave Soldiers and family members an opportunity to grieve together, said Maj. Voley Martin, the Charlie Company commander.

Martin reflected on each of the pilots and the individuality each brought to the unit.

Skoda was a mentor to all, Koch was always focused on a positive vision for the unit and Prial, coming from the active duty Army as a commissioned officer, had immense expertise and meshed perfectly with the unit, Martin said.

Lt. Col. Shawn Hatch, the 642d Aviation Support Battalion Commander, said that each one had a passion for flying and helping their community.

"They lived to fly, and they loved the men and women around them," Hatch said.

Fellow Soldiers and friends of Skoda, Koch and Prial spoke about their memories and the legacy each Soldier left behind.

Skoda was seen as a mentor with a wealth of knowledge who was always willing to help anyone. Koch lit up any room he walked into and was a friend to all. Prial would give his shirt off his back to anyone that was in need, Martin said.

Every individual that spoke agreed that the three made an impact on the lives they touched and will be remembered for their sacrifices.

The three pilots had more than 50 years of combined flight experience who were all devoted to Army Aviation and flying, said Lt. Col. Jason Lefton, the New York National Guard State Aviation Officer.

Their loss is felt across the entire flying community in the state, he said.

"Most of us are the best of the community and if we get hurt, the whole community hurts," Lefton said.

Skoda was a 35-year veteran of the Army and the New York Army National Guard and became a pilot in 1992. Koch was a 20-year veteran of the New York Army National Guard and became a pilot in 2006. Prial earned his commission from the United States Military



A memorial honors three New York Army crewmembers assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 171st General Support Aviation Regiment during a unit vigil held at the Gates Fire District Firehouse in Rochester, N.Y., on Sunday, January 24. The three died in the crash of their UH-60 helicopter January 20 near Mendon, N.Y. Killed were Chief Warrant Officer 5 Steven Skoda, in photo at left, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Christian Koch, center, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Daniel Prial. Courtesy photo.

Academy at West Point in 2012 and attained the rank of captain before accepting an appointment as a warrant officer in the New York Army National Guard so he could continue to fly.

"When I think about Prial, here is a guy with a Ph. D who gave away immense opportunity, who could have done anything, and he stayed with us," Lefton said. "Every one of these guys grew up around Steve (Skoda), and then you hear about the other part of Christian Koch. I knew he was with the State Troopers, but you don't realize the depth National Guard members have on the community."

People all over the community, state and country have reached out to express their deepest condolences, Lefton said.

The vigil showed the great impact these men had on many lives. They will be deeply missed by all, he said.

"We are all in this together, and we will get through this by looking after each other," Lefton said.

The loss of the aircraft and crew remain under investigation by the Army Safety Center. An investigation team visited Rochester to conduct its analysis of the crash. **gt**



Army Chaplain (Maj.) Anthony Stevens, chaplain for the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade, offers a memorial prayer January 22 at the crash site of the UH-60 Black Hawk medical evacuation helicopter where three crewmembers died January 20, 2021 near Mendon, N.Y. Courtesy photo.

THE JOINT FORCE

NY Troops Receive First Wave of COVID Vaccine

Story by Col. Richard Goldenberg, Joint Force Headquarters

WATERVLLET, N.Y. — Nine hundred and seventy-five New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen were vaccinated against COVID-19 from Dec. 17-20 as part of a Department of Defense pilot program which took place at 16 locations worldwide.

Priority for the vaccine went to Army and Air Guard healthcare providers and personnel assigned to the COVID-19 response force.

Soldiers and Airmen received the first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at the Camp Smith Training Site near Peekskill and Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in Syracuse.

The vaccines were all administered within 96 hours after being received at New York Army National Guard Medical Command headquarters at the Watervliet Arsenal on Dec. 16, with a second

dose available after 21 days.

The vaccine is 95% effective against contracting or spreading COVID after its second dose, according to the FDA.

But going from manufacturer into service members arms can be a tremendous effort, explained Staff Sgt. John Gamalski, the NCOIC at the Camp Smith vaccination site.

The Pfizer vaccine requires unique storage requirements, including the very low temperature of -94 degrees Fahrenheit during travel and storage in a specially designed shipping container, or shipper. The vaccine is delivered on dry ice and remains stable for about five days.

“It’s an extremely logistically heavy lift for a vaccine like this,” Gamalski said. “That shipper can’t be opened more than two times a day for more than a minute at a time. Once it’s reconstituted, it is only good for six hours from that point.”

The challenge was reconstituting the vaccine while readying medical staff and hundreds of recipients all at once.

“We have to make sure we have seats filled with Soldiers and Airmen ready to go to administer it,” he said.

The DoD limited distribution of 44,000 vaccines arrived at 10 military treatment facilities in the U.S., four overseas treatment sites and two National Guard states – New York and Indiana.

The DoD COVID Task Force selected New York for initial distribution based on its population of at least 1,000 priority military personnel and the Medical Command’s available personnel



Air National Guard Master Sgt. Towana Barnes administers the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to Airman 1st Class Fiona Kirnan, assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing, at Camp Smith, N.Y., Dec. 18, 2020. Photo by Sgt. Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

to administer vaccines and then monitor vaccine recipients.

Staff from the New York Army National Guard Medical Command led the effort to implement the vaccination of 975 personnel, all volunteers to receive the vaccine.

Since the vaccine is approved for emergency use by the FDA, it can only be offered on a voluntary basis, explained Army National Guard Maj. Keith Casserly, the Medcom unit commander.

“Many of us were some of the first service members in the nation on the front lines of the worst pandemic of the last 100 years,” said Maj. Stephen Carson, a physician assistant and medical standards officer with the New York Medical Command.

“For nearly a year all we could do is fight defense ... now we are again among the first in the nation. Now we have the initiative. Now we are able to take this fight to

the enemy,” Carson added.

Even for a vaccine given under an Emergency Use Authorization, the data behind its development gives confidence for its use, Gamalski said.

“I think it’s important to realize that these things have gone through clinical trials, even though it is an Emergency Use Authorization, there is the data and the evidence-based medicine showing, that at this point, on the people who’ve received it, it is safe enough to give to our Soldiers and make sure that they are healthy and protect those around them and make everyone around them healthier,” Gamalski said.

The COVID-19 vaccinations in Syracuse were administered to medical personnel from the 105th Airlift Wing, 174th and 107th Attack Wing medical groups, along with the Army Guard Medcom.

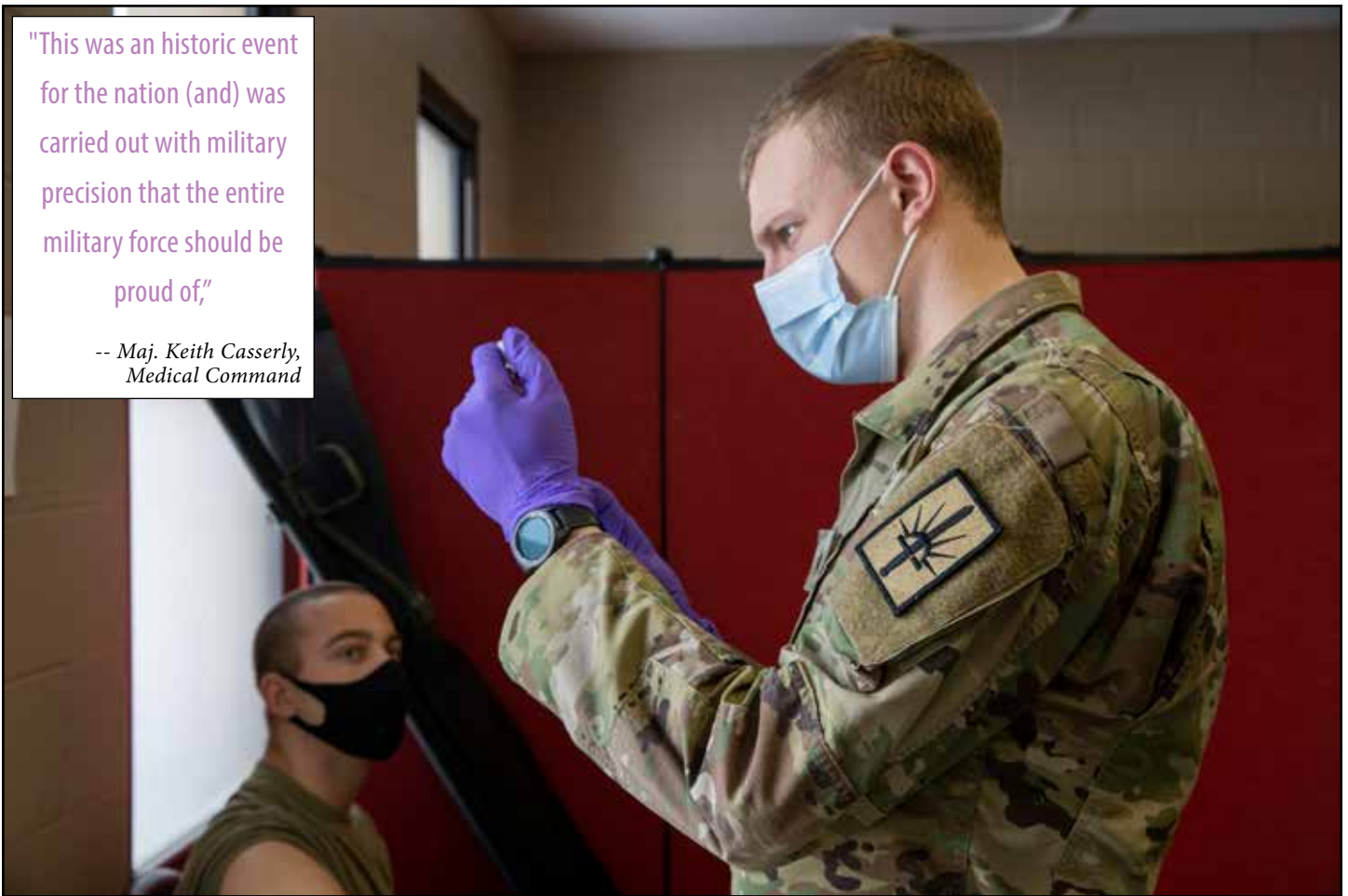
“I am personally most proud how quickly a joint team was



Air National Guard Master Sergeant Anja Manresa administers a vaccination at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in Syracuse, N.Y. on December 19, 2020. Photo by Sgt. Matthew Gunther, Joint Force Headquarters.

"This was an historic event for the nation (and) was carried out with military precision that the entire military force should be proud of,"

-- Maj. Keith Casserly, Medical Command



Sgt. Tyler Kelfant, Medical Command, prepares to administer the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at Camp Smith on December 18, 2020. The New York National Guard is participating in a Department of Defense vaccine pilot program in which 44,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine were administered to front line medical personnel at 16 locations around the world. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantoni, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

formed and how efficiently we were able to execute the mission we were given," Casserly said.

"We all worked relentlessly and without break ever since the State Surgeon, Col. (William) Lecates, accepted this mission. This was an historic event for the nation (and) was carried out with military precision that the entire military force should be proud of," he said.

For the Medical Command, Casserly says the accomplishment in a brief time-frame was exceptional in forming the team and getting shots into arms.

The next shipment of 1,000 vaccine doses arrived in New York in late January for continuing the vaccination effort.

"The next challenge will be vaccinating the rest of the force," Casserly said. **gt**



1st Lt. Timothy Foster administers the first COVID-19 vaccination to First Sgt. Steven Seidenstein, assigned to the 442nd Military Police Company at Camp Smith, N.Y., December 17, 2020. The New York National Guard provided nearly 1,000 vaccine doses to Soldiers and Airmen as part of a Department of Defense vaccine pilot program. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Laura Moore, Medical Command,

National Guard Helps at Massive Vaccination Site

Story by Col. Richard Goldenberg, Joint Force Headquarters



Spc. Anthony Randazzo, assigned to Company H, 427th Brigade Support Battalion, waits for his cue during a mission rehearsal for mass COVID-19 vaccinations in support of the New York State Department of Health at the Javits Convention Center in Manhattan, New York, January 10, 2021. The National Guard has more than 350 Guardsmen and women deployed to the vaccination site to support access control, registration, and command post staffing for the site. Photo by Sgt. Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

NEW YORK — The New York National Guard is back at New York's Jacob Javits Convention Center, helping to turn what was a COVID-19 hospital in 2020 into a mass vaccination site in 2021.

350 Guard Soldiers and Airmen worked with New York State Department of Health officials to turn the convention center, where 1,095 COVID-19 patients were treated by military

doctors from March to May 1, into the largest vaccination site in the state.

The first 1,000 shots were administered on January 13. It's anticipated that several thousand people a day will get shots daily when more doses become available.

The first New York City resident to get a shot was 85-year-old Arlene Radmin, a Manhattan

grandma. The process was painless, she said.

"The last time I was here at this facility I was here with Governor Cuomo during a very different time," said State Health Commissioner Howard Zucker at the Javits Center opening.

"It was in the spring during some of the darkest days in the history of this city and state. At that time we were here to set this facility as a medical safety valve," Zucker told reporters.

"We set it up for healthcare networks that were consumed by COVID. While the fight is not over, we are here today with a much more



Left photo: Spc. Brandon Sheremeta, assigned to the 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters, directs New York residents through the waiting area immediately before COVID-19 vaccinations at the Javits Convention Center, January 14, 2021. At right, Spc. Mohammad Khan, assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, helps a New York resident move smoothly through the line using a wheelchair during COVID-19 vaccinations at the Javits Center, January 14, 2021. Photos by Sgt. Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.





New York National Guard, Naval Militia, Department of Health and state partners stand together with Col. Michael Bice, front center, the Javits Incident Site Commander, in support of state efforts to provide mass COVID-19 vaccinations administered by the New York State Department of Health at the Javits Convention Center in Manhattan, New York, January 21, 2021. Photo by Sgt. Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade.

Below, Arlene Radmin, an 85-year-old grandmother and Manhattan resident, is the first Priority 1b resident of New York to be vaccinated, at the Javits Convention Center. January 13, 2021. Photo by Maj. Michael O'Hagan, 106th Rescue Wing.

optimistic outlook. We are here with a vaccine," he said.

New York State received its first shipments of a COVID-19 vaccine in mid-December 2020. Shots were initially administered to healthcare staff and those in nursing homes or long term care facilities.

Now, the state is expanding eligibility to 7 million essential workers, educators and those over age 65, among others, as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The challenge, Zucker explained, is providing vaccine doses in as many locations as possible.

Three state-run mass vaccination sites opened on January 13, and more are due to open in the next week. The sites will supplement locations run by counties, medical providers and pharmacies.

National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, along with members of the New York Guard State Defense Force and New York Naval Militia, will make sure things run smoothly at all of these locations, said Army Guard Col. Michael Bice, the commander at Javits.

"This is about getting as many people through as we possibly can," Bice said on the first day at Javits. "It is simply amazing to see this all come together, from the day we got here to get us all to today," he added.

"New York State is rapidly expanding our networks and capabilities to get as many New Yorkers vaccinated as fast as our supply allows," Governor Andrew M. Cuomo said January 12.

"The new vaccine sites across the state will

expedite our distribution to get our most vulnerable New Yorkers vaccinated efficiently," he emphasized.

The goal for Javits is to be the model for reaching as many eligible residents as possible, explained Dr. Doug Fish, the Department of Health pharmacy coordinator for Javits.

"Our goal is to vaccinate as many as logistically possible," Fish said. "And the space here, the staffing and the ability to increase our throughput as more vaccine arrives will get us where we need to go."

The Soldiers and Airmen at Javits provide more than the staffing for the facility and access control at the door of the site.

The troops walk people through every step of the vaccination process: from the temperature check upon arriving, to the line where they wait for their shot, to the recovery station.

During rehearsals and walk-throughs prior to opening their doors, members of the vaccination team were able to identify shortfalls, obstacles or potential choke points to help resolve issues before they arrive.

That process will continue even after opening their doors to the public, said Army National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Jenks, the senior enlisted advisor at the Javits site.

"Every day we will continue to improve our fighting positions here," Jenks said, referring to the military cultural procedure to always seek improvement. "We got this."

People getting shots on day one ranged from those over 75 years old to essential workers



from New York City agencies.


A second round of 1,000 appointments on January 14 helped build staff "muscle memory" of the steps involved, explained Col. (Dr.) Jamie Green, the medical liaison officer for the incident command post.

The more we repeat the process, the better it gets, Green said.

Officials estimate it will take between 20-30 minutes to get vaccinated when up and running.

For New Yorkers, a Guard Soldier or Airman is the first person they see when they enter and the last person they see when they leave.

Radmin, the first resident to get her shot, said she really appreciated the Guard members.

"Wonderful, unbelievable, they've been so nice to me," she said. "I'm so proud of the American Soldiers. Unbelievable." 

Guard Troops Help Secure Presidential Inaugural

Story by Spc. Jorge Garcia, 138th Public Affairs Detachment

WASHINGTON — When President Joe Biden delivered his inauguration address January 20, 1,300 members of the New York National Guard breathed a sigh of relief after spending 12 days securing the Capitol grounds.

Following the riot at the Capitol on January 6, New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo mobilized 1,000 Soldiers and Airmen in response to a federal request for troops. In 48 hours, 200 Airmen and 800 Soldiers moved to Washington on January 8 and 9. They were followed a week later by an additional 250 troops who mobilized January 15 and deployed January 17.

The New York National Guardsmen, charged with securing the area around the Supreme Court building, said they were relieved when no violence had occurred after more than a week of preparation.

Capt. Christopher Haggard, the logistics officer for Team SCOTUS, the abbreviation for Supreme Court of the United States, said he was relieved the inauguration was a smooth transition of power.

But, he said, the job was not quite done.

“Looking forward, we have to continue protecting core American values and we have to continue promoting peace and democracy,” Haggard said. “That’s an enduring mission and I feel it’s important to keep reminding ourselves of our purpose as Soldiers while executing this mission.”

Col. Jamey Barcomb, commander of the 153rd Troop Command and the task force commander, said it was awe inspiring to be on duty in the heart of the nation’s capital.

Team SCOTUS included New Jersey and Delaware National Guard troops as well as those from New York. The Soldiers and Airmen secured the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress, and the Madison building and also maintained relative security around the Capitol.

During the first few days, he felt a feeling of “veneration” when he entered the Capitol grounds, Barcomb said. It really hit home to drive into the capital region and see the iconic neoclassical architecture of the Capitol and the Washington Monument, Barcomb said.

“Our task force is operating out of the Library of Congress where some of our most



New York National Guard Soldiers provide security in front of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., Jan. 20, 2021. 25,000 National Guard troops conducted mission support for the 59th Presidential Inauguration. Below, Soldiers conduct a roving patrol near the Capitol Jan 16, 2021 Photos by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantoni, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

treasured documents reside—that sense of responsibility is awe-inspiring,” Barcomb said. “The National Guard’s obligation to serve and protect these monuments is essential and critical to the history of the United States and to democracy.”

Now that domestic threats have reached the capitol, the onus is on the Soldiers and Airmen to do everything they can to preserve the age-old foundations that define the identity of the country, he said.

“I reflect back on the events from January 6, which I think will go down in history as a day similar to that of Pearl Harbor, or 9-11 and it was a call to action for the National Guard and for the uniformed services, overall,” Barcomb said. “I think there was a sense of sadness and some degree of fear as to what it meant and what it could mean for the country.”

Being on duty, meant being ready for anything, said Sgt. Sofia Castellano, a member of the 104th Military Police Battalion said.

“It’s all about situational awareness,” she said. “It’s important to always stay vigilant because,



in a mission like this, you can’t get complacent.”

“I would say—what we did defending the capitol is an amazing accomplishment. With our military presence here, I feel like we drastically affected the outcome of this whole event,” said Sgt. Fnu Nakalunk, a member of the task force logistics staff. “You can say it was great teamwork from everyone.”

The 1,300 Army and Air Guard members represented every component of the New York National Guard, Barcomb pointed out.

“We had elements from the 153rd Troop Command, the 27th brigade, the 42nd Divi-



A Soldier assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, New York National Guard provides security support in front of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., Jan. 18, 2021. New York provided more than 1,300 Soldiers and Airmen in support of the 59th Presidential Inauguration. Below, Soldiers stand guard in front of the U.S. Capitol Jan 16, 2021. Photos by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantonio, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

sion, and Joint Force Headquarters,” Barcomb said. “We also had other elements from the 53rd troop command like the 369 sustainment brigade individuals as well as the 53rd troop command headquarters and the Digital Liaison Detachment team.”

When service members enlist they take an oath to protect and defend the constitution against both foreign and domestic enemies, Barcomb said. But most people never think about the “domestic” part of that oath, he said.

“Here we stand just days after a riotous mob thought they could use violence to silence the will of the people, to stop the work of our democracy, to drive us from this sacred ground,” President Joseph Biden said during his inauguration address.

“It did not happen, it will never happen—not today, not tomorrow, not ever,” Barcomb said.

The task force members conducted their redeployment back to New York in late January, with the majority of troops home January 27. **gt**



“What we did defending the Capitol is an amazing accomplishment. With our military presence here, I feel like we drastically affected the outcome of this whole event,”

-- Sgt. Fnu Nakalunk, 204th Engineer Battalion

NGB Top Enlisted Leader Visits Empire Shield

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

NEW YORK — Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Tony Whitehead, the top enlisted leader in the National Guard Bureau, visited New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen on security duties in New York City Dec. 11, 2020.

Whitehead, whose formal title is the National Guard Bureau Senior Enlisted Advisor, visited New York along with Gen. Daniel Hokanson, the Chief of the National Guard Bureau and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Whitehead's role is to advise Hokanson on issues pertaining to the enlisted Soldiers and Airmen of the National Guard.

During the visit Whitehead spent time with members of Joint Task Force Empire Shield, the New York National Guard security augmentation force in New York City.

The task force, which assists city, state and federal law enforcement at key transportation hubs, was created after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Whitehead said it was great getting to know the Soldiers and Airmen of the task force.

"Their professionalism and commitment to the mission in New York City since 9/11 and during the pandemic is unparalleled," he said.

He visited the Guard members on duty in Pennsylvania Station and Grand Central Terminal, the two railroad stations in New York, to recognize the Soldiers and Airmen for their work, Whitehead said.

Whitehead took on the role of senior enlisted advisor to Hokanson in August. Prior to that he had served as command chief master sergeant for Air Forces Northern and the Continental U.S. North American Aerospace Defense



Senior enlisted advisor to the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Tony Whitehead speaks to Staff Sgt. Kyle Cornelius, assigned to Joint Task Force Empire Shield Airmen at Grand Central Station, New York City, on December 11, 2020. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantoni, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

Command Region.

Along with speaking with the task force members, Whitehead joined the New York Soldiers and Airmen in producing a National Guard Birthday video.

Whitehead said that it was a pleasure meeting with the Soldiers and Airmen of JTF Empire Shield.

"They go to work every day to protect key infrastructure locations, keeping citizens safe," said Whitehead. "They are a testament to the incredible work our Guardsmen and women are doing for our communities every day."

There are currently 750 New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen on the mission. Most are members of the Army National Guard and 10% belong to the Air National Guard.

"As proud Guardsmen we're here in our community, in which we live, protect and defend in our own backyard," explained Air National Guard Col. Paul Salas, the task force commander told Whitehead.

"The mission has been long

and enduring," Salas said. "But the Empire Shield members are very cognizant and they're proud that they are the ones providing that first line defense here in New York City."

Staff Sgt. Kyle Cornelius said that he was motivated and felt acknowledged by Whitehead's visit.

"It felt great to have him come, engage and talk to us on an indi-

vidual level," Cornelius said. "By doing that, it shows we're cared for and that we're not just numbers on the floor."

"It motivates my Soldiers to know that top officials care, are paying attention and took time out of their day to meet with us," Cornelius added.

Army National Guard Spc Tenzin Tashi, received a challenge coin from Whitehead during his visit.

It means a lot as a junior enlisted Soldier to get a coin," Tashi said. "It boosts your morale and drives you to do even better and greater things."

"I consider New York City my home, and it's important that we are here to keep our home safe," she said.

Tashi was one of the Soldiers at Penn Station to be recognized and receive a coin from Whitehead.

"It's important that we're here to show the city that there are people out here, ready and willing to support in defending the city," said Sgt. Rivkah Weissberger, who was also recognized at Penn station. **gt**



Senior enlisted advisor to the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Tony Whitehead speaks to Army Sgt. Daniel Cepeda, assigned to Joint Task Force Empire Shield at Grand Central Station, New York City, on December 11, 2020. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantoni, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.



NY's Civil Support Teams Train Together

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

Army Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Myers, assigned to the 2nd Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team, takes photographs for analysis during a training event at Stewart Air National Guard Base, Newburgh, October 19-22, 2020. The 2nd CST is stationed at Stratton Air National Guard Base, in Scotia, N.Y. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Pietrantonio, 138th Public Affairs Detachment.

NEWBURGH, N.Y. — Returning from work at Stewart Air National Guard Base, an Airman became ill and was rushed to the hospital. Medical staff discovered he was exposed to a hazardous nerve agent called Soman.

Authorities were sent to Stewart, where they found a laboratory containing illegal chemicals.

Local and state authorities called in the 2nd Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team (CST) to provide reconnaissance of the building and to collect and analyze samples.

This was the scenario set in place for the 2nd CST by Maj. Gaetano Casarella, nuclear medical science officer for the 24th CST.

The 24th and 2nd CST conducted the combined training exercise at Stewart Air National Guard Base, outside Newburgh, N.Y., from October 19-22, 2020.

The 24th CST, based at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, focuses on the New York City area, while the 2nd CST, based at Stratton Air National Guard Base, in Scotia, N.Y., is configured to deploy to upstate New York.

The 24th CST drafted the first scenario for the 2nd CST to go through, and the following day, the roles reversed.

The training was designed to strengthen the relationship between the two teams and ensure

interoperability in the event of a large scale incident, according to Army Lt. Col. John Sandefur, the commander of the 2nd CST.

“Having the opportunity to conduct a joint training exercise allows us to hone the skills of working together, where both teams can utilize each other’s assets and share tactics, techniques and procedures that we’ve learned through real world events,” Sandefur said.

Two Soldiers, Staff Sgt. Kristin Northrup, the Survey Team Chief for the 2nd CST and Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Myers, the NCO in charge of the reconnaissance section, conducted the mission.

They were required to wear Level A Hazmat Suits, which is the highest level of encapsulating chemical protective suits. They used a BG4 rebreather, which is designed to filter out carbon dioxide from exhaled air, to ensure they do not inhale contaminants.

“The Level A suits with the BG4 are the hardest of the suits to work in,” Northrup said. “But it’s important for us to gain familiarity in these suits while performing in a training scenario.”

But the Soldiers and Airmen of the 2nd CST don’t just train, Sandefur said.

The 2nd CST responded to two upstate incidents in the summer of 2020 that took place within one week of each other, he explained.

The first incident was a fire at a former munitions factory during World War Two. The 2nd CST conducted air monitoring to ensure no toxic industrial chemicals were aerosolized.

The second was to a train car where a transported polymer overheated and was at risk of exploding.

The team monitored air around the incident site for toxins released by the rail car smoke, to prevent spreading to surrounding areas, and provided local authorities with insight on how to manage the situation.

“It’s not very often we get called out,” said Sandefur. “Twice within a week is especially unusual, but we’re always ready to respond.”

Each Civil Support Team includes 22 Soldiers and Airmen trained to detect chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear hazards.

There are 57 civil support teams across the United States and its territories. New York is one of the three states that have two teams.

“You never know when an incident will take place and will require both teams on scene,” Sandefur said. “These exercises make us even more prepared and efficient for real events.”

“I’m glad we did this exercise,” Northrup said. “We’re more prepared to work together in the event of a future catastrophe.”

Sniper Team Competes at Guard Bureau Match

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

LATHAM, N.Y. — Two Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry finished eighth out of 35 teams during the sniper competition held at the National Guard Marksmanship Training Center in North Little Rock, Arkansas Dec. 4-10.

Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Melendez and Sgt. Andreas Diaz, both New York City police officers who served together in Afghanistan and in the 69th's sniper section, competed against 23 National Guard state teams and 12 active duty military units in the Armed Forces Skill at Arms Sniper Match.

Diaz was the shooter, using a bolt action M-2010 enhanced sniper rifle with range of one kilometer. Melendez was his spotter, armed with the M110—a larger caliber version of the M-16A2—used to engage closer targets.

While they finished eighth overall, they came in fourth place among National Guard Teams.

That part of the competition is known as the William P. Winston Sniper Competition, named for a former chief of the Guard Bureau who encouraged marksmanship training.

Their performance was impressive enough that there is a chance they will get invited to the annual International Sniper Competition held at Fort Benning, Georgia.



Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Melendez (left) and Sgt. Andreas Diaz, both members of the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, pose in the unit's historic Lexington Avenue Armory in New York City on Nov. 25, 2020. The two, both New York City police officers who first met in Afghanistan, represented New York in the annual National Guard William P. Winston Sniper Competition in December, 2020. Courtesy photo.

"I think we outperformed most people's expectations," Melendez said. "I am actually really proud of how well we did."

"That competition has some of the best shooters and snipers in the country. You have Special Forces teams, Marine Recon and Special Operations guys there," he added.

"As far as the sniper community it is the 'who's who' of the best guys. It is pretty cool to feel you can hang with them at that level," he said.

The sniper competition tested the Soldiers' ability to acquire and engage targets using sniper rifles and pistols, their physical fitness and their ability to approach and engage a target undetected.

Diaz and Melendez also learned that the competition tests snipers ability to plan for a mission and cope with the unexpected.

The two friends, who attended the New York Police Department academy together, prepared for the contest by shooting at a private range in the Catskills. The range is used by the NYPD long-range shooting team to hone their skills.

If they could redo their train-up, Melendez and Diaz agreed, they would focus on night shooting. That was the toughest part of the competition for them.

They did their best when it came to the unusual firing positions they had to use, Diaz said.

In one case they were on a platform known as a "boat" that was elevated on four sides but not on the fifth.

"The second you got on, it moved constantly," he recalled. "We just decided to lay down on the boat and alternate shooting."

The two also did well on a "stalk lane." That task involved executing a "ruck march" with all their gear, getting into position unobserved, shooting a target and then remaining hidden when a "walker" came looking for them.

Shooting, though, was only part of the challenge, Diaz said.

"Getting through the mission is just as important as shooting," he said.

The teams would be told what their mission was. But they were not told what equipment



Sgt. Andres Diaz (left) and Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Melendez, both assigned to the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, participate in the ruck march segment of the William P. Winston Sniper Championships at Fort Chaffee Joint Manuever Training Center in Blanding, Arkansas on Dec. 5, 2020. The two Soldiers finished in 4th place. Photo by Sgt. Israel Sanchez, Arkansas Army National Guard.

they would need, or whether getting there would require a road march. They had to decide what to bring and what to leave behind so a potential ruck march would not exhaust them, he explained.

The most challenging event literally involved tying one arm behind his back, Melendez said.

The competitors flipped a coin to decide if they would lose the use of their right or left arm. He's right handed so he got lucky when his left arm was tied behind his back.

But the firing data he needed to engage the target was on written on his left sleeve. So Diaz had to read the data off to him so he could shoot successfully, Melendez recalled.

Melendez, who led the 69th sniper section, said participating in the event was "bittersweet" for him.

"I wish I had an opportunity to do this sooner in my sniper career. I learned so much about potential sniper training I would have altered my section training plan," he said.

Diaz, who took over as head of the battalion sniper section, said he came away with lots of great information to share.

He would like to see New York hold a similar sniper competition for Soldiers in those positions.

That would be great training and it would be great way to pick contestants for the National Guard's annual event, Diaz said. **gt**

Orion Soldiers Conquer New Weapons Qualification Tables

FORT DRUM, N.Y. – Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony McLean, senior noncommissioned officer of the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, engages targets with his M9 pistol during individual weapons qualification at Fort Drum, New York, November 7. McLean and his headquarters conducted the Army's new combat-focused weapons qualification in order to maintain readiness. Photo by Capt. Avery Schneider, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.



Maintenance Troops Conduct Slingload Training



Story and photo by Sgt. Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade

Spc. Arthur Allen, assigned to Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 142nd Assault Helicopter Battalion and Pfc. Cliff Joseph, assigned to the 145th Support Maintenance Company, conduct sling load operations during a training mission at the Army Aviation Safety Facility in Ronkonkoma N.Y., on Nov. 24, 2020. Sling load operations allow for the quick deployment of supplies during combat operations or to areas that are geographically difficult to reach during natural disasters or emergencies.

RONKONKOMA, N.Y. — Eleven Soldiers from the Staten Island-based 145th Support Maintenance Company partnered with six Soldiers assigned to Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 142nd Aviation, to conduct slingload training on UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters in preparation for combat and emergency response, on November 24, 2020.

Hurricanes and tornadoes have devastated towns and roadways in the past cutting off ground access to necessities such as food, water, and medical care. Sling load operations allow for the quick deployment of supplies during combat or to areas that are geographically difficult to reach, said Sgt. 1st Class Zhifeng Liao, the readiness NCO for the 145th.

“This training prepares our Soldiers to be ready to deploy urgent supplies needed during natural

disasters or on the battlefield,” Liao said.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Scott Specht and Chief Warrant Officer 5 Marques Martins, Black Hawk pilots assigned to the 142nd Aviation, picked up the maintenance Soldiers from their Staten Island armory and flew them to Ronkonkoma.

Non-aviation units, such as the 145th, must request air missions to train with aviation companies. Without these requests, aviation crews must complete their training on their own which means less time training to proficiency, Specht said.

Nine of the maintenance Soldiers experienced the Black Hawk flight and sling-load training for the first time.

“This was exciting for me because it was the first time in my

three years enlisted that I’ve seen a helicopter land on the front lawn of our armory,” said Spc. Tenzin Tashi, a wheeled vehicle mechanic assigned to the 145th.

Two Soldiers from Bravo Company guided the maintenance Soldiers through the basics.

Sgt. 1st Class Amy Klemm, Bravo Company’s readiness NCO, taught sling-load basics to the maintenance Soldiers who learned to properly identify and use the equipment they needed to hook up the load to the helicopter.

“It was great that they came in prior to the mission to do some hands-on learning,” said Klemm. “It really helped create a successful training event.”

On the airfield, Spc. Arthur Allen, the crew chief who helped guide the Soldiers doing the hookup procedure, explained the

benefits of having the maintenance Soldiers there.

“With the 145th doing the hookups and signaling, our crews were able to spend more time training with the aircraft,” Allen said.

Each Soldier doing the hookup overcame the challenge of getting the loop of the sling on to the helicopter’s hook while it hovered less than 4 feet above them with a force of more than 30 miles per hour winds.

Pfc. Shosha-Gay Forbes, an automated logistical specialist assigned to the 145th, completed her first sling load.

“The scariest part was the helicopter hovering above you and the winds pushing you away,” Forbes said. “But now that’s over I’m confident I can do this whenever needed.” **gt**

42nd Division Returns Home from Deployment

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

TROY, N.Y. — After completing their overseas mission on November 18, 660 New York Army National Guard Soldiers who deployed to the Middle East in March of 2020 returned to New York after outprocessing at Fort Hood, Texas.

The last large group of returning Soldiers, 175 arrived back in New York on Friday, December 4, at airports across the state after spending two weeks in quarantine at Fort Hood to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The Soldiers returned home in small groups to the airport nearest their home. Soldiers returned home in several movements during November.

The troops are members of the 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters who served in the Middle East in support of the Army's Operation Spartan Shield.

The division headquarters, based in Troy, New York, provided the command structure for the 10,000 men and women of Task Force Spartan; the U.S. Army forces serving in the region under the control of United States Central Command.

A small number of Soldiers involved in closing out the division's presence in Kuwait returned home later. All troops were back home by Christmas.

The Soldiers took COVID-19 tests before leaving Fort Hood. They then quarantined at home for three days and obtained COVID-19 tests to comply with New York's pandemic travel regulations.

The 42nd Division formally turned over responsibility for task force command to the 36th Infantry Division of the Texas Army National Guard on November 18.

Soldiers from the 42nd Infantry Division began arriving back at Fort Hood on November 1. The first group of returning troops arrived back in New York for home on November 18.

Soldiers continued to arrive back at Fort Hood, quarantining for 14 days and then outprocessing to return to home to New York throughout November. The last group of Soldiers arrived home December 4-5.

The bulk of the Soldiers live in New York's Capitol Region, while a large number call New York City home. But the Soldiers live in communities across the state.

Maj. Gen. Steven Ferrari, the division commander, credited the support of family and friends back home for playing an important role in the success of his Soldiers.

Task Force Spartan supported operations in Kuwait, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. 42nd Infantry Division personnel also supported combat operations in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

An armored brigade combat team, an engineer brigade, a field artillery brigade, an explosive ordnance disposal battalion and two Army aviation task forces reported to Ferrari.

"Looking back at the division's deployment, it's been a challenging and rewarding experience to be here during this historic period supporting the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility during a global pandemic," Ferrari said.

Along with overseeing combat operations, the division headquarters served as the Central Command's primary command effort for prevent-

"What made this mission great were simply the people; the people we met and the relationships built will never be forgotten,"

-- Maj. Gen. Steven Ferrari, commander, 42nd Infantry Division



Maj. Gen. Steven Ferrari (right), commanding general for the 42nd Infantry Division, and Command Sgt. Maj. Corey Cush, the division senior enlisted advisor, pass the division's colors during a transfer of authority ceremony held recently in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. The ceremony was held to transfer responsibility for Task Force Spartan to the Texas Army National Guard's 36th Infantry Division. Soldiers of the 42nd Division redeployed and after a period of quarantine and demobilization, returned home to New York throughout the 2020 holiday season. Photo by Sgt. Trevor Cullen, 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters.

ing COVID-19 from degrading Soldier readiness.

The division also oversaw numerous training exercises with allied and host nation militaries as part of the effort to deter regional aggression and strengthen relationships.

Training exercises between countries varied from testing command-post capabilities to side-by-side maneuvers. During one of these exercises, the 42nd Infantry Division deployed a mobile command post from Kuwait to Jordan within a few hours.

"What made this mission great were simply the people; the people we met and the relationships built will never be forgotten," Ferrari said. 🇺🇸



The New York Army National Guard's 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade, headquartered in Latham, N.Y., is honored by the Albany County Legislature for their work in state-wide response to the COVID-19 pandemic since March, 2020, at New York National Guard headquarters, Latham, N.Y., Nov. 12, 2020. Bill Ricard (left), Mark Gimm (second to left) and Andrew Joyce (right) presented a "Beyond the Call" COVID-19 award and proclamation to the brigade, which had 216 members on duty since the New York National Guard was mobilized in March by Governor Andrew Cuomo.

Aviation Brigade Recognized for COVID Response

Story and photo by Ryan Campbell, Guard Times Staff

LATHAM, N.Y. — Soldiers assigned to the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade were honored by Albany County legislators for their eight months of continuous service responding to the COVID-19 pandemic during a ceremony at the New York National Guard headquarters November 13, 2020.

Four Soldiers represented the brigade, headquartered in Latham, New York, receiving a certificate and proclamation from the county legislature on behalf of the entire command's work responding across New York State.

Over their eight months of responding to the pandemic, 216 members of the brigade were on duty, with 67 currently on duty as of November.

"We are recognizing our neighbors and our friends for the outstanding work they have done," said Andrew Joyce, Albany County district 9 representative. "The New York National Guard: they are our

friends, they are our neighbors; they are normal folks that serve our community."

Joyce praised the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade, or CAB as it is known, by saying that when the pandemic started, "they rose to the call, rose to the challenge and did some unbelievable, incredible things."

Since mobilization on March 10 by Governor Andrew Cuomo, more than 4,000 members of the New York Air National Guard, Army National Guard, New York Guard and Naval Militia have served in a COVID-19 response capacity.

Since the outbreak began, Albany County has had a total of 4,531 cases as of November 15, with 147 deaths.

Major mission sets conducted by New York Soldiers and Airmen include operating drive-thru testing sites, COVID-19 test kit assembly, decedent recovery, food

distribution and medical supply warehousing, among several others.

To date, more than 220,000 people have been tested in Albany County. This equates to two thirds of the county's population of 304,000.

"Often is the case with disasters, manmade and natural, and now with pandemics, we call on the National Guard to do things that are almost impossible," Joyce said. "And these folks from the span of several months from March through the summer, they ran testing sites, they delivered food and they made sure people stayed safe."

Joyce was joined by Bill Ricard, representing county legislative district 17, and Mark Grimm, representing the county's district 29.

The three legislators said they recognized the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade deserved the Albany County Legislature 'Beyond the Call' COVID-19 Award

for Soldiers' efforts to help the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The Soldiers of our combat aviation brigade are very proud to be able to help out," said Maj. Henry Chandler, assistant operations officer assigned to the 42nd CAB. "It was Soldiers that live both in Albany County and outside the county."

Chandler said Soldiers of the brigade worked all across the state, part of the New York National Guard effort that has assisted in conducting almost 600,000 tests and assembled more than 3 million test kits.

"I just want to congratulate the Soldiers of the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade and of the New York National Guard for the incredible work they've done," Joyce said. "It is a true act of patriotism to wear your mask and take all precautions possible. We will see our way through the pandemic." **gt**

Six Soldiers Are Part of New Army Museum

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

FORT BELVOIR, Va. — When the National Museum of the United States Army opened its doors to the public on Veteran's Day 2020, six New York Army National Guard Soldiers took special pride in the role they played in that event.

The six men were the models for six of 63 life-sized Soldier figures that will bring exhibits in the museum to life.

The figures of Maj. Robert Freed, Chaplain (Maj.) James Kim, Maj. Kevin Vilardo, 1st Lt. Sam Gerdt, Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Morrison and Sgt. 1st Class Nick Archibald will populate two exhibits from two different eras.

Construction on the \$200 million museum began in the fall of 2016. On Wednesday, Nov. 11 the museum held a virtual ceremony to celebrate its opening.

The National Museum of the U.S. Army, located at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, open to the public will be the first and only museum to tell the 245-year history of the U.S. Army since its establishment in 1775.

The Soldiers served as models for the figures back in 2018. While Studio EIS, a Brooklyn company that specializes in making museum exhibit figures would normally hire actors to serve as models, the museum wanted to use real American Soldiers for their project.

"Having real Soldiers gives the figures a level of authenticity to the scene," Paul Morando the chief of exhibits for the museum explained at the time.

"They know where their hands should be on the weapons. They know how far apart their feet should be when they are standing. They know how to carry their equipment," he said.

Three of the Soldiers are in an

exhibit that depicts Soldiers clambering down the side of a ship to land in Normandy on June 6, 1944.

The models of Vilardo, Gerdt, and Archibald inhabit the exhibit featuring Soldiers clambering down a cargo net into a landing craft off the Normandy beaches on D-Day.

The figure modeled by Archibald is climbing down the cargo net slung over the side of a ship into the 36-ft. long landing craft known as a "Higgins boat."

Vilardo was the model for a combat photographer. His figure is in the back of the boat taking pictures of the action.

Gerdt modeled a Soldier standing in the boat gazing toward the beach, thinking about what is to come.

Kim, Morrison and Freed modeled figures that will be in an Afghanistan combat tableau.

They portray Soldiers from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment on patrol in 2014. Each Soldier depicting a different responsibility on a typical combat mission.

The figure based on Morrison is holding an M-4 and scanning for the enemy.

Freed modeled a platoon leader talking on the radio.

Kim was the model for a Soldier operating a remote control for a MARCbot, which is used to inspect objects which might be improvised explosive devices.

The process of turning a Soldier into a life-sized figure started by posing the Soldier in the position called for in the tableau and taking lots of photos.

This allows the artists to observe how the person looks and record it.

Next, a model of the individual's face is made. A special silicone



Three New York Army National Guard Soldiers served as the models for the figures in this display in the National Museum of the United States Army at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Maj. Robert Freed, posed for the figure holding the radio, Maj. (Chaplain) James Kim was the model for the crouching figure and Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Morrison was the model for the rifleman at the right of the tableau. Courtesy photo.

based material is used for the cast. The model's nostrils are kept clear so the subject can breathe.

The Soldiers were told what their character was supposed to be doing and thinking and asked to make the appropriate facial gestures.

The Soldiers were recruited for their look and in some cases their ethnic background.

The museum needed Soldiers who were leaner than the 21st Century norm to portray World War II GIs. Museum officials also wanted Asian-American and African-American Soldiers for the Afghanistan exhibit which is why Kim and Morrison were approached.

Next the artists sculpted the sections molded from the Soldier into a complete figure, dress and accessorize, and paint precise details on the face and skin; crafting it to humanistic and historical perfection.

Being a part of the National Museum of the United States Army is

an honor, the six Soldiers said.

While their names won't be acknowledged on the exhibits, it will be great to know they are part of telling the Army story, they all agreed.

Freed said he was looking forward to visiting the museum. But because of the COVID-19 pandemic he doesn't anticipate going until the spring or summer, he added.

Visitors to the museum will have to acquire tickets online and attend at specified times in order to prevent crowding, according to museum officials.

Vilardo, who has a 9-year old daughter, said she was pretty excited when he showed her photographs of him being turned into an exhibit figure.

"I told her it would be just like 'Night at the Museum'," he said referring to the Ben Stiller movie about museum exhibits coming to life, "and that we could go visit anytime." **gt**

EOD Techs Partner with FBI for Blast Training

Story and photos by Ryan Campbell, Guard Times Staff



Explosive materials are demonstrated to show differences in how explosions from bombs occur during a five day Post Blast Investigators School led by the FBI at a rock quarry in Jamesville, N.Y., Oct. 27, 2020. The quarry, owned by Hanson Aggregates, allowed the students to see blast demonstrations and conduct crater analysis which was used by the 1108th Explosive Ordnance Company as part of their predeployment training.

JAMESVILLE, N.Y. — Thirty members from several agencies, including 21 Soldiers from the New York Army National Guard's 1108th Explosive Ordnance Company, trained with FBI agents on the identification of explosive ordnance at a Jamesville, New York rock quarry from October 26 to 30, 2020.

In cooperation with Hanson Aggregates, the company that runs the quarry, the Soldiers used the FBI-led training as part of their preparations for deployment.

They were also joined by members of the Vermont Air National Guard, Puerto Rico National Guard, New York State Police and active Army personnel from Fort Drum, New York.

"It is a five-day course known as the Post Blast Investigator's School," explained David Acquavella, special agent bomb technician assigned to the FBI Albany Division. "We normally conduct the class for law enforcement and reserve a few seats for the military, so this iteration is unusual for the audience being almost entirely military personnel."

For the 1108th, this satisfied a training need that they otherwise would not have during predeployment training, according to Maj. Salvatore Cautela, training officer for the 501st EOD Battalion.

"We asked the FBI for the training in lieu of equivalent training in Alabama during the 1108th premobilization training because the

11th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group could not provide the training," Cautela said.

Cautela explained that during the course, they learned how to identify what initiates an explosion, how to reverse engineer the explosion and then analyze the blast crater and debris for forensic evidence.

"The other units in theater are going to rely on the expertise of the EOD companies if anything were to happen," Acquavella said. "Anything we can do to help them prepare for the mission and support the other commands keeps them safe."

Demonstrations at the quarry allowed the students to see firsthand the lessons learned and best practices when it comes to dealing with explosives, FBI instructors explained.

"Those techniques we highlighted go way back over decades," Acquavella said. "Sometimes the tactics change in order to bypass security measures, but the science of chemical reactions won't. Mixing A plus B under standard conditions is always going to give you C."

Cautela called the training "top-tier practice" for scene and evidence exploitation, and skills proficiency for the 1108th. Not only will it help them overseas he said, but the skills can also be used at home.

"The training provides the FBI requirement to support any post-blast federal case evidence in the event of CONUS EOD support to civil

authorities," Cautela said.

This relationship between the FBI and the New York National Guard is one that has gone back many years, Acquavella said.

"FBI Albany has worked with the National Guard since before I was transferred here 10 years ago," he said. "We do a lot of joint training involving emergency response to explosive devices and weapons of mass destruction."

Acquavella also emphasized that the joint effort included bomb squads from the New York State Police, Onondaga County Sheriff's Office and Syracuse Police Department who helped make the practical demonstrations happen, he said.

"When I contacted our area bomb squads to enlist their support, everyone was very eager to help," Acquavella said. "Police officers are very patriotic to begin with and many of us involved with the training are veterans ourselves."

Hanson Aggregates was also very eager to allow use of their property on a short notice, he added.

"Doing this course for the benefit of deploying military personnel gives it an added significance that I hadn't fully realized until the class began," Acquavella said.

"I have a ton of respect for everyone in our military and will do anything I can to help them in their mission." **gt**



Former 109th Wing Commander Moves to Pentagon

Story by Master Sgt. Christine Wood, 109th Airlift Wing

STRATTON AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, Scotia N.Y. — New York Air National Guard Col. Michele Kilgore, commander of the 109th Airlift Wing since 2017 has moved on to a new position at the Pentagon in 2021.

Col. Christian Sander was named the next commander. He deployed for Operation Deep Freeze until February 2021.

Kilgore's last day at the 109th was on December 14th and she began her new job immediately as Political-Military Affairs Officer for the Joint Chiefs of Staff office for Strategic Plans and Policy, JCS-J5.

That assignment will entail working in the Strategy, Plans & Policy Directorate which provides recommendations to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Her new assignment will focus on Political-Military Affairs in the Western Hemisphere Division.

Kilgore explained the position is suitable for her education background in political science, with an emphasis in Latin America studies and a minor in Spanish. She also has a master's degree in national security studies.

"Col. Kilgore's high level of enthusiasm, engagement, vision and commitment in leading the unit over the past three years has kept the 109th Airlift Wing in the forefront of emerging arctic operations," said Command Chief Master Sgt. Jeffrey Trotter, the senior enlisted leader in the wing. "Her leadership has leveraged our wing to meet the needs of the recently released Air Force Arctic Strategy."

During her command tour, Kilgore said she spent a lot of time explaining the wing's mission in Canada, Greenland and Alaska to

civilian and military leaders.

The fact that the 109th is mentioned specifically as an asset in the United States Air Force Arctic Strategy, published earlier this year, reflects the importance of the wing in arctic operations, she said.

"Col Kilgore is one of those exceedingly rare leaders with an impressive diverse background," said Maj. Gen. Timothy LaBarge, the commander of the New York Air National Guard.

"Combine this with a penchant for detail, a unique ability to connect and communicate and a remarkably professional group of Airmen at the 109th, you have a recipe for a superior command tour, which is exactly what we have witnessed over the last three years at the 109th," LaBarge said.

Kilgore said her most memorable moments at the wing were the times she participated in exercises and joint operations, along with the wing's annual deployments to Antarctica and Greenland.

"The best part of the job is being boots on the ground with the people where the mission happens," Kilgore said.

Kilgore deployed to Antarctica three times. On two of those times, she was the Expeditionary Group Commander of the Air Force personnel deployed to Antarctica.

She also went to Greenland seven times for various distinguished visitor and planning engagements, Exercise Polar Reach, Arctic Survival School, Exercise Arctic Edge 2018 and visited allies and partners in Canada.

"The execution side of the mission is very rewarding," Kilgore said.

"Working so far in the future on planning and programming initia-



Col. Michele Kilgore, the former commander of the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing, poses by the official South Pole at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station in Antarctica on February, 6, 2020. Courtesy photo.

tives, however, means you don't always see the immediate reward. As a leader you put in long hours behind the scenes planning and budgeting to make sure the wing is set up for success," Kilgore said.

"When you go on a deployment or an exercise, you can see all the hard work come together to complete the mission," she added.

Kilgore said she took pride in her efforts to make sure the unit had what it needed to achieve success; making sure budgets were correct, recruiting the next generation of Airmen, advocating for new and improved airplanes, new buildings and renovations to base security.

"Ultimately the job of the commander is to get resources into the hands of the people who accomplish the mission," Kilgore said.

According to Kilgore, one of the most challenging times she faced as a commander has been dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and

challenges it has presented to the unit members and continuing to meet mission requirements.

To help combat the personal stress of pandemic, she sought out simplicity, spending time with family, reading and exercising, she said.

Despite the challenges of the past three years, Kilgore reflected fondly upon her time as commander of the 109th.

"I am privileged to lead the 109th Airlift Wing. My life is forever changed because of the people I met and worked with over the last three years," Kilgore said.

"My chapter here may be closing, but like any good story or book, I can't wait to see what happens next," she added. **gt**



Members of the 174th Maintenance Group prepare to taxi the first Block 5 MQ-9 Reaper on February, 12, 2019 at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in Syracuse, N.Y. A Block 5 is an updated version of the MQ-9 that allows upgraded communication and electrical systems. Photo by Master Sgt. Barbara Olney, 174th Attack Wing.

Syracuse Airmen Hit 60,000 Hours of MQ-9 Time

Courtesy story

HANCOCK FIELD AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, Syracuse, N.Y. — The Airmen of the 138th Attack Squadron, part of the 174th Attack Wing, hit the milestone of 60,000 hours flying unmanned MQ-9 Reapers in combat at the end of November, 2020.

That 60,000 hour figure isn't like the odometer turning over in a car, explained Maj. Elliot Sanders, the assistant director for operations for the squadron. It represents a lot of time and effort by many Airmen, he emphasized.

"Each of those hours requires a team of 10 or so people, pilots, sensor operators and intelligence coordinators, actively engaged in close air support or reconnaissance over watch," he said. "In other words, those hours are spent supporting the warfighter on the ground."

"60,000 hours is a really significant milestone," said Lt. Col. Nathaniel Johnson, 138th Attack Squadron commander. "It's literally 2,500 days of keeping an aircraft in the air, watching our enemies, protecting our allies and keeping America safe."

The 138th has been flying combat missions almost continuously since 2009, Johnson said.

The 36 ft. long aircraft, with a 66 ft. wingspan, is controlled via satellite link by a pilot and sensor operator located at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base.

The MQ-9 can find enemy forces or individuals, track them on the ground and attack if required, using a Multi-Spectral Targeting System, which includes an infrared sensor, cameras which can track objects miles away and a laser rangefinder and target designator. The aircraft is armed with Hellfire missiles and satellite guided bombs to strike targets on the ground.

In fiscal year 2020 the Air Force maintained 70 MQ-9 combat air patrols over American and allied forces operating throughout the world. National Guard attack wings like the 174th and the 107th, based in Niagara Falls, flew 20% of those missions, according to the National Guard Bureau.

The Air Force strives to maintain 60 MQ-9 aircraft overwatching American forces around the world.

The 138th Attack Squadron traces its history back to 1947 when it was organized as fighter

squadron, flying World War II-era F-47D fighters and charged with defending northern and central New York from attack. In 1950 the unit switched to jet fighters and continued to upgrade to new aircraft.

The wing flew combat missions during Operation Desert Storm and in 2001, F-16's from the 174th were some of the first fighter jets scrambled after the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center.

In 2008 the decision was made to transition the 174th Fighter Wing from F-16s to the MQ-9. In 2010 the F-16s were retired and the wing, and the 138th Attack Squadron switched to flying the MQ-9.

"We were the first Guard unit to fly Reapers," said Johnson. "We're still doing it to protect our families from terrorist threats that train in ungoverned parts of the world."

"I have an immense sense of gratitude to all the Air National Guard men and women, and the civilians and contractors of the 174th Attack Wing that enable us to continue doing our part, Johnson said. **gt**



A LC-130H assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing lands at at McMurdo Station, Antarctica, 2020. Because of COVID-19 the wing deployed aircraft to New Zealand where they were in a standby status, responding to emergency mission flights only. Courtesy photo.

109th Airlift Wing Returns to New Zealand

COVID restrictions keep LC-130 flights in standby status

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

STRATTON AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, Scotia N.Y. — Airmen and aircraft from the 109th Airlift Wing flew to Antarctica this year to provide logistics support to the National Science Foundation's U.S. Antarctic Program.

For the last 32 years the 109th Airlift Wing has supported National Science Foundation research in Antarctica by flying people, supplies and equipment around the continent.

The mission was part of Operation Deep Freeze, the Department of Defense's annual support to U.S. Antarctic operations.

The wing deployed three LC-130s and three aircrews and a maintenance team, a total of 31 Airmen, to Christchurch, New

Zealand where they were on standby for contingency missions that require flying to Antarctica.

The three Skibirds left Scotia on Monday, November 23. It takes roughly a week to fly from upstate New York to New Zealand.

The change in mission is being made because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The National Science Foundation minimized the number of people who set foot on the continent during the 2020-21 season as part of a commitment by the United States and other nations to prevent the introduction of the COVID-19 virus to Antarctica.

The footprint of activity will be "reasonably reduced," according to the National Science Foundation.

Traditionally the 109th Airlift

Wing flew six to seven LC-130 ski-equipped aircraft and around 250 personnel to McMurdo Station, the National Science Foundation facility on the continent which serves as the hub for U.S. research activities.

McMurdo Station is 2,415 miles away from New Zealand, roughly eight hours of flying time.

"Despite the complications of operating during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the 109th Airlift Wing will continue its support of the National Science Foundation," said Col. Christian Sander, the wing's vice commander. "Personnel and aircraft will operate during the timeframe when only ski-equipped aircraft may operate within Antarctica, while adhering to all international and Center for

Disease Control guidelines."

Sander will be in command of the deployed aircraft and personnel.

The 109th Airlift Wing flies the largest aircraft in the world which are equipped to land on ice and snow. This ability makes the 109th Airlift Wing an indispensable partner to the National Science Foundation in the Arctic and Antarctic activities.

During the 2019-20 season, crews completed more than 150 missions within Antarctica by flying 2,100 researchers and support staff, 2.8 million pounds of cargo and 1.8 million pounds of fuel to research stations across the continent. **gt**

Star Shines for 105th Airlift Wing Commander

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times Staff

LATHAM, N.Y. — Denise Donnell, the commander of the New York Air National Guard's 105th Airlift Wing, based at Stewart Air National Guard Base in Newburgh, was promoted to brigadier general during a ceremony held at New York National Guard headquarters in Latham, New York, January 6.

Donnell has commanded the wing since 2017 and will continue as the wing commander. The base is also host to the Marine Corps Reserve's Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 452 and Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 49.

Normally, her promotion would have taken place in one of the wing's massive hangers with 1,000 Airmen in formation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic a small group of 35 people gathered at New York National Guard headquarters and others viewed the proceedings over a Zoom call.

Maj. Gen. Timothy LaBarge, the commander of the New York Air National Guard, said the Donnell was promoted to the general officers rank because of her leadership skills and drive.

"Denise has demonstrated her capabilities time and time and time again and she has never disappointed," LaBarge said.

Donnell, who has more than 4,000 flying hours in aircraft ranging from the giant C-5 Galaxy transport to the Navy's P3 Orion patrol plane, started her career in the Navy and has served in the New York Air National Guard since 2002.

In her remarks, Donnell thanked her family for their support and those along the way who helped her do well.

"It is an honor to continue to serve the men and women of the 105th Airlift Wing," Donnell said. "This star is as much for them as it is for me."

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Robert Tilli, the chaplain of the 105th Airlift Wing, noted that the star, the rank of the general officer, has traditionally denoted exceptional things. Donnell, he said, has been an outstanding leader and "she truly is a shining star."

Her husband Greg Szczesny, and son Max Szczesny pinned her new one star rank on her uniform during the ceremony. Her daughter Alison presented her with a new officer cap with one star.

Donnell received her commission through Naval ROTC and served in the Navy for nine years as a naval aviator.

She joined the New York Air National Guard's 105th Airlift Wing in 2002 and qualified to fly the C-5 galaxy.

In 2005 she was selected as the commander of the 105th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron and earned her maintenance badge while continuing to fly as a C-5 aircraft commander.




Air National Guard Brig.Gen. Denise Donnell's son Max Szczesny, left, and husband Greg Szczesny pin her general's star on during a promotion ceremony held January 6 at the Joint Force Headquarters in Latham, New York. Donnell is the commander of the 105th Airlift Wing, based at Stewart Air National Guard Base in Newburgh, New York. The wing flies the C-17 Globemaster III on missions around the world. Photo by Senior Master Sgt. William Gizara, 109th Airlift Wing.

In May 2010, she assumed command of the 105th Maintenance Squadron, and led the unit through a conversion from C-5 to C-17 aircraft and simultaneously qualified as a C-17 pilot.

In 2013 she was assigned to the 109th Maintenance Group at Stratton Air National Guard Base in Scotia and also qualified to fly the LC-130 "Skibird" that the wing flies in support of missions in Antarctica and the arctic.

In 2016 she was reassigned to the 105th Airlift Wing as wing vice , commander.

Other New York Air National Guard female officers who have reached the general officer ranks are: Maj. Gen. Dawne Deskins, currently serving as Deputy Director of the Air National Guard; retired

Maj. Gen. Irene Trowell-Harris, a medical officer; and retired Brig. Gen. Esther A. Rada, a judge advocate general. 

NY Airmen Link Sensors to Shooters



CAMP ATTERBURY, INDIANA -- New York Air National Guard Capt. Will Boddy, a joint terminal attack controller assigned to the 274th Air Support Operations Squadron based in Syracuse, N.Y., controls aircraft during Exercise Bold Quest 20.2 October 24, 2020. Led by the Joint Staff, Bold Quest was a multinational exercise that demonstrated joint capabilities to link sensors to shooters across air, land, sea, space and cyberspace. Photo by Staff Sgt. Joel Pfeister, 1st Combat Camera Squadron.

NY Guard Volunteers Lend Support to Vaccinations

Photos by Sgt. Sebastian Rothwyn, 369th Sustainment Brigade



NEW YORK — New York Guard Spc. Jennifer Alvarado, assigned to 56th Area Command, assists with safety for New York City residents in the observation area at the Javits Vaccination Site by sanitizing chairs before and after use January 31, 2021. At left, Pfc. Yuriy Burmagin, assigned to the 88th Area Command, provides chaplain assistance January 13, 2021 in support of the Javits Incident Command Post. The NY Guard members support efforts to provide mass COVID-19 vaccinations administered by the New York State Department of Health at the Javits Convention Center in Manhattan, New York. The National Guard has more than 350 Guardsmen and women deployed to support staffing for the site.

New York Naval Militia



Supporting Task Force COVID-19

ORISKANY, N.Y. — Members of the New York Naval Militia are supporting COVID-19 missions across the state, including unloading pallets of hand sanitizer at the State Preparedness Training Center, in order to be distributed across New York. Courtesy photos.



Patrol Boat Maintenance

LEEDS, N.Y. — Engineman Petty Officer Third Class Maria Serani and Maintenance Technicians Bill Fenty and Keith White perform 300 hour service on an OptiMax engine for Patrol Boat 281 December 28, 2020. The water pump was replaced on the engine's lower unit.

The fleet of patrol boats were built specifically for the New York Naval Militia. They are all aluminum, high speed boats capable of operating in waters throughout the state's waterways.

At left, Patrol Boat 281 is part of the New York State Military Emergency Boat Service, formed in 2001 after identifying the need to develop a boat service to support homeland security efforts. The fleet can conduct missions including port security, support of law enforcement, surveillance, evacuations and maritime transport. Courtesy photos.



