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



FROM THE LEADERSHIP

Making your unit one where people want to stay

With every branch of the military struggling to meet end strength, it's no surprise that recruiting and retention is the New York National Guards' top priority.

There are many reasons that people decide to join or not join the military, but as the Command Chief of the 106th Rescue Wing and now the New York Air National Guard, I have focused on the reasons why they stay or leave.

Focusing on retention requires us to analyze what motivates people already serving to continue to do so, or why they decide to leave.

Once we find those reasons, then we need to take action to do what works and change what doesn't.

As Command Chief of the 106th Rescue Wing, I took the time to not only interview every member onboarding but, more importantly, I interviewed every member leaving.

Taking this time to sit with Airmen gave me insight into what they thought. But these interviews also gave me a feeling of responsibility for their success or failure in their service.

Two conversations I had one week were particularly enlightening to me and have impacted how I view every single person who chooses to wear a uniform.

While speaking to a young man who was in-processing, I

asked about his accent. He told me his family had immigrated from a small country in Africa called Eritrea. We then spoke about what made him join and what he expects to get out of his service.

His response was, "I work at the gas station down the block, and I always see the men and women in uniform getting gas. This country has given me so many opportunities and I want to serve with them."

Later that same week I met with a 42-year-old man in-processing as an E-3.

Through our conversation, I learned that this recruit owned a successful law firm in the Hamptons and that yes, he is an attorney.

I asked if he knew about our JAG office and his response was typical, but not what I expected to hear in this case. He responded that he was happy serving as a

helicopter crew chief stating, "I always wanted to serve my country and always wanted to work with my hands".

Here are two new Airmen who couldn't have been in more different places in their lives but shared the same passion for service.

As leaders at all levels in both the Air and Army Guard, it is our responsibility to make sure that these new recruits get to serve the way they pictured serving to the best of our ability.

And when it comes to retaining them, our job is not to get them to reenlist for another four years but to create an organization in which they want to stay for 20 plus years.

This means creating an environment where Soldier and Airmen safety is our top priority: free from bullying, discrimination, sexual assault, and toxic leadership.

"while everyone keeps focusing on recruiting to get to end strength, I challenge us to also look at retaining the Soldiers and Airmen who are already trained and wearing the uniform,"

-- Chief Master Sergeant Michael Hewson



Chief Master Sergeant
Michael Hewson

I know we can't save everyone when it comes time to reenlistment and not all members are worth reenlisting but there are some that just need a little extra attention to keep them motivated.

The military has invested a lot of time and money training these warfighters and with the pool of new recruits shrinking the need to keep them in uniform is more important than ever.

Fortune magazine wrote an article on why people leave organizations, and only a very small percentage left for a better salary.

People leave organizations because they are not respected for the work they do and they do not feel valued, the magazine found.

A large percentage of Soldiers and Airmen leave for the same reasons. Great leaders create a culture in which our members feel like they are an integral part of our success in executing both our State and Federal missions.

So, while everyone keeps focusing on recruiting to get to end strength, I challenge us to also look at retaining the Soldiers and Airmen who are already trained and wearing the uniform., the Soldiers and Airmen who had that dream of serving their country.

As their leaders it is our responsibility to retain every man and woman we can, to be ready for that next fight.



NYC Signal Soldiers Welcome New Commander

NEW YORK -- Army National Guard Major Kevin Vilardo, executive officer of the 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters Battalion, at left, passes the guidon of the 42nd Infantry Division Signal Company to Capt. Joseph Bologna during his change of command ceremony at the Manor Road Armory on Staten Island, January 21 2023. Bologna replaced Capt. Ryan Visgauss. Photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Morales, Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

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Airmen from the 109th Airlift Wing's Polar Camp Skiway Team join members from the 440 Transport Squadron, Royal Canadian Armed Forces to load equipment and fuel into a Twin Otter aircraft at Resolute Bay, Nunavut Canada, in preparation for Exercise Guerrier Nordique, Feb. 27, 2023. The team prepared an arctic landing strip for a wing LC-130. Courtesy photo.



FRONT COVER: Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, celebrate St. Patrick's Day while deployed to Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Mar. 17, 2023. During the celebration, the unit marched on parade across Camp Lemonnier, attended mass at the post chapel, and held an award ceremony to recognize Soldiers with 10 years of service with the regiment. Photo by 1st Lt. Joshua Castillon, Task Force Wolfhound.

BACK COVER: Cargo pallets are loaded on to a C-17 Globemaster III assigned to the 105th Airlift Wing during exercise Guerrier Nordique at Resolute Bay, Nunavut, Canada, March 18, 2023 Photo by Master Sgt. Patrick Espeut, 105th Airlift Wing.

FACES of the FORCE



Staff Sgt. Angelo E. Gelster, an ammunition specialist assigned to Task Force Orion, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, is promoted during a ceremony atop an M1A2 Abrams tank in Grafenwoehr, Germany, Feb. 20, 2023. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jordan Sivayavirojna, Task Force Orion.

Overseas Soldier Picks Abrams Tank for Promotion

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

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany -- In 2004, Staff Sgt. Angelo Gelster enlisted in the New York Army National Guard to be an M1 Abrams main battle tank crewman.

However, in 2006, his unit, the 1st Battalion, 127th Armor was reorganized as the 2nd Squadron, 101st Cavalry and he was no longer a tanker. He was now a cavalryman training to conduct reconnaissance instead of employing armor.

But he never forgot where he came from. So when he came up for promotion to staff sergeant, and he was deployed to the Grafenwoehr Training Area alongside an armor unit, he asked to be promoted standing on one of their M1A2 Abrams tanks.

"It went back to my roots," the Cheektowaga resident said. "Coming in through tanks and then going to be cavalry."

Gelster, an ammunition specialist, is among

140 Soldiers from the New York Army National Guard's 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team who are deployed to Grafenwoehr as part of the Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine.

The unit ensures the combat effectiveness of Ukrainian military personnel training on systems and equipment issued under the United States' Presidential Drawdown Authority.

The 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, is part of that training effort, and they are equipped with M1A2 tanks.

He hasn't been around tanks since his days in the 127th Armor, but he still misses serving on them, Gelster said.

"They're awesome," he said. "They're big. They go boom. It's not hard to explain."

The 4th Cavalry tankers were happy to allow Gelster to get promoted on one of their tanks.

Army National Guard promotions are based on overall performance, attitude, leader-

ship ability and development potential. They recognize the best-qualified Citizen Soldiers to continue careers in the New York Army National Guard.

"Angelo's outstanding contributions to the New York National Guard at home in his community and on deployment overseas are a sure sign that he will excel in his new rank," said Col. William Murphy, commander of Task Force Orion.

When his deployment is complete, Gelster's new rank will take him to the New York Army National Guard's 642nd Aviation Support Battalion in Rochester.

He said he worked hard to get his promotion, and tells other Soldiers who aim to advance their careers that it takes a lot of determination and knowledge.

"Work hard. Fight for yourself," he said. "Nobody's just going to give it to you." **gt**

State Chaplain pins on Colonel's rank

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

LATHAM, N.Y. — Douglas Brock, who serves as the state chaplain for the New York National Guard, was promoted to the rank of colonel in the New York Army National Guard during a ceremony on January 13 at Guard headquarters in Latham.

In his role, Brock coordinates the activities of New York Army National Guard and New York Air National Guard chaplains.

Military chaplains provide for the religious needs of service members and their families, while also serving as an expert on religious, moral and ethical issues for commanders. They play a key role in helping Soldiers and Airmen and their families deal with the stresses of military life and deployments.

Brock also serves as the chaplain for Joint Task Force Empire Shield, the New York National Guard's 700-person security augmentation force in New York City that is based at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn.

Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, praised his service to the Soldiers and Airmen of the National Guard, particularly during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Young men and women were asked to do the difficult work of retrieving the bodies of those who died, Shields said, and Brock and

his chaplains were there to help them deal with the emotional fallout of the necessary job.

"Chaplain Brock has earned this promotion through his years of service," Shields said.

In his remarks, Brock thanked his family, his friends, his fellow chaplains and soldiers, and the members of his church for their support over the years.

"I just think, this feels like this promotion is the result of a group effort," Brock said.

His military experience made him a better pastor and his civilian experience made him a better chaplain, Brock said.

Brock has served as battalion chaplain for two units, the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade and the 42nd Infantry Division. He deployed to Kuwait in 2013 and again in 2020, when he served as the head chaplain for Task Force Spartan Shield, the Army forces based in Kuwait and other Middle Eastern countries.

Brock enlisted in the Air Force in 1985 after graduating from high school in Hayward, California. He served as a radio technician in Iceland and Texas.

After leaving the Air Force, Brock studied at Davis Bible College in Binghamton where he earned a bachelor's degree in religious education and



Chaplain Douglas Brock's wife Lori pins on his new rank as Brock is promoted to colonel during a ceremony at New York National Guard Headquarters, Latham, New York, Jan. 13, 2023. Photo by Ryan Campbell, *Guard Times* staff.

went into the ministry.

He served as the pastor of the Straits Corners Baptist Church in Straits Corners from 1999 to 2021.

In 2008, Brock decided to become a military

chaplain and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army's chaplain's candidate program and attended Liberty Theological Seminary as part of that process.

He currently resides in

Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn, with his wife and four of their 12 children. Three of their adult children are in the military and five are involved with the Navigators Military Ministry. **gt**



Chaplain Douglas Brock is promoted to colonel during a ceremony at New York National Guard Headquarters, Latham, New York, Jan. 13, 2023. Photo by Ryan Campbell, *Guard Times* staff.

Air Guard Chief Takes on 1st Air Force Role

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

LATHAM, N.Y. — Command Chief Master Sgt. Denny Richardson, who was the top enlisted leader in the 5,880-member New York Air National Guard, is now the senior enlisted leader for the 1st Air Force and the Continental U.S. NORAD Region.

From 2020 to March, 2023, Richardson was the enlisted advisor for the commander of the New York Air National Guard; first for Maj. Gen. Timothy LaBarge, and then for Maj. Gen. Denise Donnell.

In his new role, Richardson is the enlisted advisor to Lt. Gen. Steven Nordhaus, an Air Guard officer who took command of 1st Air Force in March.

He replaced Command Chief Master Sgt. Mikael Sundin, who had been in the job since 2020.

1st Air Force, based at Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City, Florida, is responsible for aerospace control and air defense of the lower 48 states.

The force of 15,000 Airmen in the active Air Force, Air Guard, Air Force Reserve — including some Canadian Forces personnel — is responsible for carrying out the responsibilities of the Continental U.S. North American Aerospace Defense (NORAD) Region. It is also the Air Force component of the U.S. Military's Northern Command.

NORAD is the joint U.S. and Canadian command responsible for coordinating air defense of North America.

Taking on his new role is “a big change,” Richardson said.

“1st Air Force is the New York Air National Guard times five,” Richardson said. “The scope of responsibility, and all the different centers, and wings, and sectors that fall under the umbrella of 1st Air Force is amazing and encompasses the North American continent.”

But being the Command Chief for the nation's largest Air National Guard — New York has five flying wings, the Eastern Air Defense Sector and four geographically separated units — is good preparation for the 1st Air Force job, Richardson said.

Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, praised Richardson for his service.

“Command Chief Master Sgt. Denny Richardson is a proactive leader who has made a tremendous impact during his career in the New York Air National Guard. I am confident he will do a great job as the senior enlisted advisor for 1st Air Force,” Shields said.

Richardson joined the Maryland Air National Guard in 1989 and served as an aircrew life support specialist.

“My goal was to get money for college, do my first term enlistment and then leave,” he said.

But then, “I found my why and I found my purpose was serving,” Richardson added.

In 1997 he got the opportunity to transfer to the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing and become a full-time Guardsman.

The 109th flies the LC-130 ski-equipped Hercules and supplies Antarctic research stations. That took Richardson to the bottom of the world 15 times, as well as to the Greenland ice cap.

“The time spent in Antarctica sticks out. It is definitely unique,” he said.

Back home, Richardson ran the 109th Airlift Wing honor guard program. His team conducted about 400 military funerals across northeastern New York each year.

“When I hear taps, it still gets me every time, because it means something,” Richardson said.

He also deployed to Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan along the way.

In 2020 he was selected to move to the state headquarters role and begin spending time on the road going from unit to unit.

The travel and diversity have prepared him for his next mission, Richardson said.

One tool Richardson used to reach out across



Command Chief Master Sgt. Denny Richardson speaks with Col. Rob Donaldson, the vice commander of the 109th Airlift Wing at Stratton Air National Guard Base near Schenectady, New York, on March 23, 2021. Photo by Jaelyn Lyons, 109th Airlift Wing.

the force, was a podcast he created called “Journeys Through Leadership.”

In his podcast Richardson talked with Airmen in every unit ranging in rank from senior airman all the way up to the New York Air Guard commander about their life, jobs and how they have succeeded in the Air Guard.

He wants to bring that podcast with him in his new job, Richardson said.

His role in 1st Air Force will be to advocate for the Airmen and their missions, he said. He wants to help build a sense of community among the different elements and units for 1st Air Force, Richardson said.

“People know about NORAD. You hear about NORAD all the time. But you never hear about 1st Air Force,” Richardson said.

And as a Black Airman, he also knows he is a role model for other Black service members, Richardson said.

“I do realize, and I know, that when I walk around, I represent not just the proud tradition of Airmen, but I represent the proud tradition of Black Americans who have served,” he said.

He's looking forward to his new duties, but he will miss the New York Air Guard, Richardson said.

“It has been an amazing journey, to say the least and the experiences that I have had, and the opportunities to learn, have been absolutely amazing,” he said. **gt**



Amber Murray, the management support specialist for the New York Air National Guard headquarters, has been recognized as the top civilian employee in the Air National Guard for 2022, Latham, New York, Jan. 25, 2023.

Civilian Takes Top Air Guard Award

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

LATHAM, N.Y. — New York Air National Guard employee Amber Murray has been named the Air Force Association Lisa S. Disbrow Outstanding Civilian of the Year for 2022 for the work she did throughout the year in support of New York Air National Guard operations.

The award was created to annually recognize Air Force civilian employees with less than 10 years of federal service, who exemplify the professionalism and dedication to duty of former Under Secretary of the Air Force Lisa S. Disbrow.

Each year, Air National Guard leadership announces the recipient of this award based on nominations from the 54 state and territory Air National Guards.

Winning this award moves onto compete for overall Air Force top honors out of the more than 170,000 Air Force civilians across the world.

Murray works as the management support specialist for the New York Air Guard as well as the administrative aide for Maj. Gen. Denise Donnell, the commander of the New York Air National Guard.

“At first I thought it was just a local nomination type of thing,” Murray said. “I didn’t realize how big it was.”

“I’m very honored and a little overwhelmed,” she continued.

Murray was put in for the award by Chief Master Sgt. Greg Mihalko, the senior enlisted leader at New York Air Guard headquarters.

“I really just try to do the best I can, I give everything I’ve got and then some.”

-- Amber Murray, the Air National Guard 2022 top civilian employee

“When I was hired at JFHQ last September, Mrs. Murray was the first person to contact me asking if I required assistance gaining access to the Army network, shared drives and other administrative taskings,” Mihalko explained.

“After I started, I saw her consistently doing the same thing for everyone and never hesitated to go above and beyond,” he said.

Besides her work in the office, Mihalko emphasized the magnitude of what she does outside of work for her community, volunteering her services as a paralegal and public notary to low income families.

In the last year, Mihalko explained that Murray notarized 63 documents at no charge which was valued at \$1,890. She also teamed with a local attorney to provide legal services to 12 families valued at \$65,535.

She also takes pride in coming from a military family, frequently attending fundraisers and events to honor veterans, Mihalko said.

From Latham, Murray has worked for DMNA for 16 months.

“My main function is the administrative support of the office, which helps the functionality of all the wings,” Murray said.

The New York Air National Guard is made up of the 105th Airlift Wing in Newburgh, the 106th Rescue Wing on Long Island, the 107th Attack Wing in Niagara Falls, the 109th Airlift Wing in Scotia, the 174th Attack Wing in Syracuse and the Eastern Air Defense Sector in Rome, making it one of the largest Air National Guards in the country.

Murray also handles the administrative needs for Maj. Gen. Denise Donnell, including travel, scheduling and daily functions.

She said she always had a dream of serving the nation and found that she could contribute the most as a civilian employee.

“I realized that sometimes you can do the job you really want just behind the scenes,” Murray explained. “This was an opportunity for me to do that.”

The best part of the job according to Murray, is getting the chance to work with all of the wings across the state and getting to know people and understanding the various missions the New York Air National Guard is tasked with.

“For me, it’s pretty cool,” she said. “Not everyone understands the missions or can relate to it, being able to explain it to people is pretty cool.”

Looking into the award criteria, Murray said she wanted to understand who Lisa S. Disbrow is and do as much research into it as she could to see if she could measure up to the significance of the award.

“Yes and no,” Murray said. “I really just try to do the best I can, I give everything I’ve got and then some.”

“This recognition for Mrs. Murray means so much to me,” Mihalko said. “As a leader, the greatest award for me is to see the appreciation of the people in my charge.”

Looking ahead, Murray said she is looking forward to where the New York Air National Guard will take her and the opportunities for growth and to keep learning.

“It’s a great place to work as,” Murray said. “I’ve got a lot to learn and I’m hoping to do more.”

THE JOINT FORCE

PJ Becomes NY Air Guard State Command Chief

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

LATHAM, N.Y. — A pararescue jumper who served in the 1991 Gulf War and deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in the War on Terror, became the senior enlisted leader of the New York Air National Guard on March 10 during a ceremony at New York National Guard headquarters.

Command Chief Master Sgt. Michael Hewson took over as the New York Air Guard's top enlisted Airman from Command Chief Master Sgt. Denny Richardson during the change of responsibility ceremony.

The traditional ceremony featured the transfer of the New York Air National Guard flag from Richardson to Hewson by Maj. Gen. Denise Donnell, the commander of the 5,880-Airman force, marking the transfer of responsibility from one enlisted leader to another.

Richardson, a resident of Schuylerville, has been tapped to become the command chief for the 15,000-member 1st Air Force at Tyndall Air Force Base, near Panama City, Florida.

Hewson, a Queens resident, was formerly the command chief for the 106th Rescue Wing based in Westhampton Beach on Long Island.

In her remarks, Donnell praised both men for their service and dedication.

Richardson, she said,

“gives trusted advice, shares much needed feedback, and covers my blind spots.”

She thanked Hewson for taking on the responsibility of being the highest-ranking non-commissioned officer in the New York Air Guard.

“We will work together to ensure our five wings and air defense sector are as ready as possible for winter storms in Buffalo, deployments from Africa to Antarctica or something

completely unexpected,” Donnell said.

Hewson thanked Donnell for selecting him for the job and said it was an honor to take on the new responsibilities.

He also thanked the leaders who helped him during his career.

“The people who invested in me didn't do it so because I asked them to. They did so because of their own character and their commitment to improving others,” he said.

Richardson, who served in Scotia's 109th Airlift Wing before moving into the state position, said he valued his service here.

“I consider myself blessed to have spent the last 26 years in New York and in the New York Air National Guard,” Richardson said.

Hewson joined the Air Force in 1986 and transferred to the New York Air National Guard's 106th Rescue Wing in 1989 to serve as a pararescue

jumper.

Pararescue Airmen go through two years of training that includes medical training, parachute training and high-altitude parachute jumping, scuba diving and survival training.

Along with his wartime deployments, he has served in the Horn of Africa.

He also supported NASA space shuttle launches, civilian search and rescue operations, long-range open ocean rescue missions, hurricane relief and responded to the 9/11 attacks at the World Trade Center.

Hewson also served as the 106th Operations Group superintendent and has been the command chief for the 106th Rescue Wing since 2018.

In civilian life, Hewson served as a Suffolk County police officer, retiring in 2018 after 25 years as the head of the department's emergency services unit.

His military awards include the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Medal, the Aerial Achievement Medal, the Air and Space Commendation Medal, the Combat Readiness Medal, the New York Aid to Civil Authority Medal, and the New York Defense of Liberty Medal for service following the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. **gt**

“The people who invested in me didn't do it so because I asked them to. They did so because of their own character and their commitment to improving others,”

-- NY Air National Guard Command Chief Master Sgt. Michael Hewson



Maj. Gen. Denise Donnell, the commander of the New York Air National Guard, returns a salute from Command Chief Master Sgt. Michael Hewson during a ceremony at New York National Guard headquarters, Latham, New York, March 10, 2023. Photo by William Albrecht, *Guard Times* staff.



New York Army National Guard State Planner Maj. Melanie Padilla works alongside her Brazilian army counterpart during the initial planning conference for exercise Southern Vanguard 24 in Macapa, Brazil, Dec 5-8, 2022. Photo by Maj. Tifani Summers, U.S. Army South.

NY and Brazil Plan Major Joint Exercise

Story by Ryan Campbell, *Guard Times Staff*

LATHAM, N.Y. — The New York Army National Guard is laying the groundwork for a joint exercise between New York and the Brazilian military set to take place in the fall of 2023.

Having a relationship with Brazil under the National Guard's State Partnership Program, exercise Southern Vanguard 24 was planned during the first week of December 2022, according to Maj. Melanie Padilla, the New York National Guard state planner.

The planning conference held in Brazil identified training scenarios, logistical requirements, and objectives for the training event.

"Exercise Southern Vanguard is an enduring exercise to advance Brazil-US strategic partnership and increase US-Brazil human, procedural and technical interoperability," Padilla said.

"All while enabling regional crisis response capability and capacity," she added.

The complicated jungle terrain of Brazil makes planning well in advance even more important, as U.S. Soldiers will be operating in unfamiliar conditions, explained Master Sgt. Rob Mitchell, the U.S. Army South Training and Exercises non-commissioned officer in charge.

"When we come down here and train face to face, we create lifelong relationships with each other, and we learn how they apply tactics in a different terrain than what U.S. Soldiers are used to."

New York will be sending 80 personnel from the Army National Guard Medical Command, the 466th Medical Company-Area Support, the 138th Public Affairs Detachment, the 1st Battalion, 258th Field Artillery, the 53rd Digital Liaison Detachment and the 133rd Composite Support Company.

Padilla explained that the primary missions for New York

Guardsmen will be medical support, integrating staff between the U.S. and Brazil, water purification, public affairs integration with the U.S. Embassy, Brazil and U.S. Army South, and fires planning and integration.

Many of these tasks are designed to enhance readiness between New York and Brazil to operate in a joint environment, Padilla said.

"The purpose of providing medical support will be to focus on the ability to conduct health protection activities to improve efficiency in providing medical care in a multinational force environment," she said.

She also explained that the water purification efforts will be focused on the ability to conduct bulk water storage and distribution in austere environments.

New York formed a state partnership with Brazil in 2019.

"Combatant Commands across the board are realizing (the state partnership program) is an untapped resource that is available to them to enhance relationships on the diplomatic side," Padilla said.

Padilla said the National Guard's expertise in planning for disaster

response and catastrophic events in major metropolitan areas such as New York City, would be useful in Brazilian urban areas like Rio De Janeiro.

Because the National Guard focuses on domestic operations, the Guard is better at these missions than the active-duty military, she said.

"It's essential to plan together and discuss the issues between the two armies," said Brazilian army Maj. Rafael Pentead, the North Military Command G3.

"We can face each other and determine what works for both armies. For me, it's a very great opportunity to get a shared experience with a friendly country and develop my view of the U.S. Army and its processes," he said.

New York participated in Southern Vanguard 21 in December of 2021. Over 900 U.S. and Brazilian soldiers conducted operations in Lorena, São Paulo, Brazil, making it the largest U.S.-Brazil training exercise since World War II. **gt**



Master Sgt. Rob Mitchell and a Brazilian army infantry officer discusses training scenarios, logistic requirements and training objectives for the forthcoming bilateral event that will take place in the fall of 2023. Photo by Maj. Tifani Summers, U.S. Army South.

NY Represents Entire ARNG at Best Medic Competition

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times Staff



Sgt. Thomas Mulhern and Sgt. Klayton McCallum, both members of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry, treat a simulated patient during an event at the Army Best Medic Competition at Fort Polk, Louisiana, Jan. 23 2023. Photo by Sgt. Terry Vongsouthi, 21st Signal Brigade.

FORT POLK, La. — The worst moment for the two New York National Guard Soldiers who competed in the Army Best Medic competition at Fort Polk was when they tried to land navigate in a cold driving rain coming in sideways.

“I never struggle with land navigation,” said Sgt. Thomas Mulhern. “But we couldn’t even take our map out for fear of getting drenched.”

They thought things wouldn’t be too bad at Fort Polk for the competition, said Sgt. Klayton McCallum.

“I was thinking the Gulf Coast in January. How bad can it be?” he recalled.

But when the wind was driving that day, he fell into a knee-deep pool of water.

“We found ourselves laughing that time,” Mulhern said.

“Every now and then you have to step out of your body. We both found it funny, the conditions we were doing land nav in,” he added.

Mulhern and McCallum, both medics assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, represented the entire Army National Guard at the annual Command Sgt. Maj. Jack L. Clark U.S. Army Best Medic Competition, held January 23 to 27.

Competing as Team 24 out of 31 teams, they narrowly lost 10th place

to the 10th Mountain Division stationed at Fort Drum, New York, McCallum said.

This was the second year that medics from the 108th competed at the Best Medic event. In 2022, Staff Sgt. Dylan Delamarter and Sgt. Ethan Hart represented the Army National Guard.

McCallum, the 108th’s full-time medical operations non-commissioned officer, enlisted in 2014. He served as an airborne infantryman in the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vincenza, Italy. In 2017 he joined the New York Army National Guard and became a medic.

Mulhern enlisted in 2012 and served as a medic in the 101st Airborne Division before joining the New York Army National Guard in 2016.

He currently works in construction after serving as the full-time medical readiness NCO for the FEMA Region II Homeland Response Force for a couple of years.

The four-day competition was mentally and physically demanding with only four hours of sleep each night, the two men said.

“It seemed like a continuous event,” McCallum said.

Mulhern said they would get a packing list each night and try to figure out what to expect as they didn’t know what was going to happen the next day.

But that was no guarantee. They would be told to pack something and

then they would not use it at all, they said.

They didn't know if they should prepare to move fast, or slow and easy, Mulhern said.

"We just kind of woke up each day, not knowing what to expect," McCallum said.

On a ruck march carrying 75 pounds of gear, nobody knew how far they were going. After 16 miles, they had to handle simulated casualties from an attack.

"I work in the trades, and I handle 75-pound bags of concrete regularly. This was like carrying a bag of concrete for 16 miles, Mulhern said.

During one march there were six events, including a stress shoot where they engaged targets with M4 carbines and M17 pistols while moving.

Afterwards, they had to move a simulated casualty 1.8 miles on a stretcher and hoist the casualty onto a hovering helicopter.

They did the best at a water event, Mulhern and McCallum said.

They jumped into a pool from a high diving board in full field gear, carrying a rubber rifle. When they hit the water, they dropped their gear and swam 25 meters to the far side of the pool, retrieved a casualty and swam it back.

Then while Mulhern dove down into the pool to retrieve their gear, McCallum administered CPR at pool side. Then they jumped back into the water with their full rucksacks and swam back.

Most exciting was when they jumped from a hovering CH-47 Chinook helicopter into a lake in a move called a helocast, the two said. Of course, more medical tasks awaited when they reached the shore.

"It was a unique thing that I never had a chance to do," Mulhern said.

During the closing ceremony, Lt. Gen. Scott Dingle, the Surgeon General of the Army, praised all the participants for their "mental toughness" and "enthusiastic endurance."



Sgt. Thomas Muhlern and Sgt. Kalton McCallum, both members of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry, tread water during an event at the Army Best Medic Competition at Fort Polk, Louisiana, Jan. 22, 2023. Photo by Sgt. Terry Vongsouthi, 21st Signal Brigade.

"That type of determination was heartwarming," Dingle said.

The competition, he said, was the toughest and most demanding he's seen in his 35 years in the Army. But, he emphasized, it is important that the U.S. Army have outstanding medical personnel.

"The world's most powerful and lethal Army must have the world's best medical instrument of power supporting it," Dingle said.

McCallum and Mulhern said they were glad to get the chance to attend and learn a lot.

The Army National Guard will host the event in 2024 and they have been invited to an April planning meeting for that competition.

The best thing about competing, Mulhern said, was getting the chance to test himself.

On the first day of the event, one of the chaplain's said "chose growth over comfort," Mulhern said. He kept that in mind the entire time.

"If you chose the easy way in the Guard, you can get by," he said.

"But when you step out of your comfort zone and do this difficult thing, it shows you how tough you are and how capable you are. We are all tough in the military and we are all capable. You just need to be as tough and as capable as you can," Mulhern said. **gt**

"The world's most powerful and lethal Army must have the world's best medical instrument of power supporting it."

-- Lt. Gen. Scott Dingle, Surgeon General of the Army



Sgts. Thomas Mulhern and Klayton McCallum, members of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry, work on a simulated casualty an event at the Army Best Medic Competition at Fort Polk, Louisiana, Jan. 24, 2023. Photo by Sgt. Terry Vongsouthi, 21st Signal Brigade.

369th Recognizes New NCOs in Kuwait

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

CAMP BUEHRING, Kuwait — Ninety Soldiers deployed to Kuwait under the command of the 369th Sustainment Brigade were inducted into the ranks of the non-commissioned officer corps during a Feb. 18, 2023 ceremony at Camp Buehring.

This celebration, with hundreds in attendance, was a solemn affair that emphasized and built on the pride shared by all NCOs.

Three candles representing the virtues of a non-commissioned officer were lit by Sgt. Teion Middleton, a human resources sergeant assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division's 82nd Finance Battalion, to start the ceremony.

A red candle signifies valor, a white candle stands for purity and a blue candle represents honor.

After the national anthem and the invocation, Master Sgt. David Ressler, the master of ceremonies, spoke about how the legacy of the unit, as the 369th Infantry Regiment of World War I, stands as an example of the best of America.

The 369th Infantry was an all-Black New York National Guard unit mobilized and sent to France in World War I. But the racism in the U.S. Army at the time meant they fought as part of the French Army instead.

But the regiment distinguished itself and became known as the Harlem Hellfighters for their determination in battle.



An arch made by Soldiers with the 783rd Support Maintenance Company, Task Force Red Ball, stands tall for non-commissioned officers to walk through during an NCO Induction ceremony held at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Feb. 18, 2023.

Ressler spoke about one particularly bloody encounter the Harlem Hellfighters had in the Argonne Forest of France, on May 14, 1918.

Pvt. Henry Johnson fought off a German raid in hand-to-hand combat. Johnson was promoted to the rank of sergeant upon his return to New York City and posthumously received the Congressional Medal of Honor on June 2nd, 2015, from former President Barack Obama.

"The sergeant operates in an environment where sparks fly," said Sgt. Jeffrey Kemper with the 82nd Finance.

"The sergeant can accurately be described as where the axe meets the stone," he continued to recite. "I am that sergeant!"

Around the room, selected NCOs of increasing rank stood up to recite words that would resonate with inductees on the roles of the NCO up to the first sergeant.

"When you are talking about the first sergeant, you are talking about the lifeblood of the Army," said 1st Sgt. Shawnta Rood, senior enlisted advisor to the commander of the 101st Human Resources Company, of the 101st Airborne Division.

"When first sergeants are exceptional, their units are exceptional, regardless of any other personality involved," she continued. "The first sergeant is proud of the unit and, understandably, wants others to be aware of the unit's success. I am that first sergeant!"

The guest speaker of the ceremony was Command Sgt. Maj. Ricardo Saunders of the Army Reserve's 143rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command.

"As you raised your right hand to join the Army, you became a leader," Saunders said. "Now you will be charged to build and shape the leaders of the future."



Command Sgt. Maj. Curtis Moss, the senior enlisted advisor of the 369th Sustainment Brigade, Task Force Hellfighter, leads the Charge of the Non-Commissioned Officer during an NCO Induction ceremony held at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Feb. 18, 2023.

The newly promoted NCO takes this charge along with upholding the traditions and standards of the Army. The inductees understand that Soldiers of lesser rank must obey their lawful orders and accordingly accept responsibility for their actions, Saunders told the audience.

"Each Soldier is a vital part of your team," said Saunders. "As a leader, you will always be on watch; setting the tone for your organization."

As Saunders closed his speech, he spoke about Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston's initiative called This Is My Squad, or TIMS. The goal of the initiative is to build more cohesive teams throughout the Army.

Saunders encouraged everyone to really understand the people sitting next to them.

"The leader must ensure each member is competent, physically fit, highly trained, ready, disciplined and a part of a cohesive team," he said.

Saunders said that leaders should listen to and understand each member, show compassion and empathy, find common ground with each member, identify risks and stressors, set the culture and motivate to always achieve success.

"Remember that you are a warrior and a member of the greatest team ever assembled," he said. **gt**



Sgt. 1st Class Alex Williams, a recruiter at the Jamaica Recruiting Office, works at his office in Queens, New York, Jan. 23, 2023.

Recruiter Aims to Help Others Reach their military Goals

Story and photos by Sgt. Andrew Valenza, Joint Force Headquarters

When he was 10 years old, Williams’ family immigrated from Jamaica to the United States. Although they were excited to be in a new country, tragedy struck almost instantly, he recalled.

“My family was fortunate enough to immigrate here to the States, you know, to provide a better opportunity for me...and within my first month of being in the country, September 11 happened. So again, a little bit bittersweet to have the opportunity to immigrate, but then simultaneously, something so traumatic happened to the country,” Williams said.

In 2010, Williams saw service in the Army as a way to earn citizenship for himself and his family. In particular, he wanted to join the National Guard for its focus on community.

“We have people that are in the communities, we have people that are in colleges, we have people that are just, they’re stationed here, right, working in their community, and simultaneously working in the military,” Williams said.

Through a close family friend, Williams was able to enlist and begin his path to citizenship.

After 13 years of service, Williams said he is grateful for what he has received through the National Guard.

“I think about what the guard has offered me, right? The opportunity to better myself, career training, leadership experience, leadership opportunity, you know, and the opportunity to change my family’s life,” Williams said.

On top of bettering himself individually and his family’s life, it also helped him start a family of his own.

“Both of us were able to attain our citizenship and immigrate to the United States. We’ve been blessed enough to have children and essentially, to a degree, fulfill the American dream. I think that’s just some of the ways the military has helped my family,” Williams said.

Now for his full-time job, Williams works to provide others with the same opportunities he was given when he came to the United States, as a recruiter in his home town.

“The opportunity of being able to help people get into the Guard, help people with their citizenship or through the Guard process, it’s near and dear to my heart for that reason,” Williams said.

“Having immigrated, having gone through the immigration process through the military, seeing the ups and downs of it, and being able to help people expedite that process and just navigated has been really great,” he said. 🇺🇸

NEW YORK — Serving in the New York Army National Guard helped Sgt. 1st Class Alex Williams become a United States citizens sooner than he would have otherwise.

Now he is out to help other immigrants achieve their goal of becoming a citizenship by helping them join the National Guard, by serving as a recruiter in the Jamaica, Queens recruiting office.



Aviation Soldiers Honored Prior to Deploying

RONKONKOMA, N.Y. — Maj. Gen. Raymond Shields, the adjutant general of New York, met with Soldiers of the 642nd Aviation Support Battalion during a ceremony bidding them farewell as they are mobilized for a deployment to Kuwait in support of Operation Spartan Shield.

The more than 400 Soldiers, including a contingent from the 126th General Support Aviation Battalion, said goodbyes on January 22 before heading out for training in Pennsylvania and Texas, before going overseas where they will spend the rest of the year. Photo by Capt. Mark Getman, New York Guard..



Aviation Troops Mobilize for Middle East Deployment

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — Four hundred New York Army National Guard Soldiers from Rochester, Dunkirk and Long Island left for a deployment to Kuwait on January 23.

The Soldiers trained in Pennsylvania and Texas before heading to the Middle East for 10 months.

Three hundred and fifty Soldiers are assigned to the 642nd Aviation Support Battalion who are trained to provide logistics and maintenance support to the helicopter units of an Army combat aviation brigade.

Forty-five Soldiers are members of Detachment 1, Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 126th General Support Aviation Battalion, which is

based in Rochester and fly CH-47F Chinook heavy lift helicopters.

The 642nd conducted farewell ceremonies at the Army Aviation Support Facilities in Rochester and Ronkonkoma on January 22.

The Soldiers from Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 126th General Support Aviation Battalion, took part in the ceremony in Rochester.

The 642nd conducted two weeks of training at Fort Indiantown Gap, a training base near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

The unit then deployed to Fort Hood, Texas to conduct about two months of training before deploying to Kuwait.

The Soldiers from Bravo Com-

pany will also train at Fort Indiantown Gap and move to Fort Hood, Texas with their helicopters for training. They will be under the control of their battalion at Fort Hood and in Kuwait while they fly missions in support of Army forces in the region.

The 642nd will provide support to the 185th Expeditionary Combat Aviation Brigade during operations throughout the region.



Sgt. 1st Class Joann Duclose, a senior human resources sergeant from the 642nd Aviation Support Battalion, flags in a UH-60 Black Hawk during sling load training with aviators from the 3rd Battalion, 142nd Assault Helicopter Battalion, Camp Buehring, Kuwait, June 5, 2014. Photo by Staff Sgt. Harley Jelis, 42nd Infantry Division.

The 185th is a Mississippi Army National Guard unit.

The Soldiers from both units are expected to return home in about around the end of the year. **gt**

Guard Chief Visits Deployed Soldiers

Story and photo by Maj. Avery Schneider, *27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team*

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany – One week removed from the one-year anniversary of Russia’s unprovoked invasion, the National Guard’s top officer visited Guardsmen helping to ensure the combat effectiveness of

Ukrainian troops.

Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, met the New York Guardsmen. They are at the forefront of training, equipping and assisting Ukrainians just off the

front lines from Ukraine.

“Our Guardsmen and their active component Army partners are exceptional trainers, and the Ukrainian Soldiers are motivated learners,” Hokanson said.

Elements of the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team are staffing the Joint Multinational Training Group - Ukraine mission.

The CNGB met with Task Force Orion leadership and Soldiers at Camp Kherson, home of the JMTG-U.

“It is important for me to see you here to ensure you have everything you need to make the Ukrainians successful,” Hokanson told them.

“The whole world is watching the work you’re doing,” he said, “and it’s making a huge difference.”

This is the second time the 27th IBCT has served with the JMTG-U, following a deployment to Ukraine in 2017. It is the first Guard unit to serve two JMTG-U rotations.

“We’re here to help in any way we can,” Army Col. William Murphy, the Task Force Orion commander, told Hokanson.

“We are the conduit between active U.S. military forces and members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine,” Murphy said. “We know the urgency of this mission and the gravity of what the Ukrainian people have at

stake.”

“Our close ties with Ukraine speak to the global strategic relevance of the Guard,” Hokanson said. “Training is more effective when it’s built on trust and enduring relationships.

“I am incredibly proud of the work our Guardsmen and women continue to do in support of our Ukrainian partners,” he said.

When he asked Task Force Orion Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Markle about the morale of the Ukrainians, he was told plainly:

“They are extremely motivated to push the Russians out of Ukraine.” **gt**



Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, speaks with Col. William Murphy, commander of Task Force Orion, at a training site for the M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle in Grafenwoehr, Germany, March 1, 2023.

In midst of Buffalo Blizzard, Soldier Gets Expecting Mom to Hospital

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

BUFFALO, N.Y. — As a massive blizzard hit Buffalo on Christmas Eve 2022, New York National Guard Pfc. Matthew Waldman got ready to report in for storm duty at the city's Connecticut Street Armory, when he decided to make a detour.

Waldman, a member of the 105th Military Police Company, went to a house on Ruspín Avenue to pick up a pregnant woman who was going into labor and get her to Erie County Medical Center before reporting in.

The storm Waldman headed out in that morning eventually dumped 50 inches of snow on the city and caused a 16-hour whiteout. Emergency vehicles were getting stuck in the never-ending storm.

By the time it was over, 39 people had died.

Waldman was part of a week-long response that eventually involved 849 New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

"My mother told me that she was snowed in and couldn't get to the hospital," Waldman said. "So, I decided to take a detour and see if I could find her."

Waldman's mother, Danielle, who was a complete stranger to the woman and her family until that day, got in touch with the woman's family on social media to find out where they lived.

So, Waldman and his mother's boyfriend got into their Chevrolet Colorado truck and set out to see if they could help.

"Buffalo was a mess at that point, with waist-high snow everywhere and stranded vehicles," Waldman said. "It took us over an hour to do what would normally be around a 20 minute drive, but we got there."

When they got to Ruspín Avenue it was clear that even his truck was not going to make it up the street, Waldman said.

"The road she lived on was completely full of snow, so I had to wade through it to get to her door and clear enough away to get inside," Waldman said.

There was no way of knowing how long she had before the baby came, Waldman said. But he knew time was of the essence and she wanted to go to the hospital.

"At that point I asked if she could make the trip to my car, and she said 'yes.' So, I had her put her arms around my shoulders and gave her as much support as I could, and we slowly pushed our way through the snow and back to the vehicle."

Then they made their way to Erie County Medical Center, where Waldman wished her well and continued his journey to the armory to report for state active duty.

His mother kept in touch with the pregnant



Pfc. Matthew Waldman recalls his trek to get a pregnant woman to the hospital during Buffalo's Christmas Blizzard, while sitting at home in Buffalo, New York, Dec. 30, 2022.

woman's family and learned that both she and her baby, who weighed 6 pounds and 13 ounces when he was born on Christmas Eve, were healthy and happy.

Helping another family like this, was what he joined the National Guard to do, Waldman said.

"I'm glad that I was able to help her, and that them and their family were able to celebrate Christmas together safely," Waldman said.

"I like to think that anyone else would do the same thing were they in my shoes," he added. **gt**



SECDEF Visits Ukraining Training in Germany

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III meets with Soldiers assigned to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division and U.S. Army Europe and Africa's 7th Army Training Command supporting combined arms training of Ukrainian Armed Forces battalions in Grafenwoehr, Germany, Feb. 17, 2023.

By mid-February, the first Ukrainian battalion completed training on the M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle, representing the continuation of a worldwide effort led by the U.S. and supported by more than 50 nations to help Ukraine defend itself from Russia's brutal and unprovoked war, which began one year ago. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jordan Sivayavirojna, Task Force Orion.

Deployed Guardsmen Train with Active Duty Soldiers Increase Combat Capabilities with Aviation and Air Defense

Story and photos by Maj. Avery Schneider, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team

KATTERBACH, Germany — National Guard Soldiers deployed to Europe recently spent time training with active duty counterparts to improve their ability to plan and win future battles together.

The Guardsmen, serving in Grafenwoehr with the New York National Guard's Task Force Orion, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, on the Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine mission, met aviators from the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade and air defenders from 5th Battalion, 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment to learn how their unique assets can be incorporated into large scale combat operations.

In December, Task Force Orion treated a holiday lull in their mission training the Ukrainian Armed Forces as an opportunity to train themselves. For two weeks, officers and noncommissioned officers assigned to the

task force's training team turned their focus to the military decision-making process – better known as MDMP.

The seven-step process is used at battalion-level and above to enable commanders and their staffs to understand a situation and mission, develop a course of action and produce a well thought-out plan for operations.

The Soldiers of Task Force Orion represent 57 different military occupational specialties. And while each will get some exposure to different branches and jobs in the course of their careers, the scope of that exposure can be limited.

“We do get kind of siloed in the way we think within our branch,” said Capt. Ishfaque Kamal, an air defense officer assigned to the task force. “But in today's battle space, especially after fighting 20 years of [counter-insurgency] war, battlefields are changing back to conventional

war again.”

Because of that return to focusing on conventional warfare and large scale combat operations, it is more critical than ever that Army officers and NCOs in both active and reserve components understand the different branches and capabilities across the joint force, and how to incorporate them into plans for training and combat.

To help break out of siloes, and as a bonus to cap off MDMP training, Kamal organized a meeting with the aviation and air defense units stationed nearby at Katterbach Army Airfield.

Standing in front of an AH-64D Apache Longbow, 1st Lt. Sean Schlagel, an aviation officer assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment (Attack Battalion), 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, explained the capabilities of the helicopter and how it is employed.

“The most critical thing Soldiers should



1st Lt. Sean Schlagel, an aviation officer assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment (Attack Battalion), 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, gives an overview of the capabilities of the AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopter during a professional development event in Katterbach, Germany, Jan. 4, 2023.



Staff Sgt. Eric Kreisler, a fire support specialist assigned to Task Force Orion, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, examines the eyepiece of an AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopter during a visit to Katterbach Kaserne in Katterbach, Germany, Jan. 4, 2023.

understand about attack aviation is that we are a maneuver asset. We are like tanks or infantry. We can maneuver around the battlefield,” Schlagel said.

Schlagel told the group that aviation units can plan and execute missions based on minimal information, and aviators can determine where they need to go and whether to engage an enemy or not.

Capt. Michael Archer, an air defense artillery officer assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 5th Battalion, 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, gave Task Force Orion an overview of his battalion’s equipment and their mission to provide short-range air defense.

“While we are combat arms, we are here to support maneuver forces and enable their operations so that aerial threats do not impact their capabilities,” Archer said.

The 5th Battalion, 4th Air Defense Regiment was the first U.S. Army unit to field and test the prototype Maneuver Short Range Air Defense system, and will be the first M-SHORAD battalion in the Army.



Warrant Officer Michael Salvi, an AH-64 D Attack Pilot assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment (Attack Battalion), 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, gives an overview of the cockpit of an AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopter to Spc. Kathleen Delage, a human resources specialist, and 2nd Lt. Lasheema Rose, a human resources officer, both assigned to Task Force Orion, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, during a professional development event in Katterbach, Germany, Jan. 4, 2023.

Seeing an Apache or getting inside one of the Army’s newest pieces of air defense equipment is a rarity for most Soldiers – perhaps even more so for National Guardsmen from New York. Because the makeup of National Guard units vary from state to state, there is no guarantee that Task Force Orion’s Soldiers would see the 12th Aviation Brigade or 5th Air Defense Battalion’s equipment at home. New York’s 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade has no attack aircraft and the nearest air defense units are hundreds of miles away in Ohio and North Carolina.

So Schlagel and Archer made the most of Task Force Orion’s visit.

The Guardsmen got a chance to sit in the cockpit of the Apache and see what pilots see. They were given a ride in a CH-47 Chinook to get a feel for Army cargo aviation capabilities. And Archer’s team showed them around the inside of the M-SHORAD and the outside of the long-utilized Avenger Air Defense System.

Over the last 20

years, National Guard and active duty Soldiers have developed a robust history of working together in Iraq and Afghanistan, and on various training and operational missions around the world. Professional development opportunities like this one are an essential way to maintain interoperability between active and reserve units.

“It’s only through having meetings like this, having engagements, and having these shared collaborative experiences that we can truly become the most effective force working together,” Archer said. 🇺🇸



Sgt. Athen Crump, an air and missile defense crewmember assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 5th Battalion, 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, gives an overview of Maneuver Short Range Air Defense Stryker armored vehicle during a professional development event in Katterbach, Germany, Jan. 4, 2023.

Leaders Visit Hellfighter Soldiers in Saudi Arabia

Story and photos by Spc. Ryan Scribner, 369th Sustainment Brigade
PRINCE SULTAN AIR BASE, Saudi Arabia — New York Army National Guard leaders visited Soldiers from the 369th Sustainment Brigade stationed at Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, on March 2, 2023, as part of a visit to New York Guard Soldiers on duty in the Middle East.

Maj. Gen. Michel Natali, the assistant adjutant general, Army; Brig. Gen. Joseph Biehler, the commander of the 53rd Troop Command, and Command Sgt. Maj. Marc Maynard, the 53rd CSM, had lunch with Soldiers and toured the base.

Soldiers assigned to the 369th Sustainment Brigade, known as the Harlem Hell Fighters because of the regiment's service in World War I, are deployed at locations across the Middle East supporting the Army's Task Force Spartan.

Currently almost 3,000 New York National Guard Soldiers are deployed in Africa, the Middle East and Europe, or training to deploy at Army bases in the U.S., and is one of the largest deployments by the force in years, Natali said.

He praised the Soldiers for their professionalism and commitment to the mission.

Many Soldiers, he added, came off the state's COVID-19 mission and rolled right into a deployment.

Biehler told the Soldiers that it was important for leaders to visit forward deployed troops to let them know they are not forgotten and their service is appreciated.

Following the lunch, four brigade Soldiers received a challenge coin from Biehler.

The presentation of challenge coins is a way for senior leadership to make clear to Soldiers that they are valued and appreciated for their phenomenal work.

Spc. Matthew Chung, an information technician specialist with the 187th Signal Company, said that it made him feel honored to be recognized for his hard work.

Chung was recognized for his work maintaining the networks for the brigade's Tactical Action Center, said Capt. Brendan Sullivan, the officer in charge of the center. Every time an outage occurred, Chung worked hard to restore the downed network, Sullivan said.

"This kind of recognition makes me want to learn more about my Army profession and further my skills," Chung said. "When a senior leader is impressed by my work, I feel that I'm on the right track."

Natali and Biehler made time to speak with as many Soldiers as they could.

The importance of face to face conversation with Soldiers is supreme, said Natali.

"We are responsible for readiness, and so we want to make sure that Soldiers have everything they need to complete the mission," Natali said.

"But more than that, we want to provide career solutions and support for Soldiers for when they return from deployment," he added.

Master Sgt. Jaime Lino, chief ammo sergeant with the 369th support operations ammunition management section, said that the leaders showed genuine concern for Soldier's opinions and inputs, and questions and concerns.



Maj. Gen. Michel Natali, assistant adjutant general, sits with Chief Warrant Officer 2 Silvestre Sosa, a network management technician with the 369th Sustainment Brigade, during a luncheon on Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia, March 2, 2023.

"These senior leaders have great insight to offer Soldiers about what the National Guard has to offer," Lino said. "They can provide guidance on what a Soldier can do to advance themselves." **gt**



Spc. Kayla Chin, an information technician specialist with the 369th Sustainment Brigade SPO SASMO, holds a challenge coin from Brig. Gen. Joseph Biehler, commander of the 53rd Troop Command, after a visit from New York National Guard leadership to Soldiers with the 369th Sustainment Brigade on Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia, March 2, 2023.

CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti — Poet Joyce Kilmer, most famous for the poem “Trees”, was killed over 100 years ago while serving as a sergeant in the New York National Guard’s 69th Infantry Regiment scout section during World War I.

But a reminder of Kilmer is still with the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry today, as Task Force Wolfhound serves in Africa as part of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa.

The crucifix belonging to Kilmer, reportedly taken from his body by Medal of Honor holder Maj. William “Wild Bill” Donovan after Kilmer’s death on July 30, 1918, has been taken to war and overseas deployments by the battalion commander ever since.

Today it is being carried by Lt. Col. Shawn Tabankin, the commander of the 69th Infantry and the 1,100-member Task Force Wolfhound.

“The Kilmer cross is one of the legends of the 69th,” said Tabankin. “It is part of our history and part of our lineage.”

Normally the crucifix is kept in a display case at the 69th Infantry’s headquarters at the Lexington Avenue Armory in Manhattan. Traditionally the battalion commander carries it during the annual New York City St. Patrick’s Day parade, which the 69th has led since the 1850s.

But the cross went to war in Iraq with the 69th in 2004 and Tabankin brought it with him to Africa.

While deployed to CJTF-HOA, Tabankin made sure that at the five locations Task Force Wolfhound Soldiers are stationed, the Kilmer crucifix went there as well.

“It is important for us to maintain our traditions to the greatest extent possible, even while deployed,” Tabankin said. “Whenever I travel to any of the outstations, it comes with me. I’ll wear it again when we have our St. Patrick’s Day parade here in Djibouti.”

Kilmer was a famous writer, editor, poet and ardent convert to Catholicism in the years before World War I.

In April 1917, Kilmer enlisted in the New York National Guard’s 69th Infantry because it was a predominantly Irish-Catholic unit then.

Kilmer served with distinction and though he was eligible to receive



Lt. Col. Shawn Tabankin, the commander of the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, holds the “Kilmer Cross” at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, where the battalion is currently stationed while on duty at locations in the Horn of Africa. Courtesy photo.

69th Infantry Carries Poet's Crucifix to Africa

Story by Staff Sgt. Alexander Rector, Task Force Wolfhound

a commission, he reportedly stated he would rather be a sergeant in the “Fighting 69th,” than an officer in any other regiment.

While serving, Kilmer wrote the poem “Rouge Bouquet”, commemorating 19 men killed when a command bunker was hit by German artillery fire. That poem is now read at all 69th events.

As a scout, Kilmer was often forward and was killed while in action near Seringes-et-Nesles, France during the Second Battle of the Marne. “Rouge Bouquet” was read aloud at his gravesite.

After the war, the crucifix was passed down from commander to commander before being lost to history in the years following World War II.

Thankfully, in the 1990’s it was returned to the regiment, and since that time, it once again has been passed from commander to commander and is revered as one of the unit’s most important relics.

The 69th Infantry will be absent for this year’s New York City’s St. Patrick’s Day Parade on March 17, which will have the rear detachment will march instead.

But despite the distance, the unit plans to mirror the celebrations overseas at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, where the unit is currently headquartered.

Tabankin, who is Jewish, realizes that though the demographics of the unit have changed over the years, its commitment to its traditions haven’t wavered.

“The 69th Infantry was formed by Irish immigrants who were predominantly Roman Catholic,” Tabankin said. “That was probably the dominant religion in the regiment for decades.”

“Today we are obviously much more diverse and reflect the population of New York City,” Tabankin continued.

Now a baker’s dozen of faith groups are represented across the once predominantly Roman Catholic unit. During this deployment to Africa, 13 different religious communities are represented across the task force of more than 1,100 Soldiers.

The regiment, which is slated to redeploy back to the United States later this year, will bring the Kilmer crucifix home with them where it will once again be placed on display. **gt**

Soldiers Complete French Desert Commando School

Story by and photos by Staff Sgt. Alexander Rector, Task Force Wolfhound



1st Lt. Brendan Kalaf, the executive officer for Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, overcomes a water obstacle during the French Desert Commando Course at the Centre Detrainment Au Combat Djibouti, Jan. 30, 2023.

CAMP LEMONNIER, DJIBOUTI — Thirty-one Army National Guard Soldiers and one U.S. Air Force Airman assigned to Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) earned the prestigious French Desert Commando Badge after completing the arduous French Desert Commando Course in Djibouti, Africa, February 3.

Twenty-nine of the graduates are New York National Guard Soldiers deployed to the region as part of Joint Task Force Wolfhound, built around the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment. Soldiers from the New York National Guard's 108th Infantry Regiment and 101st Cavalry Squadron are also part of the task force.

Founded in 1974 in Djibouti by the French army, the FDCC became a routine training

requirement for French soldiers stationed in the country. The French army's 5th Overseas Combined Arms Regiment (5th RIAOM) who hosted the course has invited U.S. personnel stationed in Djibouti to participate since 2015.

The French Armed Forces in Djibouti host the course three times throughout the year.

When the first course of 2023 was announced, the response from U.S. service members was immediate and overwhelming. More than 100 people competed for the few coveted slots and at the end of the selection process, only 35 were chosen to participate.

"I thought this course would be a great challenge for myself," said 1st Lt. Brendan Kalaf, the Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, executive officer. "The

ability to be involved with our foreign partners is something that I always knew I wanted to do while being deployed here in the Horn of Africa."

The course consisted of the French pre-assessment and the commando phase. Before the official course, CJTF-HOA conducts a pre-assessment to identify the 35 most physically and mentally fit service members to compete in the course.

U.S. troops completed a ranger physical fitness test consisting of push-ups, sit-ups and a timed 5-mile run, before heading to the 5th RIAOM base for the French assessment.

After an additional fitness assessment, participants traveled to the French army's Combat Training Center at Arta Beach where



New York Army National Guard service members are presented with the French Desert Commando Badge during a ceremony following the completion of the French Desert Commando Course at the Centre Dentrainment Au Combat Djibouti, Feb. 2, 2023.



A Soldier assigned to the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, scales a water obstacle during the French Desert Commando Course at the Centre Dentrainment Au Combat Djibouti, Jan. 30, 2023.

they completed a ruck run and an intense water obstacle course before beginning the week-long commando training.

During the commando phase, the service members received instruction in knot tying, mountaineering, combatives and desert survival training.

The last day of the course consisted of the commando phase's culminating event, a rope course where participants had to navigate rope swings, rappel, mountain climb and cross multiple rope bridges while suspended high above the ground.

"The hardest part for me was getting over my fear of heights," said Spc. Adam Fouladi, an infantryman assigned to Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment. "I really hadn't done anything like this before, but once I actually got up there and got used to all of the obstacles, I realized I could do this and pushed forward."

Before taking on the rope course, the troops honed their skills on a three-story tower before heading to the mountainside.

"The training prepares you for the course, but you don't realize just how high up you're going to be until you're actually up there," said Kalaf, a graduate of the U.S. Army Mountain Warfare School. "The wind is howling in your ears and you're looking down while crawling across a bouncing one inch piece of steel high-tension wire more than 200 feet off the ground!"

During the course, Kalaf was tapped to lead the contingent of U.S. service members partici-

pating in the course.

"Once I was labeled the platoon leader, the French cadre told me that in order to be successful, we had to operate as a cohesive unit," Kalaf said.

Kalaf ensured the troops worked together and pushed each other to succeed.

"I think they took that advice to heart," Kalaf said. "Which is why they ended up hitting it out of the park."

According to Kalaf, the French cadre insisted that this course's U.S. graduates were one of the most successful United States platoons to come through the course in the last nine years.

Thirty-two U.S. service members completed the grueling training course, something for which the austere environment of Djibouti is perfectly suited. For the French army, this is just the desert portion of the training. The full French commando training program also consists of a jungle, forest and combat phase.

"I wanted to do this course to better myself and make sure I'm more mission capable," said Fouladi. "I gained a lot of confidence during this course. If I ever have to do something like that again, I know I'll be ready."

The U.S. service members who successfully completed the course were presented the French Desert Commando Badge during a pinning ceremony at the 5th RIAOM base.

"I just want to thank the French for allowing us to participate," said Fouladi. "It was a lot of fun and a great experience."

The course acts as a platform for U.S. and French partnership in Djibouti. Members of CJTF-HOA regularly train and work alongside allies, partners and government organizations, to achieve a unified effort to improve safety, security and prosperity in East Africa, according to French officials. **gt**

Soldiers Become US Citizens While Overseas

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Alexander Rector, Task Force Wolfhound

DJIBOUTI, Djibouti — Fifteen New York Army National Soldiers serving with Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa became American citizens during a naturalization ceremony at the United States Embassy in Djibouti on March 10, 2023.

The Soldiers, all assigned to the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, are in the midst of a nine month deployment to East Africa as part of Task Force Wolfhound where they conduct security and crisis response operations.

“I’m from Mali in west Africa,” said Pfc. Abdoul Fofana, an infantryman from Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment. “I came to the United States in 2017 to try and get a better life and help my family.”

Fofana who enlisted in 2021, said he always knew he was destined for service.

“I always wanted to help people,” Fofana said. “My dream was to be a police officer or a Soldier because it’s an honest way to help people.”

Spc. Steven Alexander Delgado, a culinary specialist from Hotel Company, 427th Brigade Support Battalion, said he wanted citizenship so he can take care of his younger sister.

“I have a little sister back in Ecuador,” Delgado said. “My main plan is to get a house after this deployment and bring her to the United States like my mother did with me.”

Delgado, who emigrated from Ecuador at 12 years old, said he wants to give his little sister the upbringing he never had when he was younger.

“I want to let my sister have the things I couldn’t have in my childhood, education, good food, and a safe home where she won’t be afraid of going out and being mugged,” Delgado said.

While Delgado wants to reunite with his family, Spc. Joan Manuel Veras Pichardo’s does not want to be separated from his.

Being a citizen means he can stay in the U.S., Pichardo said.

“It will mean a lot to me to get naturalized,” said Pichardo, a combat medic assigned to Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment. “I have two kids and I don’t want to be separated from them.”

Pichardo, a resident of Mount Vernon New



Fifteen New York Soldiers assigned to Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa received their U.S. citizenship during a naturalization ceremony at the U.S. Embassy in Djibouti City, Djibouti, March 10, 2023.

York, recalled coming to the United States as a child when his family immigrated for the hope of a better life.

“I came to the U.S. in 2009 with my father,” said Pichardo. “We came here to find a new life and help our family back in the Dominican Republic.”

The Oath of Allegiance the Soldiers took was remotely administered by Mr. Juan Wood, a supervisory immigration services officer from the United States Department of Citizenship and Immigration Services.

“It is a privilege to have you here because I believe you represent the best that America can show to other nations,” said Jonathan Pratt, the U.S. Ambassador to Djibouti.

“You are new U.S. citizens and public servants. I hope that your newly attained American citizenship brings you closer to your own definition of happiness,” Pratt said.

“I’m proud to call you fellow Soldiers and fellow Americans,” said Maj. Gen. Jami Shawley, the CJTF-HOA commander. “When I look across this room, I’m reminded of what makes an American. It’s not the color of your skin, your face, your gender, or your bloodline. It is your commitment to our constitution of fair play and liberty.”

In addition to the Soldiers mentioned above, the following Soldiers became American citizens during the ceremony:

- Spc. Ralph Josuah Dela Cruz Alvarez, assigned to Alpha Troop, 2nd Squadron, 101st Cavalry, from the Philippines
- Spc. Rennie Barahona Enamorado, assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, from Spain
- Cpl. Joel Calderon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, from Ecuador
- Spc. Adama Faye, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, from Senegal
- Spc. Sudre Francis, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, from Jamaica
- Pfc. Max Ralph Jr. Jean-Baptiste, assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, from Haiti
- Spc. Chernice Leon, Hotel Company, 427th Brigade Support Battalion, from Saint Lucia
- Spc. Adantoni Maduro Gomez, assigned to the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry
- Spc. Stiven Orozco, Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, from Colombia
- Spc. David DeJesus Mendez, assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, from the Dominican Republic
- Spc. Stevenson Sterlin, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, from Haiti
- Spc. Antoine Tyndale, assigned to Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, from Jamaica. 🇺🇸

St. Patrick's Day 7,000 Miles Apart for Fighting 69th

Story by Staff Sgt. Alexander Rector, Task Force Wolfhound and Sgt. Andrew Valenza, Joint Force Headquarters



The 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment lead the annual New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade, March 17, 2023. Photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Gunther, Joint Force Headquarters.

NEW YORK — The Soldiers of the “Fighting 69th” marked St. Patrick’s Day 2023 7,000 miles apart from each other, with the bulk of the regiment in the Horn of Africa and a rear detachment in New York.

In Manhattan, 150 members of 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment’s rear detachment and the 42nd Infantry Division Band, led the New York City St. Patrick’s Day Parade, in a tradition that dates to 1851.

In Djibouti, Soldiers assigned to Task Force Wolfhound marked the day by parading through Camp Lemonnier, the American base that houses the headquarters of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa.

The Task Force Wolfhound company guidons, including those deployed in Kenya and Somalia, were carried in the procession.

“I believe it’s even more important to adhere to our traditions and lineage while deployed than when we’re back state-side,” explained Lt. Col. Shawn Tabankin, the commander of the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry.

A host of traditions have grown up around the 69th, and both Tabankin in Djibouti and Lt. Col. Padraic Lilly, the rear detachment commander, ensured they were honored.

At the end of the day, even with oceans and thousands of miles between them, the 69th conducted another St. Patrick’s Day parade as unified as ever, Tabankin said.

In New York and Djibouti, the day began with a toast of Irish whiskey by unit leaders.

In New York, Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York and Lt. Gen. Jon Jensen, the Army National Guard Director, joined Lilly and rear detachment leaders in a toast at the Lexington Avenue Armory.

In Djibouti, Maj. Gen. Jami Shawley, the commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, joined Tabankin and leaders in the toast. In her remarks, she praised the history of the 69th Infantry and the role its Soldiers are playing today.

Prior to the parade up 5th Avenue, the 69th Infantry Soldiers attended a special mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, presided over by Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan, with a video feed for the Soldiers in Djibouti.

In Djibouti, a special service was held at the Camp Lemonnier chapel presided over by Navy Chaplain (Lt.) Brian Reedy, who was assisted by Chaplain (Capt.) Garth Olsen, the chaplain of the 69th Infantry.

In both places, Soldiers placed sprigs of boxwood in their uniforms in commemoration of the 69th’s role in the Civil War during the December 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg. Soldiers of the Irish Brigade placed green boxwood sprigs on their blue uniforms to show that they were Irish before assaulting the Confederate positions.



Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, on duty in the Horn of Africa, mark St. Patrick’s Day parading through Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, March 17, 2023. Photo by Staff Sgt. Alexander Rector, Task Force Wolfhound.

And in both locations, officers carried black-thorn sticks imported from Ireland. They are considered the mark of an Irish gentleman.

The Kilmer cross, a crucifix belonging to poet Joyce Kilmer, a member of the regiment killed in combat during World War I, was carried by Tabankin during the parade in Djibouti.

Events like this are important, Tabankin said.

“It keeps us rooted to our legacy, sends a message about overcoming adversity by accomplishing something that others might think couldn’t or shouldn’t be accomplished, and quite simply, it’s good for the morale and esprit de corps of our deployed Soldiers in arduous conditions, he said. **gt**

AIR NATIONAL GUARD



Air Guard Recognizes Top Airmen of the Year

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times Staff*

LATHAM, N.Y. — Five New York Air National Guard members have been named Airmen of the Year for 2023 for the 5,800-member force.

They were selected based on their achievements and overall performance over the last year.

Those recognized were:

- Senior Airman Dhruva Poluru, assigned to the 222nd Command and Control Squadron of the 107th Attack Wing as a mission crew chief, is the Airman of the Year for 2023.
- Tech. Sgt. Jarrod R. Becker, who serves as a weapons director assigned to the 224th Air Defense Squadron, is the Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year for 2023.
- Master Sgt. Justin Phillips, who serves as the logistics superintendent for the 174th Security Forces Squadron, is the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year for 2023.
- Senior Master Sgt. Renae M. Turner, who serves in the 105th Airlift Wing's Operations Group, is the First Sergeant of the Year for 2023.
- Capt. Zachary A. German, who serves as the medical plans and operations officer for the 105th Medical Group, is the Company Grade Officer of the Year for 2023.

All the Airmen, except for German, will now compete against their peers in the other 53 state and territorial Air Guards, to pick the best Airmen in the entire Air Guard.

"The 2023 New York Outstanding Airmen of the Year represent the best members serving our nation, state, and community," said Command Chief Master Sgt. Denny Richardson, the highest ranking enlisted leader in the New York Air National Guard.

"These members have consistently performed above expectations placing service before self in the defense of our nation. Their commitment to excellence and unmatched volunteerism in the local community place them at a stratospheric level well above normal standards," he said.

"I am proud of their accomplishments, growth and development as citizen Airmen," Richardson added.

Poluru has served in the 222nd since 2019 and the National Reconnaissance Office. This is the federal agency which oversees America's spy satellites.

Poluru is responsible for orbital threat analysis and for the command and control of over 85 commercial data providers and orbital analysts who contribute to the United States Space Force's Space Protection and Space Defense Missions.

Poluru serves as the primary government representative to a team of 190 military, contractor, and international analysts geographically dispersed which provide Space Domain Awareness support to the Commander, United States Space Command.

Becker serves as a weapons director evaluator and instructor for the 224th Air Defense Squadron which conducts the mission of the Eastern Air Defense Sector in Rome.

He enlisted in the Air Force in 2011 and deployed to Afghanistan twice before joining the New York Air National Guard in 2016. As a weapons director evaluator and instructor, he upholds the highest training standards and evaluates the unit's newest weapons directors and air battle managers.

Phillips is the logistics superintendent for the 174th Security Forces Squadron. He is responsible for resource management, equipment, and readiness requirements for the unit. He also leads the squadrons combat arms section, which is responsible for training wing personnel and maintaining 500 small arms.

He enlisted in the New York Air National Guard in 2008 and deployed to Kyrgyzstan in support of operations in Afghanistan in 2009.

Turner enlisted in the 105th Airlift Wing in 2003. She is the first sergeant for the 105th Operations Group and Wing Staff Agencies. In addition, she works with the wing's senior enlisted leader to ensure first sergeants and additional duty first sergeants across the wing are properly trained and equipped to support their respective units.

Additionally, she has held several additional duty and wing organiza-

106th Rescue Wing Trains With Marine Reserve

Story by and photos by Airman 1st Class Sarah McKernan, 106th Rescue Wing

F.S. GABRESKI AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, WESTHAMPTON BEACH, N.Y. — Airmen of the 101st Rescue Squadron teamed up with Marine Corp Reserve aviators for a tactical refueling and personnel recovering training exercise at F.S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base on Feb. 2, 2023.

Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773, known as the Red Dogs, is a Marine Corps Reserve squadron headquartered at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey. The Marines fly the Bell AH-1Z Viper attack helicopter and Bell UH-1Y Venom transport helicopter.

The joint training involved a simulated rescue of a downed pilot, employing a 101st Rescue Squadron HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter, followed by refueling from the Marine aircraft.

During the rescue phase, known as TRAP for Tactical Recovery of Personnel and Aircraft, the AH-1Z and UH-1Y served as escorts while the HH-60G rescued the downed pilot.

After the rescue, the rescue helicopter landed and was refueled by a Marine Corps CH-53 Sea Stallion heavy-lift transport helicopter. This is known as a FARP, for Forward Area Refueling Point, in which one helicopter fuels another to extend the range of the tactical mission.

This capability allows for aircraft to land, refuel, rearm and return to air operations quickly in austere environments.

“The FARP exercise allows us to practice something that’s kind of non-standard for us. Just another option to have overseas for flexibility, getting fuel from another rotary-wing aircraft, potentially at a remote site where otherwise, it may not be possible to accomplish



A Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom assigned to Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 from Marine Aircraft Group 49, takes off during a training exercise alongside an HH-60G Pave Hawk assigned to the 101st Rescue Squadron at Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base in Westhampton Beach, New York, Feb. 2, 2023.

the mission,” said Maj. Sean Gavin, the 101st Rescue Squadron assistant operations officer.

“The purpose of the training was to integrate with our joint partners,” Gavin said. “It’s not often that we get to work with helicopter rescue escorts, so it’s great to see how their capabilities and strengths can help us to execute the mission a little bit more efficiently and differently than when we work with fixed-wing platforms.”

“TRAP and escort is one of the mission sets that we train to,” said Capt. Adam Fischer, the future operations officer of HMLA Squadron 773. “I think everyone got a lot out of it and we all got some good training so I’m glad we were able to come out here and make it happen.”



Pilots assigned to Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 from Marine Aircraft Group 49 conduct training with members of the 101st Rescue Squadron at Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base, Westhampton Beach, New York Feb. 2, 2023.

Top Airmen Cont'd

tion positions, to include additional duty first sergeant for the 105th Force Support Squadron and the 105th Maintenance Operations Flight.

German is the Medical Plans and Operations Officer for the 105th Medical Group, Detachment 1. German is responsible for daily operations and readiness of the medical detachment and coordination for all training, exercises, and operations.

He executes the yearly training plan, which encompasses 7,300 hours of combined training and oversees the logistics readiness of the medical detachment’s multimillion-dollar inventory of pharmaceutical formulary and medical equipment. He ensures compliance with all inspections and allocates the annual budget.

He also serves as a liaison to the New York CBRN Task Force com-

mander regarding medical operations in domestic response missions.

German entered the New York Air National Guard via direct commission into the Medical Services Corps in May of 2017 after completing bachelor’s degrees in biology and Business Administration. He completed Health Services Administration School at Fort Sam Houston in February 2018 and earned a Master of Public Administration shortly after in May 2018.

German also serves as an instructor with the Defense Institute for Medical Operations and is the treasurer for the Air National Guard Medical Services Corps Society. German previously held roles as the operations officer for the United States Air Forces of Europe Headquarters Eastern European International Affairs Branch.

106th Welcomes New Wing Command Chief

Story by Airman 1st Class Sarah McKernan, 106th Rescue Wing

WESTHAMPTON BEACH, N.Y. — Members of the 106th Rescue Wing welcomed Chief Master Sgt. Edward Rittberg as the wing's new command chief during a March 5, change of responsibility ceremony at F.S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base.

Rittberg is a veteran of 28 years in the Air Force and New York Air National Guard.

He replaced Command Chief Master Sgt. Michael Hewson who took over as the state command chief on March 10.

"This is an incredible honor and I look forward to embarking on it," Rittberg said.

"The most valuable resource we have is our Airmen. I challenge everyone to continue to do their best and to strive for success. As a wing and as a team, I'm convinced we can accomplish anything," he said.

As command chief, Rittberg will be the liaison between the commander, Col. Shawn Fitzgerald, and the 106th's enlisted force. He will be the advisor on all matters regarding the health, morale, welfare, quality of life and professional development of enlisted personnel.

"His leadership, problem-solving skills and ability to take care of Airmen under his charge will make him an invaluable command chief for the wing," Fitzgerald said.

"I do not know of any other chief in the entire total force that has done what you have done," Fitzgerald said. "I am excited to start a new chapter within the history of the 106th with you."

Rittberg enlisted in the Air Force in 1994 and served as a life support specialist in the 335th Fighter Squadron at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina.

In 1997 he transferred to the New York Air National Guard and the 106th Rescue Wing. He is also a veteran of the Afghan War, and an instructor loadmaster with over 1,100 hours in different versions of the C-130 Hercules tactical transport.

From 2011 to 2014, he served as the Chief for the Air Expeditionary Force cell at Joint Base Andrews outside Washington, D.C. This team was responsible for managing the deployment of Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve



Col. Shawn Fitzgerald, the commander of the 106th Rescue Wing, left, and Command Chief Master Sgt. Michael Hewson, right, applaud Command Chief Master Sgt. Edward Rittberg, following a change of responsibility ceremony at F.S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base, Westhampton Beach, New York, March 5, 2023. Photo by Staff Sgt. Daniel Farrell, 106th Rescue Wing.

personnel around the world.

"I look forward to being the next wing command chief and working with the Airmen and outstanding command teams to continue to make this wing the top-notch organization that it is," Rittberg said. **gt**

First Female Command Chief at 174th Attack Wing

Story by Airman 1st Class Elizabeth Green, 174th Attack Wing

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Command Chief Master Sgt. Sonja Williams became the first woman to serve as senior enlisted leader for the 174th Attack Wing on February 4, during a change of authority ceremony at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base.

Williams replaced Command Chief Master Sgt. Michael Will who retired after serving as wing command chief since 2017.

"I want you all to know that I understand the importance of this position and that I am here for you," Williams said.

"I am here to empower you, listen to you, to continue to uphold the outstanding reputation that you all have cultivated as members of the 174th Attack Wing," she said.

Williams previously served as the senior enlisted leader for the 174th Mission Support Group. She joined the New York Air National

Guard in 1997 as a personnel specialist.

After cross training in the education and training career field, Williams assumed the role of unit education and training manager for the 174th Civil Engineer Squadron.

After deploying in 2011 to Kyrgyzstan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Williams was selected in 2012 to serve as the Human Resources Advisor for the wing, a post she held until 2018.

In addition to serving as the senior enlisted leader for the Mission Support Group, Williams also served as the senior enlisted leader for the 174th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

For the past 20 years, Williams has also worked as a high school Spanish teacher. For two years she served as president of her local branch of the American Association for University Women. **gt**



Chief Master Sgt. Sonja Williams becomes the 174th Attack Wing command chief during a ceremony for the new senior enlisted leader at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base, Syracuse, New York, Feb. 4, 2023. Photo by Senior Airman Tiffany Scofield, 174th Attack Wing.

"I understand the importance of this position and I am here for you,"

-- Command Chief Master Sgt. Sonja Williams, senior enlisted leader, 174th Attack Wing

Air Guard Participates in Nordic Conference

Story by Eric Durr, Guard Times Staff



Military personnel from the United States, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden pose for a photograph taken during a conference focused on sharing airspace information in Copenhagen, Denmark, January 2023. Courtesy photo.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Three New York Air National Guardsmen who specialize in planning and executing air war campaigns took part in a four-day workshop in January designed to ensure that the militaries of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland all know what's flying in the skies above their region.

The New York Airmen, all assigned to the 152nd Air Operations Group based at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in Syracuse, were part of a U.S. military delegation which included the U.S. Army, Navy and Marine Corps, as well U.S. Air Forces Europe.

Two Airmen from the Michigan Air National Guard's 217th Air Operations Group also took part in the conference.

The goal, according to Col. Kevin St. John, the commander of the 152nd, was to explore the ways to connect the radars and sensors of the Nordic nations with NATO and United States systems.

The idea, he said, was to create a common picture of what is flying in the region, first, and then expand the capability to share information.

The January 23-27 meeting in Copenhagen was hosted by the Royal Danish Air Force and the U.S. Air Forces Europe. Seventy people attended to discuss improving the regional partnership in support of unified network of sensors from all the services operating in the region.

This concept is known as Joint All-Domain Command and Control, or JADC2.

The discussions also included integrating air and missile defense information as well, according to St. John.

While Norway and Denmark are both NATO members, Sweden and Finland just applied for membership in 2022 following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

This was the first time those two countries took part in these discussions, St. John said.

Their inclusion in the workshop built on that process, he added.

"This conference was executed at exactly the right time in both of our planning cycles to mutually inform and highlight all the parties on the benefits and needs of collaboration," said Maj. Ignacio Perez, the multi-domain warfare officer for the 217th.

"The event outlined milestones for bilateral sensor sharing arrangements, connections and their use to improve interoperability," said Lt. Col. Douglas Schafer, the 152nd Air Communications Squadron commander.

These efforts allow the allied air forces to plug in the U.S. Air Force's Mission Partner Environment, a term for computer networks

which allow different militaries to work collaboratively and effectively and to share sensitive, classified information securely, Schafer said.

The discussions highlighted the need for more international training and exercise opportunities, according to Col. John Meili, the deputy commander of the 152nd Air Operations Group.

"These expanded opportunities strengthen the foundational trust and relationships necessary to facilitate strategic partnerships," Meili said.

The demand for Air National Guard operational, intelligence and communication support for operations in Europe was also discussed, he said.

This creates "integrated deterrence," St. John said.

This is the concept that the United States "uses every tool available in close collaborating with counterparts, allies and partners and is central to any future fight," St. John explained.

"By balancing capabilities among partners, we can mitigate capacity gaps," he said. **gt**

"These expanded opportunities strengthen the foundational trust and relationships necessary to facilitate strategic partnerships,"

-- Col. John Meili, deputy commander of the 152nd Air Operations Group

NY Airmen key to Canadian Arctic exercise

Story by Eric Durr, *Guard Times* Staff, Master Sgt. Patrick Espeut, 105th Airlift Wing and Staff Sgt. Madison Scaringe, 109th Airlift Wing



U.S. Army and Canadian Soldiers conduct tactical insertion on an open ice skiway delivered by an LC-130 Hercules skiplane of the 109th Airlift Wing near Cornwallis Island, Nunavut, Canada, March 15, 2023. The exercise, Guerrier Nordique 23, held March 6 to March 20, 2023, included National Guard units from Connecticut, New Hampshire, Utah, New York, and Vermont. Photo by Capt. Mikel Arcovitch, Joint Force Headquarters Vermont.

RESOLUTE BAY, Nunavut, Canada --New York Air National Guard Airmen from the 105th and 109th Airlift Wings played a key role in the Canadian Forces' annual Guerrier Nordique Arctic training exercise which ran from February 22 to March 22.

Six C-17 Globemaster III from the 105th made 23 flights to move 285 reserve soldiers from the 2nd Canadian Division, and over 90 tons of cargo, to the Resolute Bay Airport on Cornwallis Island in the Arctic Ocean. Seventy-four 105th Airmen supported the mission.

From there, an LC-130 assigned to the 109th Airlift Wing moved 37 Canadian and American Soldiers 60 miles further north to a location on the Arctic ice east of Little Cornwallis Island.

Sixty 109th Airmen deployed to Resolute Bay in Canada's Nunavut Territory, where temperatures can reach minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit, with two LC-130 Hercules "Skibirids."

They were joined by Army National Guard Soldiers from Vermont, Utah, New Hampshire, and Connecticut, who worked alongside the Canadian reserve Soldiers.

Moving troops from Quebec to the Arctic was a challenge for the 105th Airmen, according to Major Rodrigo Nagle, one of the pilots.

Resolute Bay Airport is not equipped with radar. That, combined with a runway made up of frozen gravel and ice, made operating the C-17 challenging, he explained.

"We flew 2,000 miles. We landed on an austere field, which is something most cargo planes don't do. We unloaded and loaded cargo and people and flew another 2,000 miles back, basically all on our own," said Lt. Col. Andrew Townsend, another C-17 pilot.

Loading and unloading planes in the extreme cold also presented challenges, Townsend said.

There were computer malfunctions caused by the cold, which meant doing weight and balance calculations with pencil and paper. And chunks of ice and snow that had to be chipped off cargo pallets to fit them into the aircraft.

"Cargo upload in such extremely cold conditions presented some unique challenges for us," said Master Sgt. James Segreti, one of the loadmasters.

The Airmen from the 109th worked with the Royal Canadian Air Force's 440th Transport Squadron to prepare a 6,000 foot-long "ski-way" so the LC-130s could land on the sea ice.

The Canadians used their smaller two-engine Twin Otter ski-equipped planes to land the 109th's Polar Camp Skiway Team. That team used snowmobiles and other gear to groom a landing area for the much larger LC-130s.

And while doing that they were guarded by Canadian Rangers, whose job was polar bear patrol.

"The living conditions at camp are demanding. But seeing that first LC-130 land on a ski-way that you created out of nothing makes

it worth it," said Lt. Col. Matthew Sala, officer-in-charge of the ski-way team.

When the ski-way was done, a New York LC-130 flew 37 Army National Guard and Canadian Reserve Soldiers to the remote location.

After landing, Soldiers disembarked and set a security perimeter 100 meters from the landing zone. Dressed in white camouflage, Soldiers established their security positions.

"We've been flying missions in Greenland and Antarctica for over 30 years, and this is the first time we've ever conducted a tactical insertion with Canadian reserve Soldiers," Sala said.

During the exercise, the 109th Airmen transported over 29 tons of cargo and 89 Soldiers and Airmen to and from the remote camp.

"This is only the beginning," said Canadian Army Lt. Col. Andre Morin, land component commander for Guerrier Nordique.

"The partnership between the Canadians and Americans is invaluable. I would like to see this exercise grow from here. We have now confirmed we have the ability to deliver Soldiers in a very difficult environment," he added.

Col. Christian Sander, commander of the 109th, said the exercise was important training.

"I'm proud and excited for the hard work of our LC-130 aviators and other multi-capable Airmen in support of the Guerrier Nordique exercise," he said. **gt**

Aeromed Techs Train in Arctic

Story by Staff Sgt. Madison Scaringe, 109th Airlift Wing

NUNAVUT, Canada — Air Guard medical technicians who normally transport patients on aircraft like C-130s are learning to do the same thing on the much smaller, Canadian CC-138 “Twin Otter” as part of their participation in a month-long Canadian Arctic exercise that kicked off on February 22.

The three Airmen from the 139th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, were part of a 60-Airmen contingent in Guerrier Nordique 2023, a Canadian Forces exercise.

This year the focus of the annual exercise is on combat capability and lethality in temperatures that consistently range from -30 to -50 degrees Fahrenheit for weeks on end. The aeromedical specialists are testing their casualty evacuation capabilities in a degraded environment, according to Lt. Col. Robert Huhn, the 139th’s commander.

“As agile combat ready Airmen, familiar with operating in the Arctic, we are collaborating with exercise partners with providing casualty evacuation in a degraded environment like the Arctic,” he said.

The Royal Canadian Airforce operates the much smaller de Havilland CC-138 “Twin Otter” ski-equipped aircraft that has only two engines and is operated by 440 Transport Squadron.

In keeping with the focus on agile combat employment, the 139th learned to operate with the smaller aircraft in smaller teams, explained, Maj. Nathan Phelps, a 139th flight nurse.

“We not only modified our equipment footprint, but our crew size as well. Normally, we fly with five medical aircrew members, but here we have found a way to function with only two.

This is a much more deployable force package than our traditional system,” he said.

Because the 109th Airmen were working with the Canadians of 440 Squadron, the aeromedical personnel got a chance to learn how to work in the Twin Otter, explained Senior Master Sgt. Jennifer Dipppo, a 139th aeromedical technician.

“The training involved actually getting on the Twin Otter and learning about the equipment they have on board, and how we can configure and secure our patients for in-flight care,” Dipppo said.

The 139th medical technicians also received similar training on carrying casualties in the Canadian Army’s Hagglunds “Bandvagn 206”, an all-terrain vehicle that has two carrier compartments on power track, Dipppo said.

The 139th team also tested newly assembled medical kits the squadron created for the Arctic environment, Dipppo said.

“One of the key components we wanted to do was both validate and refine the medical kit that we spent the last year designing specifically for use in a tactical environment, and to make sure that it was appropriate for both our patients and the Arctic area of operations,” she said.

The 139th Airmen operated a joint-service medical office in Resolute Bay with the Royal Canadian Medical Services and sharing best practices on functioning in the extreme Arctic conditions, Phelps said.

Together, the medical teams established plans and procedures on how and where to take casualties in the event they needed evacuation from Resolute Bay, Dipppo explained.

While the 139th has experience working in



Airmen from the 139th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron visit an arctic survival training camp in Resolute Bay, Nunavut, Canada, Feb. 23, 2023. Photo by Staff Sgt. Madison Scaringe, 109th Airlift Wing.

various types of tactical environments, the lack of advanced medical facilities in remote arctic regions like Resolute Bay presented a unique challenge they wanted to take on, Huhn said. **gt**



U.S. Army and Canadian soldiers offload an LC-130 Hercules flown by the 109th Airlift Wing during Guerrier Nordique in Nunavut, Canada, March 15, 2023. Both the 105th and 109th Airlift Wings provided critical lift to the participating units from five state. Photo by Capt. Mikel Arcovitch, Vermont National Guard Joint Force Headquarters.



A De Havilland Canada CC-138 “Twin Otter” aircraft from the 440 Transport Squadron, Royal Canadian Armed Forces sits at the landing area at Resolute Bay, Nunavut, Canada 25 Feb. 2023. Photo by Staff Sgt. Madison Scaringe, 109th Airlift Wing



Senior Master Sgt. Felix Moya, a loadmaster from the 105th Airlift Wing, assists loading cargo pallet during exercise Guerrier Nordique at Resolute Bay, Nunavut, Canada March 18, 2023. Photo by Master Sgt. Patrick Espeut, 105th Airlift Wing.

NY Guard Member Honored During Parade

Story and photos by Warrant Officer Ed Shevlin, New York Guard

ROCKAWAY BEACH, N.Y. — New York Guard member Steve Vera served as the deputy grand marshal of the Queens County St. Patrick's Day Parade held March 4 in Rockaway Beach.

Vera, the command sergeant major of the New York Guard's 88th Area Command, said he accepted the position to honor the 88th's Civil War ancestors, the members of the 88th New York Volunteer Infantry.

The 88th Regiment fought in the famous Irish Brigade, alongside the better known 69th Infantry Regiment, which is still a unit in the New York Army National Guard.

The New York Guard is a volunteer force which augments the New York National Guard during state emergencies.

"I accept this position on behalf of those Soldiers of the 88th who were forced to march into battle while we march in celebration," Vera said.

Forty members of the 88th marched in the parade as well.

"Given that our military lineage traces back to the Civil War Irish Brigade, it is appropriate that we



Members of the New York Guard's 88th Area Command march in the Queens County St. Patrick's Day Parade in Rockaway Beach on March 4, 2023.

participate in events such as this," said 1st Lt. James Chin, a Queens resident assigned to the 88th's operation section.

"As the only military unit marching in this parade, we presented a professional appearance which was greatly appreciated

by the crowds along the line of march," Chin added.


"We were grateful when members of the National Guard and the New York Guard were among the first to come to our aid after Hurricane Sandy left us looking like a war zone. So, when we see

the Soldiers of the New York Guard marching down our streets during the Rockaway St. Patrick's Day Parade, it is no wonder they receive the loudest claps and cheers," said Katie McFadden, editor of the Rockaway Times.

Community members also recognized the service of the 88th by presenting the unit with a plaque commemorating New York Guard Staff Sgt. James Rodriguez. He died away just one day after marching in the 2015 parade.

The plaque was accepted by Vera, and by Rodriguez's daughter, New York Guard Sgt. 1st Class Becky Rodriguez.

Marching in the Queens County St. Patrick's Day Parade is an annual event for the New York Guard unit, which operates throughout New York City.

Staff Sgt. Eddie Santiago with the 88th Area Command noted, "Our Soldiers love this parade. The crowds are very enthusiastic and welcoming of the New York Guard. We don't often get this kind of support so when it comes our way it is a good feeling." 



Members of the New York Guard's 88th Area Command march in the Queens County St. Patrick's Day Parade in Rockaway Beach on March 4, 2023.

New York Naval Militia

Patrol Boats Winter Over in Leeds for Maintenance

Photos courtesy of the New York Naval Militia

LEEDS, N.Y. -- Landing Crafts 301 and 350, part of the Naval Militia's Military Emergency Boat Service, receive annual maintenance after their movement indoors prior to a mid-March snowstorm.



Chief Boatswain's Mate Bill Kaul is presented with the MEBS Craftmaster qualification device (Ser #11) by MEBS commander, Capt. Don McKnight, at Camp Smith, New York, Jan. 26, 2023. The MEBS Craftmaster device is earned by those members who have attained subject matter expertise in all things "small boat." During the brief presentation, he was also awarded the New York State Military Commendation Medal for his many other services. Kaul has recently been designated as the MEBS Training Officer.

Sailors Receive Awards

Photos courtesy of the New York Naval Militia



New York Naval Militia Cmdr. William Kempner, of Roslyn Heights is recognized with the New York State Medal for Meritorious Service, presented by Rear Adm. Weill, recognizing his retirement from the New York Naval Militia at New York National Guard headquarters, Latham, New York, Jan. 20, 2023.



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