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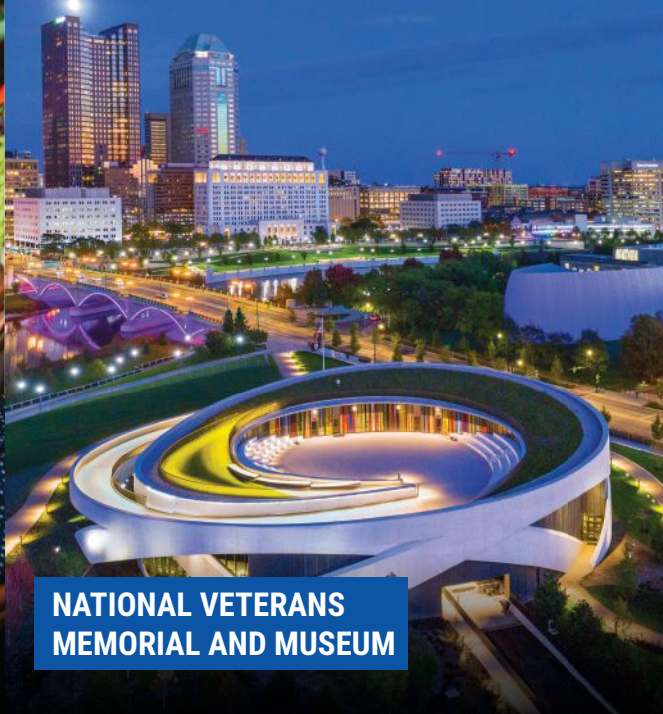
NATIONAL GUARD

JUNE 2022
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ECHOES

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NGAUS is the nation's oldest military association. Militia officers formed the association in 1878 to obtain better equipment and training by educating Congress on militia requirements. Today, with a membership of more than 40,000 Army and Air National Guard officers, NGAUS continues that mission in support of 450,000 current Guard men and women, their families, their employers and all Guard retirees.

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Update: Iowa Guard Paint Facility Produces Solid Gold F-16

THE AIR NATIONAL GUARD paint facility with the Iowa Air Guard's 185th Air Refueling Wing in Sioux City, Iowa, continues to produce rare gems.

In June, the facility's 13-member team unveiled a fully gold F-16 Fighting Falcon. It's a retro paint job identical to the one the 185th had for its 50th anniversary in 1996, when it flew F-16s.

The original gold F-16 made headlines because painting an entire jet something other than standard tactical gray was rarely done in the 1990s, according to Senior Master Sgt. Vincent De Groot, a member of the wing's current public affairs office.

It was on display at the unit nearly 20 years. The wing's 174th Fighter Squadron flew fighters in the 1990s until converting to the KC-135 Stratotanker in 2001.

After the unit's conversion, the F-16 was added to the unit's small airpark of previously flown 185th aircraft.

Just like its predecessor, the new gold jet has the script "Pride of Siouxland" imprint-



MASTER SGT. VINCENT DE GROOT

ed across the fuselage on one side. The other side of the aircraft has the words "The Bats 50th Anniversary" in large print. The paint also includes text that shows "1946-1996" painted on the ventral fins.

The 2022 scheme also retains the gothic bat tail flash with "Iowa" painted on the top of

the tail. The words "Sioux City" appear inside an elongated Native American headdress on the empennage at the bottom of the tail.

Other work by the facility was featured in the March NATIONAL GUARD cover story "Iron Canvas."

—NGAUS staff report

Reaching NATIONAL GUARD

Letters

Tell us how we're doing or share your opinion on something you read in NATIONAL GUARD in 250 words or less.

Last Word

Send us your commentaries on Guard or defense-related topics in 800 words or less.

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Submit your original Guard or defense-related articles, reviews or print-ready photos (300 dpi required).

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All submissions* should include your rank, full name, state National Guard affiliation, phone number and email address. You may submit your materials three different ways:

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*The content must be of interest to a predominately military audience. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length and clarity.

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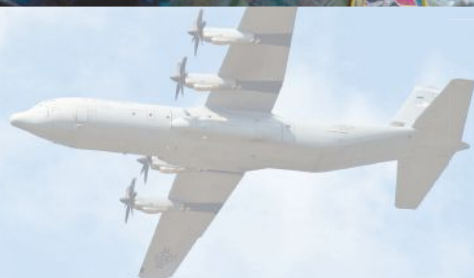
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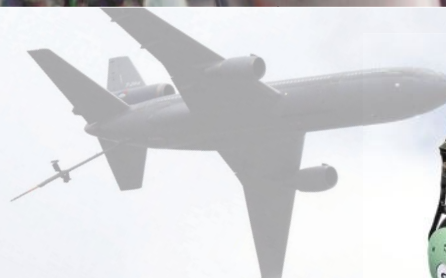
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No-Cost Dental, FEDREC Waits Among House NDAA Provisions

The House Armed Services Committee included no-cost dental care for every National Guardsman and Reservist in its version of the fiscal 2023 National Defense Authorization Act.

The language comes from a bill introduced in early June by [Rep. Andy Kim, D-N.J.](#), and [Rep. Trent Kelly, R-Miss.](#), two HASC members, at NGAUS's behest.

The measure is one of several Guard-related provisions association-staff has found as it combs the House draft of the always voluminous defense policy bill.

The HASC completed initial work on the fiscal 2023 NDAA during a marathon session which began the morning of June 22 and concluded early the next day.

The Senate Armed Services Committee completed its markup the week before.

But the two committees operate differently. The HASC marked up its NDAA in open session and released its product. The SASC met behind closed doors and didn't initially reveal its full work, although some details leaked.

Both committees added tens of billions of dollars to President Joe Biden's already record request of \$813 billion for defense, with \$773 billion going to the Defense Department.

The SASC added \$45 billion beyond Biden's request, while the HASC added \$37 billion.

Lawmakers cited 40-year-high inflation coupled with increasing threats worldwide as reasons for the increases.

Differences like these between the House and Senate versions will be reconciled in negotiations between the two chambers later this year.

The committees differed on creating a Space National Guard. For the second consecutive year, the HASC bill calls for a Space Guard, while the SASC's version takes no action.

Last year, language for launching a Space Guard didn't make the final bill.

NGAUS believes this year's negotiations could produce a different result with increasing Senate support for a Space Guard.

There are other Guard-related provisions in the HASC bill seemingly absent in the SASC version.

One provision is language that would backdate the effective date of rank for National Guard officers experiencing "undue delays" in the federal recognition of their state promotions.

Delays are defined as those exceeding 100 days from the date the National Guard Bureau deems an officer's application for federal recognition completely submitted by the state and ready for review.

NGAUS has kept lawmakers informed of increasing FEDREC delays.

Another provision would force military criminal investigative agencies to inform military personnel in writing

when they are under investigation. It would be retroactive to investigations opened after Jan. 1, 2011.

NGAUS attributes the provision's language to the failure of the Army Criminal Investigative Division to inform hundreds of Guard soldiers they were being investigated during the service's lengthy hunt for purported Guard Recruiting Assistance Program fraud.

Both committees included language in their respective versions that would require the Army to develop more strenuous fitness standards for soldiers in combat roles.

Lawmakers: VA Home Loans Out of Step with Current Market

A bipartisan group of House lawmakers has asked the Department of Veterans Affairs to fix the agency's home loan program, citing fears the initiative leaves veterans disadvantaged in today's competitive housing market.

In a letter to VA Secretary Denis McDonough, 65 lawmakers warned only a small fraction of home sellers prefer VA loans.

The House representatives argued the "rise in cash and conventional loans with waived contingencies can leave veterans unable to compete with other buyers."

The group added McDonough should "explore how VA mortgage loans can compete in today's marketplace and ensure veterans have negotiating power throughout the home-buying process."

[Rep. Derek Kilmer, D-Wash.](#), and [Rep. Guy Reschenthaler, R-Pa.](#), organized the letter.

Under the VA home loan program, private lenders provide the loans, but the department guarantees a portion of each loan against the possibility of default.

This model enables borrowers to get more favorable terms than might otherwise be possible, including no down payments, lower interest rates and limited closing costs.

But the program requires VA home appraisals and other qualifying steps that can lengthen the time to close sales, frustrating buyers and sellers.

Testifying before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee in December, VA officials said the average wait time for VA appraisals is roughly 15 business days. For non-VA loans, it's about two days.

The difference, and perceptions the delays are worse, means a rising number of sellers are ignoring offers from buyers using the VA program.

A National Association of Realtors' 2021 survey on home loans found 94% of sellers were most likely to accept an offer with conventional financing, compared to 1% who said they were most likely to accept an offer involving a VA loan.

The high number of buyers in today's market coupled with limited home inventory makes the situation worse for people using VA home loans, real estate experts say.

—Also contributing: John Goheen



Rep. Andy Kim
D-N.J.



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Recruiting Suffers Across the Military

Every military branch is struggling to meet its fiscal 2022 recruiting goals, multiple reports say, with the Army having the most difficulty.

The active Army had met just 40% of its enlisted recruiting mission for this fiscal year with three months remaining.

Army National Guard recruiters are not faring much better. As of June 15, the Army Guard had recruited 48.1% of its fiscal 2022

goal of 38,430 new soldiers, the National Guard Bureau said.

The Army Guard hasn't met its recruiting mission since fiscal 2019, reaching 80.6% in fiscal 2021. Excellent retention has made up the difference.

The active-component Army is bracing for the struggle ahead. Service officials involuntarily extended some of their top-performing recruiters and are offering a \$35,000 bonus to recruits willing to sign a four-year contract and

ship to basic training camp within 45 days.

The Army hedged its bets for fiscal 2023 by requesting an active-component personnel end strength of 12,000 less troops than this fiscal year.

Some of the recruiting problem stems from negative perceptions of the military among young people, the recruiting base for every component.

NBC News said it obtained an internal Defense Department survey showing only 9% of young Americans eligible to serve have an inclination to do so — the lowest figure since 2007.

More than half of young Americans who answered the survey — about 57% — believe they would have emotional or psychological problems after military service, NBC reported, while nearly half think they would have physical problems.

And few had someone at home who could dispel such fears or explain the benefits of service. Just 13% of the surveyed had parents who had served in the military, down from approximately 40% in 1995.

Vaccine Refusers Banned From Drill

Army National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers refusing the COVID-19 vaccination can no longer participate in federally funded drills and training and will not receive pay or retirement credit, a July 1 Army statement said.

The policy doesn't apply to soldiers with pending or approved exemptions from the COVID-19 shot, the Army Public Affairs statement added.

"Soldiers who refuse the vaccination order without an approved or pending exemption request are subject to adverse administrative actions, including flags, bars to service, and official reprimands," it added.

"In the future, soldiers who continue to refuse the vaccination order without an exemption may be subject to additional adverse administrative action, including separation."

The Army's action follows a June 30 deadline for Army Guard and Army Reserve members to be vaccinated.

The Air Force took the same action against members of the Air Guard and Air Force Reserve who refused the vaccine.

CONFERENCE UPDATE

Final Dinner to Be Tailgate Party

EXPECT A STATES DINNER at the 144th General Conference & Exhibition, Aug. 26-29 in Columbus, Ohio, like none other in the annual event's century-old history.

For decades, the conference's concluding dinner was strictly formal, but NGAUS has allowed host states to embrace their local culture in recent years.

Kentucky recommended Derby attire in Louisville in 2017 and Louisiana went full Mardi Gras in 2019. Last year, it was Las Vegas wear in Nevada.

This year's theme is "Bring Your Sports Teams to Columbus," an experience like tailgating before the big game.

The fare will resemble offerings from the best tailgate parties, emphasizing smoked meats, but Ohio Guard officials promise alternatives for guests with dietary restrictions. There will also be games, including cornhole, ladder ball and more.

Sports jerseys are recommended attire. A review of some state associations suggests many attendees are ready to represent their favorite teams.

For example, the Alabama Guard Association said to expect a "heavy" showing of Alabama Crimson Tide jerseys — and some Auburn University fans. Other Southeast Conference states are also likely to show their college football pride.

On the more-is-better side of the ledger, the Maryland delegation is taking variety to new levels with jerseys from local teams (the Baltimore Ravens and Orioles), the region (the Washington Capitals) and the past by honoring teams from the old Negro and Ladies leagues.

Several NGAUS board members have already chosen their outfits for the festivities.

For example, Maj. Gen. Janson D. Boyles from Mississippi, the association chairman, plans on wearing a Mississippi State University baseball jersey. He graduated from the school, which won the 2021 national championship in baseball.

Other Guard leaders are also set on their attire. Maj. Gen. Daryl L. Bohac, the adjutant general of Nebraska and president of the Adjutants General Association of the United States, will wear a throwback Nebraska Cornhuskers football jersey.

Some attendees say they are still deciding between two college teams, two professional teams or one of each.

A pair of scissors and a sewing machine might be the answer. Don't be surprised to see some split jerseys in Columbus.



—NGAUS staff report



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“SOUND BITES”

“Since the start of the pandemic, Vermont’s National Guard has stepped up to serve, always willing to go the extra mile for their fellow Vermonters.”

—Gov. Phil Scott,

“Vermont National Guard Concludes COVID-19 Missions,”
Vermont National Guard release, June 30

“Serving is just one small way I can give back to this country.”

—Capt. Alcides Silva

Arkansas Air National Guard,
a native of Brazil,

“National Guard Captain Speaks
at Naturalization Ceremony,”

Arkansas National Guard release, June 29

“I’m sitting here still getting messages of ‘thanks’ from these guys and that’s the payoff.”

—Sgt. 1st Class Chris Freymann,

Washington Army National Guard,
a Javelin instructor who got to know
many Ukrainian troops while deployed last year,

“Meet the Guardsman Helping Ukrainians
Blow Up Russian Tanks over the Phone,”

Military.com, June 3

“[Chinese President Xi Jinping] can bring enormous pressure on Taiwan without ever firing a shot through cyber and through economic measures.”

—Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates

“Former Defense secretary says China
‘could bring Taiwan to its knees’ without invading,”
The Hill, June 23

“The [White House Office of Management and Budget] incorrectly presumed that every state would stand up Space National Guard units, which greatly inflated its cost projections.”

—Brig. Gen. J. Roy Robinson (Ret.),

NGAUS president,

Letter to President Joe Biden, June 7

A Space National Guard could be established for roughly \$250,000 —
the approximate cost to change uniform name tapes and signs.

Source: National Guard Bureau

More Guard F-16s Get Advanced Radar

More than 70 F-16 Fighting Falcons across 12 Air National Guard units now have the new active electronically scanned array radar enabling pilots to detect, target, identify and engage a wider spectrum of threats at longer ranges and with greater precision.

AESA radar reinforces the viability of the F-16 to execute its homeland defense mission while remaining ahead of near-peer threats.

“[With the F-16’s previous APG-68 fire control radar], I had the ability to target up to two tracks, that’s it,” said Lt. Col. Michael Trujillo, a District of Columbia Air Guard pilot. “At that point, my radar is completely saturated and has no more bandwidth. With the AESA radar, [without getting into] specific numbers, I can target more things than I can shoot.”

Air Guard and defense industry leaders marked the addition to Guard F-16s June 9 during a ceremony at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland.

Officials attributed the achievement to the combined effort of Guard advocates, Congress, the Air Force, the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the defense industry.

Upgrading Guard F-16s with AESA radar has long been a NGAUS legislative priority.

Court: State Agencies Subject to USERRA

State agencies are not immune from private lawsuits under federal laws meant to protect the employment rights of National Guardsmen and Reservists, according to a recent Supreme Court ruling.

In a 5–4 ruling, the high court said Texas cannot claim “sovereign immunity” from a lawsuit by a former Texas State Trooper who was mobilized to serve in Iraq in 2007, came home sick and was subsequently fired.

The ruling will strengthen work protections for thousands of state-employed Guardsmen and Reservists.

Service members are protected from losing their jobs due to military obligations under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994, or USERRA.

But when the employer is a state government, it has been more difficult to seek

MAGAZINE ARCHIVES

remedy because of sovereign immunity, a constitutional provision enabling states to reject some state and federal lawsuits.

This specific case involved Le Roy Torres, an Army reservist and former employee of the Texas Department of Public Safety.

Torres told the agency he could no longer serve as a state trooper and sought a comparable job to accommodate his service-related disability.

When Torres was denied, he filed suit under federal law but lost in state courts. He appealed the decision to the Supreme Court.

In the ruling, the justices found the states do not have sovereign immunity when it comes to USERRA.

“By ratifying the Constitution, the States agreed their sovereignty would yield to the national power to raise and support the Armed Forces,” Justice Stephen Breyer wrote in the majority opinion.

Defending .mil Networks Focus of Cyber Exercise

The nation’s oldest military service is quickly adapting to a new warfighting domain: cyber.

“The cyber skills that many members of the National Guard bring to the fight are unique within the Department of Defense and can be brought to bear in protecting the military’s own networks,” said George Battistelli, the exercise director for Cyber Shield 2022 during a June 7 media roundtable.

More than 800 cyber experts from the Guard, other military components, industry and state and federal agencies conducted the exercise June 5-17 at Camp Joseph T. Robinson Maneuver Training Center in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

The Guard’s role in protecting military networks was the focus of this iteration of the annual exercise.

Many Guard cyber experts bring civilian-acquired skills and experience assisting agencies in their states, say Guard leaders.

“The Illinois Board of Elections Network was attacked in 2016, as well as several other states,” said Maj. Gen. Richard Neely, the adjutant general of Illinois. “As a result, the Illinois National Guard has been working closely with the Board of Elections in cyber defense.”

—Compiled from staff & Pentagon reports

Below is an excerpt from the August 2014 issue of **NATIONAL GUARD**. It is part of a series of relevant articles from our more than 74 years of archives.

Irreplaceable Assets

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Austin Norris has a Purple Heart and more than 700 hours of combat flying under his belt. He’s taken a lot of shots. But the punch to the gut late last year ... well, that was pretty hard to take.

“Anger,” he says, describing his reaction when he heard the Army wants to purge the Army National Guard of its AH-64 Apache attack helicopters.

Norris has been flying the aircraft for well more than 20 years. He is the senior instructor pilot for one of the most-experienced Apache units in the Total Army, the South Carolina Army National Guard’s 1st Battalion, 151st Aviation, an attack reconnaissance battalion based at McEntire Joint National Guard Base.

He is also true grit in the cockpit. An insurgent’s bullet shattered his left arm on his first deployment to Iraq in 2004, but he healed and went back to the fight a few years later.

But none of that matters under the Army proposal. The thousands of cockpit hours he has collected in the attack helicopter will be tossed in the rubbish bin. The knowledge he has gleaned from taking his formidable bird into the uncertainty of combat will not be around for passage to other pilots.

Norris has seen it all, either in training or on the battlefield. “I trained all those years to kill Soviet tanks,” he says of his first deployment to Iraq. “Now I’m looking for a guy in civilian clothes with a rifle.” When the unit returned in 2011, he says, “We had some idea of what to expect.”

Army officials tout their Aviation Restructure Initiative as little more than a helicopter swap — Apaches for Black Hawks, everybody’s happy. But briefing slides fail to detail some very real costs. The plan kicks to the sidelines the experience not only of Norris, but all Apache pilots and maintainers in the Guard, rendering inoperative the expertise and knowledge of the Army’s most experienced aviators.

“There’s going to be a huge brain drain in the Apache community,” says Chief Warrant Officer 2 George Protzman, an instructor pilot in the unit and a combat veteran who flew Apaches for nine years in the active-component Army before joining the Guard four years ago.



DID YOU KNOW?

A Space National Guard could be established for roughly \$250,000 — the approximate cost to change uniform name tapes and signs.

Source: National Guard Bureau

BACK FROM THE BRINK

Guard Apache units have gone from the chopping block to receiving the latest model of the attack helicopter



TEAMWORK Petroleum specialists with 1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 151st Aviation Regiment refuel a new AH-64E Apache Guardian helicopter.

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 WILLIAM CARLSON

BY MARK HENSCH

THERE IS FINALLY LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL for what remains of the Army National Guard AH-64 Apache attack-helicopter community.

It's a very welcome sight for the Guard's four attack reconnaissance battalions, which have endured battles at home and abroad over the last nine years.

Their aircraft were once on the Army chopping block. While some did survive, they were among the oldest Apaches in the Army and so few in number that Guard units had to borrow aircraft from each other to deploy.

But that's all becoming a memory now.

The Army has started delivering the new AH-64E Version 6 Guardian to the Guard. The first Echo arrived at South Carolina's 1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 151st Aviation Regiment in March, with the last of the full complement of 24 is set to arrive this summer.

Plans call for the Guard ARBs in North Carolina, Utah and a battalion split between Texas and Mississippi to get the E model by end of fiscal 2026, a fielding plan the Army recently accelerated by 18 months.

"I think the more the Guard looks like the active-duty Army, the better the Total Force is," says Lt. Col. Jonathon Norris, the 1-151st commander. "For us to be a functional reserve for the active duty, we need to look like them, we need to train like them and we need to have the same equipment."

His battalion is now learning how to operate that same equipment with the help of an Army New Equipment Training Team, which has been at McEntire Joint National Guard Base near Columbia, South Carolina, for much of the year.

The training team brought mobile training trailers, smart classrooms and a full-size AH-64E simulator to train pilots and maintainers. Six weeks are what it takes to train an AH-64D Longbow pilot to fly the new aircraft, says Maj. Steve Johnson, the battalion operations officer.

The AH-64E is the next-generation Apache, replacing the AH-64D. The

Army began fielding it to active-component units in 2013.

The aircraft has multiple upgrades from its predecessor, like the ability to control unmanned aerial vehicles and share real-time situational awareness of the operational environment and enemy forces to soldiers on the ground.

"I think the more the Guard looks like the active-duty Army, the better the Total Force is."

—Lt. Col. Jonathon Norris

1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion,
151st Aviation Regiment
South Carolina Army National Guard

More powerful engines and software make the E model faster and more lethal. It has a top speed of 186 mph and can detect 256 potential targets at once up to 10 miles away and prioritize threats in seconds, according to industry specs.

And it can also carry more fuel and munitions, allowing the aircraft to stay in the fight longer.

Col. John “Jay” W. McElveen, the commander of South Carolina’s 59th Aviation Troop Command and a long-time Apache pilot, is impressed.

“From an actual flying perspective, the additional power that comes with it — go faster, go further, go higher, carry more weapons — is what matters,” he says.

Retired Col. Greg Hartvigsen says the AH-64Es will be more capable in extreme altitudes and weather than older Apaches.

“It’s the best in the world,” says Hartvigsen, the former commander of Utah’s 1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 211th Aviation Regiment, and the former chairman of the NGAUS Army Aviation Task Force.

“Of course, anytime you put soldiers in the field, you want them to have the best and latest equipment,” he adds. “You want to combat overmatch with your enemy.”

A PACHE MAINTAINERS may be even happier than pilots to receive the Echo, says Maj. Steven Seigler, the National Guard Bureau’s Aviation Maintenance Branch chief and a former 1-151st executive officer.

“The Delta models have been ridden hard the last 20 years,” Seigler says. “You’re going to see a bump in operational readiness.”

The arrival of the E model is a great departure from Army plans a decade ago.

In 2013, Army leaders planned to eliminate all-eight Guard Apache battalions and transfer their 192 helicopters to the active-component as part of the sweeping Aviation Restructure Initiative.

NGAUS began opposing the ARI on first read. It argued the plan effectively took attack aviation out of the Guard, squandering some of the Army’s most skilled Apache pilots and maintainers and leaving the service without a surge capacity.

The association worked with Congress to create the National Commission on the Future of the Army to look at the proposal and other friction points between the Army and the Guard. The commission in 2016 recommended the retention of four Guard Apache battalions of 18 aircraft, which the Army followed.

Two years later, NGB announced the four ARBs that are still in the force structure.

But maintaining four battalions of 18 old AH-64Ds was a challenge. Apache battalions need 24 aircraft to deploy, which meant Guard battalions had to borrow aircraft for overseas missions and even some training.



CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 WILLIAM CARLSON

MOCK MISSION A South Carolina Army Guard aviator trains on a simulator during his unit’s conversion to the AH-64E Apache Guardian.

Three battalions did deploy. Utah’s 1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 211th Aviation Regiment, was the last ARB in Afghanistan.

Compounding the aircraft shortage, the Army reduced the number of Guard seats available at the Army’s aviation schoolhouse at Fort Rucker, Alabama. In 2019, Guard aviation instructors ran a special flight school there to ensure the Guard had enough pilots for scheduled deployments.

“No one likes uncertainty,” Norris

says of the last few years. “It was difficult.”

“We had to just keep our heads down and focus on really high-level training to make sure we were relevant in the Apache conversation, and we were ready to do any mission asked of us,” he says.

NGAUS helped plant the modernization seed by convincing Congress to add funds for six E models for the Guard in Army fiscal 2019 appropriations.

Now, all four Guard Apache units are set to mirror those in the active component.

North Carolina’s 1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 130th Aviation Regiment is next, beginning early next year.

Col. Benny F. Collins, the North Carolina Army Guard’s director, aviation and safety, says AH-64Es will draw new talent while keeping seasoned aviators in the ranks.

“Having the newest Army Apache fielded in our unit is a fantastic thing for the North Carolina National Guard and the National Guard as a whole,” he says.

Back in South Carolina, McElveen can barely believe the new aircraft he sees at his old unit.

“There were rumors every day we were going to lose them,” he says. “The biggest thing I hope people take away is that the National Guard is a necessary force in our Total Force. When that force shows up, they need to be right there with the same capability.”

The author can be reached at (202) 408-5885 or mark.hensch@ngaus.org.



CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 WILLIAM CARLSON

ECHO SCHOOL An Army New Equipment Training Team instructor explains the unique intricacies of the new attack helicopter during qualification training.

STATE GUARDS

Governors in many states have a second military force to augment the National Guard when disaster strikes

BY BOB HASKELL

THE SECOND SATURDAY IN MAY found Sgt. Justin Stanton and perhaps 40 members of his Texas military medical unit in Houston training to load and strap down a stretcher bearing a 185-pound rescue dummy aboard a military helicopter.

It was among the emergency measures they might employ should their fellow Texans need their help if another hurricane hammers their state. Knowing how to care for victims and communicate with crewmembers could be critical.

Another training exercise during a Texas Army National Guard drill weekend? Guess again.

The medics, some of whom were full-time doctors and nurses, were volunteer members of the Texas State Guard's 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade. They were not being paid or accumulating retirement points.

Fact is, they were not obligated to be there at all. They were there strictly because they *wanted* to be. "There" being the National United States Armed Forces Museum and the helicopter a tandem-rotor HH-46E Sea Knight, a smaller version of the CH-47 Chinook, formerly flown by the Marines.

Welcome to one of America's state defense forces. If you've never heard of these organizations, you're not alone.

"I feel like the Texas State Guard is probably one of the best-kept secrets in the state because nobody has ever heard of us or know what we are," says Stanton, who has served as a recruiter and a medical noncommissioned officer over the past nine years.

The same could be said of other military units that only operate solely under state control. Nearly every state has laws authorizing them, and 21 states and Puerto Rico have active SDFs, as state Guards are generically called, with different levels of activity, support and strength.

Their personnel numbers range from a couple hundred to a couple thousand, with California, Georgia, New York and Texas among the largest. Exact state strengths and a national total can be elusive because SDFs aren't connected to a central agency like the National Guard Bureau, which tracks Army Guard and Air Guard personnel totals.

But recent figures from the State Guard Association of the United States, a voluntary networking entity, provide a good picture: A 2020 survey of 16 SGAUS members standing up to assist with the COVID-19 pandemic found 8,244 available personnel.

SDFs exist primarily to support the National Guard — to take its place should it be federalized and sent away to war as occurred during both World Wars; or to augment National Guard forces during domestic crises. That has especially been the case the last two decades.

"9/11 was really what changed it because there were so many missions," says New York Brig. Gen. David Warager, the SGAUS president, who had already served 16 years



TEXAS STATE GUARD

MEETING THE TROOPS Texas Brig. Gen. Anthony Woods, the Texas State Guard commander, visits with some of his troops called for a state mission late last year.



FIRE LINE California State Guardsmen work on fire-line operations with state firefighters during a week-long training session at Camp Roberts in Paso Robles, California, last year.

in the New York Guard by 2001. “Then leveraging off that, there is domestic support for civilian authorities. For most states, that is the prime mission, to augment the National Guard.”

The collaboration is National Guard policy for domestic operations under state control.

“The NG may interact with SDFs to train and conduct exercises and maneuvers in support of domestic or civil support operations, as appropriate,” instructed Gen. Joseph Lengyel in June 2017 as NGB chief. “The NG will consider the SDF as any other State entity with respect to preparation for and participation in domestic or civil support operations, and the related use of Federal equipment, with the exception of specific restrictions.”

The policy is due for a five-year review this year.

STATE DEFENSE FORCES have various names: The Georgia State Defense Force. The California State Guard. The Indiana Guard Reserve. The New York Guard. The Virginia Defense Force.

They have much in common, according to NGB Historical Services. They were authorized by federal law beginning with the National Defense Act of 1916 and the 1917 Home Guard Act that covered World War I.

Twenty-two state Guards were formed by December 1917.

President Franklin Roosevelt authorized states to again organize state Guards in 1940 before the Second World War. Nearly 90,000 had mustered in 37 states by June 1941, and seven more states plus Hawaii, Alaska and Puerto Rico later came aboard, says NGB historian Bill Boehm.

Missions supporting civil authorities included the November 1942 Cocoman Grove fire in Boston; race riots and labor strife in Texas, Michigan and Alabama in 1943; and the Great Atlantic Hurricane of September 1944, he says.

Title 32, which became law in 1956, “governs the establishment of state defense forces at any time,” Boehm notes.

State defense forces must be sanctioned by governors and fall within the adjutants general chain of command.

SDF officers hold state Title 32 commissions, as do National Guard officers. National Guard officers also have federal Title 10 commissions and can be mobilized by the president for duty at home or abroad. SDF personnel primarily serve within their states. They do not deploy overseas.

“We are not combat troops,” says Stanton, whose role conducting SGAUS podcast



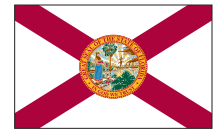
ALASKA



CALIFORNIA



CONNECTICUT



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MARYLAND



MICHIGAN



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NEW MEXICO



NEW YORK



OHIO



OREGON



PUERTO RICO



RHODE ISLAND



SOUTH CAROLINA



TENNESSEE



TEXAS



VERMONT



VIRGINIA



WASHINGTON

interviews with state commanders has given him a national perspective. “Our mission is humanitarian support. Our mission is support for local authorities during times of disaster and emergencies.”

SDFs have been busy lately. The Georgia State Defense Force alone had more than 300 members put in over 9,000 man-hours while supporting over 30 COVID-19 missions during 124 straight duty days in 2020, says Brig. Gen. Mark Gelhardt Sr., the force’s commanding general.

“Some members had lost their jobs and could volunteer,” Gelhardt says. “Others took time off from their jobs. It was the longest activation in our history.”

It was the same story for many other SDFs. State Guard troops performed many of the same pandemic missions as National Guard soldiers and airmen. They distributed food, vaccines and protective equipment; administered tests; screened people entering medical facilities; decontaminated personnel and facilities; helped process unemployment claims; and staffed mortuary trailers at hospitals.

Other missions have included multiple storm and wildfire responses. There have also been missions unique to particular states. For example, the Indiana Guard Reserve provided logistical support to an Afghan evacuee resettlement mission. Additionally, the Texas State Guard continues to augment the National Guard in Operation Lone Star, the state active duty mission on the U.S. southern border.

During such state missions, state Guard personnel and National Guard soldiers and airmen are often intermingled for some tasks. SDF commanders say it’s not uncommon for state Guard officers and NCOs to lead teams of National Guard and SDF personnel serving together.

SDF personnel with significant skills and experience, like cyber and medical, have also helped train National Guard units.

“I feel like the Texas State Guard is probably one of the best-kept secrets in the state because nobody has ever heard of us or know what we are.”

—Sgt. Justin Stanton
Texas State Guard

STATE GUARDSMEN, in most cases, have to buy their own uniforms. And tight state budgets mean they have very limited equipment and other resources for training.

So who would want to belong to an organization that requires so much and offers so little in tangible rewards? Probably for the same reasons people join volunteer fire departments, dedicate Saturdays to their church or assist at hospitals.

The desire to serve is the driving force — to help make their communities better, to do something useful with friends, neighbors and others who want to do the same, commanders say.

Incoming personnel are asked to serve for a specific amount of time, like three years, when they sign up, but they can leave at any time without penalty unless they are on state active duty orders, for which they are normally paid at state active duty rates.

“There is no contract coming in,” Stanton says. “Unlike the federal services, we’re not legally obligated to serve after becoming members. It’s a voluntary commitment. There can be a revolving door.”

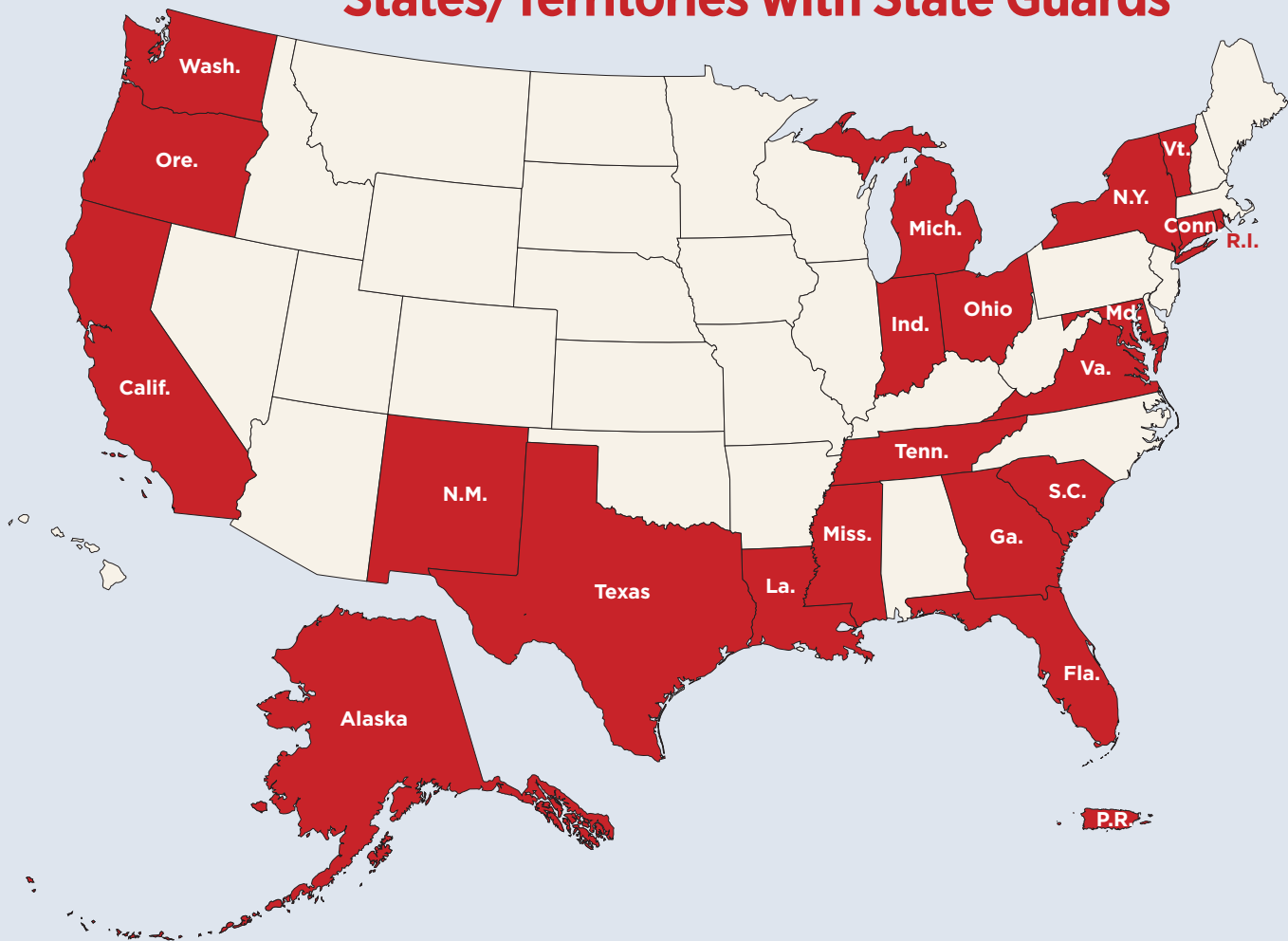
He says Texas asks recruits to make a three-year commitment because “we’re going to make an investment in our time and attention to train them. The only way you can effectively build a force that is reliable for the governor is to have members who are reliable.”

HELPING HAND
A cyber expert with the South Carolina State Guard advises a South Carolina Army Guard soldier during Cyber Shield 21, a Defense Department cyber exercise.



SGT. TIM ANDREWS

States/Territories with State Guards



“I think once somebody makes it past the first three years, they’re likely to serve for a much longer period,” Stanton says. “There’s a lot of adjustments that have to be made during those first three years. Then I think it just becomes a part of who you are.”

Most new personnel, claim longtime members, fall into one of three categories: They were in the military and want to remain in uniform or return somehow. They wanted to join but were turned down, and still want to serve. Or they just want to find out what it’s all about.

Estimates are a little less than half the force nationwide has prior military service. The New York Guard provides an example of the resulting mix. A medical condition prevented him from entering the U.S. Naval Academy, Warager explains, so he joined the Empire State’s Guard in July 1985 and was appointed commanding general in 2018.

His successor, Brig. Gen. Peter Riley, served for 30 years in the New York Army Guard and retired as a colonel in May 2019. He joined the New York Guard in 2020 because of the pandemic and assumed the state command in September 2021.

The typical member tends to be older than the average National Guard soldier or airman. SDF spokesmen say state Guardsmen often join in their 30s and 40s after settling into families and careers, whereas most National Guard recruits are somewhere between high school and their 20s.

Entry requirements are not nearly as stringent as they are for joining the traditional uniform services. In Georgia, for example, recruits must clear a background check and “be in relatively appropriate shape,” Gelhardt says. Four duty levels range from being fit enough to “go into the woods with a backpack” to sitting at a desk and not going to the field, he adds.

“We’d like you to be within the height-weight standards of the active military,” says Gelhardt, a retired Army lieutenant colonel. “But we’ll look at you, talk to you and make a determination on a case-by-case basis. If you’re going to put on the uniform, you’d better look like you belong in the uniform.”

Most SDFs have initial entry training for those new to military service. It’s only a few days and the rigors bear little resemblance to Army boot camp. The curriculum is focused on the basics: customs and courtesies, drill and ceremony and wear of the uniform.

Monthly drills are conducted differently from state to state, and annual training varies from four days to a week.

All this, some acknowledge, can create skepticism about SDF members among those who pay a more demanding price to wear the uniform.

“I know from personal knowledge what a National Guard member goes through in basic training. And I know from personal experience

rience what our entry training is,” Stanton says. “So I would never say to a National Guard member that I am the same as you because I have too much respect for what they do and what they’ve accomplished to elevate myself into that position.”

SDFs are always looking for new recruits, especially those with professional experience in skills they are often asked to provide in an emergency: communications, IT, public relations, medicine, the law and the clergy.

There are also people that state forces don’t want in their ranks, namely those with ties to or affinity for anti-government militia groups.

“We don’t want those folks because they’re not there to serve the betterment of society,” Warager says. “Most of our SDFs are not armed. Those other militia groups are not us. They may sneak in for a little while, but not long. We don’t tolerate it.



TIMELY RESPONSE Texas State Guardsmen distribute food and other provisions after a tornado struck Onalaska, Texas, in 2020.

“The fact that they’re getting press and referred to as ‘militia’ doesn’t help us,” adds Warager, underscoring the SDF’s lack of a distinct identity.

Media people sometimes see personnel in essentially the same military uniforms distributing food and water or filling sandbags and identify them all as National Guard, explains Stanton and others. That state flags, not the U.S. flag, are worn on right shoulders may be overlooked.

And when SDFs do get press attention, it’s often not the kind commanders seek.

In 2007, the *New York Times* reported many senior officers in the New York Guard had little or no formal military training despite some holding general officer ranks. In 2015, Gov. Greg Abbott

“If you’re going to put on the uniform, you’d better look like you belong in the uniform.”

—Brig. Gen. Mark Gelhardt Sr.
Commanding General
Georgia State Defense Force

made headlines when he ordered the Texas State Guard to monitor a special operations exercise across the Southwest. He said he did so to quell public concern that Jade Helm 15 was a covert effort to institute martial law.

Additionally, SDFs appear to come and go. Three states have deactivated their forces within the past decade — Alabama in 2014, Massachusetts in 2016 and Missouri this year.

Missouri’s SDF ceased operations because “it provided little or no benefit to the National Guard,” according to reports. “This should act as a warning for those less active State Defense Forces. It is up to the leadership . . . to seek out new and better avenues to assist their National Guard,” says Jean Marciniak, the StateDefenseForce.com administrator.

Meanwhile, Gelhardt says Gov. Brian Kemp wants the Georgia State Defense Force to grow from its current 400 personnel to “800 to 1,200 members,” and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has brought the Florida State Guard back to life after it was disbanded following World War II.


DeSantis, a Navy Reserve officer and Iraq War veteran, announced in December that he wanted a dedicated emergency force that doesn’t answer to the federal government, reported *Florida Politics*.

“If you love the state of Florida, have a desire to help your community, and have skills beneficial to protect the state from a disaster, we encourage you to apply to join the FLSG,” states a news release.

The announcement was a political football for the Republican governor. “Democrats accused him of trying to establish a ‘vigilante militia’ and ‘secret police,’” reported *Bloomberg News*.

But elected officials on both sides of the aisle have long said the Florida National Guard’s 12,000 soldiers and airmen are insufficient to respond to the state’s “worst day.” Florida is prone to hurricanes.

DeSantis has since appointed a Florida State Guard commander, retired Marine Corps Lt. Col. Chris Graham, and 1,200 people have reportedly volunteered to serve in the rejuvenated 400-member force with an approved \$10 million budget for 2023.

Politics aside, SDF members feel a bond with members of the National Guard. A desire to serve their people and their states, to be part of an organization that is bigger than themselves. They believe they belong to the same team in the same fight. 

Bob Haskell is a retired Maine Army National Guard master sergeant and a freelance journalist in Falmouth, Mass. He may be contacted at magazine@nga.us.



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THE WORLD CHANGED
THE NATIONAL GUARD
CHANGED

MUSEUM OPEN

The National Guard Memorial Museum has reopened to the public. Visit the NGEF website for updates.

The **9/11 Era Gallery** details the National Guard's heroic response to the devastating terrorist attacks through photographs, personal stories and objects, and highlights the Guard's ever-expanding domestic and global roles. www.ngef.org/the911EraGallery

One Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001
www.ngef.org

NATIONAL GUARD
MEMORIAL MUSEUM

ROAD WORK

Michigan exercise proves a stretch of highway can be turned into a forward air base



A Michigan Air Guard pilot lands an A-10 Thunderbolt II fighter on a closed stretch of state highway during the exercise.

MASTER SGT. DAVID KUJAWA

WHEN AN AIRCRAFT RUNWAY isn't around, sometimes a long stretch of road can suffice in a pinch to project airpower.

That's what some airmen from around the country proved the last week of June during the Michigan Air National Guard's exercise Northern Agility 22-1 in the state's Upper Peninsula.

Last year, airmen made history during the exercise by landing four A-10 Thunderbolt II fighters and two C-146 transport aircraft on a closed portion of Michigan State Highway M-32 — the first time Air Force aircraft intentionally landed on a civilian roadway on U.S. soil.

This year, exercise participants took it a step further, practicing integrated combat turns on a closed section of Michigan State Highway M-28, where airmen quickly re-armed and refueled the aircraft while they

were still running so they could take off again and rejoin the fight.

The move required multiple ground crew members to work together to pull it off, all without the usual facilities of a large air base or an expansive tarmac.

They turned multiple Air Guard A-10, Air Force Reserves C-146A Wolfhound and Air Force Special Operations Command C-145A Combat Coyote, MC-12W Liberty and U-28A Draco aircraft.

Guard airmen from Maryland and Oklahoma joined those from Michigan in the exercise.

The activity occurred on what exercise organizers called "Hawk LZ" in honor of F-16 pilot Maj. Durwood "Hawk" Jones of the Wisconsin Air Guard's 115th Fighter Wing, who lost his life in a training accident in Michigan in 2020.

Northern Agility 22-1 demonstrated "the

ability of our airmen to generate combat power anytime, anywhere," said Brig. Gen. Bryan Teff, the assistant adjutant general and commander of the Michigan Air National Guard.

"Michigan is a champion for Agile Combat Employment, so when it comes to leveraging our state's unique partnerships, training environment and resources to ensure the joint force stays one step ahead of our adversaries, today was a huge success."

The exercise is meant to prepare airmen in case they have to operate in "austere environments," like remote Pacific islands where the only runway available may be an ordinary road or just a dirt strip.

That's a possibility senior Air Force leaders are already working on.

"We've surveyed almost every piece of concrete in the Pacific for whether we can use it for a hub or a spoke" for projecting airpower, Gen. Kenneth S. Wilsbach, the

commander of Pacific Air Forces, told reporters last September.

The exercise required significant planning not only across the components of the Air Force, but also several state and local agencies, Michigan Guard officials said.

“Northern Agility 22-1 would not be possible without the long-term partnerships that exist between the Michigan National Guard and the Michigan State Police, Michigan Department of Transportation, Alger County Sheriff’s Office, and of course, support from our neighbors in the Upper Peninsula,” said Lt. Col. Brian Wyrzykowski, the exercise’s lead operations planner.

The Kelly Johnson Joint All-Domain Innovation Center at Selfridge Air National Guard Base near Detroit was also involved.

The center teamed with industry partners to demonstrate technologies for augmented reality to enhance the multicapable airman concept, rapid integration of the command and control ecosystem, synthetic aperture radar, and advanced threat detection.

“Michigan is home to an incredible manufacturing spirit, business culture, and immense pride and patriotism that makes it a great place for the Department of Defense to continue to train for the future warfight,” said Maj. Gen. Paul Rogers, the adjutant general of Michigan.

—Capt. Andrew Layton



WEST VIRGINIA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Pfc. William Farkas, 17, is the youngest soldier ever to receive the distinguished sapper tab after graduating with honors from the Sapper Leader Course at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

WEST VIRGINIA

Soldier Youngest Ever To Receive Sapper Tab

A soldier attached to the 119th Engineer Company, 1092nd Engineer Battalion recently became the youngest to ever receive the distinguished sapper tab after graduating with honors from the Army’s Sapper Leader Course.

Pfc. William Farkas is 17 years old.

The demanding 28-day leadership development course at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, reinforces critical skills and teaches advanced engineer techniques needed

across the Army.

It builds esprit de corps by training soldiers in troop-leading procedures, conventional and expedient demolitions and mountaineering operations. The course culminates in an intense field training exercise that reinforces battle drills and specialized engineer techniques learned.

“Private 1st Class Farkas earning the sapper tab at such a young age is a tremendous achievement,” said Lt. Col. David Watson, the commander of the West Virginia Army Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion, a sapper himself. “The sapper motto is, ‘Sappers Clear the Way!! Sappers in the Breach!!’ His physical fitness, capacity to foster teamwork and mental aptitude for quick thinking have been tested and proven to be of high merit.”

Farkas joined the Guard after graduation as valedictorian of class 1-2021 of the Mountaineer ChalleNGe Academy-South, one of two West Virginia locations of the Guard program offering high school dropouts a second chance at an education.

He attended basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, followed by Combat Engineer One Station Unit Training. He then applied for and was selected to attend the Sapper Leaders Course, making the Commandant’s List of graduates.

Farkas’s time as an enlisted member of the Guard will be short, as he has accepted an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, as a part of the Class of 2026.

—By Edwin Wriston



TECH. SGT. CHELSEA E. FITZPATRICK

Michigan Air Guard maintenance personnel quickly rearm and refuel an A-10 Thunderbolt II fighter on a closed stretch of Michigan State Highway M-28 during exercise Northern Agility 22-1.



STAFF SGT. TERRENCE CLYBURN

Members of the 105th Airlift Wing receive the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with valor for flying critically needed rescue personnel and equipment aboard a C-17 Globemaster III transport into Kabul, Afghanistan, as Taliban forces took the Afghan capital city in August 2021.

NEW YORK

Airmen Honored for Valor During Final Afghan Sortie

Flying into a “hornet’s nest” is how one of the crew of Reach 824 described the scene as their C-17 Globemaster III transport plane approached Kabul, Afghanistan, as Taliban forces took the Afghan capital last summer.

The crew of seven drill-status airmen with the 105th Airlift Wing couldn’t grasp their heroism at the time, but their airlift mission would earn them the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal, each donned with the V device for valor, or the Meritorious Service Medal.

“It is nothing short of inspiring to be in your company,” Gen. Daniel Hokanson, the chief of the National Guard Bureau, said at a ceremony honoring the crew June 4 at Stewart Air National Guard Base in Newburgh, New York.

Recognized were Capt. Matthew McChesney, Lt. Col. Andrew Townsend, Capt. Jonathan Guagenti, Tech. Sgt. Joseph Caponi IV, Staff Sgt. Evan Imbriglio and Staff Sgt. Corey Berke.

The seventh member, Tech. Sgt. Byron Catu, on board the aircraft as a flying crew chief, was previously recognized with the Meritorious Service Medal.

Reach 824 diverted from routine operations in South America to airlift a Special Operations Aviation Regiment MH-47 Chi-

nook helicopter and 22 personnel from Al Dhafra Air Base, United Arab Emirates, to Hamid Karzai International Airport.

Once on the ground, rescue personnel were to find U.S. personnel in Afghanistan and get them to the Kabul airport for evacuation.

Initial intelligence indicated Taliban forces were approaching Kabul but would not be able to take the city for at least a month. However, by the morning of their flight Aug. 15, the Taliban were on the outskirts of the city. Nevertheless, the New York Air Guard crew pressed on.

On their final approach, Reach 824 had no secure communications with air traffic control. The crew could see small-arms fire, aircraft taking off in every direction and civilians overrunning the airfield. Consequently, they aborted the mission and returned to Al Dhafra Air Base.

After minimum crew rest, and despite limited information on whether the airfield was open, Reach 824 made a second attempt to reach Kabul.

Under cover of night, the crew navigated mountainous terrain on the approach to Kabul, passing a half-dozen C-17s unable to land due to the airfield closure, minimum fuel or threats.

With no air traffic control or onsite intelligence, McChesney engaged with other pilots to glean real-time intelligence and establish a landing window.

Reach 824 orbited within a 10-mile radius, making the aircraft vulnerable to sur-

face-to-air threats until the crew was nearly forced to divert again due to minimum fuel.

In a critical turning point, efforts made earlier in the day by copilot Townsend to secure air refueling paid off when a refueling tanker crew reached out. Now, with enough fuel to orbit Kabul until the airfield opened, the crew set up for a 15-mile visual landing.

On the final approach, they witnessed small-arms fire under their flight path, one round damaging their left winglet. With no landing clearance, no terminal lights and no building lights, the crew received one simple instruction: “Land at your own risk.”

Against all odds, Reach 824 safely landed. On the ground, 12 vehicles with heavily armed Taliban escorted the aircraft to the allied side of the airfield.

The crew offloaded the cargo in an unprecedented 40 minutes, enabling the special operations team to conduct its mission.

“We found out through our contact with the unit that we brought in there that they were able to get over 800 people out from the countryside who otherwise would not have made it to Kabul,” said copilot Guagenti.

But, Reach 824’s job wasn’t done. Over the two weeks of Operation Allies Refuge, the crew returned to Kabul to complete two additional missions to help evacuate 348 people, the youngest a 17-day-old girl.

In its final mission, the crew transported 13 service members killed in action in a bombing at the airport from Kabul to Kuwait.

—By Staff Sgt. Sarah M. McClanahan

NEW MEXICO

Guard Cyber Teams Train With Mescalero Apache

New Mexico National Guard soldiers and airmen trained with Mescalero Apache Telecom Inc. June 13-16 as part of a Defense Department program that provides critical services to historically underserved U.S. communities.

While most Innovative Readiness Training programs involve medical and civil engineering training and assistance, the focus for this event was cyber, a historical initiative for the NMNG.

“We’re essentially training a vulnerability assessment. This an opportunity for our team, A, to practice doing a vulnerability assessment and, B, practice training,” said Tech. Sgt. Estevan Ravencrest, from the 150th Communications Squadron, Special Missions Flight. “It’s also an opportunity for MATI to learn how to do their own mini-vulnerability assessments on themselves.”

In addition to the six members of the 150th CS, there were participants from the New Mexico Army National Cyber Operations team, the Air Force Reserve and IRT headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Some were there to observe one of the first cyber IRTs, others for hands-on training and to get their own programs up and running.

The cyber IRT event was initiated by Central New Mexico Community College and Public Service Company of New Mexico. They submitted a request to the IRT program on behalf of MATI.

MATI provides Mescalero Apache Reservation residents with local telephone ser-



STAFF SGT. JERON WALKER

Georgia Army Guard infantrymen move forward at a mock city at Fort Stewart, Georgia, during the 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team’s Exportable Combat Training Capability exercise.

vice, high-speed internet along with data services to the largest businesses in the area.

—By Senior Master Sgt. Daniel Butterfield

GEORGIA

Infantrymen, Engineers Conduct Urban Training

Members of B Company, 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment and the 177th Brigade Engineer Battalion underwent some urban combat training during an Exportable Combat Training Capability exercise at Fort Stewart, Georgia, June 18.

Both units are part of the Georgia Army National Guard’s 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

The event focused on breaching doors and clearing rooms.

“I feel like this training prepares me and improves my readiness by giving me that real-world effect without being outside the wire,” said Spc. Josiah Pierce, a combat engineer with the 177th Brigade Engineer Battalion. “We get all the necessary training and learn the value of being patient.”

XCTC exercises feature rigorous training in a simulated combat environment. The experience is similar to a Combat Training Center rotation at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, or Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

“We want to be proficient in our squad and platoon operations,” said Cadet Michael Sandrin, an acting platoon leader with B Company, 1st Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment. “When we go to further training missions stateside and deployments overseas, we’re more than proficient in operating as a platoon with other units.”

Sandrin, a University of North Georgia cadet, said he was grateful to experience his first real opportunity to lead a platoon.

“This is a huge leadership opportunity,” he said. “Even for privates and specialists, they will have the opportunity to be team leaders and complete missions side by side with everyone.”

—Spc. Princess Alexandria Higgins



Brig. Gen. Jamison Herrera, the deputy adjutant general, speaks with New Mexico Army and Air Guard cyber experts while visiting Mescalero Apache Telecom Inc. in Ruidoso, New Mexico.

STAFF SGT. RYAN SANDERS



STAFF SGT. ZANE CRAIG

Soldiers with 1st Battalion, 109th Field Artillery Regiment operate a M109A6 Paladin 155mm howitzer during Defender Europe 22 and NATO exercise Flaming Thunder in Pabrade, Lithuania.

PENNSYLVANIA

Field Artillery Battalion Supports Defender Europe

About 250 members of 1st Battalion, 109th Field Artillery Regiment deployed to Lithuania in May to participate in Defender Europe 22 and NATO exercise Flaming Thunder.

The Pennsylvania Army National Guard soldiers drew prepositioned M109A6 Paladins 155mm howitzers and conducted artillery live-fires to increase interoperability with NATO partners, especially Pennsylvania's State Partnership Program partner, Lithuania.

"Up and down the battalion, from our main efforts to our supporting efforts, everyone did an outstanding job and I'm really pleased with where we are," said Lt. Col. Michael Tornambe, the battalion commander.

"We were able to maintain nine out of nine of our crews certified. We were able to achieve timely and accurate fires for effect, on target."

The battalion performed 36 fire missions, sending some 400 rounds downrange.

Flaming Thunder is designed to enhance fires skills and assess units' ability to complete live-fire tasks while creating the conditions for close cooperation of fire support units among NATO allies as part of Defender Europe 22.

Defender Europe is an annual, U.S. Army-led joint exercise to build U.S., NATO and partner militaries' readiness and interoperability.

Eight battalion soldiers served as liaison officers in the multinational Joint Air Ground Integration Cell, essentially replicating a division headquarters.

They worked closely with the Lithuanian Land Forces and the German Armed Forces, Tornambe said.



ILLINOIS ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Spc. Jeremy Ridlen, 23, a member of the 1544th Transportation Company, died from small-arms fire in East Fallujah, Iraq, in 2004.

ILLINOIS

Post Office to be Named After Fallen Guardsman

A post office in central Illinois will soon bear the name of a member of the 1544th Transportation Company killed in Iraq in 2004.

Spc. Jeremy Ridlen was among roughly 170 members of the Illinois Army National Guard unit who deployed to Iraq in December 2003.

He was 23 years old when he died from small-arms fire May 23, 2004, after a dump truck rigged with explosives on the side of the road detonated as his convoy passed in East Fallujah, Iraq.

On June 16, 2022, President Joe Biden signed House Resolution 3579, designating the U.S. Post Office in Maroa, Illinois, as the Jeremy L. Ridlen Post Office.

"Specialist Jeremy Ridlen gave his life for his country, and renaming this post office in his honor will serve as a lasting tribute to his sacrifice," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the adjutant general of Illinois.

Ridlen was born and raised in Maroa, where he attended Maroa-Forsyth High School. He and his twin brother, Jason, attended Illinois State University, signed up for the Illinois Army Guard and were assigned to the 1544th.

Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Ill, who represents Maroa in the House, introduced the legislation naming the post office for Ridlen.

—By Barbara Wilson



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