

OREGON SENTINEL

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATIONAL GUARD

ORNG opens off-road tank trail in Eastern Oregon



Tank commander, Oregon Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Eric Gilliland, of 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment communicates with driver Sgt. Maxwell Rounds from Castle Rock, Washington, as they maneuver their M1A2 SEP v2 Abrams tank onto the new six-mile tank trail at the Raymond F. Rees Training Center in Umatilla, Oregon, on February 1, 2025.

Story and photos by Maj. Chris Clyne, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

UMATILLA, Ore. — The Oregon Army National Guard has unveiled a new six-mile tank driver training course at Raymond F. Rees Training Center, marking a significant upgrade in armor units’ training capabilities in Eastern Oregon.

The new course, which saw its first tank traverse the trail this week, enables local National Guard units to conduct essential driver training without traveling hundreds of miles to out-of-state facilities. The development represents a significant milestone in the transformation of the former Umatilla Chemical Depot into a modern military training facility.

“Having this opportunity here in our hometown, in our home armory, to maneuver our vehicles is a great learning opportunity,” said Sgt. First Class Eric Gilliland, readiness noncommissioned officer for Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment in Hermiston.

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Oregon Air Guardsman completes Commander Tour in Antarctica



ORANG Director of Staff, Col. Christopher Lantagne displays the State of Oregon flag for a photo in Antarctica, November 2024. Lantagne recently finished a six-week tour as the commander of the 13th Air Expeditionary Group at McMurdo Station, Antarctica. (Courtesy photo)

Story by Steven Conklin, 142nd Wing Public Affairs

PORTLAND, Ore. – Oregon Air National Guard Director of Staff, Col. Christopher Lantagne has finished a six week tour as the commander of the 13th Air Expeditionary Group at McMurdo Station, Antarctica. The 13th AEG supports the National Science Foundation, which is the lead agency at McMurdo.

“I’ve done a lot of cool things, but this is just so unique. Trying to operate here and seeing what this continent is about,” Lantagne said. “I just consider myself lucky to be one of the few that get to set foot in Antarctica and actually go see the south pole.”

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National Guard combat medics test Drone delivery during recertification



Oregon Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Day (left) retrieves simulated blood supplies delivered by a Blueflite drone while Sgt. Keikkala (right) provides security during a field training exercise on January 30, 2025, at Camp Rilea, Warrenton, Oregon.

Story and photos by Maj. Chris Clyne, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

WARRENTON, Ore. – Combat medics with the Oregon National Guard are adapting their battlefield medicine skills for large-scale combat operations through innovative training that includes drone-delivered medical supplies at Camp Rilea.

The 249th Regional Training Institute medical detachment conducted its annual 68W Combat Medic sustainment course from January 23-31, 2025 incorporating unmanned aerial systems for the first time during the culminating field training exercise.

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Connected to our People & Culture: Oregon National Guard members and their spouses enjoy an evening of camaraderie & pageantry at the Military Ball.

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Competency put to the test: Oregon Guardsmen take on the challenges and battle adversity during the Best Warrior Competition held at Camp Rilea.

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Committed to our Communities: Retired Oregon Air Guardsman named 2024 OSAA (6A) High School Girls’ “Soccer Coach of the Year.”

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COMMAND

Entering 2025: Navigating changes, taking on new challenges

Team Oregon,

As we enter spring 2025, I want to reflect on our position within the evolving strategic landscape and address upcoming changes from the Department of Defense that will affect our organization.

The world remains a dangerous place. As I've mentioned in recent 'TAG Talks,' powerful nations and non-state actors continue to destabilize regions and threaten global security. These challenges require us to remain vigilant, prepared, and ready to respond at a moment's notice. Every Oregon National Guard member is a leader, and we will continue to rely on your leadership as we navigate this complex environment.

Our Strategic Guidance 2030 outlines our vision of being the Service of Choice, comprised of a team of winning units who are trained and ready to fight and win. Our three core values—Connected, Competent, and Committed—continue to guide everything we do. We must stay connected to our people, maintain competence in our skill sets, and remain committed to improving our organization. These values are not just words on paper; they represent who we are and how we operate.

You've likely heard about several recent changes announced by the Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth regarding DoD's financial priorities. The Department is pulling approximately 8% from nonlethal programs to refocus on core warfighting capabilities.

Secretary Hegseth has made it clear, this isn't a cut, but rather a reinvestment in building a more lethal force. Additionally, DoD is implementing measures to address fraud, waste, and abuse within the department's budget.

What does this mean for the Oregon National Guard?

First, we will continue to prioritize our main effort: People and Culture. Taking care of our members and their families remains our highest priority. When we put people first, we build trust, strengthen our formation, and create an environment where everyone can thrive.

Second, we will maintain our focus on Readiness. The upcoming DoD changes will require us to be even more efficient with our resources. We must maximize training time, meet or exceed service-specific standards, and improve systems and processes to drive decision-making at all echelons.

Third, we will strengthen our Partnerships. As resources potentially shift, our relationships with local, state, tribal, national, and international partners become even more crucial. These partnerships multiply our capabilities and help us accomplish our mission more effectively.

In the coming months, my staff and I will work diligently to understand how DoD's changes will specifically impact our organization. We will communicate transparently throughout this process and make decisions that align with our strategic priorities.



Brigadier General Alan R. Gronewold,
Adjutant General,
Oregon National Guard

Remember, the Oregon National Guard has weathered transitions before. We've responded to wildfires, a global pandemic, and numerous other challenges with professionalism and dedication. We live here, we serve here, and we're a family. The connections we forge and maintain throughout our careers and lifetimes make us uniquely resilient.

We are the 'Service of Choice for Oregonians' not because it's a slogan, but because of who you are—dedicated Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen who embody the spirit of service, integrity, leadership, and commitment to our communities.

I am honored to serve alongside each of you. Together, we will navigate these changes and emerge stronger, more capable, and better positioned to protect Oregonians and defend America.

Always Ready, Always There!

Oregon Guard & ESGR host 'Boss Lift' for community leaders

Story and photo by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Dept. Public Affairs

AURORA, Ore. – The Oregon Army National Guard partnered with Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) to host a "Boss Lift" event for community leaders and educators at Aurora Airport on Feb. 28, 2025.

Approximately 28 participants, primarily from area high schools including East Portland, Clackamas, and Gresham, along with representatives from the Oregon State Athletic Association and a state legislator, experienced a 60-

90 minute flight over Mount Hood National Forest aboard a CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

The event aimed to showcase the National Guard's capabilities while strengthening relationships with community partners, according to Staff Sgt. Benjamin Herrmann, who coordinated the Boss Lift.

"We're trying to showcase the Guard and demonstrate the exciting opportunities it offers,"

said Herrmann, a recruiter for the Clackamas and Oregon City areas. "The National Guard provides high school graduates with career training in over 200 job specialties while offering 100% college tuition assistance for members."



Local education and community leaders stand in front of a CH-47 Chinook helicopter during an Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Boss Lift event at Aurora Airport, Oregon, Feb. 28, 2025.

Oregon Guardsmen serve part-time, typically one weekend a month and two weeks a year, while maintaining civilian careers. They stand ready to respond to state emergencies such as wildfires and floods while training to defend the nation when called to federal service. Guard members live and work in the same communities they serve, creating a unique connection between military service and local communities.

The CH-47 Chinook helicopter used for the event was from Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 168th Aviation Regiment, based in Pendleton.

For Herrmann and his recruiting team, known as Detachment 2, this marked their first time organizing such an event. Despite some initial challenges, including a last-minute venue change from Portland Air National Guard Base to Aurora Airport, the event proceeded successfully.

"There were a lot of different logistics involved since it was our first time coordinating something like this," Herrmann said. "Next time it will be even better."

Scott Witt, Area One Co-Chair for ESGR, explained that Boss Lifts are an important community outreach tool for connecting military service members with civilian employers.

"Community outreach is a big part of the ESGR, getting out to the community and reaching employers, kind of being the liaison between the military service member and the civilian employer," said Witt, a former Air Force crew chief who also served in the Air National Guard. "Whenever they allow us to get on and bring folks up on a training mission, we will jump at the chance."

COMMAND

Commander finishes Antarctica tour

Continued from Front Page

The 13th AEG provides logistical support for the research United States scientists conduct in Antarctica, which requires a team of motivated professionals to accomplish. The 109th Airlift Wing out of New York flies a modified C-130 fitted with skis that allow it to take off and land on the icy continent.

“The [Lockheed] LC-130 is an old airplane and we are operating it in a really austere location,” said Lantagne. “Parts are hard to get, so it takes a lot of TLC from the operations and maintenance team here to work. So they’re just all working their tails off to make this mission happen here.”

During his tour, Lantagne served as the senior U.S. military officer on the continent, overseeing a joint team of Army, Navy and Coast Guard partners working to support Operation Deep Freeze, a presidentially directed joint-operation to establish an active and influential presence in Antarctica.

Being so far from home during holidays was made easier by the hundreds of service members and the townsfolk calling Antarctica their temporary home.



Courtesy photos provided by Col. Christopher Lantagne Oregon Air National Guard Director of Staff, Col. Christopher Lantagne takes a “selfie photo” in front of a 109th Airlift Wing LC-130 Hercules in November 2024 during his assignment in Antarctica.



Oregon Air National Guard Director of Staff, Col. Christopher Lantagne, stands in front of a 109th Airlift Wing LC-130 Hercules in November 2024 while being assigned in Antarctica. Lantagne recently finished a six-week tour as the commander of the 13th Air Expeditionary Group at McMurdo Station, Antarctica.

“I’ve been in the military a long time. Missed a lot of birthdays, holidays,” said Lantagne. “You’re never used to it. Everybody worked on Thanksgiving, but the following Saturday, the whole town here at McMurdo, which is about 1,000 to 800 people, took Saturday off and the dining facility made just this massive Thanksgiving feast.”

While thousands of miles away from their loved ones, the team made the best of the situation.

“When you deploy, you make new friends wherever you go, and we had a good family environment here and celebrated a nice day together.”

Beyond spending time with his military comrades, Lantagne also enjoyed the local wildlife; minus the penguins.

“There’s lots of seals here, I’m looking out of my window and I can see four seals laying on the ice outside, but the penguins need the ice to be broken, they probably won’t be in here in force until after I’m gone, unfortunately.”

Ultimately, pulling together minds from across the U.S. has led to success for the team.

“Most of the team here comes from the 109th Airlift Wing (New York ANG) but a lot of my very close staff tend to be augmentees from all around the [country]” he said.

Oregon is a great state and we do great work there, but it’s always good to mix it up with peers from around the country and hear how other states are doing it. All together, I think we’ve come together as a good team and are supporting the overall mission well.”

All good things must come to an end though. Luckily for Lantagne, he was able to make it home just before Christmas, but unfortunately, the weather back home was not quite the same.

“My wife was telling me she can’t wait to have me home to hear me complain about all the rain. I definitely think I get seasonal depression in Oregon when it gets six months of grey, so to come down here, even though it’s cold, the sun is out almost every day and it’s light 24/7.”

173rd Fighter Wing officer selected as “Inspiring Leader of the Year”

Story by Master Sgt. Daniel Reed, 173rd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore.— Oregon Air National Guard Lt. Col. Richard Schuster, commander of the 173rd Maintenance Squadron, was recognized as the “Inspiring Leader of the Year” in Klamath Falls, Oregon for his exceptional leadership and contributions to the local community on Jan. 28, 2025.

Schuster has played a pivotal role in several initiatives that have helped improve the quality of life for both military families and local residents. Through his collaborative work with local boards and committees, he has been able to make significant strides in addressing key community challenges, such as the housing shortage and healthcare access.

“We have been able to positively impact our housing shortage by bringing in multiple out-of-state builders and developers,” Schuster said. “Additionally, we’ve incentivized local building by lowering costs and fees. It’s been a tremendous partnership with local leaders to help make Klamath Falls a more livable community for all.”

Schuster’s leadership also

extended to the medical sector, ensuring residents have access to high-quality services.

“We impacted local medical services by including Klamath Falls into a rural community tax incentive program that helps attract and maintain local providers,” added Schuster. “It’s been a collaborative effort that will benefit everyone in our community.”

In addition to housing and healthcare, Schuster has also focused on expanding employment opportunities for military spouses. By working closely with business owners and leaders, Schuster has helped raise awareness of the skilled workforce available through Kingsley Field families.

“We worked to create programs and assistance to increase employment opportunities for military spouses,” Schuster said. “And we’ve made it a priority to consistently share the word with business owners and leaders about the potential workforce we bring.”

Schuster’s impact on Klamath Falls highlights the power of collaboration and trust. His ability to work alongside local leaders and community members to solve problems in real-time has fostered strong relationships and trust between the military and the community.



Courtesy photo provided by Lt. Col. Richard Schuster Lt. Col. Richard Schuster, 173rd Maintenance Squadron commander, poses with his family during an awards gala in Klamath Falls on Jan. 28, 2025. Schuster received the “Inspiring Leader of the Year” award for 2024.

“There are so many great people locally wishing to make a difference,” Schuster said. “When we work with them in the context of bettering our community overall, and trust and understanding is established, they help with our military member’s needs just as much.”

Schuster’s enthusiasm for the relationships he’s built, and the

progress made was evident in his remarks. “I am super excited about the relationships that have been built and the issues tackled. I know it will continue to create successful outcomes for both Kingsley Field families and all our local community partners.”

As a long time Kingsley Field member, Schuster’s contributions have been instrumental in bridging the gap between the military and the broader Klamath Falls community. His continued efforts ensure that collaboration remains a key driver of success for the region, benefiting both military families and residents alike.

“Kingsley Field’s participation is key to building relationships and teams that solve problems in real time – over and over,” Schuster said. “It is awesome to be a part of and to see the positive effects come to be.”

Schuster’s dedication to Kingsley Field’s mission and his leadership in building strong community partnerships are a testament to his commitment to making lasting, positive changes in the Southern Oregon region.

LEADERSHIP

The ORNG Military Ball blends an evening of camaraderie & pageantry

Story and photos by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department
Public Affairs

PORTLAND, Ore. – On a weekend when training, physical fitness testing, and required military tasks were not part of the official schedule, members of the Oregon National Guard gathered for a much more elegant evening of camaraderie and pageantry during the annual Military Ball held at the Melody Event Center in Portland on February 22, 2025.

With a wide variety of music provided by “Oregon’s Own” 234th Army Band, mess dress uniforms and ballroom dresses replaced ‘Camo and Kevlar’ as the uniform of the day, where guardsmen and their significant others could relax, rekindle connections, and make new acquaintances.

“So much of our time in the [National] Guard is spent conducting our military responsibilities,” said Col. Russell Gibson, Government and Legislative Affairs Director for the Oregon National Guard. “The Military Ball is a chance to unwind during this unique, once-a-year social event – where we get dressed up, bring our spouses together, and enrich our relationships.”



Members of ‘45 Away’, a group of musicians from the 234th Army Band, play cover songs from the 1970s and 80s during the 2025 Oregon National Guard Military Ball held at the Melody Event Center in Downtown Portland, Oregon, on February 22, 2025.

Military balls have a long history of comradeship while providing the opportunity to recognize service commitments, reflect on past accomplishments, and enhance Esprit de corps. Russell said one of the main goals for the 2025 Oregon Military Ball was to allow attendees a chance to strengthen unit cohesion and meet other members of the organization outside of their close-knit units.

“The focus of this year’s ball was to make it one of our key social events for the year – where all of our members, including currently serving members, retirees, and our civilian workforce could gather for one evening,” he said. “With music and good food... this gives everyone a chance to interact with their leaders and co-workers in a comfortable and fun atmosphere.”



Oregon Guard members spend time enjoying an evening of dinner, music, dance, and camaraderie during the annual Military Ball and pause for a photograph at the Melody Event Center.

After an hour of cocktails and Hors d’oeuvres, the evening officially began with the posting colors, an invocation, and a series of formal toast. The host for the 2025 Military Ball was Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon.

“We’ve had one of the most active years in our organization’s history, Gronewold said, listing off the highlights of the past year – from mobilizations, intensive pre-deployment training, wildland firefighting activations, and implementing new equipment. “We had a wide variety of mobilizations and demobilization ceremonies,

focused on specialized training, got the new F-15 EX (fighter jets), and did a record-setting number of wildland firefighting operations in the past summer.”

Gronewold also emphasized what makes the Oregon National Guard a distinctive organization and the ‘Service of Choice’ for the state’s citizens.

“The Oregon National Guard protects Oregonians and defends America. This ball



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon National Guard, welcomes attendees at the Oregon Military Ball. The annual Military Ball allows service members and their spouse’s time to enjoy a formal evening to relax, rekindle connections, and make new acquaintances.

tonight is a celebration...chance to celebrate us. A time to reflect on our presence, catch up with old friends, and meet some new ones,” he said.



An Oregon Army National Guard Color Guard team posts the colors to start the 2025 Oregon National Guard Military Ball held at the Melody Event Center in Downtown Portland, Oregon, on the evening of Feb. 22, 2025

With nearly 250 people in attendance, Gronewold thanked everyone for attending and those who made the evening possible.

“So many of you were involved with putting together his year’s event,” Gronewold said, as he recognized Chief Master Sgt. Sarah Chiapetto who helped organize the overall planning.

With a large dance floor and a fully equipped stage for the band, dinner tables created a semi-circle around the grand 90-year-old ballroom, which was recently restored in 2018 with state-of-the-art equipment and on-site catering.

“I had a team that pitched in when it came to putting the table tents together and all of the ‘whatnots’ around the ballroom,” Chiapetto said.

“We kind of shuffled the jobs around to have everything in place but we made sure we had overlapping responsibilities because we didn’t want to have any single points of failure.”

The Oregon Military Ball has had some challenges over the past several years with cancellations due to the COVID-19 pandemic and having to move the venue after a fire struck one location. Thus, this year’s event was a reason to rejoice as couples danced to cover tunes ranging from Carole King, Justin Timberlake, and Johnny Cash – played by ‘45 Away,’ a high-energy group of nearly a dozen soldiers from the 234th Army Band.

“We wanted to reflect on our traditions and comradeship to make this year extra special,” Russell said, emphasizing all the hard work that went into this year’s Military Ball. “Hopefully this will lead to more participation in the future, but mostly to have a quality event we can be excited to attend for years to come.”



Couples enjoy the music of the 234th Army Band during the annual Oregon National Guard Military Ball held in Downtown Portland on Feb. 22, 2025. The Military Ball allows military members and their spouses to enjoy a formal evening to relax, rekindle connections, and make new acquaintances.



Oregon National Guard members spend time enjoying an evening of dinner, music, dance, and camaraderie during the Oregon National Guard Military Ball, pause for a photograph at the Melody Event Center in Portland, Oregon, on Feb. 22, 2025. The annual Military Ball allows military members and their spouses to enjoy a formal evening to relax, rekindle connections, and make new acquaintances.

LEADERSHIP

Indo-Pacific CDWG25 builds partnerships, advances security cooperation

Story and photos by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department
Public Affairs

HAPPY VALLEY, Ore. – The 2025 Capabilities Development Working Group (CDWG) reconvened for a week of working sessions and collaboration aimed at enhancing security cooperation across the Indo-Pacific.

This year, more than 450 participants, including international partners and delegations from Japan and the Republic of Korea gathered. The event was held for the third consecutive year at Camp Withycombe, Oregon from March 3 to 7, 2025, and built upon the foundational principles of a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

The event was organized by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's J5 Strategic Policy and Planning Directorate, in collaboration with the J55 Security Cooperation Division. The event focused on assessing feasibility and building momentum while identifying and developing specific military capabilities for each partner nation.

At the start of the conference, British Commodore Jonathan Lett, USINDOPACOM J5 Deputy Director for Policy, welcomed attendees and encouraged them to actively participate in both the training sessions and the breakout groups during CDWG.

“Our primary responsibility is deterrence; however, we must ensure that we have adequate warfighting capabilities to succeed in conflict,” he stated, emphasizing the week’s objectives. “I encourage you to maximize your participation in this event, focusing on enhancing your security cooperation efforts and supporting the warfighter.”



Brig. Gen. Kyoung-suk Woo, Republic of Korea Ministry of Defense, along with ORARNG Lt. Col. Christopher Markesino, SPP Director, and Katrina O'Brien, Director of Programs & Services for the Oregon Military Museum, pause for a discussion following a tour of the museum on March 4, 2025.

Taking that message to heart, Army Maj. Aaron Harris, Chief of the Office of Defense Cooperation at the U.S. Embassy in Dili, Timor-Leste, underscored the importance of his role in coordinating training opportunities and enhancing the capabilities of partner nations in the Pacific region.

“I work with their military on a variety of projects, so for example, right now we have an English language program for their Air Component, taking 10 airmen at a time through the Defense Language Institute,” Harris said.



British Commodore Jonathan Lett, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command J5 Deputy Director for Policy, delivers opening remarks at the Capabilities Development Working Group on March 3, 2025.

“Another project with a team of [U.S. Navy] Seabees working with their military to construct a humanitarian assistance warehouse.”

As a Foreign Area Officer serving in a Security Cooperation Officer (SCO) role, Harris is an extension of INDOPACOM J55 and is 18 months into his current assignment. He noted there are various opportunities for training, multilateral exercises, and direct military-to-military support with partner nations.

“My role in defense cooperation involves coordinating numerous bilateral projects and working alongside military personnel from other nations to implement security assistance,” Harris said. “Each embassy has the capability to build and customize training opportunities for our partner nations in the Pacific.”

The role of SCOs is continuously evolving. In many ways, they function as Soldier-Statesmen and serve as the primary military advisors to ambassadors. Often, they work closely with National Guard State Partnership Program Bilateral Affairs Officers assigned to partner nations from the 54 states and U.S. territories. A crucial aspect of fulfilling these responsibilities is the peer-to-peer networking that takes place during CDWG, both in the scheduled formal sessions, breakout groups, and ad-hoc meetings throughout the week.

“You move beyond just exchanging emails and can actually put a face to someone you might have been informally referred to by others in the career field,” Harris said. “This is an opportunity to refocus and engage with my peers and others, using them as a sounding board for feedback... it also provides some new tools to work with.”

Participants can leverage peer-to-peer feedback to improve their skills and overcome challenges together. This collaborative approach promotes the development of strong, supportive networks of allies throughout the region. Engaging with one another, they share insights, resources, and strategies, ultimately enhancing cooperation on many levels with partner nations.

During the week, Navy Cmdr.

Sean Jin took advantage of opportunities to interact with fellow SCOs. As he approaches the conclusion of his three-year assignment as the Chief of Defense Cooperation at the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, Jin recognizes that the CDWG empowers him to connect with and team up with key leaders. It also allowed him to come home to Oregon and check in with some of his family members in the state.

“I graduated from the University of Oregon in 2009. Shortly after that, I was commissioned as a supply and logistics officer. When I learned about the Foreign Area Officer program, it sounded exciting and challenging on many levels,” Jin said, crediting Mr. Dave Jensen, USINDOPACOM J55 Division Chief, for his enduring leadership.



CDWG participants take part in a discussion following a trilateral working session attended by representatives of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and delegations from Japan and the Republic of Korea on March 6, 2025.

“He [Jensen] has put a tremendous amount of effort into making this process as rigorous and systematic as possible,” Jin said. “Overall, I have observed that his team has done an excellent job of providing guidance, linking our events to our activities, and effectively using the resources and funding allocated to our partner countries.”

Jin emphasized the importance of enhancing maritime security and domain awareness capabilities for Sri Lanka and the Maldives. By offering training and economic support, the U.S. can foster stronger partnerships that benefit all stakeholders involved.

“Navigating the maritime environment presents unique challenges that differ significantly from land travel. Unlike cars that typically operate on established roadways, boats can roam into international waters, creating opportunities for illicit activities,” Jin said. “This lack of oversight facilitates issues such as drug trafficking, smuggling, and human trafficking, all of which commonly occur through maritime routes... which underscores the need for enhanced regulation and monitoring in these areas.”

Ensuring the security of these corridors is pivotal for promoting free and open international commerce, which offers significant advantages to global trade. The U.S. is working with partners to improve security

in these regions. Ongoing involvement helps promote stability and safety, building long-term geopolitical goals.

During the annual CDWG, various developments and threats can be discussed in more detail. Thus, having access to both the extensive facilities and secure spaces at the Armed Forces Reserve Center on Camp Withycombe presents valuable opportunities for development and collaboration.

“This training facility has truly been a remarkable asset over the past three years. As I looked out over the expansive drill floor this week, I was struck by the numerous groups actively engaged in follow-up discussions,” Commodore Lett said, highlighting the recurring location for the working group. “This training facility offers an excellent environment for security, teamwork, and ample space for small group discussions during the training.”

The facility supported several bilateral and trilateral discussions aimed at advancing shared security interests in the region. Lett welcomed the trilateral security cooperation session where U.S. representatives met with delegations from the Republic of Korea and Japan.

“It’s about bringing all of these groups together – where meeting face-to-face, we can enhance the way we work together, and support regional security and stability,” he said.

The sessions focus on sharing best practices, discussing past challenges, and troubleshooting to anticipate future concerns. In light of the dynamic developments within the Indo-Pacific region, Lett emphasized the emerging concerns in various countries that gained attention throughout the week.

“In terms of diplomatic and military relations with Cambodia, a potential key partnership is beginning to emerge,” Lett stated. “However, this past year in the South China Sea, we have witnessed issues arising from China concerning the Philippines.”

Leaders from the Indo-Pacific region have begun to adopt the term ICAD – which stands for illegal, coercive, aggressive, and deceptive. This term is now being used to characterize a range of actions that historically might have been referred to as “grey zone incidents.”

“These ‘grey zone’ activities reside in the critical space between conventional peace and war. This reinforces my earlier point from the conference’s outset about the critical importance of this year’s working group.” Lett asserted. “While we focus on deterrence and maintaining a position of peace through strength, we must also be fully prepared for potential conflicts and the realities of war.”

NEWS

Mother and Daughter share 'Spirit of Service' while deployed

Story by Master Sgt. Steph Sawyer,
142nd Wing Public Affairs

WARRENTON, Ore. – The Oregon Air National Guard's 116th Air Control Squadron has been deployed over the past several months. Some of its Airmen are assigned to bases on the east coast of the United States while others have been assigned to bases overseas, but all are supporting the United States Central Command (CENTCOM).

One of these Airmen is Staff Sgt. Caitlin Conn, a mission systems operator. The focus of her role is on surveillance and systems, and the work she does helps enable missions across the globe, including where her mom, Army Maj. Beth Conn, is currently deployed with the Oregon Army National Guard.

Maj. Conn is a behavioral health officer whose job is to ensure and enhance mission readiness by providing mental health resources and support to the military's most valuable asset, its people. She's currently serving overseas, and like her daughter, is supporting CENTCOM.

"This has been really cool because even though she's at Shaw [Air Force Base], she's still very much involved in the CENTCOM [area of operation]," said Maj. Conn. "We have people that have to talk to [Shaw] in order to deconflict airspace...it's pretty incredible to be able to say, 'yeah, that's where my daughter's at. She's watching over us.'"

Maj. Conn joined the National Guard later in life, compared to most. She began working as a contracted civilian in her current role in 2013. Two years later, her position was reclassified, requiring the person who held that position to be actively serving in the National Guard.

Wanting to continue the work she was doing for the National Guard, Maj. Conn decided



ORARNG Maj. Beth Conn administers the oath of enlistment for her daughter, Caitlin Conn, as she enters the Oregon Air National Guard. In late 2024, the mother and daughter both deployed in support of the United States Central Command.

family being in the military, which I thought was cool," said Staff Sgt. Conn.

When Caitlin enlisted in the Air National Guard in 2018, her mom had the honor of administering the oath of enlistment.

Caitlin said that seeing her mother and her sister serve in the military inspired her to take the steps to join.

"It lessened the intrusive thoughts of 'I'm not sure I could do this' or 'I don't know if I'm cut out for it,'" said Caitlin. "I was given a sense of confidence that I could handle the challenges that came my way."

Since joining and gaining experience in her career field, Caitlin says she has no regrets and appreciates the "crew mindset" adopted by the members of the ORANG's 116th Air Control Squadron.

to commission in 2015 at the age of 43. At the time of her commissioning, Maj. Conn already had a daughter who was serving in the U.S. Navy, so it seemed fitting when her daughter, Caitlin decided to join the Air National Guard after graduating high school.

"I contacted the Air National Guard recruiters and realized I could go to school, get tuition assistance, plus continue the tradition of women in my military, which I

thought was cool," said Staff Sgt. Conn.

When Caitlin enlisted in the Air National Guard in 2018, her mom had the honor of administering the oath of enlistment.

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"It lessened the intrusive thoughts of 'I'm not sure I could do this' or 'I don't know if I'm cut out for it,'" said Caitlin. "I was given a sense of confidence that I could handle the challenges that came my way."

Since joining and gaining experience in her career field, Caitlin says she has no regrets and appreciates the "crew mindset" adopted by the members of the ORANG's 116th Air Control Squadron.

"It ended up being something I enjoy. [I] was able to meet a ton of really great people, and [it] has given me opportunities that have shaped me as a person," said Caitlin. "Everyone has their respective jobs and training, but the integration of skill sets, ranks, and experience levels is something that [we all] excel at."

While service members are deployed, families can face many challenges in their day to day, from routines and getting necessary tasks accomplished to the emotional and mental hardship of missing your loved one. For the Conn family, the challenge has been twofold with both mother and daughter away from home.

"Our whole family serves in [a] way because of how it affects everybody," said Maj. Conn. "They're very supportive and they're very proud of us and we're proud of them too for what they're doing on the other side."

For Beth and Caitlin, serving in the Oregon Air and Army Guard has added another layer to the connection commonly shared between a mother and daughter.

"My mom and I are lucky to have both levels of connection," said Caitlin. "And while we have been on very different journeys, sharing this common ground has made us closer than ever."

"I'm just incredibly proud of her successes," said Maj. Conn. "I also know being a female in the military comes with challenges. It's very important to me that I am here to support and encourage her during the tough times too."

In a few months, the Conns will be back in Oregon, and while the demands and conditions of their roles may evolve with the mission, they'll lean on each other through changing tides. "I love my mother," Caitlin said. "She's a badass."



Oregon Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Caitlin Conn, poses for a photo with her mother, Maj. Beth Conn, a member of the Oregon Army National Guard.

1249th Engineer Battalion prepares for year-long border mission

Story and photo by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. — The Oregon National Guard's 1249th Engineer Battalion is preparing for a year-long mobilization to support security operations along the United States' southern border.

The battalion recently received a Notice of Sourcing (NoS) for a mission that will begin October 1, according to Maj. Christopher Campbell, the battalion's operations officer.

"We'll be providing a battalion or sector headquarters of about 50 people with specialized skills," said Campbell. "There will be somewhere between two to five companies underneath the headquarters, depending on which sector we're assigned."

Oregon Army National Guard Lt. Col. Thanh Vo, commander of the 1249th Engineer Battalion, expressed confidence in his unit's readiness for the mission.

"The 1249th has a proud history of answering the call to serve, whether here in Oregon or abroad," said Vo. "Our Soldiers bring diverse skills from their civilian careers that complement their military training, exemplifying the Citizen-Soldier and demonstrating their capabilities to accomplish this mission. Whether it's for wildland fires, domestic response, or federal missions worldwide, the Soldiers of 1249th stand ready when called."

The 1249th will serve as the command element for units from other state National Guards operating at the border. The mission, coordinated through the Department of Homeland Security in cooperation with the Department of Defense, requires the battalion to deploy personnel with expertise in operations, medical and behavioral health services, and contracting.



Soldiers from the Oregon National Guard's 1249th Engineer Battalion stand in formation during a Change of Command Ceremony at the Anderson Readiness Center in Salem, Oregon, Sept. 8, 2024. The battalion is preparing for a year-long mobilization to support security operations along the southern border beginning October 2025.

While the specific location has not yet been determined, Campbell explained the battalion could be assigned to one of four sectors along the southern border in California, Arizona, or Texas.

"We'll be coming in behind another headquarters," Campbell said. "We just

don't know which one yet."

The deployment will include a pre-mobilization training period in August, followed by approximately two months of preparation at Fort Bliss, Texas. The engineers expect to be on the ground for their primary mission for nine months, with a total deployment time of about 12 months.

The 1249th Engineer Battalion has a history of both domestic and overseas deployments. In 2021, the battalion's horizontal construction company from Dallas, Oregon, supported Operation Allies Welcome at Camp Atterbury, in Indiana, helping integrate Afghan refugees sponsored by the Department of Defense. Previously, two of its companies deployed to Afghanistan in 2011-2012, and following 9/11, the entire battalion provided security at Joint Base Lewis-McChord and the Umatilla Chemical Depot in 2003-2004.

Oregon National Guard members serve part-time, typically one weekend a month and two weeks a year, while maintaining civilian careers. They stand ready to respond to state emergencies such as wildfires and floods while also training to defend the nation when called to federal service. Guardsmen live and work in the same towns they serve, creating a unique connection between military service and local communities.

NEWS

Inspiration & Determination: Oregon's Finest Contend for Best Warrior Competition Honors



Oregon National Guardsmen make their way from the chilly Pacific Ocean waters as they take part in the final event, "Omaha Beach," during the Oregon National Guard's Best Warrior Competition at Camp Rilea on March 15, 2025.

Story and photos by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

WARRENTON, Ore. – Eighteen competitors from Oregon National Guard units across the state battled it out over three grueling days to determine the top noncommissioned officer and junior enlisted Soldier/Airman of the Year during the 2025 Oregon Best Warrior Competition. This event took place at Camp Rilea in Warrenton, Oregon, from March 12-14, 2025. Participants tested their tactical, technical, and physical abilities throughout the competition.

The annual competition is designed to challenge each participant across a wide variety of events that test Soldiers' competencies. Competitors' physical and mental toughness is assessed through a comprehensive range of military tasks, including coursework, weapons, and combat-like scenarios. These challenges are made even more difficult by the harsh adversities of rugged terrain and unpredictable late-winter weather.

"All I ask is that you don't quit during the next three days and that you put your heart and soul into this experience," said Command Sgt. Maj. Lee Smith, as the nervous entrants gathered at Warrior Hall before the competition began.



Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers recover from a tear gas attack during an afternoon ruck march after just completing the obstacle course event at Camp Rilea, near Warrenton, Oregon, on March 14, 2025.

As the Command Senior Enlisted Leader for the Oregon National Guard, Smith echoed many of the Army's Core Values such as integrity, respect, and courage – stating that "this experience will push each of you to overcome multiple setbacks... just give it all you got, so in the end, you can be proud of your effort."

Service members compete in two categories: enlisted Soldiers [E-4 and below] and noncommissioned officers [E-5 to E-7]. Each participant must outperform their peers at the unit level before advancing to the state-level Best Warrior Competition. The overall event reflects the unpredictable nature of a real-world battlefield, as contestants move from station to station without a published schedule. The first day concluded late after a series of fitness tests, a 50-question exam, a written essay, and individual Soldier/Airman boards.



Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers and Airmen take part in the Mogadishu Challenge event at the urban training village at Camp Rilea, near Warrenton, Oregon, on March 15, 2025.

Day two began at 0300 hours with a pre-dawn land navigation course that lasted nearly four hours. Afterward, participants were able to enjoy a hot morning meal, which was a welcome break from the intense pace of the day's activities. The contestants then proceeded to a series of ranges at Camp Rilea. They started with a "zero range" to qualify their accuracy with M-4 rifles, followed by a calculation of their marksmanship on a grenade course. Next, they transitioned to a three-gun range event and concluded the day by being assessed on their sharpshooting with a variety of automatic weapons.

Towards late day, the obstacle course confronted the challengers' fatigued muscles with 10 demanding barriers, as participants then wrapped up the long day with a computer-based 'Call for Fire' test and finally, a medical response assessment as the completion of events approached midnight.

"This is how we get the best of the best," Smith said. "As Soldiers go through each grueling station, by the end of the competition, we're able to find out who's got what it takes to go onto the regionals later in the year."

The final day started with a long ruck march, with most of the course running north along the Pacific Ocean beach.

Participants faced strong winds and choppy tides as they approached the traditional finish line, marked by the remains of the 'Wreck of the Peter Iredale.' This four-masted steel sailing vessel has been a prominent feature on the Oregon coastline since it ran ashore on October 25, 1906.

"This was a demanding course and overall, the cadre put on a great event," said Master Sgt. Daniel Gardner, the 173rd Fighter Wing Maintenance Squadron Q&A manager, is making his second consecutive appearance at Best Warrior. "I knew I wanted to come back and I improved in some areas that I bombed in last year. The camaraderie is such a big part of this experience, and I was determined to improve my performance this year."

Saying he "improved" would be an understatement. Gardner's all-around performance earned him recognition at the non-commissioned officer (NCO) level, making him the first member of the Oregon Air National Guard to win the Best Warrior Competition. Gardner acknowledged that he wouldn't be able to advance to the Best Warrior Region VI Championships as a member of the Air National Guard, but he emphasized that this was never his primary goal. "We don't interact with the Army Guard very often, so when we do, it's always a positive experience," he said at the event conclusion.



Oregon National Guard service members participate in the Army Combat Fitness Test on March 13, which assesses Soldiers' physical fitness as part of the 2025 Oregon National Guard Best Warrior Competition at Camp Rilea.

The last two events on day three emulate two historic U.S. Army conflicts – "Mogadishu and Normandy Beach," pushing the competitors to finish Oregon Best Warrior with a meaningful note while replicating momentous battlefield action.

"I didn't know what they would throw at us, but at the end of the day, they could throw whatever they wanted at us... I was just kind of going with the punches," said Army Spc. Justin Slothower, an infantryman assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment, who took top honors in the Soldier category. "The lack of sleep really played a big part in this competition, which is one of those things that is hard to prepare for."

The Wilsonville native and Oregon State University finance student hopes to build on this victory when he goes to the regional competition in Idaho in the coming months. He explained that his preparation for Best Warrior emulates some of his overall goals in the Army.

"I came here trying to learn a few new things and maybe in the process advance my career in the military, he said, reflecting on the results. "Now I have to look at the regional and fix some mistakes...I am not going to be perfect, but I know what I need to work on and learn from this event – and hopefully improve upon for the next one."



Oregon Army National Guard Spc. Justin Slothower, assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment, takes on the Obstacle Course during the Army Best Warrior Competition on March 14, 2025. Slothower won the Soldier tier competition and will go on to compete in the regionals.

NEWS

Airman's triumph as "Best Warrior" highlights the power of teamwork

Story and photos by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

WARRENTON, Ore. – Perseverance. The dictionary defines it as “to continue despite difficulties, opposition, or discouragement,” which is a fitting description of Oregon Air National Guard Master Sgt. Daniel Gardner’s achievement at the 2025 Oregon Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition. Making his second appearance at the event in back-to-back years, Gardner left nothing to chance, as his determination was evident from start to finish during the rigorous three-day contest held at the Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center from March 13-15.

His victory marked the first time an Oregon Air Guard member won in either category of the competition. The support from the 173rd Fighter Wing and their commitment to aiding Airmen like Gardner reflect the importance of promoting a culture of excellence and mutual support within the Oregon Air National Guard. This win not only highlights the personal achievements of one individual but also illuminates the collective effort and enthusiasm within the entire unit.

With two members entered in the Soldier/Airman classification and Gardner in the noncommissioned tier, “Team Kingsley” has been sending representatives to the Best Warrior Competition for the past eight years and has embraced the U.S. Army’s “Warrior Ethos” culture at the event, which emphasizes placing the mission first, to never leave a fallen comrade, never quitting, and never accepting defeat.

“This was an amazing event the first time I participated, and I knew I had to come back,” Gardner said, following the awards ceremony on March 15. “There were some aspects I attempted the first time that I knew I could improve upon, and knowing that, I wanted to re-engage with this event. It was just great to see it through.”

A member of the 173rd Fighter Wings since 2000, Gardner is the Maintenance Group Q&A manager. The unit is the nation’s sole F-15 Eagle fighter pilot schoolhouse, training both Air Guard and active duty pilots to fly the Eagle airframe in air-to-air and air-to-ground operations.

While Gardner was rehearsing for his ‘second season’ at Best Warrior, Senior Airman Alma Gomez, and Airman 1st Class Colby Schols, assigned to the 270th Traffic Control Squadron, were entered into the Soldier/Airman tier for the first time. The trio, along with their sponsors and other key support staff, has been drawing inspiration from fellow Airmen participating on the Army’s home field since 2018.

“The Army National Guard invited the Air National Guard to come observe what was going on here at Best Warrior and see if this was something that we would be potentially interested in competing in,” said Chief Master Sgt. Ross Hawking, assigned to the 173rd Communications squadron. “After observing the entire event, I put together a training plan to take back to my base and get participants to compete in the next Best Warrior Competition.”



ORANG Master Sgt. Daniel Gardner, assigned to the 173rd Fighter Wing (center), runs alongside other Army National Guard participants on March 13, 2025, during the Army Combat Fitness Test, which evaluates Soldiers’ overall physical fitness as part of the 2025 Oregon National Guard Best Warrior Competition.

In August of 2018, Tech. Sgt. Jared Boyer and Senior Airman David Garcia arrived at Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center to represent the Oregon Air National Guard for the first time. The 173rd Security Forces Squadron played a crucial role in their preparation by putting them through a series of trial events designed to test their skills and readiness for the rigorous challenges of the Army’s Best Warrior competition.

It was an important moment for Boyer and Garcia, along with the organization to be part of something so unique, and set a precedent for future Air National Guard involvement in the competition. In addition, Tech. Sgt. William Griffith was selected as the Sparrow Award for the Sponsorship support for the event, voted on by all the Cadre for leadership, morale support, and positive attitude during the competition.

“I wanted to compete in the Oregon BWC to represent my unit and challenge myself,” Garcia said, as he entered the Best Warrior Competition in 2018.

For his part, Boyer said his goal was to focus on being an enthusiastic competitor and to acknowledge the people who helped make his participation in Best Warrior a reality as the 2018 event concluded. “It is the Army’s world, they are offering us a sample – I hope it stays Army-centric and we can adapt.”

The two Airmen made a remarkable impact, setting a high standard and clear expectations for their peers. The tryout for this year’s team took place on October 19, 2024, with eight contestants arriving promptly at the base gym at Kingsley Field in Klamath Falls. They reported at 4:00 a.m. to tackle a series of

events designed to mirror the state’s Best Warrior Competition. These challenges included interview boards, essay writing, the Army Combat Fitness Test, weapons qualifications, ruck marches, and other rigorous tasks. Tech. Sgt. Cody Cox from the 270th Air Traffic Control Squadron and Airman Phanuphong Phongprayoon from the 173rd Logistics Readiness Squadron were chosen to compete at the state level alongside Gardner. Unfortunately, as is often the case, injuries and military commitments kept Cox and Phongprayoon from participating.

“So my supervisor, Sergeant Cox advocated for me to come and compete since he wasn’t able to attend, so I filled in and showed up to see what I could do on short notice,” said Schols, as the contestants were heading off to well deserved a post-event BBQ following the awards ceremony. “This was my first time interacting with the Army and what they do and train for regularly. All things considered, I think I did well.”

If an Army Marches on its stomach,’ as Napoleon Bonaparte said, Schols stated that if he came back to Best Warrior, it would be with upgraded footwear.

“If I could make one big change, it would be better boots. I am feeling every step from the past three days,” he said, with a noticeable soreness in his stance, recalling the task of the morning ruck march. “It was physically and mentally very challenging. I haven’t pushed myself like that for a very long time, maybe ever.”

Competitors had to carry a list of essential items and the pack, and it had to weigh at least 35 pounds. Schols said his pack came in at 55 pounds, an added dilemma to an already demanding chore. “Yeah, I was trying to fit all the required gear in the bag...figuring out how these Army guys make it skinnier is the key.”

Toward the end of the second day, Senior Airman Gomez had to make the difficult decision to withdraw from the competition. A knee injury kept her from maintaining the stringent pace of the contest.

“My knee had nearly doubled its normal size,” she said, still upbeat about her effort. “I could walk but running became too much, but I hung in there as long as I could.”

Injuries play a big part in the competition, oftentimes well trained Soldiers and Airmen get hurt or sick during the event as attrition is factored into the equation. A total of 21 participants had been on the

opening roster for this year’s event. By the time the contest was over, only 15 would finish.

“First and foremost, this is a physically demanding event; it’s one of the reasons I prepared myself better for this year’s event,” Gardner said, describing his

training experiences. “We don’t process our medical casualties the same way the Army does, and we don’t have access to things like their specialized weapons and radios. That’s why it has been important for our members to have a long-term commitment to this event.”

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Oregon Air National Guard Airman 1st Class Colby Schols (left), and Master Sgt. Daniel Gardner (right), standing by for their evacuation on an ORANG Black Hawk helicopter, flying them out of the “Mogadishu Challenge” event area on March 15, 2025.



Oregon Air National Guard Senior Airman Alma Gomez, assigned to the 173rd Fighter Wing, navigates the grenade marksmanship course during the Oregon National Guard Best Warrior Competition at Camp Rilea, near Warrenton, Oregon, on March 14, 2025.

NEWS

Oregon Army National Guard provides ‘Lift for Army Futures Command’

Story and photos by Aaron Perkins,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

FORT IRWIN, Calif. - On a chilly and dusty morning at Fort Irwin, California, aka the “Sandbox”- four Oregon Army National Guard CH-47F Chinook helicopters are loaded up with soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division’s Combat Aviation Brigade and equipment from the Army Futures Command, as they begin testing on a field training exercise on March 9-14, 2025.

The Army Futures Command (AFC), headquartered in Austin, Texas, has more than 17,000 personnel worldwide. It is the newest of the Army’s four major commands and was established in 2018 to ensure the Army and its soldiers remain at the forefront of technological innovation and warfighting ability.

Oregon’s Chinook mission, within the scope of this field training exercise, was to provide heavy lift operations.

replicating the future vertical lift of long-range aircraft, and our rule here is to move some of the bigger, heavier equipment that doesn’t fit on the normal helicopters.”

Project Convergence experiments are conducted to enhance strategic readiness and explore capabilities, formations, and emerging concepts. The AFC and Concepts Center conducts over 60-70 experiments annually, an initiative known as persistent experimentation. These experiments are carried out by various organizations within the Army Futures Command enterprise, including notable projects like Project Convergence-Europe and Project Convergence-Pacific.

“Overall operations during the exercise for Oregon have been going smoothly,” said Oregon Army National Guard Sgt.1st Class Jeff Prine, a Chinook mechanic and quality control technician assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 168th Aviation Regiment, based in Pendleton.

“They welcomed us with open arms and are so grateful that we’re here to lend a hand,” he explained. “As for the vetting process, we’re helping to facilitate that. Overall, everyone seems to be having a great time, and we’re enjoying our time here while helping out. It’s been a positive experience.”

The training they have received during this exercise has been valuable in that they have been delivering actual cargo and not having to simulate certain aspects of the training mission. The crew gets to experience the weight and all the other aspects of lifting cargo and passengers to infill Landing Zone positions all around different locations inside the training center.



Four Oregon Army National Guard CH-47F Chinook helicopters load up soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division’s Combat Aviation Brigade as they take off for a morning flight on March 11, 2025, at Fort Irwin, California. The five-day training allowed ORARNG crews a chance to provide heavy lift support to the Army Futures Command.

“We are collaborating with a multinational unit here, including some British soldiers from the United Kingdom. We also have other personnel from North Carolina, specifically the 82nd Airborne Division,” said Oregon Army National Guard Sgt. August Radke, Flight Crew Chief of one of the CH-47s. “Our objective is to test various unmanned aerial vehicles and ground components with infantry personnel to simulate battlefield movements. Our mission is to integrate these technologies and operators into the LZ to enhance operational capabilities.”

Even with changing weather conditions and other variables, the CH-47 pilots and crew worked to make the mission successful while fostering best practice capabilities.

Assessing the week of training that he and his two colleagues are doing, Radke said that the mission was going great and is grateful for the experience and training at Ft. Irwin.

“Considering all factors, the operations are functioning slightly more efficiently,” Radke said, describing the field training experience. “We will conduct a debriefing with the pilots and crew to identify areas for improvement, particularly in the movements of the packs and cargo handling; tomorrow, we will implement the necessary changes.”



On a chilly and dusty morning at Fort Irwin, California, aka the “Sandbox”, on March 11, 2025, four Oregon Army National Guard CH-47F Chinook helicopters load up soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division’s Combat Aviation Brigade.

“We were tasked to provide heavy lift support, in support of PCC5, (Project Convergence, Capstone 5),” said Oregon Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 5 Donald Ford, State Rotary Wing Standardization Officer with Joint Force Headquarters, out of Salem. “We’re

‘Team Kingsley’ Airman takes top honors in 2025 Army Best Warrior Competition

Continued from Page 8

The real driving factor that brought him back this year was the shared experience of the Best Warrior Competition, an event that pushed him to adapt and overcome obstacles time and again. When he wasn’t leading the group formations between events, he was regularly interacting with his fellow competitors and often cheering them on from the sidelines.



Oregon Air National Guard Airman 1st Class Colby Schols, assigned to the 270th Traffic Control Squadron (right), takes part in a 3-gun event on March 14, as part of the 2025 Oregon National Guard Best Warrior competition held at Camp Rilea, near Warrenton, Oregon, from March 13-15, 2025. The full range of events assessed the warriors’ physical fitness, land navigation skills, marksmanship, and other battlefield scenarios.

“The camaraderie is such a big part of this experience, and I was determined to improve my performance this year,” he said, still trying to soak in his accomplishment. “It’s such a great event.”

The investment in the Best Warrior competition has been an evolving process for 173rd Airmen. After scoring their first win, the sense of accomplishment will only help promote the event to future members wanting to take part.

“As long as we keep motivating the Airmen at Kingsley Field, and finding people to compete and run our local competition, we will keep sending people to this event,” said Hawking, listing off many of the distinctions between the Air Force and Army training. “There is a perspective and appreciation to what our sister service is doing that comes out in this event each year as well.”

Hawking said the predominant tangible that emerges is establishing trust and building on the total war-fighting effort by the Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen. “So many of our people have never fired a machine gun, they’ve never done a long-distance road march or taken on an obstacle course like the one here at Camp Rilea.



ORANG Master Sgt. Daniel Gardner, assigned to the 173rd Fighter Wing, is presented with the NCO of the Year winning trophy from Command Sgt. Maj. Lee Smith, Command Senior Enlisted Leader for the Oregon National Guard, during the awards ceremony for the 2025 Oregon Best Warrior Competition, on March 15, 2025.

Building on these common skills and the ability to take on new challenges, Hawking paused to confirm the process had only helped Air Guard members find success as leaders and warriors.

“The growth and development of our Airmen throughout the Best Warrior Competition is a clear testament to their dedication and hard work. Their progress underscores the success we’ve achieved together as a team. We take immense pride in this achievement.”

TRAINING

“Guard for a Day” program embarks on winter survival training venture

Story and photos by Spc. Michael Germundson, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

WOODBURN, Ore. – Final preparations were made, cold weather gear was issued and two busloads of soldiers departed on a rainy day with a final destination being a stretch of snow along the approach to Mt. Bachelor from Woodburn, Oregon. Seventy Soldiers with the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment left traditional training behind to embark on a weekend of survival training in freezing cold weather conditions at Swampy Lakes Sno-Park.

“I think it’s a skill every infantryman should have,” said Staff Sgt. Stephen Young. “We don’t just train in the desert and it makes for fun team building. It comes down to survivability – do our job and survive in any conditions.”

“I found out about GFAD through a social media post,” said Elliot Pond. “It’s a good idea to get a feel for the Army without getting yelled at, like at basic training. It’s nice to put a name and face on the uniform.”

The four-hour bus ride to Swampy Lake Sno-Park was loud as Soldiers caught up with each other and shared stories from past missions. Morale was high entering central Oregon where a good snowpack made for ideal snow camping

conditions. The parking lot restroom held a hint about the current conditions with four feet of snow on its roof.

The air brakes hissed and the bus door swung open – time to work. As a fine snow fell, Soldiers and GFAD alike donned their warm layers and shouldered their gear. Stepping off, the team moved as a line uphill on a knee-deep snow-packed trail. Several squads peeled off to break new trails to their overnight positions among the small pine trees.

With entrenching tools in hand, Soldiers and Guard and those signed up for GFAD experience took turns moving snow below their feet, shaping and fortifying their living quarters for the night, and digging trenches or snow caves for shelter, with a final goal to dig a trench or snow cave. The work was a group effort and the team took turns digging, resting, eating MREs (Meals Ready to Eat), or collecting tree branches for a warming fire. Snow shoes were delivered and some people took the opportunity to walk over the deep snow.



Oregon Army National Guard recruiter Sgt. Edgar Medina instructs several ‘Guard for a Day’ students on the proper procedures to build a snow shelter during cold weather survival training at Swampy Lakes Sno-Park, Bend, Oregon, on Jan. 4, 2025.



Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers with 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment, conduct cold weather survival training into the night at Swampy Lakes Sno-Park, Bend, Oregon, on Jan. 4, 2025.

The two-day drill weekend had a dual mission: apply skills to survive the night while hosting thirteen volunteers with the ‘Guard For A Day’ program. The GFAD program allows people interested in the guard the opportunity to shadow service members before officially enlisting in the military.

New off-road tank trail in Eastern Oregon

Continued from Front Page

“Before, we were having to go to Gowen [Field in Idaho] in order to do any type of maneuvering, which was logistically kind of a nightmare.”

The purpose-built course will support training for M1A2 SEP v2 Abrams tanks, allowing crews to conduct both day and night operations. The night driving capability is particularly crucial, as it enables crews to train with thermal imaging and night vision equipment in a controlled environment.

“We can do night driving, where we use our thermals and NVGs without lights,” explained 1st Sgt. Karl Baum of Bravo Company. “That’s a huge risk factor...we have to have a safe place to drive where there is no one else driving because they don’t see us coming.”

The training center was renamed in 2022 to honor retired Maj. Gen. Raymond F. Rees continues to expand its capabilities. The facility serves as home to two tank units based in Hermiston and Ontario, Oregon, operating as part of the 3-116th Cavalry Regiment.

The addition of the tank trail is part of more than \$150 million in improvements spent or planned since the Oregon Army National

Guard assumed responsibility for the center in 2017, aiming to create what officials describe as “the best training center in the Army National Guard.”

For tank crews, the new course means more frequent training opportunities and better maintenance for their vehicles. “Part of getting our tanks back and increasing our operational readiness for our



Tankers from Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment, Oregon Army National Guard, conduct maintenance by cleaning the main gun tube of their M1A2 SEP v2 Abrams tank during an Inactive Duty Training weekend in Umatilla, Oregon, on Feb. 1, 2025.



equipment is exercising them. Thus, why we need this tank trail,” Baum said.

The facility’s growth continues to fulfill the vision of its namesake, who long recognized the potential of the site for National Guard training.

As Maj. Gen. Rees noted during the 2022 renaming ceremony, that National Guard units previously had to drive past the Umatilla Chemical Depot en route to distant training sites, calling it “one of the most maddening circumstances.”

Oregon Army National Guard Spc. Chance Savage, assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment, prepares the loader’s station of an M1A2 SEP v2 Abrams tank before conducting driver training on the new tank trail at the Raymond F. Rees Training Center in Umatilla, Oregon, on Feb. 1, 2025.

TRAINING

Combat medics adapting their battlefield skills

Continued from Front Page

“We’re transitioning from the way we did combat in the global war on terror,” said Sgt. 1st Class John Lee, NCOIC at the 249th RTI medical detachment. “We’re not going to always have medevac one hour away. We might have to travel to it or use ground transport to get to an ambulance exchange point before we can get the casualty to a higher level of care.”

The two-week course includes classroom instruction, medical trauma lanes, and testing before culminating in a field training exercise that combines all learned skills. This year’s training featured a partnership with Legionair Tactical, utilizing their specialized drones for medical supply delivery.



Staff Sgt. Emily Simonson applies pressure to control arterial bleeding while her team evacuates Sgt. 1st Class Ryan Warren to a M997 Field Litter Ambulance during a tactical casualty care scenario.

It goes about 40 miles an hour at cruise speed. You can carry about 10 pounds, and it runs roughly about 35 minutes,” Travis said. Petete, co-founder and managing director of Legionair Tactical. “So you’re going about 25 miles, which allows us to deliver medical supplies wherever they’re needed in the field.

Combat medics must recertify every two years, making realistic training crucial for maintaining life-saving skills. The course begins with fundamental medical principles before progressing

to more complex scenarios.

“We start at the basic level and work our way back up, improving their skills,” Lee said. “There’s no telling how much hands-on medicine they might have done in those two years, so we need to knock the rust off.”

Course instructors create high-stress scenarios that mirror battlefield conditions, challenging medics to make critical decisions under pressure. The training emphasizes the importance of adaptability and resourcefulness in austere environments where traditional medical evacuation methods may be compromised.

“We train as we fight,” Lee explained. “The medics need to deal with the consequences of their decisions in real-time. If they make mistakes, it might cause further harm to the casualty, and they need to fix it.”

The training incorporated TacMed Simulation’s Whole Body Simulator HEMOSTATIC-PB, a state-of-the-art casualty simulator that provides real-time feedback on medical interventions. The remote-controlled simulator features realistic



Oregon Army National Guardsmen perform medical treatment on simulated casualties during a field training exercise on Jan. 30, 2025.

breathing, pulse points, and arterial bleeding, allowing instructors to create high-fidelity trauma scenarios. “This technology lets us monitor the effectiveness of tourniquet application, wound care, and other critical battlefield



Staff Sgt. Logan Livingston, Oregon Army National Guard, takes a defensive position after spotting an enemy drone while Spc. Kaitlyn Nation, 249th Regional Training Institute, reports the threat during a field training exercise at Camp Rilea, Oregon, Jan. 30, 2025.

medical procedures,” Lee explained.

The evolving curriculum reflects the military’s broader shift toward preparing for near-peer conflicts where immediate medical evacuation might not be possible. The integration of drone technology represents an innovative approach to addressing these

emerging challenges in battlefield medicine.

The program also focuses on building team cohesion, as successful casualty care in tactical environments requires a coordinated effort. When asked about the qualities needed in combat medicine, Lee emphasized problem-solving abilities and teamwork.



Oregon Army National Guard Spc. Anderson Coons, performs a clinical assessment during Table 8 evaluation as Sgt. Ken Kippley, 249th Regional Training Institute instructor, acts as the patient at Camp Rilea, Oregon, Jan. 28, 2025. The clinical evaluation tests combat medics’ ability to assess and treat patients in a medical facility environment.

“These are people that aren’t going to shy away from a fight,” Lee said. “They’re going to step up and get the job done, no matter what.”

The partnership with Legionair Tactical showcases the Oregon National Guard’s commitment to exploring new technologies that can enhance medical capabilities on future battlefields. As military medicine continues to evolve, the integration of unmanned systems may become increasingly crucial for saving lives in combat situations.

67th Fighter Generation Squadron conducts proficiency training in Portland

Photos by Master Sgt. Steph Sawyer, 142nd Wing Public Affairs



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Jaylen Platt, a weapons loader with the 67th Fighter Generation Squadron stationed at Kadena Air Base, Japan, prepares to load a trainer missile onto an aircraft at Portland Air National Guard Base, Oregon, on Feb. 11, 2025. Aircraft maintainers and weapons loaders from Kadena Air Base conducted a 60-day proficiency training on the F-15 Eagle as well as training on the F-15EX Eagle II at the Portland Air National Guard Base, Oregon, as their base prepares to receive the EX models beginning in 2026.



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Brian Robinson and Senior Airman Jaylen Platt, both weapons loaders with the 67th Fighter Generation Squadron stationed at Kadena Air Base, Japan, load a trainer missile onto an F-15EX Eagle II on Feb. 11, 2025 at the Portland Air National Guard Base, Oregon.

OREGON NATIONAL GUARD: COMMITTED TO OUR COMMUNITIES

**A Universal Language:
Retired Air Guardsman
Finds success coaching
High School girls' soccer**



U.S. National Guard photo by John Hughel, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

David Douglas High School Girls soccer coach Jonathan Dyer pauses for a photograph at the school's soccer field in Portland, Oregon, on Dec. 3, 2024, after being named Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) 6A Girls Soccer Coach of the Year. Dyer retired from the Air Force after a 20-year career as a military photographer and has been coaching youth soccer for over 25 years.

Feature story by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

PORTLAND, Ore. – It’s an unseasonably warm autumn afternoon, as the opening round of the Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) 6A Girls Soccer Championships kicks off at David Douglas High School, in Portland on November 2, 2024. Hosting their first-ever playoff game, the ‘Scots’ hold on to a late lead in the final minutes to beat Cleveland High School 2-1, marking the first-ever playoff win for the girls’ soccer program.

For the David Douglas seniors, the win is especially gratifying. It comes after three straight years of getting knocked out in the opening round. For their first-year head coach, Jonathan Dyer, it highlights a long journey – balancing a full-time job, coaching youth soccer, and military commitments in the Oregon Air National Guard.

“Really, it’s all them. These girls have demonstrated an ability to come together, especially under the circumstances that we started this year,” Dyer said to a local sports reporter following the victory. “I’ve been coaching 25 years and this is easily the most talented and most united team that I’ve ever been around and I can’t be prouder.”

Deflecting the praise to his players and assistant coaches, Dyer knows how special these moments are to the school and community. The team went on to win their second round match four days later against St. Mary’s 3-2, before being knocked out in the Quarterfinals – by the eventual State Champions Jesuit High School on November 9. In addition to the two playoff wins, the Scots won a school-record 12 games for the season and Dyer was named OSAA 6A Girls Soccer Coach of the Year.

“The idea of something bigger than just soccer that governs our behavior is very much a part of my coaching paradigm and that absolutely came out of being in the military,” he said. “Oftentimes, I find myself repeating many of the core values when dealing with the kids I coach.”

Initial Military Assignments & Transition

Enlisting in the active duty Air Force in 1990, Dyer completed the Still Photography Specialist course at Lowry Air Force Base at Denver, Colorado. His first assignment landed him at Homestead Air Force Base in Florida. On August 24, 1992, the full force of Andrew, a Category 5 hurricane, demolished the entire base and surrounding community. Dyer was one of the first service members to return to document the damage.

“I was the first photographer back on base, so I got some amazing images of the damage,” he said. “But the destruction left all of us as “refugees,” and allowed us to choose new assignments.”



File photo by Air National Guard Senior Airman John Hughel, 142nd Fighter Wing Public Affairs
Oregon Air National Guard Master Sgt. (ret.) Jonathan Dyer pauses in a secure area at the Portland Air National Guard Base while taking still photos during a Phase 2 training exercise on March 10, 2006. Dyer has found success as a High School soccer coach after retiring from the military in October of 2012.

After spending a 12-month tour in South Korea, Dyer was later assigned to the Air Mobility Command at Plattsburgh Air Force Base in New York. As the base was going through Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) in 1995,

Dyer left active duty and eventually joined the 142nd Fighter Wing in Portland.

Over the next 16 years he served as a traditional Guardsman, and used many of his veteran’s education benefits to return to college, completing a degree in Science at Portland State University. He began working for the Oregon State Crime Lab full time where he is still employed.

Dyer said that many of the reasons he stayed in the guard was the people, both with the interaction and the responsibility for working with a team. “It helped me thrive within the routine, even when it was just drilling once a month. Where you focus on others and that motivation is consistent with coaching (athletic) teams.”

Along the way he was able to work on numerous military exercises and training opportunities around the U.S., Canada, Jamaica and Bangladesh as part of the Department of Defense State Partnership Program.

“One of my last assignments was working with our (Oregon) State partner in Bangladesh on a three-week exercise, SHANTI DOOT-3 in March of 2012,” he explained.



Courtesy photo provided by Jonathan Dyer
Oregon Air National Guard Master Sgt. (ret.) Jonathan Dyer takes time for a group photo after playing a pick-up soccer match with local kids in Bangladesh during the SHANTI DOOT-3, a three-week United Nations peace-keeping exercise in March of 2012.

“I really looked at this as ‘a gift,’ to have this unique opportunity to work with over a dozen nations working together as part of the United Nations peace-keeping operations.”

Not only did he bring his military camera equipment but Dyer packed a soccer ball too.

“I brought along a ball just to keep in shape. I was out in one of the grass fields juggling a ball and within 15 minutes there must have been 30 kids joining in to play,” Dyer said. “We didn’t all speak the same language but we spoke the universal language of football.”

This pick-up game and subsequent afternoon matches transformed into a tournament during the SHANTI DOOT exercise that several of the country’s participating in the exercise helped organize.

“From just kicking a ball they organized a tournament among themselves,” Dyer said, describing soccer as a chance to “bridge a gap between everyone.” For his part, he ended up photographing the tournament matches while still hanging out playing pick-up games with the local children.

Story continued on page 13

OREGON NATIONAL GUARD: COMMITTED TO OUR COMMUNITIES

Military Retirement Has Its Advantages

When he retired as the 142nd Fighter Wing's Public Affairs noncommissioned officer-in-charge in late 2012, the extra time on his hands allowed him to pursue new coaching opportunities. He had already been coaching his own kids youth soccer teams and working to help build two separate soccer clubs in the Clackamas and Milwaukie area on Portland's east side.



Courtesy photo provided by Jonathan Dyer

David Douglas High School coach Jonathan Dyer greets the Scots after a tough 3-2 win over St. Mary's on November 6, 2024, during the second round of the OSA A Class 6A girls soccer state tournament on their home field on Portland's east side.

"I got into coaching soccer in 1998 with my stepson Nick. The coach didn't know that much about soccer and I had played in High School and some on active duty," Dyer said, describing his early encounters in youth coaching. "The guy was just hanging out and basically killing time until his kid was old enough to play (American) football. I stepped in and was technically the assistant coach and from that point on... I've never looked back."

This led to working on the board of North Clackamas Soccer Club. He was joined by Gordon Williamson, a coaching counterpart at the same youth age level.

"He's (Williamson) a former professional player and has the soccer pedigree. His son was on one team, and mine on another team so there was some natural competition. We upped the ante and started Thelo Football Club as an elite pathway for player development," Dyer said. Along the way he would coach all three of his kids youth teams as they became active in the sport, including his youngest son Gabriel, who has played at the collegiate level.

Throughout the years he established himself as coach, mentor and club coordinator to give kids at every level a chance to play on both ability and economic means.

"I wasn't trying to coach these kids for any particular High School but mostly for participation and enjoying the game," he said. "My last girls' club team represented seven different High Schools and I always found a sense of pride in that because I knew their other coaches appreciated that I was preparing them equally."

Eventually Dyer would start coaching High School girls' Junior Varsity teams over the next seven years to include; Clackamas High School, La Salle Catholic College Preparatory High School, and Putnam High School. But the connection to landing the David Douglas head coaching position came through a parent of his club team.

"By chance, one of the moms on my team was helping with the David Douglas program. The head coach had stepped down at mid-season the year before so the job was open," he said. "She wrote me a glowing recommendation and to be honest, I was both flattered and somewhat caught off guard by the endorsement."

Right Place, Right Time

With the job being posted state-wide, the school was looking for a coach that had a history with working with kids with a wide variety of backgrounds.

"We had several different candidates that made it to the final stages for an interview and then we took it down to our finalist when our assistant principal and athletic director chose Jon," said Brad Joy, Athletic Director for David Douglas High School.

"The soccer community is a pretty small circle so we knew many of the same people. Jon has been instrumental in building programs in the community and creating opportunities for kids who can't always afford to play at a club level."

Dyer inherited a team with nine seniors and one of the state's best goalkeepers. After an initial team meeting to get to know his players and assistant coaches, he did what he always does; he brought his knowledge and passion for the game to the program.

"He has such a love of the sport," Joy said. "Not only that he's very regimented, and is super organized so adapting to the job could not have been easier."

David Douglas High School has the largest enrollment in the state and the campus itself encompasses several blocks on Portland's east side of town.

It has a highly distinct student population in cultural backgrounds.

"It is probably the most diverse school in Oregon," Joy said, describing the unique collection of students. "I've been here 32 years and have watched the demographics change over that time. There's more than 30 languages spoken here...it's like the United Nations!"

As the school's demographics have changed, Joy said that nearly 70 percent of the student population is on a reduced lunch plan. "They are great kids, but they come from households with income challenges."

This ability to work with diverse populations and kids from under served communities also made Dyer the right coach for the program. He's done volunteer work teaching science classes at Portland STARBASE – a Department of Defense "hands-on, minds-on" STEM Program. For over two decades, he has been a youth mentor and group leader with Camp Rosenbaum, an Oregon National Guard annual summer camp for at-risk 10-12 year-old's.

During his military career, Dyer was an active participant in the 142nd Wing's professional development programs, human relations, and best practice training sessions. These programs helped shape an environment where unit members rose to their potential by embracing the Air Force Core values of integrity, service, and excellence; while fostering productive changes that accelerated collaborative teamwork and unit cohesion.



Courtesy photo provided by Jonathan Dyer

David Douglas High School Girls Varsity Soccer coach Jonathan Dyer takes a 'selfie photo' with his girls team and assistant coaches after their soccer match, garnering their first playoff win on November 2, 2024, at David Douglas High School in Portland, Oregon. As the first-year head coach of the David Douglas Scots, the team won their first two playoff matches in the school's soccer program.

"I really don't use my 'NCO voice,' now that I've retired," he laughed, recalling his time in uniform. "There is a difference between supervising Airmen trying to meet a critical deadline, and kids on a soccer pitch... I am overtly positive when it comes to coaching now."

Yet...he's quick to recall how much the military training, culture and values are still part of who he is.

"After I retired, it never really left me," Dyer said, recalling his experience in the military. "I still identify very strongly with my service commitment and the lessons I have learned along the way. And my motivation for coaching now is to somehow instill those similar values that were instilled in me. Those characteristics are still essential."



File photo by Air National Guard Technical Sgt. John Hughel, 142nd Fighter Wing Public Affairs Jon Dyer, a State of Oregon Forensic Scientist and retired Oregon Guardsman, gives instructions on a fingerprint experiment to students from Chief Joseph-Ockley Green Elementary School in Portland, attending STARBASE at the Portland Air Base, on Dec. 16, 2013.

FEATURES

Oregon National Guard leaders share career skills with High School students

*Story and photo by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs*

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon National Guard continues to strengthen its educational partnerships across the Willamette Valley by visiting Salem’s Career Technical Education Center (CTEC) on Feb. 4-5, 2025, to discuss leadership development and digital media skills with students preparing to launch their own campus-wide podcast.

State Chaplain (Col.) Jacob Scott, host of the successful military podcast “Hope in the Trenches,” led discussions with CTEC’s student leadership group, sharing insights on military leadership principles and modern communication strategies, including podcasting techniques. Now in its fourth season with 35 episodes, Scott’s podcast features conversations about finding strength in life’s challenges, embodying his signature message to “live and lead with hope.”

“This collaboration with CTEC exemplifies our commitment to developing the next generation of leaders while showcasing how military experience translates to civilian career paths,” said Public Affairs Officer Lt. Col. Stephen Bomar. “The visit is part of a strategic initiative led by Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, The Adjutant General of Oregon, to highlight National Guard career opportunities that align with trade school and high school technical programs.”

“When students heard about ‘Hope in the Trenches,’ they became inspired by the connection of hope and how it translates to their everyday experiences at CTEC,”

said Christiana Kennedy, CTEC leadership group faculty instructor. “More than 50% of CTEC students polled said CTEC has helped them find their technical career, and our Oregon Army National Guard personnel play a key role in this.”

During the session, Scott presented fundamental leadership concepts from Army doctrine, emphasizing how leadership focuses on providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish objectives and improve organizations.

life and work “in the trenches,” making him uniquely qualified to discuss both leadership and digital media with the students.

CTEC, a premier technical education institution in Salem, partners with industry professionals to provide students hands-on experience in high-demand career fields. The school’s emphasis on practical skills and professional development aligns closely with military training approaches.

“The relationship between the Oregon National Guard and CTEC students is one of purpose and direction which remains strong to this day,” Kennedy added. “With continued mentorship, guidance, support, career development and feedback, the Oregon National Guard supports CTEC students in developing their leadership and technical skills and abilities.”

Salem area recruiters Oregon Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Jason Scott and Cpl. Jared Quest also attended the event, providing students with information about how National Guard service can complement their technical education and career goals.

Career Technical Education Center missions focuses on preparing students for high-skill, high-wage careers while developing professional skills, technical knowledge, and real-world experience – goals that parallel the National Guard’s commitment to professional development and technical expertise.



Chaplain (Col.) Jacob Scott, State Chaplain, Oregon National Guard, presents leadership and podcasting concepts to students at the Career Technical Education Center in Salem, Oregon, on Feb. 5, 2025. Oregon National Guard recruiters, Cpl. Jared Quest and Sgt. 1st Class Jason Scott attended the presentation as part of Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold’s initiative to highlight National Guard career opportunities that align with technical education programs.

Drawing from his podcasting experience, he also covered practical aspects of digital media production, including content planning, recording techniques, and distribution strategies.

Through “Hope in the Trenches,” Chaplain Scott regularly interviews individuals who offer perspectives on finding strength for

Child & Youth Program hosts Annual Ball, connecting military families

*Story and photos by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs*

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon National Guard Child and Youth Program hosted their annual Youth Ball, held at the Willamette Heritage Center in Salem, bringing together 180 service members and their families for an evening of celebration on January 18, 2025.

The event, which has become a cornerstone of the program’s annual activities, was planned and executed by the program’s youth team panel, who worked since August to coordinate everything from the theme to dinner selections.

“This is one of our only all-family events,” said Katie Mordhorst, assistant

director of the Oregon National Guard Child and Youth Program. “A lot of our events are geared just for the kids, but this one is for the whole family to create that bond and create those connections for the entire family, and to meet other military families.”

The program, funded through the National Guard Bureau, operates in all 50 states and territories, with each state tailoring its approach to their local needs.

“Our overall mission is to make sure that all of our military youth have a connection somehow,” explained Lorene Moore, program director. “Whether that is the littles or the bigs, we always try to make sure we’re doing some type of a program throughout the state of Oregon.”

Col. Paul Dyer, Oregon National Guard J9, Resiliency Director and rear detachment commander of the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, delivered the evening’s keynote address. The Oregon State University



Members of the Oregon National Guard Child and Youth Program’s Teen Panel with program directors Lorene Moore, Katie Mordhorst, and volunteers during the annual Oregon National Guard Youth Ball in Salem, Oregon, on Jan. 18, 2025.

ROTC provided the color guard, with Maj. Jason Goodard performing a Jimi Hendrix-inspired rendition of the National Anthem on an electric guitar.

The event was supported by VFW posts throughout Oregon, who began fundraising in July to provide the dinner service. Additional community partners included local businesses, with Starbucks providing refreshments and G’s Sweet Party, owned by a military spouse, donating decorative elements.

“To celebrate the military families, oftentimes we do not get to celebrate as a whole family,” Moore said. “This event gives us that opportunity.”



FEATURES

Ash Like Snow: Oregon Air National Guardsman Aids in aftermath of Palisade Fire in Southern California

Story by Senior Airman Yuki Klein,
142nd Wing Public Affairs

LOS ANGELES, Calif. – From afar, the scene resembled a winter wonderland, with snow blanketing the hilltops. However, a closer look revealed that the white coating was not snow, but ash. This was the haunting landscape that Master Sgt. Steven Boyd, Deputy Fire Chief of the Portland Air National Guard Base, saw when assisting with the Palisade fire in Southern California last month.

Boyd had spent fourteen days in the thick of it, working alongside his strike team from Kittitas Valley Fire & Rescue, based in Central Washington. Unlike his role as the Deputy Fire Chief in the Portland Air National Guard, where administrative duties filled most of his days, this was boots-on-the-ground firefighting. On base, he oversees logistics, planning, and coordination, but on this latest expedition, he wielded a shovel and an axe, clearing brush and extinguishing embers that threatened to reignite the inferno.

“The pictures do some justice, but when you actually see it hands-on, you’re like, that is a lot of houses that got wiped out really fast,” Boyd said, recalling the devastation.

The fire had been swift and merciless, driven by Santa Ana winds that turned flickers into walls of flame. Though the official footprint was only 24,000 acres, the destruction was overwhelming. Entire communities had been wiped out in mere hours. Thousands of homes were gone, and businesses were reduced to rubble.

His team’s primary mission wasn’t glamorous. They weren’t battling flames with hoses and saving families from burning buildings like in the movies. Instead, they were in the aftermath, mitigating further

destruction, ensuring that what remained didn’t become fuel for another fire.

“So we worked with the prison crew, and we just cleared off whole hillsides and moved down all the brush to the streets,” he explained. “They brought in chippers and chipped it all away. It’s labor-intensive work. It’s not fun, but it’s got to get done for these communities.”



Courtesy photos provided by Master Sergeant Steven Boyd
Master Sgt. Steven Boyd, 142nd Wing Deputy Fire Chief (far right), along with his fellow crew members from the Kittitas Valley Fire & Rescue based in central Washington, in Southern California, January 2025.

On their first day, they arrived at a fire line where a bulldozer operator had inadvertently buried burning vegetation beneath layers of soil. To the untrained eye, the ground looked secure, but Boyd and his crew knew the heat could tunnel under the dozer tracks and reemerge, potentially reigniting on the other side.

The days blurred together, the crew working thirty-two hours on, twelve off. They caught sleep in shifts, crammed inside the cabs of their rigs. Thousands of personnel and equipment operated in unison to contain the fire.

“At the peak, when I was down there, there were just over 5,300 firefighters,” he recalled. “You’re talking over 1,100 apparatus in one concentrated area, and half of those were on duty while the other half were off duty.”

Boyd’s strike team wasn’t alone. Seven teams operated in their division, totaling 50 apparatus and over 100 personnel. Together, they methodically moved through the disaster zone, assessing buildings for structural integrity, ensuring hotspots were fully extinguished, and advising on fire prevention measures. In Mandeville Canyon, he stood in the ruins of a home where only two vases remained untouched.

Though the devastation was clear, so was his purpose and reason for being a firefighter. Whether in the military or as a civilian, the mission was the same, to serve, protect, and prevent further loss. His dual roles complemented each other.

“It works well by just mirroring each other, quite literally. I see one aspect of things as a deputy chief, then I go back to my civilian life and see the other side. It helps me understand what my guys need,” he explained.

“These fires, specifically this one...it just brings to light the importance of the firewise community versus a non-firewise community,” said Boyd.

He continues by highlighting that the local fire department can assist by assessing your residence and letting you know how to upkeep your property to prevent fire hazards.

The job wasn’t about glory. It wasn’t about heroics. It was about showing up, doing the work, and making sure that, in the end, there was something left to save.

Army Nat’l Guard’s 2-218th Field Artillery hosts public service career fair

Story and photo by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

FOREST GROVE, Ore. – Winter skies gave way to an early preview of spring weather as the Oregon Army National Guard’s 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery opened its Armory up to host a Public Service Career Fair for the public on February 28, 2025.

The event provided a valuable opportunity for veterans and young adults to engage directly with local public service workers across a diverse range of professions. In addition to the career fair, the open house offered a unique chance to discover how the Oregon National Guard plays a crucial role in supporting the state during wildfire season while also facilitating meaningful connections with professionals at every level.

Participating in the Career fair were the Washington County Sheriff’s Office, Forest Grove Fire Department, AMR Emergency Medical Response, Oregon Laborers Training and Apprenticeships, Chemeketa Community College, Pacific University, the University of Portland ROTC, and other veterans-related organizations. Hands-on demonstrations with tactical equipment, trying out the latest robots, and a chance to fire a unit howitzer were all part of the five-hour open house.

Scheduled during the event were several guest speakers from the community, which allowed many of the younger adults to listen to seasoned professionals and interact with questions and vocational advice.

Offering a view of the law enforcement career field, Washington County Sheriff Caprice Massey talked to a diversified group of young high school and community college students, National Guard Soldiers, military veterans, and other curious folks during one of the presentations.

“I got my first experience in law enforcement on the USS Theodore Roosevelt, where I was working in aviation ordinance, but had a chance to work in the brig when the ship was deployed for nine months in the Kosovo conflict,” she said, in describing how her military career led to law enforcement. “It sounds funny, but I enjoyed the work and didn’t know it at the time, but it was my first exposure to working in criminal justice.”



Washington County Sheriff Caprice Massey talks to a diverse group of young high school and community college students, National Guard Soldiers, military veterans, and other curious folks during one of the presentations at the Public Service Career Fair on Feb. 28, 2025, in Forest Grove, Oregon.

Massey began her career at the Sheriff’s Office in 2004 as a corrections deputy in the Jail and rose through the ranks, holding numerous positions, including senior corrections deputy, jail corporal, jail sergeant, lieutenant, jail commander, patrol commander, and undersheriff. She is also a graduate of the FBI National Police Academy in Quantico, Virginia.

“When I reflect on my own military experience, I can attest that one of the most critical lessons that I learned was self-discipline,” she said. “The teamwork I experienced in the Navy laid the groundwork for future success. For my understanding of what it is to be a responsible member of a team... I would tell you that one of the most valuable traits in our (sheriffs) office that makes people excel in their service is teamwork.”

These presentations allowed participants to spend time asking career professionals about the lessons they learned from trial and error along their career path, too. The day concluded with raffle giveaways and some souvenir items provided by most of the professional trades at the career day event.

AZUWUR: OREGON & MILITARY HISTORY

The National Medal of Honor Highway: Crosses America and Connects a Nation



Photo illustration by Aaron Perkins, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

1945-2025: Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the end of World War II, Part One in a series

Commentary by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. – It’s the nation’s longest U.S. highway, stretching from the Pacific to the Atlantic, weaving through a dozen states, offering diverse landscapes while accentuating the remarkable distinctiveness of the country. It connects vibrant, large, and small towns framed by majestic mountains, revealing breathtaking vistas that gracefully transform from high desert plains to expansive prairies and fertile farmland. It nudges the boundless panoramas of the Great Lakes and finally culminates at its eastern terminus, in the bustling streets near Fenway Park. Along the way, this prominent highway avows the last remaining Blockbuster video store, tucked away in Bend, Oregon, like a cinematic outpost, embodying both nostalgia and resilience.

U.S. Route 20 begins in the picturesque fishing and tourist town of Newport, Oregon, and stretches 3,365 miles east to the “birthplace of the American Revolution,” in Boston, Massachusetts. On December 17, 2024, President Joseph R. Biden signed bipartisan legislation spearheaded by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) and U.S. Rep. Mike Kelly (R-PA), designating U.S. Route 20 as the National Medal of Honor Highway.

“It’s now fitting that our country’s longest continuous highway should be dedicated to our veterans who have continuously served and protected our country from ‘sea to shining sea,’” Wyden said in a released statement. “I’m gratified the National Medal of Honor Highway now stands as a timeless tribute to the heroes of Oregon and America who helped make this grassroots movement a reality.”

The passage of this bill embodies the same national spirit of honoring ‘heroism and sacrifice,’ akin to Public Law 101-564, which was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on November 15, 1990, designating March 25 as National Medal of Honor Day.

This federal holiday serves as a potent reminder of the immense gratitude owed to those courageous members of the armed forces who have, as stated in the writing of the bill, “distinguished themselves conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of their own lives” and who have consistently risen above the call of duty.

Drawing upon the original language for the 1990 bill, Rep. Kelly said, “This bipartisan, bicameral legislation honors the extraordinary sacrifice,

courage, and devotion exhibited by every single Medal of Honor recipient,” as he introduced the National Medal of Honor Highway for the final vote in the House of Representatives on Dec. 9, 2024.

“Including in my own district in Erie County Pennsylvania...the 12 states along U.S. Highway 20 account for about 62 percent of all 3,516 Medal of Honor awards presented since the Civil War,” Kelly said, underscoring the widespread support from each of the state’s governors and legislative bodies. “Designation of U.S. Highway 20 would ensure all recipients and any future recipients from all 50 states and territories are honored.”

The legislation was supported by an extensive group of military organizations including the Military Officers Association of America, the American Legion, the Legion of Valor, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Vietnam Veterans of America, the Medal of Honor Historical Society of the United States, and the Bend [Oregon] Heroes Foundation.

“They were willing to give their lives while saving others. For their sacrifice, they were awarded the Medal of Honor, our nation’s highest award for military valor,” said Army Lt. Col. (ret.) Dick Tobiason, when the legislation was formally introduced in May of 2023. As the Chairman of Bend Heroes Foundation and the initiator of the National Medal of Honor Highway, Tobiason has dedicated the effort of renaming U.S. Highway 20 to his friend, fellow compatriot, and Medal of Honor recipient Robert “Bob” Maxwell.

Tobiason recently sat for an extended interview on Oct. 2, 2024, with Morgen Young from the Oregon State Capitol Oral History Project, where he detailed his long friendship with Maxwell, veteran’s projects he has tackled, and touched on his own military service.

“When I moved here to Bend 32 years ago we had a motorhome, and we did a lot of traveling, and I would see these highway signs across the United States, ‘Pearl Harbor Memorial Highway’ or ‘Vietnam Veterans’ or something. We don’t have that in Oregon. We don’t even have any flags in town,” Tobiason said, recalling how the idea for the highway project intersected with Maxwell and built over time to other endeavors.

The retired Army aviator who had served two tours in Vietnam is no stranger to taking on daunting projects and working with war heroes. He was given the task of organizing five “Huey” (UH-1 Iroquois) helicopters for the evacuation of 27 prisoners of war in

Lộc Ninh on Feb. 13, 1973, as part of Operation Homecoming. A total of 591 POWs were freed following the Paris Peace Accords, which brought an end to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. “It was a very traumatic thing. It’s February. It’s getting dark, and when are we going to get these guys in a helicopter?” Tobiason said, still questioning that implausible mission. “So eventually we did (get them loaded and evacuated) and in my helicopter, all five of them held hands and sang ‘God Bless America.’”

Using the same tenacity for freeing Vietnam POWs, Tobiason decided to do something about building veterans’ outreach opportunities in the local community and found through random calls that Bend had a Medal of Honor recipient living in town. He was hoping to start with a flag program with the Boy Scouts and ROTC cadets working with local veterans groups.

“That’s when we had phone books. So, I looked for Robert D. Maxwell. I found a Robert G., so I called the number,” Tobiason said, hoping he had found the correct ‘Robert Maxwell.’ “Are you Bob Maxwell, the Medal of Honor recipient?” He said, “Yes, I am.” At the time, he only lived four miles from here. So, I said, “Can I come and see you?” Without any hesitation, he said, “Sure.”

Working together, they received approval from the park district to build a memorial in Bend, and after 15 years of effort, the Bend Heroes Memorial in Brooks Park was inaugurated in 2006. It honors the 113 names of Bend veterans who were killed in WWI to the present. Other veteran projects in Bend and around the state soon followed under Tobiason’s leadership as the Chairman of the Bend Heroes Foundation, but it was in 2017 that he began working on the Medal of Honor Highway project.

“So, I promised Bob, I said, ‘I’m going to get across the United States,’ I promised him,” Tobiason said, detailing the long process to create the Medal of Honor Highway in his OSCF Oral History Project interview. “It took five years, and he (Maxwell) died while I was doing it, and I got him to two dedication ceremonies in Oregon. One is here in Bend, and one is in Newport, where the highway starts. I said, ‘Bob, you’ve got to be at the coast where the highway starts. It ends in my hometown, Boston, where I was born, a mile from the hospital I was born.’”

Story continued on page 17



U.S. Route 20 has now been officially designated as “The National Medal of Honor Highway,” crossing 12 states, beginning in Oregon and ending in Boston, Massachusetts.



World War II Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Robert D. Maxwell and Dick Tobiason stand under the Oregon Medal of Honor Highway sign in Newport, Oregon.



File photo courtesy of U.S. Army Sgt. Mary S. Katzenberger Robert D. Maxwell, a 3rd Infantry Division Medal of Honor recipient (second from left), walks with other military officials and the niece of a 3rd ID soldier killed in action on Dec. 24, 1944, to deliver a wreath that will be laid at the base of the 3rd ID monument at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va., Aug. 6, 2011.

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Tobiason said it was not easy because Maxwell was in poor health in his later life but made the trip to Newport because of the project. He became the center of attention during his visit.

“The Coast Guard took us down to their rescue boat and had lunch with them,” Tobiason said, recalling that day with a laugh. “...and Bob’s there with a [Medal of Honor Highway] sign, with all those people.”

Tobiason continued to work with Maxwell on the highway effort until his death on May 11, 2019, nearly 74 years after first earning the nation’s highest honor for valor.

Robert Dale Maxwell was born on Oct. 26, 1920, in Boise, Idaho, and he dropped out of school in the seventh grade to help work on his family farm during the Great Depression. His Quaker grandfather had profoundly influenced him at a young age, but the attack by the Japanese on Dec. 7, 1941, would alter the course of his life.

“I envision myself as a conscientious objector,” Maxwell told an interviewer after receiving the Medal of Honor, “but when Pearl Harbor happened and other people around me were going to war, I felt that it was not only my duty but my privilege to serve the country.”



Maj. Gen. Clarence Danielson presents the Congressional Medal of Honor to Technician 5th Grade Robert D. Maxwell, assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, after recovering from his injuries, in Germany, May of 1945.

After enlisting in the Army in July 1940, he was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division as a communication technician, commonly referred to as “a wire man,” responsible for carrying heavy rolls of cable for the phone lines connecting to the command post. During early operations in combat, his missions took him to North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, culminating in the invasion of southern France during Operation Dragoon in August 1944.

“Besançon is a crossroads city in the area between France, Switzerland, and Germany, and our headquarters were set up in a house, with a stone wall erected about three or four feet high surrounding the house. The Germans had infiltrated past our rifle companies on the flank, to our left and right... surrounding the command post and it was in danger of being captured,” Maxwell said, detailing the scene of the battle involving his actions on Sept. 7, 1944, during a formal video interview for “The Medal of Honor Book” series.

As the fighting intensified and pressed on into the pre-dawn hours of darkness, Maxwell and three other American soldiers held their ground behind a stone wall while returning fire against the enemy. Without warning, a German grenade landed near his feet. Maxwell’s first instinct was to throw it back. But the grenade was hard to find in the dark, and he realized he didn’t have time.

“I heard it land and couldn’t see any sign of it... realizing my time was up (after locating it) and all I could really do was grab my blanket [lying on the ground] next to me and just shove it up to my chest and drop on it.”

Maxwell was initially knocked unconscious. When he awoke, he discovered that he was alone. His fellow soldiers had evacuated, leaving him behind because they believed he was dead. Maxwell somehow managed to drag himself toward the house, where he found his

platoon leader disconnecting the last phone lines and preparing to leave. Together, they were able to escape the compound before being overrun by Nazi soldiers.

The citation for his heroic actions dutifully recounts his selfless actions that day in Besançon.

“Despite a hail of fire from automatic weapons and grenade launchers, Technician 5th Grade Maxwell aggressively fought off advancing enemy elements and, by his calmness, tenacity, and fortitude, inspired his fellows to continue the unequal struggle. When an enemy hand grenade was thrown in the midst of his squad, Technician 5th Grade Maxwell unhesitatingly hurled himself squarely upon it, using his blanket and his unprotected body to absorb the full force of the explosion. This act of instantaneous heroism permanently maimed Technician 5th Grade Maxwell, but saved the lives of his comrades in arms and facilitated maintenance of vital military communications during the temporary withdrawal of the battalion’s forward headquarters.”

After recovering from his injuries, he received the Medal of Honor from Maj. Gen. Clarence Danielson in May 1945 and would be heading home with thousands of his comrades from Europe.

In the years to follow, Maxwell would make Bend, Oregon, his home, teaching automobile mechanics to high school and community college students. He met his wife Beatrice after the war, and together they raised four daughters. The day that Dick Tobiason first showed up to meet Maxwell at his home, Maxwell was teaching one of his daughters how to fix the brakes on her Volkswagen Bug - still putting 30 years of teaching auto repair skills to good use.

The affection and admiration that Tobiason had for Maxwell was shared by nearly everyone who met him, including his high school and college students in Bend, his local ‘Band of Brothers’ group in Oregon, and other service members he met at many of the events he was invited to attend.

During Veterans Day events in 2010 in Albany, Oregon, Maxwell was invited to attend the Linn County Veterans Day Parade and the Commemoration Association Awards Banquet the night before as their honorary guest speaker, along with Brig. Gen. Bruce Prunk, the Oregon Air National Guard commander. While delivering his remarks, the message wasn’t immersed in his battlefield bravery or comparing the trials and tribulations of different generations but focused on service to the nation and the community, even after taking off the uniform.



Lt. Col. (ret.) Dick Tobiason, cleans and prepared the Bend Heroes Memorial, located at Brooks Park, for Memorial Day activities slated for May 31, 2021.



Photo courtesy of the Oregon Department of Transportation

On his 96th birthday, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Robert “Bob” Maxwell helped unveil the signage indicating U.S. 20 as the new Medal of Honor Highway across the state. He was joined by Gov. Kate Brown and Lt. Col. (ret.) Dick Tobiason, Chairman of the Bend Heroes Foundation at the event in Bend, Oregon, on Oct. 26, 2017.

“It’s great to be in a room of veterans and those still wearing our nation’s uniform,” he said. “I know for many of you, whether you served one term or more, your oath has no expiration.”

His message that evening hit home with Army National Guard Sgt. Michael Lacer, who had just returned after a year-long mobilization in Afghanistan with the 162nd Engineer Company, headquartered in Dallas, Oregon.

While deployed, Oregon Citizen-Soldiers played a crucial role in bomb clearing over 15,000 miles of roads during more than 6,000 active missions, disposing of nearly 200 IEDs. Their outstanding service earned unit members 13 Bronze Star Medals and five Purple Heart Medals.

“I’ve just been home a few days, and then I got a notice to attend tonight’s banquet and represent my unit,” Lacer said, still somewhat awe-struck

from meeting Maxwell. “I’ve never met anyone who has been awarded the Medal of Honor, and didn’t realize Mr. Maxwell was our (Oregon) only living recipient.”

This, in many regards, is exactly why Tobiason believed in the deep symbolism of the Medal of Honor Highway and the inspiration he found in Maxwell’s life and story.

“It helps us remember, and we need to make sure that veterans are not forgotten,” he said. “These are the people who saved the world from tyranny.”

“When Dick found out that Route 20 went from coast to coast, he took up the challenge to make sure the Medal of Honor highway went coast to coast,” said J.W. Terry, Executive Director of Central Oregon Veterans Outreach and a friend of Tobiason, while being interviewed by the Central Oregon Daily News on February 2024, at the Oregon State Capitol. Tobiason was being honored by the Oregon House of Representatives for his lifetime of service with a House Concurrent Resolution introduced in the opening legislative session. “He just doesn’t stop; he’s like the little engine that could,” Terry said.

Tobiason and Maxwell built 38 different veterans projects together, a friendship that has left multiple life-long contributions to the region, state, and country. The memorials stand as reminders of what they did for the world.

“He was just a humble guy that did things he saw that needed to be done,” Tobiason said in an interview with KTVZ news on May 11, 2020, on the first anniversary of Maxwell’s passing. “He didn’t talk about it, he just did it. He was an example of a great American hero that everybody knows him to be. Great citizen, great Christian, great dad, great grandfather, and a great friend to all.”



File photo by Staff Sgt. John Hughel, 142nd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

ORARNG Sgt. Michael Lacer pauses for a photo with Robert D. Maxwell during the Veterans Commemoration Association Awards Banquet, held on Nov. 10, 2010, in Albany, Oregon.

SHOUT OUTS! RECOGNIZING OUR RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS

ESGR recognizes three Oregonians with regional 'Volunteer of the Year Awards'

Story by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Dept. Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. – With over 2,300 volunteers from all U.S. States and territories, the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve announced their 2024 regional Volunteers of the Year (VOTY) award recipients on Feb. 10, 2025. After being nominated by committees from each state, three Oregon volunteers serving in key program functional areas were selected in the Military Outreach, Training, and Operations categories.

In total, the ESGR regions are broken into four groups: Northeast, Southeast, Central, and West, with six program functional areas evaluated in each of the regional designations. Oregon was the only state to garner three VOTYs, with these winners now being advanced for overall national consideration.



Richard Thibodo, ESGR Training Director and is pictured alongside his wife, Lori.

couple of different committees at various levels that determine the (four) regional winners," said Cecil Owens, Oregon ESGR Military Outreach Director, who was one of the award recipients for 2024. "Some of the basic criteria used in the selection processes included weighing in factors that are associated with ESGR's overall mission and the management of the specific functional programs."

Although ESGR is a volunteer organization, there are still training requirements based on performance standards for all volunteers. Owens said ESGR volunteers are required to meet certain Department of Defense training requirements and that "volunteers receive training in cyber, security, privacy act and USERRA (Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act) requirements that all applicants must go through."

"Rich Thibodo accepted the position of training director just over two years ago and has developed a hybrid training program where we provide

training both in person and virtually, just to make it easier for our volunteers to complete their training requirements," Owens said.

With over 50 volunteers living as far away as Medford, Ashland, Scappoose, and Cove, Owens said the new training plan has improved the training completion rate for all volunteers. "Our annual percentage of training went from the mid 30 percent to now just two years later to about 93 percent compliant."

Volunteer coordinator Greg Malkasian took regional top honors as the Military Outreach Volunteer of the Year, ensuring that ESGR has coverage at every event requested by the Oregon National Guard. This includes unit mobilizations, Yellow Ribbon, and other Soldier Readiness Checks (SRC).

"Every soldier that goes through an SRC receives a group briefing and a general overview from HR (Human Resources)," Owens explained Malkasian's role in Oregon. "The service members get more than a one-on-one personal brief, we want them to fully understand their rights and responsibilities under USERRA."

For Owens himself - he's been a volunteer since 2018, and this award marks his first Volunteer of the Year award for over seven years of service to ESGR. He retired from the Oregon National Guard in 2013 with thirty years of military experience.

"I started as a military

coordinator and then moved to outreach director and have worn several hats," Owens stated regarding his work with ESGR. "I frequently speak at business events, including chamber of commerce meetings, Rotary Clubs, and various conferences. It's essential to educate the community about our presence; we have nearly 10,000 reservists and National Guard members in Oregon, and many people don't realize how large we are as a total military force reserve component."



Cecil Owens, ESGR Operations Volunteer Director

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve is a Department of Defense office established in 1972. It is dedicated to fostering strong cooperation and understanding between Reserve Component Service members and their civilian employers. ESGR is committed to effectively resolving any conflicts that may arise from an employee's military commitments, ensuring a supportive environment for both service members and businesses.



Greg Malkasian, ESGR Military Outreach Director

"Our state chairman, retired brigadier general [Oregon Air National Guard Commander] Jim Cunningham, wrote and submitted the nominations to the national board for review, which were then evaluated by a

Oregon Soldiers compete at the 2025 CNGB Biathlon competition



Photo by 1st Sgt. Zachary Holden, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

Members of the Oregon National Guard Biathlon team pose for a group photograph after the final race of the 2025 Chief, National Guard Bureau (CNGB) Biathlon Competition, held this year at the Mt. Itasca Winter Sports Center in Coleraine, Minnesota, from February 28 to March 5, 2025.

The members of the 2025 Oregon National Guard team are (from left to right), Staff Sgt. Zachary Sweson, Maj. Leslie Reed, Lt. Col. Rocky Kumlin, Capt. Kyle Roe, Maj. Kristy Boucher, 1st Lt. Parker Wiltrout, and Sgt. Hannah Hawkins. The competition is held annually in one of three host states; Minnesota, Utah, and Vermont, and is open to National Guard members in all 54 U.S. States and territories.

Oregon Youth ChalleNGe Program earns 'Outstanding rating' in National inspection

Story and photo by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

BEND, Ore. – The Oregon Youth ChalleNGe Program (OYCP) has become the first in the nation to receive an "outstanding" rating under new federal evaluation criteria, program director Frank Tallman announced.

The program, Oregon's only accredited statewide alternative high school, underwent a comprehensive four-day on-site inspection by the National Guard Bureau's (NGB) Youth Programs Division as part of its regular three-year evaluation cycle.

"This is outstanding recognition to the staff, to the cadets, to the state, to our federal partners — everybody that helps the program had a part of this," Tallman said. "It's a great accomplishment."

Inspectors evaluated four main areas: operation compliance, operation performance, resource compliance, and resource performance. OYCP received the highest possible overall rating under a new manual implemented last year.

The program currently serves 161 cadets with 63 staff

members. According to Tallman, the most recent class was the program's largest graduating class ever with 165 cadets, and the current class began with a record 191 cadets.

"Since COVID, we've seen a steady uptick in applications," Tallman said. "We're seeing a bigger need across the state for kids applying to the program."

While the facility has capacity for up to 240 cadets per class, Tallman noted the program has not seen funding rise at the federal level for the past three years, limiting staff hiring. Despite funding constraints, demand for the program continues to grow across Oregon's 36 counties.



Cadets from the Oregon Youth ChalleNGe Program present the colors in the Oregon State House chamber at the State Capitol on Tuesday, March 18, 2025. The color guard ceremony opened the day's legislative session for state representatives.