

OREGON SENTINEL

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATIONAL GUARD

Soldiers mobilized for Horn of Africa assignment

Story and photos by Army Staff Sgt. Emily Simonson,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon National Guard held a mobilization ceremony for Soldiers with the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) at the Salem Armory Auditorium, May 4, 2025, in Salem, Oregon.

Approximately 220 Soldiers with the 41st IBCT are preparing to mobilize to the Horn of Africa to join Task Force BATAAN in support of Operation Inherent Resolve.

Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek addressed attendees, thanking Soldiers and their families for their commitment and sacrifice.

“I know you will rise to any challenge ahead of you and continue to set the bar high,” Kotek said.

Task Force BATAAN is composed of Soldiers from Oregon, New Mexico, Washington, and Louisiana. They will be serving in Djibouti, Kenya and Somalia in support of CJTF-HOA and JSOTF-SOM. The primary mission will be to conduct security and base defense operations.

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ORARNG Capt. Nathan Scull, Bravo 2-162 Infantry company commander, presents Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek with the 41st IBCT flag at their mobilization ceremony at the Salem Armory Auditorium, May 4, 2025, in Salem, Oregon.

The Oregon National Guard: An enduring commitment To our communities



Oregonians Celebrate Armed Forces Day Around the State

Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers and Airmen participate in Armed Forces Day activities at the State Capitol Mall and at the Rees Training Center in Eastern Oregon.

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2-218th Field Artillery Regiment Ruck March and Food Drive

Service members, families and new recruits participate in a 5-mile Ruck March to support a local food bank and connect with neighbors in the Forest Grove community.

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Environmental staff and Volunteers maintain Vital training areas

The early spring weather offered a chance for the Environmental Branch to promote stewardship at Camp Rilea, one of many Oregon National Guard military installations in the state.

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Gronewold honors fallen Oregon service members During Memorial Day address



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, delivers a Memorial Day address as the keynote speaker to those gathered at Willamette National Cemetery in Portland, Oregon, on May 26, 2025.

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

PORTLAND, Ore. – Oregon National Guard Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen participated in several Memorial Day observances across the state on May 26, 2025, a day dedicated to honoring all those who died in service to the United States during both peacetime and war.

At Willamette National Cemetery in Portland, Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, delivered a Memorial Day address as the keynote speaker to those gathered for the 75th Annual Memorial Day Observance.

“On this solemn occasion of Memorial Day, we gather to honor and remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our great nation,” Gronewold said. Willamette National Cemetery holds a rich history, while Oregon may not have a large active duty federal military presence, Oregonians have still paid a heavy price.”

As Gronewold reflected on the past two decades of Overseas Contingency Operations, he expressed a deep sense of compassion for the losses experienced by the Oregon National Guard since the Iraq War began in March 2003. Sacrifices that still resonate profoundly with Oregonians.

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The Oregon Sentinel is distributed to members of the Oregon Army and Air National Guard, and other interested persons by request, free of charge. Circulation: 13,600. The Oregon Sentinel is published by Eagle Web Press, a private firm in no way connected with the DoD, Departments of the Army or Air Force, or the State of Oregon, and is under exclusive written contract with the Oregon Military Department. The Oregon Sentinel is also distributed electronically, and can be found online at: www.oregon.gov/OMD/AGPA/publications.shtml and at: <https://www.dvidshub.net/unit/ONGPAO>

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COMMAND

Enjoying the summer season and our current accomplishments

These past few months have been some of the most exciting and inspiring for the Oregon National Guard. Across the state, our members have engaged with their communities and participated in meaningful events.

Earlier this spring, we celebrated the ribbon cutting of the newly renovated W.B. Jackson Armory. This project not only enhances our training capabilities—it also extends the armory's service life by another 25 years.

We've welcomed Soldiers and Airmen home from overseas mobilizations, including those supporting USCENTCOM Air and Space Operations, even as others prepare to deploy for missions in the Horn of Africa.

Many of you took part in Armed Forces Day events at the State Capitol and at the Rees Training Center in Eastern Oregon. On Memorial Day, our Guard members supported nearly a dozen ceremonies across the state, honoring those who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our freedoms.

One personal highlight for me was this year's Adjutant General's Combat Marksmanship Competition at Rees. It was a great opportunity to sharpen my skills

and compete alongside some of the finest shooters in both our Army and Air components—proof that we remain a capable and ready fighting force.

We also commemorated the U.S. Army's 250th Birthday, with some of our members completing the Norwegian Foot March in Medford while others enjoyed the traditional cake-cutting ceremony in Salem, performed by the oldest and youngest Soldiers present.

With summer in full swing, many of you are taking a well-deserved time to enjoy the outdoors with your family and friends. As you do, I want to remind you that simple safety measures can help you make the most of the season while avoiding injuries or mishaps.

If you plan to spend extended time outside, don't forget the essentials: sunscreen, water, snacks, and protective gear, such as life jackets and bike helmets. When participating in cardio activities such as walking, hiking, or running, take time to warm up properly and wear appropriate footwear.

If you're staying closer to home with a backyard barbecue, keep in mind that, according to the U.S. Fire Administration, over half of all residential grill fires occur during the "101 Critical



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

Days of Summer." Stay alert and follow safety guidelines to protect those around you.

Staying engaged with our communities builds trust, strengthens relationships, and reinforces the Guard's role as Oregon's service of choice. Our connection with our families, neighbors, and employers is the foundation of our success as Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen.

Thank you for your energy, professionalism, and commitment to service. Let's continue building on our momentum and approach the months ahead with confidence, focus, and pride in who we are and what we do.

Always Ready, Always There!

Chief of the National Guard Bureau visits Portland ANG Base

Story by Staff Sgt. Nichole Sanchez,
142nd Wing Public Affairs

PORTLAND, Ore. – The Chief of the National Guard Bureau, General Steven Nordhaus, visited the 142nd Wing at the Portland Air National Guard Base, April 30, 2025, to experience the F-15EX Eagle II for the first time and to recognize members of the wing.

Nordhaus oversees over 430,000 guardsmen in the Army and Air National Guard. One of his core missions is to ensure the readiness capabilities of guardsmen.

The 142nd Wing is home to 1,400 Airmen who support the wing's Aerospace Control Alert (ACA), special operations, and future cyberwarfare missions.

The wing ensures domestic security of the greater Pacific Northwest of Northern California to Southern Canada as part of Air Combat Command and the North American Aerospace Defense Command through the ACA mission. Future plans include the F-15EX providing that defense.

The 142nd Wing is the first operational unit in the Air Force

to receive the F-15EX. This brings with it the challenges of learning the ins and outs of an intricate new weapons system, without institutionalized knowledge.

To better understand the efficacy of the Air Force's new fighting aircraft, Nordhaus was fitted in gear, briefed, and then took flight with fighter pilot Lt. Col. Brandon Wigton in the F-15EX. He was able to experience

the nuanced differences of the new Joint Mounted Helmet Cuing System or JHMCS and the jet's flying and maneuvering capabilities.

After flight, Nordhaus commented on the advances the 142nd Wing has made in acquiring and adapting to the F-15EX. "You all are leading the way," said Nordhaus. "I think you are doing a terrific job in that already. It's building not only that readiness and capability, but that expertise here.

It's super important we look at how you take that F-15EX, which is a new platform, and take that to the next level..."

Following his flight, Nordhaus briefed mission importance and priorities at a Town Hall held in the base chapel, attended by over 200 Oregon Airmen.

Impressed not only by the F-15EX's velocity in flight, Nordhaus also emphasized how



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

Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Gen. Steven S. Nordhaus sits in an F-15EX Eagle II with Lt. Col. Brandon Wigton, a fighter pilot assigned to the 123rd Fighter Squadron, 142nd Wing, after returning from an orientation flight at Portland Air National Guard Base, Portland, Oregon, on April 30, 2025.

the 142nd Wing has been at the forefront of modernization. This concept falls under his overarching theme for guardsmen: Readiness, Partnerships, and Modernization or 'RPM'.

"...I got to witness some of your incredible modernization here today, with the first wing to receive the newest aircraft in the Air Force inventory in the F-15EX," he said.

While leading the way in modernization, the 142nd Wing is paving the road for future guard bases to receive the new F-15EX Eagle II.

The Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base in New Orleans, Louisiana, Fresno Air National Guard Base in California, and it was announced recently that Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Michigan will be receiving the aircraft soon to further the long-standing readiness and modernization capabilities that Nordhaus emphasized the importance of in the National Guard.



Photo by Master Sgt. Steph Sawyer, 142nd Wing Public Affairs
Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Gen. Steven S. Nordhaus coins outstanding Airmen while visiting the 142nd Wing at Portland Air National Guard Base, Oregon, April 30, 2025.

COMMAND

Continued from Front Page

“In April of 2004, the Oregon National Guard sent more than 5,300 personnel to Iraq. Despite being across the world, the impact of that war was truly felt here at home as teachers, first responders, and other members of our community donned the uniform,” he said.

On June 4, 2004, while out on patrol, Oregon Citizen-Soldiers assigned to Delta Company, 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry saw two clouds of smoke rise over Sadr City, as Gronewold retold their momentous deployment in Iraq.

“As the patrol got closer, they saw one HMMWV (High Mobility Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicle) on fire and the second waving for help. Our Oregon soldiers dismounted their HMMWV just 500 feet from the burning vehicle, their gunner stayed in the turret, providing overwatch,” Gronewold said, describing the chaotic action on the ground. “After coordinating with the HMMWV behind them, an IED detonated. On June 4th, we lost three of our own.”

First Lt. Eric McCrae, Spc. Justin Linden and Sgt. Justin Eyerly was killed that day. Less than ten days later, on June 13, north of Tajaji, Spc. Eric McKinley was killed after driving into an ambush and



Family, friends, visitors, and other mourners of the fallen move among the thousands of American flags displayed on the gravesites at Willamette National Cemetery, Portland, Oregon, following the Memorial Day Observances held on May 26, 2025.



Military members of a Joint Service Honor Guard team perform a rifle salute during the Memorial Day Observance held at Willamette National Cemetery, Portland, Oregon, on May 26, 2025.

detonating a vehicle bomb, subsequently critically injuring two others. On July 28, Private 1st Class Ken Lyon from Bravo Company, 2-162, was killed when his vehicle struck an IED. On Sept. 13, 2004, Staff Sgt. David Weisenberg and Sgt. Benjamin Isenberg was killed while on patrol. Ben was a 4th-generation Army veteran. Both soldiers are buried here next to each other at Willamette National Cemetery in Section X.

Gronewold recited a note written by Jim Weisenberg on the 10th anniversary of his son’s death, saying, “My son didn’t die fighting for a politician’s agenda or political goals. He died fighting for the guy fighting next to him, for those in his unit, for some of whom depended on him. He died because of what he did, what our country and the voters of our country asked him to do. He died selflessly and for us, his loved ones.”

In late September of 2004, Oregon had the unfortunate distinction of becoming the nation’s leader in national death casualties.

“With the death of Gunnar David Johnson, the Oregon National Guard

had nine fatalities in Operation Iraqi Freedom, eight of which were assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry. It’s no coincidence that the 2-162’s nickname is ‘The Volunteer Battalion.’”

The sacrifices of these individuals remind the nation of the heavy toll that war imposes not only on the service member, but their families and the communities they come from.

“The U.S. Census Bureau states that about 6% of Americans are veterans, and less than 1% are currently serving today,” Gronewold said. “These men and women are uncommon. And being uncommon means taking chances. It takes courage. These uncommon men and women raise their right hand and say, ‘Send me.’”

The impact, even twenty years later, still lingers as their absence is felt in towns both big and small across the state, Gronewold said, just as the mid-morning sun broke through a bank of clouds over the national cemetery grounds.

“The deaths of our Oregon National Guard service members robbed our Oregon Communities of some uncommon people. They chose to serve willingly, fullheartedly, courageously, and for a great purpose.”

In closing, Gronewold acknowledged those family members who have lost a son or daughter, saying that “they serve as living legacies of their sacrifice.”

“On this Memorial Day, may we remember the sacrifices of our fellow Oregonians and their indelible mark it has left on our nation, he said. “May we be committed to never forgetting those who served and sacrificed.”



Chaplain (Col.) Jacob A. Scott, Oregon National Guard State Chaplain, delivers the Invocation at the start of the Memorial Day Observance at Willamette National Cemetery, on May 26, 2025.

Maj. Gen. Gregory T. Day retires after 38 Years of military service

Story by Spc. Victoria Payne,
115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SALEM, Ore. – Army Maj. Gen. Gregory Day retired from the Oregon National Guard in a retirement ceremony held on June 7, 2025, at the Elks Lodge #336 in Salem, Oregon. A Soldier for more than 38 years, he has served in both the Army National Guard and the active duty Army.

“His leadership in these pivotal moments speaks to his character and commitment to ensuring the safety and success of our soldiers and citizens alike,” said Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, the Adjutant General of Oregon.



Photo by Spc. Michael Germundson, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, the Adjutant General, Oregon, presents one of several awards to Army Maj. Gen. Gregory T. Day during his retirement ceremony, at the Elks Lodge in Salem, Oregon, on June 7, 2025.

Day enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1986 as an M1 Abrams Main Battle Crewman. He was commissioned as a 2nd Lt. in 1989. He left active duty and joined the Oregon Army National Guard in 1992, where he served as the Executive Officer for A Company, 1st Battalion, 162nd Infantry in Eugene, Oregon.

Since then, Day has served with many units across the state, including the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry, the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry, and the 82nd Brigade.

Day was deployed overseas to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Egypt, and worked stateside as an executive officer during Operation Katrina Relief in Louisiana. Day was most recently assigned as the Special Assistant to the Combatant Commander, North American Aerospace Defense Command/United States Northern Command.

Day’s military education includes the Advanced Strategic Education Program – Basic, an Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies fellowship, Dual-Status Command Course, the Joint Forces Staff College, the U.S. Army War College, the Command and General Staff College, the Combined Arms and Services Staff School, the Infantry Captain’s Career Course, the Scout Platoon Leader’s Course, and the Armor Officer’s Basic Course.

Day’s awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal with oak



Photo by Spc. Victoria Payne, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
Oregon National Guard Maj. Gen. Gregory T. Day receives congratulations from Maj. Gen. (ret.) Michael Stencel, former Oregon National Guard Adjutant General, following his retirement ceremony from the Oregon National Guard, on June 7, 2025.

leaf cluster, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal with triple bronze oak leaf cluster, Army Achievement Medal with double bronze oak leaf cluster, and Afghanistan Campaign Ribbon, the Iraq Campaign Ribbon, the Humanitarian Service Medal, the NATO Article V Medal and the Multinational Force and Observers Medal. He was also awarded the Combat Infantryman’s Badge and the Excellence in Competition Badge – Pistol.

“As we reflect on his storied career, we recognize not just achievements and the accolades, but the friendships that he’s forged, the lives he’s affected, and the legacy that he leaves behind,” Gronewold said.

LEADERSHIP

Mid-Willamette Valley Soldiers reflect on how employer support At home strengthens their service and sacrifice while deployed

Story and photo by
Sgt. 1st Class Cory Grogan,
Oregon Military Department
Joint Force HQ Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. – Captain Jace D. Cook, a Linn County, Oregon, Deputy District Attorney from Grants Pass, is deployed to Kosovo with the Oregon National Guard. A Lewis and Clark Law School graduate, he serves as a JAG officer – specifically as the Trial Counsel and an Ethics Counselor.

As Trial Counsel, he helps maintain Soldier discipline to meet military standards. He also turns complex laws – like the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and Military Rules of Evidence (MRE) – into guidance, readying him for court-martial if needed, while protecting the mission’s integrity abroad.

Before his deployment, Cook’s colleagues at the District Attorney’s Office threw a special celebration for him on Flag Day. The ceremony wasn’t just about the event—it was a heartfelt show of pride and support for his service, reminding Cook that his community was behind him as he prepared for his mission.

Cook acknowledges that the support from his family and coworkers has played a crucial role in his deployment.

“The understanding and support I receive allows me to focus fully on my duties in Kosovo. It’s uplifting to know they’re proud and behind me—their strength fuels mine,” Cook said.

For Cook, serving in the military is not just about his work while in uniform—it’s also about the people who make it possible: families, friends, and employers.

“Without their support, the

mission would be far harder to complete,” he added.

Col. Pete Helzer, commander of the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and current commander of the NATO-led Kosovo Force Regional Command East, also known as KFOR RC-E said employers are a part of the Oregon National Guard family.



Oregon Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Lonnie Dornhecker (left) and Cpt. Jace D. Cook pause for a photo at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, Apr. 4, 2025. Cook and Dornhecker expressed appreciation for their civilian employers who have been supporting them while deployed.

“Employers play a vital role in supporting our National Guard members and their families,” Helzer said. “They are a part of the military family that bridges the gap between duty and home life. Their support helps ensure the well being of our Guard members and their families”

Sgt. 1st Class Lonnie Dornhecker, from Junction City, Oregon, is also deployed to Kosovo with the Oregon National Guard supporting KFOR Regional Command East. As the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC) of the Tactical Effects Cell, Dornhecker helps ensure Information Related Capabilities effectively contribute to the mission.

Having previously served in Afghanistan, Dornhecker, who lives in Lane County and works in Benton County, said he has always received strong support from his employer, Buffalo Wild Wings in Corvallis. Dornhecker said his employer has been in constant contact with him during his deployment to see how things are going and wish him well.

“That support makes me feel good because it shows they obviously care,” Dornhecker said.

Dornhecker and Cook share a common appreciation for the support they receive from those back home. Both know their service wouldn’t be possible without the understanding and backing of their families, employers, and communities.

The Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve

(ESGR) plays an important role in helping employers recognize the importance of supporting employees who serve in the military, and both Dornhecker and Cook emphasize how critical it is to know their jobs are safe and that they have that support from home.

ESGR is a U.S. Department of Defense program that promotes cooperation and understanding between civilian employers and their employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve. It provides resources for both employers and service members about employment-related issues. Programs like the “Statement of Support” encourage employers to back Guard and Reserve members.

ESGR also allows employees to nominate their employers for awards, including the Patriot Award that recognizes employers for their support.

Dornhecker said he plans to nominate his employer for a Patriot Award.

“I appreciate my employer because I know how important employers are to the National Guard,” Dornhecker said. “I plan to nominate them for a Patriot Award because they’re supportive and making sacrifices, too, and I appreciate that a lot.”

Cook presented his employer with awards prior to the deployment.

“I nominated my boss, Linn County DA Doug Marteeny, and supervisor Richard Wijers, for ESGR Patriot Awards because their exceptional support made my KFOR deployment seamless,” Cook said. “Oregon ESGR representatives presented the awards in a thoughtful ceremony, recognizing their efforts to keep my Deputy District Attorney role secure. That affirmation steadies my focus here, reinforcing my resolve to advise commanders with precision.”

Even while deployed, both Dornhecker and Cook carry the support of their families, coworkers, and communities, and employers with them. They know they aren’t alone. Their service is not just about what they do in Kosovo—it’s also about the people at home who are there for them every step of the way. That support gives them the strength to keep going each day and reminds them that their mission is part of something bigger—something they share with those who help them accomplish their work while deployed.

41st IBCT mobilized to the Horn of Africa to join Task Force BATAAN

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Left Photo: Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, addresses the Soldiers and their families during the mobilization ceremony for the 41st IBCT as they prepare to deploy.



Bottom Photo: Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek shakes hands with Oregon National Guard Soldiers from the 41st IBCT following their mobilization ceremony at the Salem Armory Auditorium, May 4, 2025, in Salem, Oregon.



U.S. National Guard photos by Army Staff Sgt. Emily Simonson, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

Oregon National Guard Soldiers with the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team stand in formation during their mobilization ceremony at the Salem Armory Auditorium, on May 4, 2025, in Salem, Oregon. Approximately 220 Soldiers with the 41st IBCT are preparing to mobilize units to the Horn of Africa to join Task Force BATAAN in support of Operation Inherent Resolve.

LEADERSHIP

From the field to the classroom: Kosovo Force Judge Advocate General inspires the next generation of Kosovo civic leaders

Story and photos by
U.S. Army Sgt. Cheryl Madolev,
153rd Public Affairs Detachment

MITROVICA, Kosovo – Kosovo Force, or KFOR, consists of 32 contributing NATO and partner nations. KFOR’s ongoing mission supports the people of Kosovo in various ways, including ensuring safety and security, as well as collaborating with local agencies and non-governmental organizations to meet the needs of local communities.

One of KFOR’s initial tasks over two decades ago was to support the establishment of law and order and a judicial and penal system within Kosovo.

Every KFOR Regional Command East rotation has U.S. Army Judge Advocate General’s Corps, or JAG, representatives assigned to the command. These JAG officers support the KFOR mission in a multitude of ways, including taking care of soldiers’ legal needs and helping to support the development of positive legal systems within Kosovo.

U.S. Army Operational Law Judge Advocate, OF-2 Laura Eckstein, 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Oregon Army National Guard, recently visited the campus of The Public International Business College-Mitrovica, or IBCM, April 8, 2025. She visited the school to give a lecture and was accompanied by U.S.

Army OF-2 Gurney Pearsall, a JAG officer assigned to Area Support Group Balkans, or ASG Balkans. The lecture is an example of Eckstein’s ongoing commitment to engaging with the community.

“I participate in regular Expert-Level Engagements with district prosecutors, local attorney support groups, and university professors,” Eckstein said.



ORARNG Capt. Laura Eckstein, assigned to Area Support Group Balkans and Regional Command-East of the NATO-led Kosovo Force mission, gives a presentation to students of the International Business College Mitrovica, Kosovo, on April 8, 2025.

“The goal of the IBCM lecture was to reinforce the vital nature of the relationship between the U.S. military and Kosovo, and to discuss how the U.S. military supports international diplomacy, stability, and cooperation in the region.”

The lecture provided students with an overview of the components of the U.S. Army, as well as personal and professional facts about Eckstein and Pearsall. Eckstein explained the process of direct commissioning into the U.S. Army and discussed the requirements for becoming a part of the JAG Corps.

However, the presentation’s main focus was on the JAG’s role in international security. She discussed topics including war crime trials, leadership in international law, fiscal law and advising military commanders.

Eckstein’s portion of the brief touched on Kosovo-specific history and law, including the Military Technical Agreement with Yugoslavia/Serbia and the demilitarization and transformation of the Kosovo Liberation Army, also known as UCK.

Following Eckstein’s portion of the lecture, Pearsall explained to the students his role with ASG Balkans and gave an overview of his military service.

“Our lecture gave us a chance to introduce Kosovo’s next generation of business leaders to the work the U.S. Army does in Kosovo and our role in that mission as judge advocates,” said Pearsall. “My favorite part of the day was answering the students’ questions. Interacting with them was incredibly rewarding, as it created a fun dialogue and let us talk to them one-on-one.”

Once the presentation portion of the lecture was complete, the students and faculty asked the two JAG officers multiple follow-up questions about their careers and duties. Afterwards, everyone involved proceeded to take individual and group photos together. Dea Gaxha, Head of

the Division for Communication and Public Relations at IBCM, said the best part of the day was the students’ interaction with Eckstein and Pearsall.

“They didn’t just deliver a lecture, they connected with our students,” said Gaxha. “The lecture offered a unique opportunity for our students to learn directly from experienced legal professionals serving in an international military context. It bridged academic learning with real-world application, especially in the fields of law and diplomacy.”

Eckstein continuously expresses her passion for the JAG mission and her adoration for Kosovo and its communities.

“My experiences here have allowed me to gain a perspective on why we are here that I could never have received any other way,” said Eckstein. “I truly love the people of Kosovo, and I am inspired by the upcoming generation. Kosovo’s future is in good hands.”



U.S. Soldiers assigned to Area Support Group Balkans and Regional Command-East of the NATO-led Kosovo Force mission, also known as KFOR, give a presentation to students of the International Business College Mitrovica in Mitrovica, Kosovo, April 8, 2025. The soldiers explained to the students their role in Kosovo as U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's Corps officers.

ORNG Soldiers support NATO Operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Story and photos by
Capt. Ehren Castle,
41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team
Public Affairs

CAMP BUTMIR, Bosnia and Herzegovina – Soldiers assigned to the NATO Support Element (NSE) at Camp Butmir continue to provide critical support to multinational forces, ensuring smooth operations and fostering international cooperation. Recently, a group of Soldiers shared their experiences supporting NATO’s mission and the vital role they play within the international community.



Staff Sgt. Veronique McCurdy, plans and coordinates movements and key events for U.S. service members coming in and out of Camp Butmir, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Soldiers, including Staff Sergeant’s Cynthia Phomma, Staff Sergeant Veronique McCurdy, and Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Elmore from the Oregon National Guard, discussed their mission to support the NATO headquarters through administrative and logistical tasks. Their daily responsibilities include managing property, facilitating supply trips to neighboring bases, helping soldiers with mail, and most importantly, supporting the DoD personnel who are entering and leaving the country.

“We are their first point of contact when arriving at the airport, supporting them throughout their stay, and ensuring they are well taken care of,” Phomma said. “It’s about creating a friendly face and making sure they can focus on their duties.”

Managing the NSE is no small task, with logistical support having to be organized well in advance. “Anytime we need supplies, we need



(Left to right) Staff Sgt. Veronique McCurdy, Staff Sgt. Cynthia Phomma, and Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Elmore, from the Oregon Army National Guard, pose for a photo outside of the National Support Element at Camp Butmir, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

to coordinate with Area Support Group Balkans down at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo,” Elmore said. “Then to pick it up means traveling through Montenegro, Albania, and Kosovo which is typically a four-day trip on top of the time it takes for supplies to get in, so we want to make sure we plan our needs well in advance.”

The team highlighted the importance of fostering camaraderie and cultural connections. The NSE helps all U.S. personnel stationed at Camp Butmir have a little slice of home on a busy NATO base.

Celebrating holidays together, sharing meals, and hosting events for the team strengthen bonds despite the demanding environment. Everyone is welcome, from newly enlisted soldiers on their first deployment, to seasoned Generals commanding NATO forces abroad.

“I think one of my biggest accomplishments is being able to be present and supportive for everyone who comes through our office,” Phomma said. “Building friendships with both our U.S. service members as well as the other countries on base is a great opportunity.”

As these Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers continue to finish out their deployment this summer, they remain committed to their mission of supporting NATO allies, maintaining international partnerships, and ensuring the safety and success of their fellow service members.

NEWS

Oregon National Guard honors Army's 250th Birthday with Norwegian Endurance Challenge



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

Participants gather at the start line in the pre-dawn light at U.S. Cellular Field in Medford, Oregon on June 8, 2025, before beginning the Norwegian Foot March, an 18.6-mile endurance test to help celebrate the U.S. Army's 250th Birthday.

MEDFORD, Ore. – As the U.S. Army marks its 250th anniversary, Oregon National Guard Soldiers embraced a fitting tribute – completing one of the military’s most demanding endurance tests that has challenged warriors for more than a century.

The Norwegian Foot March, established in 1915, brought together 101 military personnel and civilians on June 8, 2025 to honor Army heritage and the timeless standards of military readiness.

The 18.6-mile challenge, hosted by the Oregon Army National Guard’s 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, attracted participants from across the Pacific Northwest, including Soldiers, Airmen from Oregon’s 142nd Wing and 173rd Fighter Wing, and a Soldier from Joint Base Lewis-McChord who traveled from Washington state.

“It’s a great event just for Soldier endurance and camaraderie,” said 1st Lt. Ian Namu, the march organizer. “It’s also the 250th Army anniversary, so it’s kind of cool to celebrate that with an Army event like this.”

The Norwegian military developed the foot march to test if Soldiers could complete

long tactical movements while maintaining combat effectiveness – a standard that remains as relevant today as it was 110 years ago. Participants carried 24-pound rucksacks throughout the demanding route, with completion times determining badge qualification levels.

“The whole point of this isn’t just to get the 18.6 miles done, but to actually be done and then ready for combat,” Namu explained to participants before the pre-dawn start. “If you’re smoked after this, maybe look at yourself and be like, ‘Hey, I need to be like those older Soldiers back in 1915.’”

The event demonstrated exceptional joint service cooperation, with Air National Guard members from both Oregon wings participating alongside Army personnel. Senior Master Sgt. Justin Lafon from the 173rd Fighter Wing Medical Group claimed fourth place overall with a time of 3 hours and 48 minutes, showcasing the competitive spirit that transcended service branches.

Army leadership emphasized how the challenge reinforced the Guard’s unique dual mission capabilities.

“This event really showcases how integrated our battalion is with the community,” said Lt. Col. Heather Robinson, 1-186 Infantry Rear Detachment commander. “The Oregon National Guard is the military service of choice for many because our members live and work right here in communities like Medford. They serve their neighbors during disasters like wildland fires and deploy to protect our country. It’s that dual mission that makes us unique.”

The competition among military participants was fierce, with 2nd Lt. Wolfgang Seifer, the Battalion’s intelligence officer, claiming first place overall with a time of 3 hours and 19 minutes. Staff Sgt. Mitchell Sierra from 1-186 Infantry secured second place at 3:20, followed closely by Spc. Robert Rowland in third in a time of 3:30.

For Namu, a Southern Oregon University graduate whose Outdoor Adventure Leadership degree proved invaluable in event planning, this marked his third attempt at the Norwegian Foot March. His journey reflected the Army value of perseverance – failing his first attempt, succeeding on his second and now leading the event as an officer.

“First year I didn’t pass. The second year I did pass,” Namu recalled. “This will be my third one, and it’s cool, I get to put it on now.”

The event’s success demonstrated traditional military standards in modern readiness training. Local military recruiters provided trophies for top finishers, recognizing excellence while highlighting career opportunities in the National Guard.

As the Army celebrates its 250th year of service to the nation, events like the Norwegian Foot March serve as powerful reminders that the fundamental requirements of military service – physical fitness, mental toughness and combat readiness – remain unchanged. The Oregon National Guard’s successful execution of this historic challenge proved that today’s Soldiers continue to meet the demanding standards set by their predecessors.



Participants gather at the start line in the pre-dawn light at U.S. Cellular Field in Medford, Oregon on June 8, 2025, before beginning the Norwegian Foot March. Infantry Regiment, attracted 101 military personnel and civilians carrying 24-pound rucksacks.

The tradition continues, connecting warriors with those who first shouldered rucksacks, unified by the timeless commitment to serve with strength, endurance and unwavering readiness.

United States Army's 250th birthday cake cutting ceremony

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

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon National Guard honored the U.S. Army’s remarkable 250th birthday with a memorable ceremony at the Maj. Gen. George White building in Salem, Oregon on June 12, 2025.

The celebration began with ORARNG Staff Sgt. Emily Simonson delivered a stirring rendition of the national anthem, setting a patriotic tone for the historic milestone.

The ceremony’s highlight

featured the traditional cake cutting, performed by the oldest and youngest soldiers present alongside distinguished senior leaders. The Adjutant General, Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, and State Command Chief Warrant Officer, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Lenora Landwehr, participated in this time-honored military tradition that symbolizes the passing of knowledge and experience between generations of service members.



The formal portion concluded with all attendees joining together to sing the Army Song, their

voices united in celebration of nearly two and a half centuries of Army service and sacrifice. Following the ceremony, everyone enjoyed cake while reflecting on the Army’s proud legacy and the continued dedication of Oregon’s Citizen-Soldiers.

This gathering exemplified the camaraderie and tradition that have defined the United States Army since 1775, bringing together service members of all ranks to commemorate this significant anniversary in our nation’s military history.

NEWS

Oregon Nat'l Guard celebrates renovations to the W.D. Jackson Armory

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

PORTLAND, Ore. – The Oregon Army National Guard’s W.D. Jackson Armory, located in Portland, Oregon, hosted a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony on April 4, 2025, to officially unveil the recently completed renovations to the facility.

Presiding over the occasion, Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General of Oregon, said that the upgrades and renovations will continue to serve “as a cornerstone for training, readiness, and community engagement into the future.”

“The scope of these renovations is impressive,” he said, magnifying some of the project’s objectives. “The facility now boasts new water lines, seismic upgrades, energy-efficient windows, new flooring, fresh paint inside and out, and updated bathrooms. They represent our investment in the future of the Oregon National Guard.”

Originally constructed in 1963 and featuring an additional 6,100-square-foot storage building added in 1991, this \$9.4 million renovation project will now extend the armory’s lifespan for another 25 years. The renovations are part of the U.S. Army Service Life Extension Program (ASLEP) and are funded by a combination of federal resources and bond sales by the State of Oregon.

Additionally, dilapidated roads were replaced, backup generators were installed, and caged storage areas for equipment were created. Facility designs were provided by



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General of Oregon, addresses those in attendance at the ribbon cutting ceremony held at the Oregon Army National Guard’s W.D. Jackson Armory, located in Portland, Oregon.

BBL Architects, focusing on cost-effective and energy-efficient improvements for the Oregon Military Department.

“This project exemplifies what we can accomplish through partnership and collaboration. I want to recognize the tremendous work of the Oregon Military Department, AGI Construction, P&C Construction, and BBL Architects,” Gronewold said.



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General of Oregon and Lt. Col. Anna Robledo, 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Commander and other dignitaries cut a ceremonial ribbon to highlight recent renovations at the W.D. Jackson Armory, located in Portland, Oregon, on April 4, 2025.

The two-story building, located on the southern edge of the Portland Air National Guard Base, was officially renamed in 1975 as the William D. Jackson Armory in honor of the former Commander of Battery ‘A’ of the 148th Field Artillery in Portland.

“Over the last 60 years, the Jackson Armory has been a gathering point for Oregon Citizen-Soldiers. It has supported domestic operations, multiple deployments to Iraq, and most recently the mobilization of the Battalion this summer to Iraq and Syria,” said Lt. Col. Anna Robledo, Commander of the 2nd Battalion,

218th Field Artillery. “We are very grateful for the support from the Oregon Military Department, our state, and our partners in the community of Portland who made these upgrades possible.”

The armory stands as a symbol of dedication and mission readiness, housing both the Alpha and Charlie

Batteries of the 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery

Regiment, part of the 41st Infantry Combat Team, alongside the 1st Squadron, 82nd Cavalry Regiment of the 81st Stryker Brigade Combat Team. Over the past several years, soldiers have committed themselves to rigorous preparations for deployments and the warm reunions with family members at the armory, vividly illustrating the resilience and unity that the armory embodies.

“The halls are quiet today at Jackson Armory as our rear detachment is continuing their training over at the coast, and our brothers and sisters in arms continue their defensive

operations in the Middle East,” Robledo said.

Approximately 230 members of the unit were mobilized on August 9, 2024, to support Operation Inherent Resolve, which was directed to advise, assist, and enable partner forces to defeat terrorist elements throughout the Central Command Area of Responsibility.

The W.D. Jackson Armory also houses the Soldiers of the 1st Squadron, 82nd Cavalry Regiment, whose most recent mobilization sent them to Poland



A renovated classroom and meeting space at the Oregon Army National Guard’s W.D. Jackson Armory, located in Portland, Oregon on April 4, 2025.

in support of the European Deterrence Initiative as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve in April 2021, returning home in January 2022.

“I am proud that the Oregon National Guard remains the service of choice for Oregonians. Our Citizen-Soldiers come from every corner of this great state, bringing diverse skills, perspectives, and a shared commitment to service,” Gronewold said, emphasizing the impact of the renovations for the service members assigned to the armory. “They deserve facilities that match their dedication, and Jackson Armory now stands as an example of our promise to provide exactly that.”

Physician Assistant sets new World Record for Hand Release Push-Ups

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

WEST SALEM, Ore. – Oregon Army National Guard Physician Assistant Major Tommy Vu set a new world record May 23, 2025, for the most hand-release push-ups completed in one hour, achieving 1,422 repetitions at West Coast Strength gym in West Salem, Oregon.

The record attempt, which required a minimum of 1,250 repetitions to qualify as an official Guinness World Record, marks Vu’s seventh world record achievement. Previous records for this category had remained unbroken due to a lack of official attempts to meet the qualifying threshold.

“My goal was to break the record, but when I talked to my commanding officer about it, he said if I didn’t get 1,350, that wouldn’t be

good enough,” Vu explained following the grueling hour-long performance. “So I was really happy when I looked over and saw 1,350. I asked them to take a photo to show him I did it.”

True to his tradition, Vu dedicated \$1 per repetition to charity, with proceeds benefiting cancer research in honor of his friend Ilsa, who recently completed her first marathon while battling brain cancer.

The achievement comes after previous challenges for Vu, including developing rhabdomyolysis from his recent burpee pull-up record attempt and illness that forced the postponement of his initial attempt at this record.

Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, the Adjutant General of Oregon, said Vu’s latest achievement demonstrates the caliber of individuals who serve in the Oregon National Guard.



Oregon Army National Guard Physician Assistant Maj. Tommy Vu grimaces with maximum effort at the apex of a push-up as the counter shows 1,413 repetitions with just 26.98 seconds remaining in his world record attempt at West Coast Strength gym in West Salem, Oregon, on May 23, 2025.

“Major Vu’s ability to excel in his medical profession while pursuing personal challenges at the highest level reflects the multifaceted

talent we see throughout our ranks,” Gronewold said. “His commitment to giving back through charitable donations with each record attempt embodies the service-oriented mind-set that defines our Guard members.”

“People always ask when I’m going to stop or when enough is enough,” Vu said. “There’s always going to be charity out there, people to help, and records to break, so I’ll just keep going until I run out of steam.”

This latest accomplishment adds to Vu’s impressive record-setting career, which includes previous world records for burpees and other fitness challenges, all while serving his community and country as a medical officer in the Oregon Army National Guard.

The record is pending official verification by The Guinness Book of World Records.

TRAINING

173rd Airmen take to the skies in Hawaii for Sentry Aloha 25-2

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

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii – Six F-15 Eagles and approximately 120 Airmen from the 173rd Fighter Wing in Klamath Falls, Oregon, journeyed across the Pacific Ocean to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii to participate in exercise Sentry Aloha.



A F-15 Eagle crew chief from the 173rd Fighter Wing, Klamath Falls, Ore., assists an F-15 pilot with pre-flight gear checks during exercise Sentry Aloha at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, April 15, 2025.

Designated Sentry Aloha 25-2, this exercise took place April 8-17. Sentry Aloha brought together six different locations from across the country to include members all the way from Australia. Sentry Aloha is an exercise built around Dissimilar Air Combat Training, which provides pilots with the ability to engage in combat scenarios against aircraft

with different capabilities and performance. Training against dissimilar airframes forces pilots to adapt to unpredictable engagements, which test their ability to utilize their platform’s strengths while exploiting their enemies’ weaknesses. Team Kingsley Airmen worked directly with the Hawaii Air National Guard’s 154th Wing and the 19th Fighter Squadron to play “Red Air” and “Blue Air” with their F-22 Raptors. This game of cat and mouse allows both sides to hone their skills while flying with other airframes that are not stationed alongside one another. “When we bring together fourth and fifth generation fighter aircraft it is key to providing Air Force pilots with real world situations while testing their personal capabilities to better prepare to fight against any given aircraft,” said Maj. Derek Kear, 173rd FW Sentry Aloha project officer. “Our presence provided robust red air threat replication that they are unable to produce organically from within their squadron.”

He went on to add that the F-15s delivered invaluable basic fighter maneuver training replicating “high off boresight heat threat”, meaning threats that are at a long distance and out of direct visual range. During Sentry Aloha, the F-15s were able to complete more than 190 flying hours and 79 sorties, without any major maintenance issues during the exercise. “The professionalism and capabilities of the Airmen working in maintenance was pivotal to the continual sortie generation during the exercise,” said Major Eric McDaniel, 173rd FW maintenance officer in charge. “This is a very impressive feat when working with an aging aircraft nearing the end of its life span and is a testament of the skills and talents our maintainers bring to the table.” Alongside the training flights, approximately 21 Airmen also had the opportunity to participate in familiarization flights in the backseat of the F-15 Eagles to include members of the 154th Wing. This experience allowed Airmen who performed excellent work throughout the year to experience firsthand the fruits of their labor in the flight of a lifetime over the turquoise waters of the Hawaiian Islands.



A F-15 Eagle from the 173rd Fighter Wing at Kingsley Field, Ore., takes off from the runway during exercise Sentry Aloha at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, April 11, 2025.

“It is amazing to witness firsthand, the efforts from airmen behind the scenes to repair and get the aircraft back on the flying schedule for the next sortie is unbelievable,” McDaniel said. “To get some of the maintainers in the back seat of the D-models, and give them an opportunity to experience a flight, was awesome to see the excitement and emotions on their faces after landing.” McDaniel was quick to applaud the team effort that went into accomplishing Sentry Aloha. “Our team is the best and it shows as what we are preparing for with the F-15 sunset is a once in a generational event,” McDaniel said. “It is somewhat melancholy knowing this our last time taking the F-15’s to Sentry Aloha, but it was amazing to see how well the aircraft handled with the high sortie generation operations tempo against the F-22s.”

142nd MSG and MDG Airmen build new skills in deployment exercise

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

WARRENTON, Ore. – In early May, the 142nd Medical and Mission Support Groups (MDG and MSG) executed an AFFORGEN exercise at Camp Rilea in Warrenton, Oregon. AFFORGEN refers to the Air Force’s new deployment model known as Air Force Force Generation. AFFORGEN was put in place as a way to prepare for and respond to the evolution of the Great Power Conflict in an effort to increase readiness and lethality across the force. This exercise focused on establishing and preparing a base for the arrival of aircraft and personnel and the sustainment of operations in an austere environment. Chief Master Sgt. Rebekah Birt, 142nd MSG Senior Enlisted Leader, was one of the primary planners for the exercise. The objective, she said, was to give Airmen an opportunity to concentrate on how to best carry out their roles in a deployed environment. “This [exercise] allowed us to focus on some of our mission essential tasks and learning objectives that we don’t get to exercise in the typical wing readiness exercises,” explained Birt.



Several 142nd Wing Airmen load a “victim” of a simulated attack onto a litter during an AFFORGEN (Air Force Generation) Medical Group and Mission Support Group exercise at Camp Rilea in Warrenton, Oregon, on May 6, 2025.

Wing readiness exercises have historically focused most on executing the mission in a contested environment, assuming all facilities and supporting elements are already in place. For this AFFORGEN exercise, Airmen were tasked to figure out how to establish an operational base from the ground up. “Typically, in the past, we have deployed to places with hardened facilities,” said Birt. “What we imagine future conflicts to be...will be more of this: a small footprint on places where we’re having to establish the infrastructure for incoming forces and aircraft.” The exercise introduced Airmen to new concepts which they were able to work through by applying critical thinking and problem solving skills.

The overarching goal of the exercise, Birt said, was to give Airmen the opportunity to exercise their technical skills while developing their foundational competencies in an environment focused on learning. In the MDG, the Guard Medical Unit (GMU) set up a field hospital where Airmen accepted patients, treated them at their level of care, and learned how to put in patient movement requests to move patients out of the area of responsibility to a higher level of care. For many MDG Airmen, these processes and procedures offered opportunities for learning through application, explained Master Sgt. Alyssa Shaffer, a lead exercise planner and Wing Inspection Team (WIT) member for the 142nd Medical Group. “I can tell that some of our [Non-Commissioned Officers] are stressed and this is brand new for them and they’re...trying to figure things out as they go,” said Shaffer. “They’re having to switch their brains from domestic operations to...ok, now we’re...in an area where things are going

to go wrong. There is danger. We need to worry about our lives and our patients’ lives.” Though the exercise scenario was inherently stressful, the aim was to introduce Airmen to certain concepts and have them figure out how to organize and execute effectively. “...Not everything in the exercise was perfect in execution,” explained Birt. “Rather, we purposefully provided them a safe space to make mistakes, learn, develop courses of action, and receive mentorship from those on the site with more experience.”



An Airman from the 142nd Civil Engineer Squadron operates a bulldozer to establish a simulated flight line at Camp Rilea near Warrenton, Oregon, on May 6, 2025.

The exercise ultimately laid the groundwork for leadership to advocate for MSG and MDG to play a larger role in future exercises as they are a key component to the unit’s overall mission capability.

TRAINING

From Urban Operations to Demolitions: 41st IBCT trains for Horn of Africa Mission



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

An infantryman and an engineer range safety detonate a claymore mine from a crater position during demolitions training at Yakima Training Center, Wash., March 31, 2025. Soldiers from the 741st Brigade Engineer Battalion conducted the demolitions range for infantry units, providing hands-on experience with explosive devices that may be encountered during the upcoming Horn of Africa deployment.

YAKIMA TRAINING CENTER, Wash. – “Claymore, Claymore, Claymore!” The warning echoes across the demolition range seconds before a deafening “whoomp” sends a cloud of smoke and debris skyward. Soldiers rise from behind cover, faces breaking into exhilarated grins as they witness the raw power of battlefield demolitions firsthand.



Soldiers assigned to the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team fire M4 carbines during weapons qualification at Range 73, at the Yakima Training Center, Washington, on March 30, 2025.

This explosive training represents just one facet of Operation Djibouti Dawn, which brought more than 400 Oregon National Guard soldiers to Yakima Training Center from March 28 to April 7, 2025, to prepare for an upcoming Horn of Africa deployment.

The operation assembled soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry Regiment (2-162 IN); 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment (1-186 IN); 741st Brigade Engineer Battalion (741 BEB); and support elements to focus on fundamental infantry and combat engineer tasks.

“The end state was to master the basics, be able to fire and maneuver, and have the engineers integrated to support operations,” said Lt. Col. Ryon Skiles, rear detachment commander of 2-162 IN.

Training included weapons qualification, demolitions, live fire training at Range 24 squad level room clearing in a 369-degree shoothouse, and urban area platoon assault at Range 25. Following field training, units returned to home stations for administrative tasks and recovery operations.

“We qualified with every weapon system in the infantry battalion, from the .50 caliber machine gun to AT-4s and claymores,” Skiles said. “The goal was hands-on experience to allow soldiers deploying to HOA to be competent and confident.”

Approximately 150 Oregon soldiers will join Task Force Baton, a 1,150-member joint force from four states. The task force will support Special Operations Command and Africa Command missions across three countries.

Lt. Col. Sergio Hands, incoming Task Force Baton commander, described their mission: “Our main task is to support operations against local violent extremists, protecting critical assets in the area.”

The deployment begins at Fort Bliss, Texas, in May 2025, with an expected return in April 2026.

What made this Annual Training unique was its collaborative approach across units. With multiple battalions operating at reduced strength due to concurrent deployments to Kosovo and Egypt, units pooled resources and personnel. Cooks from multiple units formed a single section to serve approximately 800 meals daily for approximately 400 soldiers, while medical support included 18 combat medics who received specialized training with the U.S. Army Air Ambulance Detachment stationed at Yakima.

Training progressed deliberately from classroom to

application. “We went through a step-by-step three-day exercise, from crawling with dry fire to walking using blanks to the actual live fire,” Skiles explained.

For many soldiers, this marked a return to fundamentals. “The soldiers were happy getting back to what they joined the Army to do,” Skiles said. “It was about using your MOS to be successful.”

Senior leaders consistently reported high morale among participants — especially significant for National Guard soldiers who balance military service with civilian careers.

For the deployment, Bravo Company, 2-162 IN, will form the core infantry element, supplemented by soldiers from other units. “We took on volunteers for this mobilization. This Annual Training was about getting everybody in the squads prepared,” Skiles said.

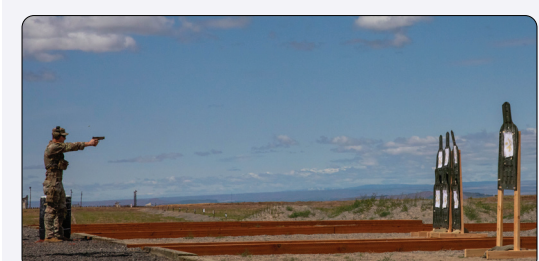
“Annual training experiences like Operation Djibouti Dawn exemplify why the Oregon National Guard continues to be the military service of choice,” said Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, The Adjutant General, Oregon National Guard.



Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry Regiment enter the live fire shoothouse at Range 24, Yakima Training Center, Wash., April 6, 2025. The urban operations training is part of the preparation for the unit's upcoming deployment to the Horn of Africa.

“Our soldiers receive world-class training that prepares them for both federal missions abroad and emergencies here at home, all while maintaining deep connections to the communities they serve.”

Oregon Guardsmen compete for top Marksmanship at ‘TAG Match’



Above: Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, takes part in the three-gun team segment on May 16, 2025. **Below:** An ORARNG Soldier takes part in the Pistol competition on May 16, 2025.

HERMISTON, Ore. – Nearly 100 Oregon National Guard Soldiers and Airmen competed in the Adjutant General (TAG) Match marksmanship competition to be Oregon’s top shooter as well as a spot on the Governor’s Twenty, from May 15-17, 2025, held at the Rees Training Center.



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, the Adjutant General of Oregon, and his team pose with the Oregon National Guard Shooting Team flag during the Adjutant General (TAG) Match marksmanship competition, on May 16, 2025, at the Rees Training Center.



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon (back row, left), along with Col. Marc Mouser, 249th Regional Training Institute Commander (right-center), and Command Sgt. Maj. Steven Baldwin (right) pauses for a group photo with those who won individual and team awards during an afternoon ceremony for the annual Adjutant General’s Combat Marksmanship Training Exercise, or ‘TAG Match,’ held at the Rees Training Center, near Hermiston, Oregon, on May 17, 2025.

THE OREGON NATIONAL GUARD: AN ENDURING COMMITMENT TO OUR COMMUNITIES

The Oregon National Guard salutes Armed Forces Day at the State Capitol

Photos by Maj. Chris Clyne &
Staff Sgt. Emily Simonson,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. – The State Capitol Mall was packed as civilians and service members gathered in honor of Armed Forces Day, May 14, 2025, in Salem, Oregon.

The Oregon National Guard had something for everyone, from the howitzer salute courtesy



Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment, fire an M119 105 mm howitzer during a salute at the Armed Forces Day celebration in front of the Oregon State Capitol building in Salem, on May 14, 2025.

of 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery, to the F-15 Eagle flyover by the Oregon Air National Guard, music from the 234th Army Band, and military static displays staged around the Mall.

“This Armed Forces Day, we gather to express our profound gratitude for the service and sacrifice of all the remarkable individuals who serve in every branch of our armed forces,” said Oregon Governor Tina Kotek.

The Oregon National Guard recognized the 20th anniversary of Oregon Soldiers who deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom during this year’s celebration. Personnel from the 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry Regiment, headquartered in Springfield, were deployed in 2004 and returned to Oregon in 2005.

Photo Right: Gov. Tina Kotek greets retired Command Sgt. Maj. “Vinnie” Jacques, who served in Iraq in 2004-2005 with Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry Regiment during the Armed Forces Day.



The North Salem High School Junior ROTC color guard posts the service flags during the Armed Forces Day event at the State Capitol Mall in Salem, Oregon, on May 14, 2025.



Oregon Nat’l Guard hosts Armed Forces Day at the Rees Training Center

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

HERMISTON, Ore. – The Oregon National Guard hosted an Armed Forces Day celebration on May 17, 2025, honoring current serving military service members, their family members, and other veterans of the U.S. military during a community event held at the Rees Training Center near Hermiston, Oregon.

“The Oregon National Guard has a long history of supporting Armed Forces Day celebration,” said Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon. “Being able to support events like these makes the Oregon National Guard the Service of Choice for Oregonians.”



Maj. Gen. (ret.) Raymond F. Rees delivers the opening remarks to welcome those attending the first-ever ORNG Armed Forces Day celebration held at the Rees Training Center.

This was the first time that the Oregon National Guard had hosted an Armed Forces Day celebration at the Rees Training Center. Activities include a vast array of static displays featuring military vehicles, local food, and community vendors, a climbing wall, and music provided by the Hermiston High School Band.

Welcoming those in attendance to open the celebration was Maj. Gen. (ret.) Raymond F. Rees, who served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Training, Readiness and Mobilization from 2014 to 2019, and as the Adjutant General of Oregon. He also served as the director of the Army National Guard and acting chief of the National Guard Bureau during his distinguished career.

In September of 2022, the Umatilla Chemical Depot was officially renamed the Raymond F. Rees Training Center in his honor and contributions to the Nation and State.

“This is certainly an opportunity to thank all our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardians, and Coast Guardsmen for their service,” Rees said. “I also want to thank the contributions of the Oregon Army and Air National Guard on this day, for their contributions to the security of the people of Oregon.”

Before the Umatilla Chemical Depot was renamed and the Oregon National Guard began its new role with the training facility, Rees noted that he attended Armed Forces Day before entering military service.



Oregon Army National Guard recruiters help kids enjoy a climbing wall while attending the Armed Forces Day celebration.

Armed Forces Day was established in 1949 by President Harry S. Truman to honor Americans serving in all branches of the military, replacing the separate Army, Navy, and Air Force Days. President John F. Kennedy officially designated the holiday in 1962.

Umatilla County Commissioner Cindy Timmons also gave opening remarks, saying, “I just want to ask you to have fun today and enjoy visiting the vendors and recruiting attractions.”

As the morning progressed, a few scattered showers gave way to warmer temperatures as the parade grounds filled with more people arriving for the day’s activities. The Rees Training Center has been constructing a variety of new buildings over the past several years to include military barracks, the 249th Regional Training Institute, while updating others. With a mixture of the old and new, many of the original brick buildings and original architecture from the early 1940s created a timeless setting for Armed Forces Day.

In the second half of the day, a formal awards presentation was held for the Adjutant General’s Combat Marksmanship

Training Exercise, or ‘TAG Match,’ which took place from May 15 to 17 at the weapons ranges of the Rees Training Center. The best marksmen in the Oregon Army and Air National Guard competed for top honors in several categories. Gronewold seized the opportunity to present the winners in each category during a late afternoon ceremony.

This year, Gronewold actively participated in the event, extending heartfelt congratulations not only to the winners but also to all the dedicated service members who took part. Their commitment and contributions were recognized and appreciated as the ‘Service of Choice for Oregonians.’

“To the winner, congratulations. Your performance here is a testament to being competent in your skill set. I am proud to stand with you in our ranks and formations,” he said. “For the rest of our competitors, I want to commend you for your hard work.”

Noting how members of the military come from all walks of life and communities large and small, Gronewold quoted an expert from author John Burring book, “The Devil’s Sandbox,” to describe their impact.



ORARNG Sgt. 1st Class Erik Gilliland and Peter Gronewold give a ‘Thumbs Up,’ after checking out one of the tanks on display that were assembled for Armed Forces Day celebration.

“Men like these are barely noticed back home. They are clerks, deliverymen, bricklayers, and landscapers who live anonymously among us. But they have one thing in common: underneath their name beats a heart.”

Gronewold emphasized the importance of Armed Forces Day by reflecting on the spirit of military service shown by generations of Americans. He highlighted how this annual observance allows us to genuinely appreciate the sacrifices made and the daily contributions of those who defend our nation and our freedoms.

“Whether you’re in the National Guard, active duty, or Reserves, when called upon, those who wear our nation’s uniform rise to the occasion and challenge,” he said.

THE OREGON NATIONAL GUARD: AN ENDURING COMMITMENT TO OUR COMMUNITIES

2-218th Field Artillery Regiment holds Ruck March and Food Drive

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

FOREST GROVE, Ore. – The 2nd Battalion, 218th Artillery Regiment, “hit the ground running” during their May drill weekend as they hosted a 5-Mile Ruck March through the town center area here on May 3, 2025, while helping support a local food bank. The early Saturday morning Ruck March provided unit members with an opportunity to work out, collect food for the St. Vincent De Paul food bank, and connect with neighbors in the Forest Grove community.

The event began at the Army National Guard Armory, traversed a loop along Oregon Route 47, then through the downtown area, and concluded back at the Armory, with nearly 200 participants taking part in the experience. A majority of participants loaded their backpacks before the start of the Ruck with canned and non-perishable food to challenge themselves with the added weight.

The event offered a chance for a broad range of service members to be involved, including retired members, currently serving Guardsmen, future military members in the Army National Guard Recruit Sustainment Program, and U.S. Marine Corps recruits.

“We got started with the idea of, ‘let’s Ruck March through town’... so the community can see us and know that we’re here as part of the (Forest Grove) community,” said Lt. Col. Anna Robledo, Commander of the 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery. “The more we talked about it, it evolved, and we wanted to do this as a food drive for St. Vincent De Paul.”

With warm weather and sunny skies, several water stops were set up along the way, including a section of the route on the ‘B Street Trail.’ Throughout the Ruck, community members honked car horns,



ORNG Soldiers, Army National Guard Recruit Sustainment Program recruits, U.S. Marine Corps recruits, along with family members and others in the Forest Grove community, took part in the Ruck and Food Drive on May 3, 2025.

waved, and shouted out “Thank you” to the service members.

“I thought that was the goal, right, to get out in front of the community and make sure people, you know that we’re here, and are proud to be part of this community,”

Robledo said. “We also got our PT (Physical Training) in for the day, so it was a great way to start a drill weekend.”

As Lt. Col. Robledo led the main body of the marchers, she was accompanied by Oregon Army National Guard Cadet Hailey Toornstra, who carried the unit’s colors.

“Originally, I enlisted over two years ago as a 42-Alpha, a human resources specialist, but I wanted to do something different, so I looked into Field Artillery,” Toornstra said, taking a break following the Ruck.

“I’ve been here since this March, and it’s been great. I’m hoping to commission in two years now.” She attends Western Oregon University and is pursuing a double major in Criminal Justice and Psychology. In addition to shouldering the unit guidon, she carried a full rucksack while representing the battalion during the event.



The Ruck March took participants along Highway 47 and then along several trails before winding through the downtown areas of Forest Grove and returning back to the Armory.

As someone interested in multiple sports, Toornstra mentioned that she has participated in several ruck marches, including a 20-mile event last Memorial Day. “Weight lifting is my favorite. It’s a lot of fun to push myself,” she said.

While some carried canned food in their backpacks, Army National Guard Master Sgt. Brittani Ponder, a full-time recruiter, carried her son in a backpack designed for young kids.

“Yeah, he’s about 50 pounds, so that’s a good haul...he’s also moving around a bunch,” she said. “I’ve done other things like this before...a lot of people in the National Guard know who Cooper is because my husband and I are both dual military.”

Events like this not only help with recruiting but also build unit morale and teamwork. Many of the unit members are currently deployed overseas, with many in the remaining rear detachment preparing to deploy soon.

“We have a majority of the battalion that’s currently forward deployed to Iraq and Syria. In the next few weeks, we have a section that’s going to Africa,” Robledo said. “We have new members, new officers in the unit, so I feel like it’s a good cohesion event for the unit, especially to get them up to speed while others are downrange.”



An Oregon Army National Guard Soldier unloads his backpack after finishing the 5-mile ruck march with food items collected at the finish area of the Forest Grove National Guard Armory.

Oregon National Guard Soldiers welcome Veterans home from Honor Flight

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

MEDFORD, Ore. – Soldiers from the Oregon Army National Guard’s 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment assembled at Medford Airport on Sunday, May 4, 2025, to welcome home veterans returning from an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.

The Honor Flight program takes World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam War veterans to visit military memorials in the nation’s capital at no cost to the veterans.

The returning veterans, who participated in a four-day trip organized by Honor Flight of Oregon, were greeted by uniformed National Guard members, family, friends and community supporters.

“We take veterans to D.C. to visit all their service memorials and show them that the nation is very grateful for their service,” said Pete Pringle, a leader with Honor Flight of Oregon. “Seeing the change in their faces after receiving welcomes, hugs, and thanks makes this mission worthwhile.”

Honor Flight of Oregon serves veterans from six southwestern Oregon counties: Coos, Curry, Jackson, Josephine, Douglas, and Klamath. The organization operates entirely on donations and sponsorships.

Lt. Col. Heather Robinson, 1-186th Infantry Rear Detachment Commander, said the battalion was honored to participate in the welcome ceremony.



Pete Pringle, a leader with Honor Flight of Oregon, shakes hands with Sgt. 1st Class Jase Deemer, 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, at the Medford Airport, Oregon on May 4, 2025.

“Our soldiers recognize the importance of honoring those who served before us,” Robinson said. “As the current generation of Oregon’s citizen-soldiers, we’re proud to carry on their legacy of service.”

The welcome ceremony was part of a busy weekend for the battalion, which also hosted a “Guard for a Day” Open House at the Medford Armory on Saturday where community members experienced military equipment and capabilities firsthand.

The 1-186th Infantry Battalion currently has soldiers deployed to Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula as part of the Multinational Force and Observers mission supervising the security provisions of the Egyptian-Israeli Treaty of Peace.



A Vietnam veteran renders a salute from his wheelchair as he passes through the honor corridor at the Medford Airport, Medford, Oregon on May 4, 2025. Oregon Army National Guard soldiers and Patriot Guard Riders formed the corridor to welcome veterans returning from an Honor Flight trip to Washington, D.C., where they visited military memorials honoring their service.

THE OREGON NATIONAL GUARD: AN ENDURING COMMITMENT TO OUR COMMUNITIES

Environmental balance is essential for preserving vital military training areas

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

WARRENTON, Ore. – With picturesque coastlines, sweeping high desert terrains, lush river basins, and mountain ranges dense in forest and plant life, the Pacific Northwest boasts an abundance of biologically diverse topographies unlike almost anywhere else in the country. Throughout the state of Oregon, there are military installations and designated training areas in all of these regions. Maintaining these areas, both for the continuous training usage and long-term environmental protection, can be a demanding balancing act for the Oregon Military Department's Installation Division and Environmental Branch. Their mission is to "provide mission-capable, sustainable, well-designed facilities and grounds to the Soldiers of the Oregon National Guard" and requires constant and consistent implementation.

During a recent sustainability project at Camp Rilea on March 29, staff members and volunteers took advantage of the pleasant early spring weather to plant trees and other foliage along one of the perimeter areas, adjacent to a visible public fence line on the installation. It also provided another opportunity to instill environmental stewardship at just one of the many military installations in the state.

"We work under AGI (Army Guard Installations), and we are here to help ensure our mission continues on state land, helping to regulate EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) guidance, while remaining compliant with federal and state laws," said Rhande Shaw, a natural resource specialist with the Oregon Military Department's Environmental Branch. "This could be anything from the Safe Drinking Water Act to the Endangered Species Act, or the protection of migratory birds...so compliance and conservation are important to ensure our lands are usable forever, essentially."

The tree planting project was allocated funding from the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) for National Public Lands Day, held annually on the fourth Saturday of September since 1994, and has become one of the nation's largest single-day volunteer efforts. As part of that celebration last fall, volunteers planted 100 sagebrush plugs in a 17-acre plot at the Biak Training Center, leased from the Bureau of Land Management near Redmond. They also planted 400 pounds of native grass seed to fill part of the 460-acre range damaged by the McCaffery Fire in July 2024.



Janet Johnson, the Natural Resources Manager for the Oregon Military Department, works with fellow staff members and volunteers as they plant trees along a designated area at the north end of Camp Rilea.

Camp Rilea is designated as public land, and there is an exposed area along a berm on the camp's northern side that the department had been looking to address. The project aims to create a barrier against an invasive species where Scotch broom has been proliferating. This invasive plant can produce up to 10,000 seeds, which can remain viable in the soil for decades, out competing native plants. Scotch broom not only hinders the growth



A dedicated group of Oregon Military Department Environmental Branch staff members and volunteers took advantage of the warm spring weather to plant trees along the designated boundary area at the north end of Camp Rilea.

of native vegetation but also increases the intensity of wildfires due to its dense stands, which produce more heat when burned. This can elevate fires into the tree canopy, further escalating the fire risk.

"It's [Scotch broom] everywhere, so by planting native species, we are protecting our land and continuing to support the pristine prairie habitat that we have here," Shaw said, describing why a list of endangered species find refuge at Camp Rilea. "Suckley's cuckoo bumblebee relies on our native prairie lands as well as native violets that grow here, along with protecting the silver spot butterfly."

In May 2021, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Oregon reported that the Suckley's cuckoo bumblebee, once common in prairies, grasslands, and meadows across the Western United States, has lost more than 50% of its historic range. This decline is primarily due to habitat loss caused by disease threats, invasive species, and global warming. As a result, the work done by the OMD's Environmental Branch on this project and other long-term initiatives is crucial for promoting a healthy habitat.

The volunteers worked to create an abatement buffer with the new hedge row, planting 90 new native trees, 76 Pacific Wax Myrtle, then adding 24 laurels that have been naturalized in Oregon. The work went quickly with the shovels cutting into the moist soil and camaraderie filling the air.

"The ones on the sides," Shaw said, pointing down the new row, "Those are Pacific Wax Myrtles, so they will hedge out just the same as the others, giving us a lot of visual and noise concealment. We'll be both good stewards of the land and good neighbors in the community."

With the project focused on invasive species, Shaw noted that coastal restoration was another important aspect. "The fruit grown by the Pacific Wax Myrtle is eaten by many kinds of birds common to the West Coast, most notably the Yellow-rumped warbler."

The biggest challenge for the Environmental staff is that Oregon has three distinct ecological environments, so there is no "one size fits all approach" to managing land conservation.

"Not only does the Oregon Army National Guard have Camp Rilea here on the coast, but there are installations in the Willamette Valley like Camp Adair, and then over on the east side of the state is RTC," said Janet Johnson, the Natural Resources manager for the Oregon Military Department. "So these are three completely different eco regions with their own whole set of plants, temperatures, species, and water usage issues."

Almost all of the installations are designated as public lands. The Rees Training Center (RTC) at the former Umatilla Army Depot near Hermiston and the Biak Training Center are federal properties. Before it became the Rees Training Center, the former Umatilla Chemical Depot became a success story in itself, revitalizing recent animal habitats. The burrowing owl population has soared back to life after nearly being eliminated in the early 2000s. Today, the largest population of burrowing owls in North America resides among the bunchgrass of the eastern Oregon military base.

Having also worked for over 15 years as an ornithologist, Johnson said there are similar connections between plant life, animal, and human interactions.

"So it's important to go with ecosystem health, so when you're creating that ecosystem diversity of species and variation of environments, they are great for soldier training – those two things go really well hand in hand."

Although Johnson has been working for over 16 years on Department of Defense land management, she spent a considerable amount

of her career in Arizona, where the environmental differences are a stark contrast to the Pacific Northwest. With the morning project nearly completed and the volunteers beginning to pack up, Johnson took time to expand on some of the distinctions.

"In some ways, I had to relearn a different type of forestry and included getting more familiar with wetlands, which was a very steep learning curve," she said, expanding on how climate variations and healthy habitats nurture high-caliber military training environments.

In making her case earlier this year under the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed that the monarch butterfly be afforded new protections. The DoD has been working with the USFWS to ensure that the same healthy ecosystem conditions necessary for the monarchs to thrive are also present for military troops training in realistic operational conditions on natural landscapes critical for sustaining mission readiness.

In discussing this enduring commitment, Ron Tickle, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for environmental management and restoration, told the Department of Defense news agency that mission readiness and species conservation are closely associated.

"Mission readiness is predicated on having sufficient access to open lands and ranges to enable our troops to train and test," Tickle said. "To achieve this, the [Defense Department] actively conducts natural resources management that provides conservation benefits to millions of acres it oversees."

These collaborative efforts play an important role as training areas decrease over time, not only because of environmental impacts but also with commercial development encroachment. It's not just training for today, but having sustainable property in perpetuity, so even just 50 years from now, soldiers will have realistic rehearsal atmospheres.

Story continued on page 13



Rhande Shaw, a Natural Resource Specialist with the Oregon Military Department, plants one of the new trees along a designated boundary area at Camp Rilea, on March 29, 2025.

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With more and more coastal prairies being encroached upon by invasive species, such as Scotch broom, Johnson said that not only is the Oregon silver spot butterfly being impacted, but so are other pollinators that are starting to become threatened.

“Because we have to keep that land open, we have to keep that Scotch broom back,” she said, describing how important the environmental balance is for preserving essential Oregon military training areas. “Camp Rilea has some of the best coastal meadows remaining because of soldier training... It’s not a coincidence.”

Protecting biodiversity and upholding robust environmental programs across installations statewide is crucial to ensure the long-term viability of military training

facilities. These efforts are critical due to the diverse nature of training activities conducted on these lands, which range from live-fire weapons ranges and aviation operations to Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT), land navigation and fitness courses, and troop billeting. Minimizing operational disruptions helps maintain military readiness while upholding environmental stewardship.

“One of the most surprising things is how well species and biodiversity go well with soldier training,” Johnson said, looking out over a well-preserved open field at Camp Rilea. “You can piece those two together. My favorite part of the job is piecing together the natural resources aspect, which falls in line with soldier training... It’s a ‘win-win.’”



Oregon Military Department Environmental Branch staff members and other volunteers (left to right) include Chris Richardson, Rhonde Shaw, Eric Frasier, Debbie Frasier, Janet Johnson, Jennifer Knowles, and Tim Gilbert took advantage of the sunny spring weather during spring break to plant trees along the designated boundary area at the north end of Camp Rilea, near Warrenton, Oregon, on March 29, 2025.

ORNG Soldiers restore Veterans’ graves at historic Medford cemetery

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

MEDFORD, Ore. – Soldiers from Hotel Company, 141st Support Battalion, attached to the 1-186th Infantry Battalion, spent part of their drill weekend cleaning veteran gravesites at the historic I.O.O.F. Eastwood Cemetery in Medford on April 13, 2025.

Twenty-seven Oregon Army National Guard soldiers from H Company, which drills out of the Medford Armory, joined by Southern Oregon University ROTC cadets, partnered with Medford Parks and Recreation to restore weathered headstones at one of the city’s oldest cemeteries.

“Senior leadership in the Oregon Army National Guard emphasized the importance of getting out into the community this training year, and we wanted to make an impact on our local community,” said Capt. Jacob Wolwicz, H/141 commander. “It was important for us to do something local, within a few miles of the armory.”

Established in 1890 by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.), the

cemetery was sold to the City of Medford in the 1970s when the organization could no longer maintain it. Today, it remains an active cemetery managed by Medford Parks and Recreation.

Soldiers worked in groups of four, cleaning moss and dirt from headstones and removing weeds from around grave markers. Many of the sites they restored belonged to veterans.

“We respected the headstones, made sure we were gentle, but also got off all the gunk,” Wolwicz said. “These are people that lived in the community, died in the community, and these are still some people’s family members’ graves.”

Tyson Thompson, volunteer coordinator with Medford Parks and Recreation, organized the event and called the military presence “a tremendous help.”

For Specialist Katia Ibarrera, who is pursuing a career in law enforcement, the project aligned perfectly with her values.



Tyson Thompson, volunteer coordinator with Medford Parks and Recreation, demonstrates proper headstone cleaning techniques to soldiers from Hotel Company, 141st Support Battalion, at the I.O.O.F. Eastwood Cemetery in Medford, Oregon, April 13, 2025.



ORARNG Pfc. Arely Luviano-Garcia cleans the engraving on a veteran's headstone while restoring veteran gravesites by removing accumulated moss and dirt to make inscriptions readable again during the community service project.

“The thing I love about the National Guard is that it’s more community oriented,” Ibarrera said. “I love serving my community. These are my people. I like helping out my people.”

The Oregon Army National Guard offers a unique opportunity for service members to maintain civilian careers while serving their state and nation part-time. With units stationed in communities throughout Oregon, Guard members can live and work in the same areas they serve, allowing them to make a direct impact close to home.

“My unit came to a historic cemetery to clean up graves belonging to veterans,” Ibarrera said. “We did this because we want to serve our community and focus more on the people around us.”

Guardsmen celebrate with the Ducks at annual Spring Football Game

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Emily Simonson,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

EUGENE, Ore. – Members of the Oregon National Guard supported the University of Oregon Ducks annual spring football game on April 26, 2025, held at Autzen Stadium in Eugene, Oregon.

The Oregon National Guard held recruiting displays outside the stadium, giving the public a chance to interact with military equipment and speak with service members.



ORARNG Sgt. 1st Class Duane Reno with the 234th Army Band sings the national anthem at the University of Oregon annual Spring Football Game on April 26, 2025, at Autzen Stadium in Eugene, Oregon.

“We get to showcase what we do, some of the vehicles we have, and what we’re capable of,” said Master Sgt. Brandon Chase, Oregon Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Noncommissioned Officer In Charge of Eugene, Springfield, and Corvallis. “We’re letting them know that we live here and we serve here and we’re huge Duck fans.”

Prior to kickoff, service members, veterans, and their families held a large U.S. flag in the center of the field as Oregon Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Duane Reno with the 234th Army Band sang the national anthem. As the flag was walked off the field, two F-15 Eagles assigned to the 173rd Fighter Wing at Klamath Falls flew overhead.

During halftime, new recruits and some currently serving members of the military took the Oath of Enlistment in the end field.

At the conclusion of the game, more than 125 service members lined up with the football team to participate in an “End of Game Exchange.”

Photo Right: Over 125 members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corp, Nat’l Guard and ROTC students exchange gifts with the Duck football players at the conclusion of the annual Spring Football Game.



ORARNG Master Sgt. Brittani Ponder along with her husband 1st Lt. Kyle Ponder pause for a selfie photo with a Duck football player during festivities at the annual University of Oregon Spring Football Game on April 26, 2025.



FEATURES

Oregon National Guard Ergonomics: ‘Keeping fit to fight’

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

SALEM, Ore. – The U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center serves as a vital resource for safety and occupational health information, benefiting Soldiers, Department of Defense civilians, and contract employees alike. By prioritizing readiness, the mission’s proactive approach is to analyze, train, and develop systems designed to prevent accidental loss of personnel and resources. The establishment of the Army Ergonomics Program in the mid-1990s has been instrumental in addressing and reducing work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), fostering a healthier and more productive workforce.

To promote a safer work environment and minimize injuries, the Oregon National Guard is actively evaluating a range of challenging job tasks that workers may face. These tasks, which involve lifting heavy items, bending, reaching overhead, pushing and pulling heavy loads, working in awkward positions, and performing repetitive activities, are being assessed to identify opportunities for improvement and better support the entire workforce.

“The ergonomics program prevents musculoskeletal disorders, and therefore increases the overall productivity of the workforce, reduces workers’ compensation claims and associated costs, and preserves the full-time employee workforce,” said Adisa Hadziselimovic, an Occupational Health Nurse with expertise in medical and workplace safety, who is actively enhancing awareness of the Oregon National Guard’s Ergonomics program.

Her efforts are focused on identifying and addressing how MSDs affect workers. They impact muscles, nerves, blood vessels, ligaments, and tendons in a variety of jobs performed in the everyday workplace by Oregon Military Department employees. Damage occurs either in a single sudden event, known as acute trauma, or gradually from repetitive events, known as micro-trauma.



An Oregon Army National Guard soldier performs maintenance inside the cabin while under the dashboard on a High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) at the Combined Support Maintenance Shop at Camp Withycombe, in Happy Valley, Oregon.

“Many injuries occur over time through repetitive tasks, but others can happen in a particular moment, like lifting something too heavy or an awkward movement, or being in an odd body position,” she said, describing the wide variety of routine issues that happen on the job.

Work-related injuries encompass a range of conditions that often arise from the cumulative effects of repetitive motions or unsafe work areas. Additionally, nervous system disorders have been associated when there is a mismatch between a worker’s training or skill set and the specific demands of their job.

“The reduplicated actions exert undue stress on one or more parts of the body over time...which can lead to deterioration,



An Oregon Army National Guard soldier performs routine maintenance with the batteries on one of the many vehicles being repaired at the Combined Support Maintenance Shop at Camp Withycombe in Happy Valley, Oregon, on March 25, 2025.

a lack of mobility, and pain in one or more areas,” Hadziselimovic said. These include conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, and various strains in the back, neck, shoulders, and legs.

A recent report from the Defense Health Agency in March of this year highlights an important opportunity for improvement within the Department of Defense: injuries are currently the leading cause of healthcare utilization across all military branches. Approximately 50% of service members seek care for injuries each year, a significant portion of which are preventable. Moreover, over a third of non-battle-related injuries necessitate evacuation. By focusing on injury prevention strategies, this has a direct impact on preventing lost duty days, members’

meeting physical fitness standards, and meeting deployment readiness objectives.

“In our work, we’re mostly focusing on the dual-status Title 32 technicians, conducting medical surveillance to help prevent or mitigate exposure to certain hazardous work conditions with the CSMS (Combined Support Maintenance Shop) facility maintenance technicians,” Hadziselimovic said. “We’re also part of hearing and vision conservation, pretty much everything that has to do with preventing injuries.”

“What I want to do is raise awareness with our overall program. That means looking at a wide variety of occupations and some of the environmental risks associated with them.”

The ergonomics program has been a valuable component of the Oregon National Guard’s comprehensive safety strategy in the past several years. With the recent appointment of Hadziselimovic to lead the program, the initiative stands to benefit from her extensive background in healthcare and wellness, spanning over two decades. Her expertise is expected to enhance the program’s effectiveness and promote a safer work environment for all personnel. She has worked as an ICU nurse, with service members at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany and in the private sector in Denver before taking on her current role here in Oregon.

“My position has been empty for a few years, going back to 2018, so now we have a plan and a budget,” she said, describing her commitment to Soldiers’ well-being. “I just love providing care to patients’ bedside needs. I was looking for something that was away from the hospital where I could create health and fitness improvements, do it more preventively, instead of waiting for patients to come to the ICU and needing treatment after the fact.”

Part of that plan is to work with volunteers in the Oregon National Guard workforce, as the state has 14 facilities and over 450 technicians who can directly benefit from safe working conditions.

“I would like them to go to a basic ergonomic training course, like an OSHA training course, so they have a basic knowledge of what to look for and do walk-throughs of the immediate areas and

try to assess ergonomic hazards or issues that can be improved in the work conditions,” she said, detailing roles volunteers can perform. “If someone is in a very awkward position when they are writing or typing, or like how they may be working on a truck – where we can look into getting them different equipment that will have them in a more neutral position in their posture.”

By paying attention to the details in the everyday workplace, Hadziselimovic hopes that volunteers can commit to six hours of annual training after completing the Department of Labor’s 40-hour initial training: OSHA #2255 Ergonomic Principles course. This would also adhere to

Army Regulations 385-10, which states that “Commanders, leaders, and supervisors ultimately have the responsibility to identify, mitigate, and assume risk, including risks not specifically outlined in this program.”

Ultimately, this would protect Army personnel, property, and equipment, and reduce the costs of occupational injuries, illness, and accidental loss to improve readiness.

“I am excited about some of the goals we have in place for the program, which would include having one advocate for each work area or at least one per facility,” Hadziselimovic said. “The proposal is to do this in three phases over the next three fiscal years at facilities around the state with full implementation by the end of FY28.”



Amanda Nowacki, an Occupational Health Technician (left), and Adisa Hadziselimovic, an Occupational Health Nurse (right), from the Oregon Army National Guard’s SOH department, pause for a photo at the Combined Support Maintenance Shop on March 25, 2025.



An Oregon Army National Guard soldier bends his body around the tire of a High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) while repairing damage to the chassis at the Combined Support Maintenance Shop at Camp Withycombe. Maintenance technicians often face various ergonomic hazards and physical challenges when working on military vehicles.

FEATURES

Innovative QA software, EQuAD to be tested and implemented at ORANG's 142nd Wing



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

SynapseMX CEO, Shane Ballman, SynapseMX program and project manager, Jacqueline Hoffman, and aircraft maintenance policy manager NGB /A4, Justin Tims pause for a photo in front of an F-15EX assigned to the 142nd Wing, March 27, 2025.

PORTLAND, Ore. – The 142nd Wing stands at the threshold of a transformative era. In late March, Justin Tims, National Guard Bureau/A4, aircraft policy manager, visited the wing and presented an innovation poised to revolutionize maintenance operations across the Air National Guard (ANG) to leaders of the 142nd Maintenance Group. EQuAD (Enhanced Quality Assurance Development) software aims to overhaul aircraft maintenance quality assurance (QA) by streamlining workflows, enhancing efficiency, and bolstering the ANG's mission to maintain a premiere fighting force.

The concept of EQuAD came as an answer to several issues aircraft maintenance quality assurance professionals across the Guard have been facing for years, including Tims, who previously worked in QA at the 164th Airlift Wing in Memphis, Tennessee.

Many of these issues stem from software that all of the Air Force is mandated to use. This software is known as LEAP (Logistics Evaluation Assurance Program) and was initially developed for supply QA, then converted so maintenance could also use it. LEAP has proven, however, not to be the ideal platform for the purposes of maintenance QA, Tims explained.

"Because you have all these different flying wings, and unlike logistics, where they're doing maybe four or five inspections a month, maintenance is doing tens of thousands, so it really bogs down the system," said Tims.

In addition to dealing with a lagging system and rolling blackouts, LEAP also makes it difficult for users to aggregate and analyze data. The program lacks the internal mechanisms for generating reports. Because of this, users must export raw data and run analytics, an arduous and time-consuming task that requires a specific skill set.

"It's very cumbersome, very technical," explained Tims.

Another known issue with LEAP is that it's possible, even probable, that data can be skewed. For example, if one unit is using a line item that is capitalized, and another unit is using a line item that is the same thing, but isn't capitalized, data is going to be off because those two things don't correlate in the system.

This presents a big problem when leadership is trying to make decisions based on the data that is pulled from this system.

"I want to use resources the best I can... the best way to do that is to look at data," said Tims. "But [with] the limitations on the system, you're really making guesses because the data is just not good."

The idea for EQuAD came about as a result of Tims' want for a solution to the problems LEAP presented, and making a connection to SynapseMX through Chief Master Sgt. Powell Crider, then with AFWERX, in 2021.

AFWERX is the innovation arm for the Department of the Air Force (DAF). As such, its goal is to seek out solutions to some of the biggest challenges the DAF is facing through technological advances and innovations from small businesses and start-ups.

SynapseMX was founded by its CEO, Shane Ballman in 2015 to solve issues with commercial airline maintenance. Powell had heard about some programs that Ballman was working on and thought they had the potential to work for QA purposes in aircraft maintenance.

Tims has been working with SynapseMX to develop EQuAD, a solution to the ANG's aircraft maintenance QA challenges, for nine months.

EQuAD aims to be easy and intuitive to access and use. One of the program's key concepts, explained by SynapseMX program

and project manager Jacqueline Hoffman, is to make it possible for maintainers to access the platform and enter data while they're on the flight line, in front of an aircraft.

"One of the big themes is around data governance and ensuring that the data being collected is consistently being collected out in the field," explained Hoffman. "What that will do is give visibility to the process for the commanders, for the chiefs, for the supervisors to be able to make rapid decisions."

The EQuAD system is designed to be used on a phone, tablet, or desktop. For gathering sensitive information, there's a checkpoint for supervisors to review and approve inputs for release on the platform.

In the vein of better enabling leadership to make well-informed decisions, EQuAD can run analytics for users, reducing the possibility of human error and time spent on the platform, allowing maintainers to focus on doing their jobs, and supervising and training their Airmen.

"I think a lot of MAJCOMS (Major Commands) see the benefit of what we're trying to do," said Tims. "We're building something very Guard-centric, but if that ends up being something other MAJCOMS want to use, I think we will definitely be able to go that route as well."

Tims and his team plan to have a minimal viable product available by July of this year. The product will then roll out to three test units: the 142nd Wing in Portland, Oregon, the 165th Airlift Wing in Savannah, Georgia, and the 134th Air Refueling Wing in Knoxville, Tennessee. These three units will run EQuAD and LEAP simultaneously while in the testing phase. The goal is to fully implement EQuAD at these three units by the next calendar year, and by 2027, change the policy for the entire ANG and implement the program at all flying units.



Justin Tims, aircraft maintenance policy manager for National Guard Bureau/A4, briefs 142nd Maintenance Group leadership on Enhanced Quality Assurance Development (EQuAD) software, a sophisticated tool poised to overhaul aircraft maintenance quality assurance processes across the Air National Guard.

Tims emphasized that at the heart of the project is the goal to enhance the ANG's mission capabilities and efficiency through a more supportive and conducive platform.

"That's what this project is," said Tims. "To get us a lot more lethal, a lot more agile, to use that big data that we have in a way that's understandable [so] commanders can make these data-driven decisions."

Willis selected for "Distinguished Members of the Corps" award



Mr. David Willis was recently awarded Quartermaster Corps "Distinguished Member of the Corps," with over 40 years of service in the command supply management discipline.

FORT GREGG-ADAMS, Va. – Mr. David S. Willis was chosen from the entire U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps for the "Distinguished Members of the Corps" award during the annual Fort Gregg-Adams Sustainment Week, held from May 5-9, 2025. Mr. Willis has served with distinction in critical positions for the Oregon National Guard at all levels of command during 29 years in uniform and 13 years as a Department of the Army Civilian.

When submitting his packet for the award, Col. Tannis Mittlebach, Deputy Chief of Staff

Logistics, stated that she first began working with him over 25 years ago when Willis was the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team Property Book Officer.

"He has mentored me from junior company-grade logistic roles through Field Grade logistic positions during deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq, and has become the go-to subject matter expert for me to seek guidance and advice as the senior-ranking Logistician (Deputy Chief of Staff Logistics/G4) in the Oregon Army National Guard."

Additionally, acknowledging his years of service to the Oregon

National Guard, USPFO officer Col. Patricia Hagen recognized that Willis has made significant and lasting contributions to the Army and Air Logistics communities in Oregon.

"Mr. Willis served with distinction as a Warrant Officer in critical positions at all echelons of command. Upon retiring from military service, Mr. Willis continued to serve the Oregon National Guard as the Financial Liability Investigation of Property Loss Manager and Supply Accountability Assistance Instruction Team Leader."

FEATURES

Oregon Guardsmen sharpen skills and strengthen Partnerships during Cyber Shield Exercise 2025



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

Oregon Army and Air National Guardsmen, along with Oregon State Partnership Program service members from Vietnam pause for a group photo on June 10, 2025 during the Cyber Shield Exercise 2025, held at Virginia Beach, Virginia from May 31 to June 13, 2025.

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. – Oregon Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen travel from ‘coast to coast’ during the annual Cyber Shield exercise held at the Virginia National Guard State Military Reservation from May 31 to June 13, 2025. They were among nearly 900 soldiers, airmen, sailors, guardians, and Department of Defense civilian cyber professionals – encompassing participants from 42 U.S. States and territories, as well as 15 State Partnership Program nations.

Over a two-week period of concentrated training and readiness drills, skilled cyber operations specialists from the U.S. military sharpened their defensive cyber capabilities while enhancing their incident response capacities for internal computer networks, working alongside industry and other government partners.

In his opening remarks during International Partners Distinguished Visitors Day, Army Brig. Gen. Russell McGuire, Cyber Shield Director, emphasized the need to defend against critical infrastructure threats while strengthening industry and international partnerships.

“We all know that our critical infrastructure around the globe can be hacked and shut down. The concern is, from a military perspective, that we think it is easy to leave the United States and then project power overseas – but what if all of our critical infrastructure is down?” McGuire said, describing homeland defense vulnerabilities. “We rely on our civilian air transportation, our civilian rail transportation, especially since we saw what happened with the Colonial Pipeline.”



Oregon National Guard Soldiers work together with State Partnership Program service members from Vietnam during the Cyber Shield exercise in Virginia Beach, Va., on June 9, 2025.

In referencing the Colonial Pipeline, which transports gasoline, jet fuel, and diesel from Texas to New York, McGuire emphasized that a ransomware attack on May 7, 2021, triggered widespread panic and significantly disrupted fuel supplies throughout the Eastern United States. This incident had a direct impact on multiple U.S. federal government agencies.

“I remember there was a gas line that was like a mile long, but the ransomware attack was solved pretty quickly. It was the I.O. [Information Operations] component that made everybody run to get gas,” he said, recounting the after-effects that followed. “It



Brig. Gen. Russell McGuire leads a discussion as the guest speaker for International Partner Distinguished Visitors' Day on June 10, 2025, during the Cyber Shield exercise.

can have a substantial disruption to both our military and our economy, and doesn't stop after the initial attack... and that's why these types of exercises are so important.”

By utilizing real-world scenarios for development, training, and simulation, Cyber Shield stands as the longest-running and largest recurring unclassified interagency and joint national-level exercise. In this year's iteration, the Oregon National Guard coordinated soldiers, airmen, and members from their State Partnership Program with Vietnam to collaborate in computer network defense and incident response.

“I was really excited by the notion of the cyber fight and where the conflicts of the future were going to be fought,” said 1st Lt. Kyle McCullough, representing Oregon's Enclave 26 during this year's exercise. “Before coming to this year's exercise, some of our members had been taking coursework for a couple of months to obtain advanced certification.”

The Cyber Shield exercise has two phases: the first provides critical cyber skills training for military, government, and private sector participants, while the second challenges them to defend networks against cyber-attacks on vulnerable infrastructure.

With 12 years of military experience, McCullough transitioned his career from the medical field to cyber operations when he was working in clinical research at a small hospital in Bend, Oregon.

“As I got more and more involved in analytics, more of the tech people took me under their wing and asked me if I wanted to start learning about sequel databases,” he said, recalling his newfound interest in cyber development. “I was so impressed with the upward mobility and the various opportunities that IT (information technology) as a career field offered.”

For McCullough, the learning curve has continued to develop his skills, fostering greater confidence in himself and positioning him as a valuable leader within the team.

“I was learning at such a breakneck speed and trying to get to know as much as possible last year here for Cyber Shield,” he said. “This year, I finally got my sea legs, and watching our team work so well together has been impressive.”

This includes having the Army and Air Force working together in hands-on situations, both face-to-face in the same enclave, while solving network threats in real-time.

“Every single time they access a system of ours, they are using a similar mechanism or similar techniques starting with the same basic box,” McCullough said, during the second day of the exercise. “Whether that's conducting recon or things that are public-facing or performing different types of scans on a network, they are just looking for little clues to get their first little bit of access, and it blooms from there.”

Taking the fight from the actual battlefield to the cyber realm, Army National Guard Sgt. Ryan Garner has benefited from the two weeks of instruction. The former infantryman said that Cyber Shield has helped him prepare for future large-scale cyber incidents.

“This is my real first taste of working in cyber at this level,” he said. “It's a learning experience for everyone. It's one of those things that if we couldn't do this, I don't think a lot of people in the guard would improve their skills.”

Garner noted that many similarities exist in the detection of cyber-attacks used in this exercise scenario, using the agricultural industry, and how it helps to be part of a team to identify these threats.

“They are going to use similar base frameworks when it comes to how they have their computer systems laid out,” Garner said, detailing how commercial and military systems can be integrated. “I've kind of been thrown fire – but at the end of the day, you're doing something individually, that adds to the collective and accomplishes the mission.”



ORARNG 1st Lt. Kyle McCullough leads a discussion during a 10-minute application session during the Cyber Shield 2025 exercise at the Virginia National Guard State Military Reservation in Virginia Beach, Va., on June 9, 2025.

Many of the exercise scenarios are different from what military members typically encounter at their home units. By collaborating with diverse partners during the exercise, they can implement best practices and address real-time issues while participating in Cyber Shield.

“The camaraderie has been good for me. I brought a lot of new members from the base

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with me this year, and they have integrated well,” said Air National Guard Master Sgt. Michael Stevens, assigned to the 173rd Fighter Wing Communication Squadron at Klamath Falls, Oregon. “We know that in any exercise that attacks are coming in that will challenge our current skill levels, but that’s why we’re here.”



ORARNG Chief Warrant Officer 2 William Hanson (center) reviews information with Oregon Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Logan Shipley (right) during Cyber Shield exercise on June 11, 2025.

Initially, Stevens was a team lead, making sure his crew had good communication, had all the right files and assets in place, and... “Getting the right people in the right seats.”

“As the exercise progressed, I’ve moved over to forensics, analyzing files, actually using the process we have to go look at the remote systems and see changes, along with the history in the files, and what was done,” he said.

The work can be tedious and takes diligence, often involving several members of the team to work through.

“Having just finished looking at some files, it took us a couple of hours and multiple sets of people to actually find it, but the adversary enabled a remote code execution, and they’d used our domain control to do so,” Stevens explained. “It took time to find where the files had been hidden...every step reinvigorates you to go a little further until you get there and detect a pattern.”

Combating the ‘Red Team’ adversary tests the proficiency of how well the ‘Blue Team’ can work together to find these issues. Having the Vietnam members only strengthened these warfighting capabilities, while also employing the Linux ‘Security Onion’ distribution platform for security monitoring and log management.

“To me, honest, our (Oregon) Blue Team has done a great job of monitoring their Security Onion, finding alerts that we’re popping up on their side for the actions we are taking,” said Oregon Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 2 William Hanson, assigned to the Red Team for this year’s exercise. “We’re employing different types of attacks that an adversary would perform. In this case, we are doing Operational Technology when it comes to farming in an agricultural setting.”

Working on his fifth Cyber Shield exercise, Hanson has operated from both the Red and Blue Teams’ perspectives. He said that having a diverse team for this exercise has been advantageous both with staffing and getting various perspectives.

“Having the 173rd here is basically a force multiplier with so many of our normal members on other real-world assignments. So, having those augmentees from the Air Force has been a godsend,” he said. “These are great exercises to be part of...we get to know each other when tested in this kind of environment.”

As the exercise approached its culmination during the final days of the operation, Hanson stated that gaining control of a drone used by farmers for testing plant chemical balances would effectively evaluate the team’s response to the Red Team’s acquisition of their equipment.

“This one last test is great because there are literally actors out there trying to get hold of different devices. When it comes to our critical infrastructure, controlling food, water, and electricity is imperative.” He said. “Practicing these skill sets is critical to our country and helping our citizens.”



ORANG Staff Sgt. Dylan Riggs reviews training mission data with SMN Hai Hao Nguyen during a training session, on June 9.

ORNG augments DPAA for first time in National Guard history

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Emily Simonson,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

QUANG TRI, Vietnam – “I will never leave a fallen comrade.” The final line of the U.S. Army’s Warrior Ethos is a promise that all service members will find their way back to American soil.

Oregon National Guard Sgts. 1st Class Nathan Brushe and Brian Miller, with the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Emergency Response Force Package (CERFP), spent more than 45 days on an archaeological site in Vietnam working to fulfill that promise. From March to April, 2025, Brushe and Miller worked with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) recovery team to bring home a missing service member from the Vietnam War.

DPAA’s mission is to provide the fullest possible accounting for missing personnel to their families and the nation. There are currently 1,572 U.S. personnel still unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War.

Recovery mission sites are determined by historical records, findings from prior DPAA investigative teams, and interviews from possible eyewitness accounts. Based on the information DPAA gathers, recovery teams are sent out to excavate for missing personnel. These recovery teams are augmented by service members



ORARNG Sgt. 1st Class Nate Brushe, a recovery noncommissioned officer, wet-screens material during a Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) recovery mission in Vietnam, April 11, 2025.

of all branches, fulfilling roles including linguists, medics, photographers, explosive ordnance disposal technicians, and recovery noncommissioned officers.

This mission was the first time the National Guard has supported DPAA. As Vietnam is partnered with the Oregon National Guard through the State Partnership Program, the Oregon National Guard has a special interest in aiding missions occurring in their partner country. So, Miller and Brushe joined the recovery efforts and got their hands dirty.

“The DPAA experience has been great,” Brushe said. “They’ve obviously been doing this a long time and they know what works and what doesn’t. They point us in the right direction and we just go.”

Every day, the recovery team and local Vietnamese workers haul bucket after bucket of excavated material from the dig site to be wet-screened. Wet-screening is the method of utilizing a high-pressure water system to rinse away soil and identify anything that might lead to an identification.

“We’re looking for anything that isn’t dirt that will give us a clue,” Miller said. “So if it looks different...we just put it in the bucket.”

Anything that “isn’t dirt” is set aside for the life support investigators and forensic archaeologists to examine. They are looking for material that could be correlated with the missing personnel: pieces of uniform, safety gear, aircraft parts with legible serial numbers, and - if they are lucky - human remains.

One of DPAA’s forensic archaeologists, Rob Ingraham, has completed more than 30 DPAA recovery missions.

“There’s something about being able to provide answers and work closely with host nation personnel ... in these kinds of environments at this sort of scale and pace that’s both challenging and rewarding,” Ingraham said.

Anything recovered from the site still has a long way to go before the service member can be identified. The collected material is formally released by the host nation to the United States in a repatriation ceremony, and sent to the DPAA lab in Hawaii - the largest skeletal identification laboratory in the world - to be tested. The findings are reviewed by the Scientific Analysis Directorate of DPAA, and, hopefully, receive a positive identification.



Rob Ingraham, a forensic archeologist for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), excavates a unit during a recovery mission in Vietnam, April 11, 2025. The DPAA mission is to provide the fullest possible accounting for missing American military personnel to their families and the nation.



ORARNG Sgt. 1st Class Brian Miller excavates for possible material evidence as part of a Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency recovery mission in Vietnam, April 11, 2025.

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World War II 'Good Luck Flag' transfer Offers closure while honoring reconciliation

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

Feature story and photos by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

ASTORIA, Ore. – It's been more than 80 years since his father, Staff Sgt. Russell A. Dierking returned home to Oregon after serving in the Army during World War II, and now 20 years since his death. Being the youngest and last surviving child, Alan Dierking has, at long last, found the time to reflect on many of the artifacts and war souvenirs his father brought home from the war, following the recent passing of his older brother. Items that were once considered "battlefield mementos" to his family hold a different meaning to him now.

After enlisting in the U.S. Army in late 1942, Russell Dierking was assigned to a replacement battalion and began training at Camp Roberts in California and later at Fort Lewis, Washington. Like many young recruits from the Pacific Northwest, he was quickly called into action in the Pacific Theater.

"My father was an infantryman, serving in multiple locations around the Pacific. He was wounded and decorated for his service in combat," Alan Dierking said, recalling the legacy of his father's experiences in a new light. "He brought home photographs, an assortment of foreign currency, and other unique souvenirs – including a Japanese (Good Luck) battle flag."

While examining the full assortment of items in his father's collection, he found some video clips online of military repatriation services for flags honoring the service of Japanese soldiers lost in battle. "Good luck flags," known as Yosegaki Hinomaru, were customary send-off gifts for over a million Japanese service members during WWII. The rectangular white flags, made of silk but sometimes cotton, feature a deep red circle representing the sun, embracing the personal signatures in ornate Japanese calligraphy – enduring messages written from family members, friends, coworkers, priests, and even neighbors.

"I think the timing now seems more important than ever – in some ways, to acknowledge a broader sense of my dad's service but also the sacrifices made by Japanese veterans."

And for Alan, returning these items that were in his father's collection has now offered an opportunity to help extend healing and closure, emphasizing that, "Bringing honor and a spirit of connection has been an important part of this entire process."



Alan Dierking (center), along with Rex and Keiko Ziak, co-founders of the Obon Society, displays the "Good Luck Flag," known as Yosegaki Hinomaru, brought home from WWII by his father, Staff Sgt. Russell A. Dierking is now being returned during a meeting with staff members of the Astoria-based Obon Society at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria, Oregon, on March 7, 2025.

The Japanese proverb, "Patience brings a favorable tide," seemed fitting for the moment on March 7, 2025, as the midday sun streamed through the windows at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria. The setting provided a spectacular panoramic view of the river as Alan arranged an array of artifacts on a large rectangular table, having finally connected with members of the Obon society, including co-founders Rex and Keiko Ziak and Bethany Glenn, a board member for the organization. As they gathered curiously around the historical items during the flag hand-off occasion, Alan described item after item, occasionally pausing thoughtfully at a specific article, recalling pertinent information his father had conveyed to him years ago, and now breathing new life into the enigmatic collection.

After describing the mementos on the table, he carefully removed the flag from its protective cover, immediately revealing the bold yet intricate black brush strokes. After a quiet moment of examining the flag on the table, Keiko's energy quickly shifted as she began to translate the ornate messages hidden

for over eight decades for the group.

"Oh, my – Already, I can tell that this is a super close family... a younger brother and sister have signed it, and so have grandparents."

Pointing out the penmanship of one particular character, Glenn asks, "This looks like it belongs to a woman? The script seems more intricate."

"Yeah, that's a woman's signature and very, very personal," Keiko explained, pausing to convey the sensitivity in the script. 'Every morning and night, you greet your mother,' saying it aloud, trying to evoke a more profound meaning in English. This part reads like an older brother...' Do your best and sacrifice your life in doing what is good.'

For Keiko, the flag becomes alive in emotion, while translating more messages on the flag. The calligraphy revealed deeper connections to the soldier, including distinct numbers and intimate gestures. Having examined hundreds of these flags now, she is keenly aware of these clues, taking in the voices of those who left these goodbye sentiments.

"I always look for this sign," Glenn says, pointing to a special character she's discovered on the flag. "It looks like a number three with a line."

"Yes, very good," Keiko says with a grin, telling the group that 'Bethany has seen so many of the flags now, she's getting good at deciphering them.'

Through the translations, the group conversations became fervent, bringing more questions and revelations into the spirited exchange. "Some of these come from maybe his workplace, like from a guy he worked with at a bank or factory, these are people who were his friends, as if he were a member of a baseball team," Keiko said, explaining more of the story held within the flag.



Photographs that belong to Alan Dierking and that were part of his father's collection, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Russell A. Dierking, while meeting with staff members of the Astoria-based Obon Society at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria, Oregon, on March 7, 2025.

Every character bears its own story, yet in its entirety, all the signatures hold a collective heartfelt farewell. The moment is bittersweet.

"These are very close relationships and friends... it is not common to use a first name... this is very intimate," Rex said, pausing for a moment while videoing the group discussion.

In describing a familiar story, Rex recounts what often takes place when the flags are successfully returned to families in Japan.

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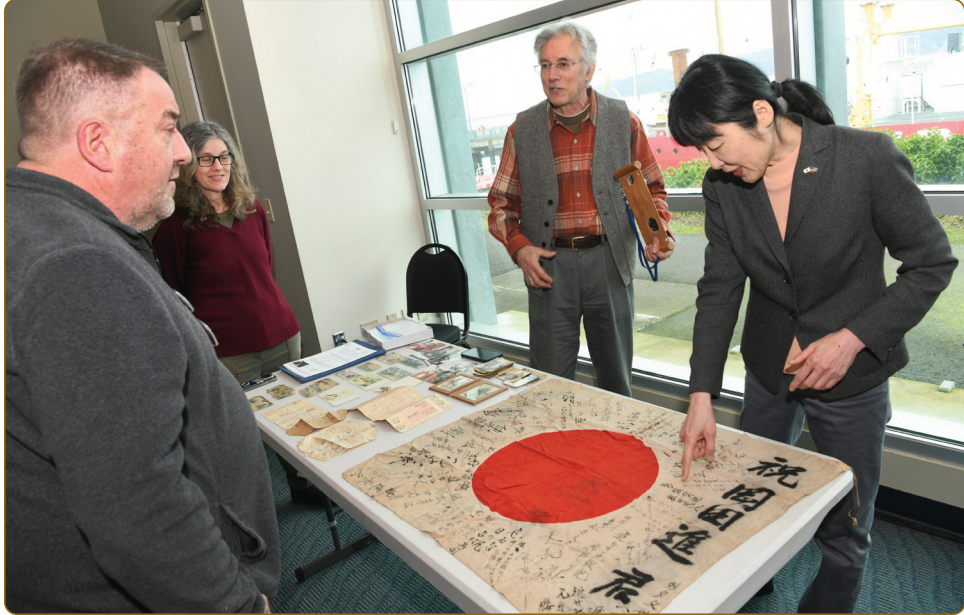


Keiko Ziak, a co-founder of the Obon Society, lays out the "Good Luck Flag," known as Yosegaki Hinomaru, with Alan Dierking, as the flag was brought home from WWII by his father, Staff Sgt. Russell A. Dierking is now being returned during a meeting with staff members of the Astoria-based Obon Society at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria, Oregon, on March 7, 2025.

"Through these videos and other research, I contacted the Obon Society here [in Oregon] to help and see if they could help me find the family of this Japanese soldier whose name was on this flag," Alan said.

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“Let’s say that we returned it in December this year; two or three years from now, people will still be coming home maybe at Christmas time, showing up saying ‘We’ve heard that you have a flag with grandma’s signature on it,’ and they’ll pull it back out again and put it on the table, much like we are doing now – going over it and retracing the intimate details.”



Keiko Ziak, a co-founder of the Obon Society (right), along with Board Members Bethany Glenn (center-left), and Rex Ziak, co-founder of the Obon Society (center-right), discuss many of the messages of the “Good Luck Flag,” known as Yosegaki Hinomaru, with Alan Dierking, as the flag was brought home from WWII by his father, Staff Sgt. Russell A. Dierking.

With the return of the flags to family members, they are preserved in a variety of ways, but one thing is common: with the journey complete, the flag is no longer a material object; it has been transformed, and for the family, their loved one has finally returned home.

“They (flags) are regarded officially now as non-biological human remains,” Rex said, pointing out the traditional significance that the flags hold in Japanese culture. “There is a different concept of living and death – they will often take the flags to the family shrine and display them to their departed family members, showing to parents and grandparents, ‘look, they have come home.’”

“That’s exactly how the recipient of a Japanese family holds this view,” Keiko pointed out in this long process, “For the ancestor, this is what they think as closure.”

With the discussion still opening new perspectives, Alan reveals how the process of the flag’s repatriation has become compelling and personal.

“I do feel like this soldier has been talking to me in a way,” he said, as the unfolding conversation revealed more of the emotional connections Alan has with returning the flag. “It’s been such a strong feeling for me during this process that – I could feel this pull, this sense of needing to go home.”

This journey home strikes at the core mission of the Obon Society, and in each case, there is an emotional sense of closure that runs beneath the material items. Rex and Keiko have found this spiritual conversation, like Alan’s, to be a common occurrence.

“He’s been talking to you for months, if not years, telling you, ‘Can you get me home?’ Can you get me back to my ancestors?” Rex reiterated Alan’s lingering question. “And you woke up one morning, and you reached out and called the National Guard, which led you here.”

That same “spirit of return” is how the Obon Society was first founded.

In 2007, a military collector in Toronto, Canada, had written in his will a special request to his son to return a Japanese flag in his possession. During a business trip to Tokyo, the son left the flag with the hotel staff in an attempt to try and find the soldier’s family. Through newspaper ads and then word of mouth, the flag eventually made its way back to Keiko’s mother nearly a year later.

“When I grew up, I didn’t know anything about my grandfather other than he was a farmer and disappeared during the war, and as part of Obon remembrance each year, we would pray for him and other ancestors,” Keiko said, describing the process of her own family’s flag. “I remember my mother was in tears when it (the flag) returned home, saying ‘his spirit, he wanted to come home,’ and for me, I was shocked – it was like a miracle that his flag returned home.”

In Japan, Obon is the Buddhist festival to pay respects to family ancestors and other loved ones, and is celebrated over three days in mid-August or mid-July, depending on the region. The concept of the OBON Society was started when Keiko met Rex several years later, and then, together, they felt inspired to return more of these flags to families in Japan.

“In 2009, there was this ramp-up where he had a kitchen table and a couple of laptops as we began to do research, seeking out as much information as possible, including information from the government in Japan,” said Rex, describing the early concept of the Obon Society. “It wasn’t until 2013 that we returned the first flag.”

Initially, they thought they would be providing the information necessary so that the Japanese government would have the information to request Americans interested in participating in this repatriation process. What they quickly discovered was that the Japanese government viewed these flags as battlefield souvenirs from American service members and couldn’t request their return to the families of lost Japanese soldiers.

“To the Japanese, words matter to them, and treaties and signing pieces of paper matter, so they have honor and respect for the conditions that ended the war,” Rex said, recalling one of the major hurdles they first had to overcome. “From the Japanese perspective, the term ‘Unconditional Surrender’ meant no conditions...so even if those treasured items of ours had unspeakable value, we had no right to request those to be returned.”

Yet from these preliminary days of working with the State Department of Japan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rex and Keiko have made historic headway. Through their work over the past 15 years, over 750 flags have now been returned, helping foster a new perspective of mutual respect among veterans in both nations.

“So in these return ceremonies, there was a huge gap that we had to overcome with the post-war (United States) occupation mind-set in Japan,” Keiko said, explaining another layer to the restorative process. “When the Americans return these items, they are showing honor and respect for the opposing Japanese soldier; this equal respect is now afforded to the families in Japan – it is a completely different action, transforming the soldier to come back home, allowing for closure to take place.”

Now, with a full exhibit at the Columbia River Maritime Museum, it displays



Keiko Ziak, a co-founder of the Obon Society, examines and deciphers a “Good Luck Flag,” known as Yosegaki Hinomaru, with Alan Dierking, as the flag was brought home from WWII by his father, Staff Sgt. Russell A. Dierking, is now being returned to the Obon Society.

the history and meaning of the Yosegaki Hinomaru flags. Many of the donated flags on display help tell this story, and as part of the process, once the family is located, they are respectfully removed and returned. In essence, it’s the spirit between former combatants that has now opened new perspectives for understanding and peace.

Part of Alan’s investigation process involved working with the Oregon National Guard, as his grandfather, Major Frederick R. Dierking, had served until he retired from the Oregon Army National Guard. During World War I, as a member of the 41st Infantry Division, he was mobilized with the American Expeditionary Forces in France.

Ironically, the 41st Division would later take part in some of the toughest fighting against Japanese forces during World War II, with their final action in clearing the Southern Philippines, where his son, Staff Sgt. Russell Dierking would later serve.

“I know that he first went to New Caledonia and then Guadalcanal, which I do believe were battles en route to Luzon (Philippines), where he obtained the flag,” Alan said, referring to his father’s actions that led to being wounded in action. “I have the original Western Union telegram dated January 21, 1945, so it was getting close to the end of the war.”

Military historical records place “The Battle of Luzon” as the highest net casualty engagement fought during WWII, with 192,000 U.S. Forces and 217,000 Japanese combatants dying, with a majority from disease and starvation during the prolonged siege and conditions.



A video and cultural display of Japanese “Good Luck Flags,” known as Yosegaki Hinomaru, are part of the exhibit curated by the Astoria-based Obon Society at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria, Oregon, on March 7, 2025.

Story continued on page 20

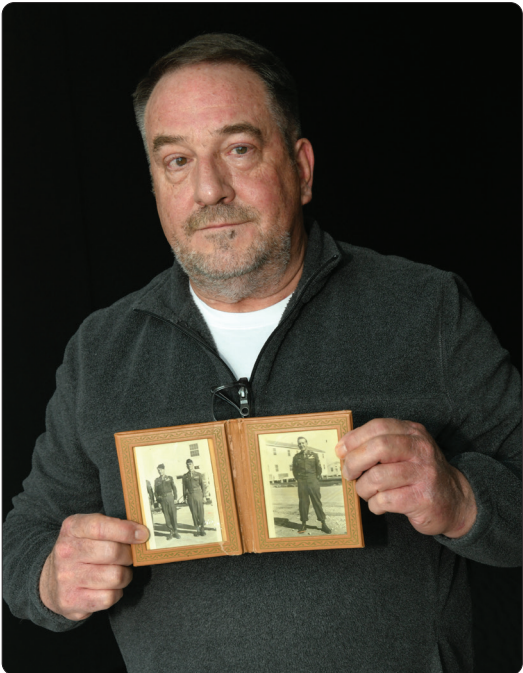
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As his unit was advancing into the hills in late January, Staff Sgt. Dierking was injured and then evaluated out just as advancing troops were moving into the same area, Alan said, recalling his father's final actions in combat. "He said he was being carried down the hillside as American soldiers were advancing past him. He got that look from many of them, like, 'I have to go up into that?'" as they passed on the trail."

With his heroic actions that day, Staff Sgt. Dierking was awarded one of the oldest and most honorable military awards, a Purple Heart.

Preserving these accounts of his own father's service was also part of the motivation to return these items to Japan, Alan said, reflecting on the occasional shared stories over the years, and having been his father's caretaker later in life when his health was deteriorating.



Alan Dierking holds photos of his father, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Russell A. Dierking in uniform during World War II, while meeting with members of the Astoria-based Obon Society at the Columbia River Maritime Museum, Astoria, Oregon, on March 7, 2025.

"My dad sat down numerous times trying to write down his own story, but just couldn't go into the details because I think it just spurred too many memories of the loss of so many of his friends."

This summer marks 80 years since the war ended. Now that the items have been transferred to the Obon Society, Alan hopes that his act of sincerity, along with a sense of destiny, will prevail in the next step of the flag's journey home.

"I never really considered these items mine to keep and didn't want them to end up in someone's World War II collection," he said. "I am now hoping this flag finds its way home, and if the family does receive it, I would be honored to meet them if it helps them bring closure too."



Part of the exhibit curated by the Astoria-based Obon Society helps tell the story of Japanese "Good Luck Flags," known as Yosegaki Hinomaru, at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria, Oregon, on March 7, 2025. The Obon society's mission is to facilitate the return of captured WWII flags to Japanese descendants of those soldiers who carried them off to war as send-off gifts.



Alan Dierking shows off a panorama photo with his grandfather, Oregon Army National Guard Maj. Frederick R. Dierking, with Rex Ziak, co-founder of the Obon Society, during the meeting and handing off of the "Good Luck Flag," known as Yosegaki Hinomaru, brought home from WWII by his father, Staff Sgt. Russell A. Dierking.

With immense pride: 103 year old Navy WAVES Veteran remembers her service to America

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Simonson,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

MCMINNVILLE, Ore. – Peggy Lutz was a first-year teacher at Myrtle Point, Oregon, in 1944 when a Navy recruiter said to her, You should join the Navy.

If a recruiter had said this three years earlier, it would have been a joke. But in the face of World War II, the U.S. military began accepting women service members for the first time in its history. The Navy Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) program filled the roles left vacant in the states as more and more men were deployed overseas. The women would be allowed to serve for the duration of the war, plus six months.

"The only reason that I went into the Navy was I liked their uniforms better," Peggy said. "The Army's [uniform] was just horrible."

Her uniform, a dark blue jacket and shirt, hangs proudly in her home to this day.

WAVES accepted both enlisted and officers, but Peggy said she wanted to serve her country in whatever capacity they needed.

"I said, just put my name in. I'll go wherever you need," she said.

So, at the age of 22, Peggy Lutz enlisted in the Navy.

With 1,600 other women, Peggy reported to Hunter College in New York City, New York, for two days of testing to determine what roles the women would fill. Enlisted WAVES took on jobs like clerical work, health care, radio operators, yeomen, or statisticians. Peggy was assigned to air traffic control.

"And I said 'I've never even been close to an airplane,'" she recalled. "I have never, ever had anything to do with an airplane. How can I be suited for that?"

After completing specialized training in Atlanta, Georgia, Peggy then reported back to her home state for her first duty station at Klamath Falls Naval Air Station in southern Oregon. She served there six weeks before transferring to Naval Air Station Tongue Point in Astoria, Oregon.



Peggy Lutz sits for a photo following an interview, March 31, 2025, in McMinnville, Ore. Lutz served in the WAVES during World War II more than 80 years ago, and in April will celebrate her 103rd birthday.

Many of the men Peggy encountered during her time in the Navy were not excited to be working with women. Chief among the naysayers was the Tower First Class, who Peggy reported to. He would belittle and embarrass the women who served under him, using any misstep to justify his disdain for women in uniform.

"He just was mad that he had been given a bunch of women," Lutz said.

The men she served alongside believed women could not do the same work as men. The pilots the tower serviced, however, did not share this belief.

"Pilots welcomed us because they liked our voice," she said. "We were easier to understand than the men, and the men got sloppy."

"Somebody started the rumor that I had the sexiest voice in the tower," Lutz said, laughing.

Peggy and the four other women who worked in the tower at Tongue Point built a camaraderie in the face of disparity.

"We just laughed about the fact that our work was [deemed] not as acceptable as men's work, and yet we were doing better. Actually, our statistics were better."

Petty Officer Third Class Peggy Lutz worked at Tongue Point until January 1946, six months after World War II ended and the WAVES program was disbanded. She received her separation paperwork at Sandpoint, Idaho, where she was given a \$300 government check for her service, which paid for a taxi, a coat, and a phone call to tell her family she was coming home.

Peggy, like many service members throughout history, felt lost after leaving the military. While she would have liked to have continued

serving, society expected women service members to go back to housekeeping and child bearing, she said. No one would hire her as a civilian in air traffic control, subject to the same prejudices as the Navy. So she took up where she left off before the war, and worked as a teacher for the next 20 years.

It has been 80 years since Peggy fulfilled her service to her country. She takes every opportunity to put her uniform on and represent the women who served in World War II. She's walked in parades, spoken to high school students, and written numerous articles, sharing how much her service to her country means to her.

"I still, to this day, have an immense pride in my uniform, my flag," she said.

Happy 103rd birthday, Peggy, and thank you for your service.