

# GUARDLIFE

JANUARY-JUNE 2024





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U.S. Army Soldiers with the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, sit in formation during the 44th IBCT's farewell ceremony at the Cure Insurance Arena, Trenton, New Jersey, Jan. 14, 2024. More than 1,500 NJARNG Soldiers will deploy in support of U.S. Central Command's Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve. CJTF-OIR advises, assists, and enables partnered forces until they can independently defeat Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – ISIS – in designated areas of Iraq and Syria, in order to set conditions for long-term security cooperation frameworks. It is the largest deployment of New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers since 2008.(U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

Cover: U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Peter J. Ashwell with the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, waves good-bye at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Jan. 27, 2024. More than 1,500 NJARNG Soldiers are traveling to Fort Bliss, Texas, for additional training prior to deploying to Southwest Asia in support of U.S. Central Command's Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve. This is the largest deployment of New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers since 2008. Coverage begins on page 3. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

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Maj. Gen. Hou bids farewell

From the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office



U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., The Adjutant General of New Jersey, presents an Army Achievement Medal to a New Jersey Army National Guard Soldier during an awards ceremony at Task Force Redleg in Iraq, June 4-5, 2024. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis)

On July 1, 2024, Maj. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., relinquished her responsibilities as The Adjutant General of New Jersey and Commissioner of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. This was a bittersweet day for Hou, a physician and combat Veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan. While Hou is excited about her new role as the Director, Office of the Joint Surgeon General, National Guard Bureau, she will miss her day-to-day work of leading Soldiers and Airmen and delivering state veterans benefits, programs, and services.

“Twenty-nine years ago, when I raised my right hand and swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, my focus was, as it remains today, to support the people of this state and country to the best of my ability,” said Hou. “As an officer, to lead, inspire, and protect. As a physician, to diagnose, treat, and heal. This was made possible by the dedicated service of the Soldiers and Airmen of the New Jersey National Guard and the devoted civilian staff of the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.”

Named to the position by Gov. Philip D. Murphy in October 2020, Hou led her team through some of the most difficult times in state history. During her tenure, the New Jersey National Guard played a leading role in the Garden State’s COVID-19 response, deployed to Washington, D.C., following the events of Jan. 6, 2021, and continued the highest operational tempo since World War II.

As Commissioner, Hou served as point person for an unprecedented expansion of state-delivered veterans benefits, programs, and services. Under her leadership, the veterans memorial homes at Menlo Park, Paramus, and Vineland improved quality of care for residents and embarked upon significant capital improvements that will result in modern, state-of-the-art homes for Garden State Veterans, Veteran spouses, and Gold Star families. She focused on building mental health resilience among service members, Veterans, and their families. She also expanded the interment capacity at the Brig. Gen. William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery.

Hou expressed confidence in her successor Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays. Mays was nominated by Murphy and unanimously confirmed by the New Jersey Senate Oct. 28, 2024. She said, “I am confident that she will lead the force and our team with intelligence, integrity, and a deep knowledge of where we have been and where we are going.”

“Maj. Gen. Hou leaves big boots to fill,” said Mays, who became the third Air Force officer to assume the role of Adjutant General and Commissioner.

“Through the crucible of domestic and overseas challenges, she led with a steady hand. I believe I speak for those in and out of uniform when I offer my heartfelt thank you to her for her many years of service.”



# 44TH MOBILIZES



U.S. Army Soldiers of the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, participate in a farewell ceremony at the Cure Insurance Arena, Trenton, New Jersey, Jan. 14, 2024. More than 1,500 NJARNG Soldiers will deploy in support of U.S. Central Command's Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve. CJTF-OIR advises, assists, and enables partnered forces until they can independently defeat Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – ISIS – in designated areas of Iraq and Syria, in order to set conditions for long-term security cooperation frameworks. It is the largest deployment of New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers since 2008. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)





Above: U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., left, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, New Jersey Gov. Philip D. Murphy, second from left, present American and New Jersey flags to Col. Brian J. Stramaglia, right, commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Kevin P. Kirkpatrick, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, during the 44th IBCT's farewell ceremony.

Below: U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Thomas A. Calvo, right, holds the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, guidon as Stramaglia, center, and Kirkpatrick, case the IBCT's colors at the Cure Insurance Arena, Trenton, New Jersey, Jan. 14, 2024. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, depart from Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, for additional training at Fort Bliss, Texas,

prior to deploying to Southwest Asia, Jan. 28, 2024. This is the largest deployment of New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers since 2008. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

# **"All my training has led up to this deployment"**

By Maj. Amelia Thatcher, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs

On a rainy January weekend, more than 1,500 Soldiers with the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, departed Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, for a final round of training and equipment fielding at Fort Bliss, Texas. Their next stop: the U.S. Central Command area of operations in southwest Asia.

"Regardless of the mission, standard or not, our Soldiers have proven to be more than capable of any task they have been assigned," said Brig. Gen. Robert W. Hughes, Jr., Assistant Adjutant General-Army, New Jersey National Guard. "Now they're anxious to do the job they signed up for."

National Guard units typically follow a five-year cycle in which training years precede the unit's ready year between overseas deployments. In 2019-2020, units of the 44th IBCT deployed to Djibouti, Somalia, and Kosovo, among other locations - and most returned to home station shortly before or directly into COVID-19 response operations. The high tempo of NJNG domestic missions in between the 2019 and 2024 deployments punctuated this dwell time, in addition to the demanding training schedule in the lead-up to Operation Inherent Resolve.

As they waited to board the plane for Fort Bliss, a group of forward observers with Detachment 1, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 112th Field Artillery Battalion, 44th

IBCT, played cards and shared their Guard experiences.

"I went directly from [advanced individual training] to Washington, D.C. for 90 days," said Spc. Carlos S. Barraza.

"The eXportable Combat Training Capability was my second drill," added Spc. Daniela S. Vargas. "Then Joint Readiness Training Center the following year."

"This is my first deployment, but I was on COVID orders at Moorestown and did election support in Bridgeton," said Sgt. Jonathan Murphy. "The Guard made things run more smoothly."

"All my training has led up to this deployment," Vargas said.

As the Soldiers finally began boarding, Hughes looked back on his own 20 years of New Jersey National Guard deployments.

"We've asked the same Soldiers time and again to do missions outside their core skill set," Hughes said, referring to a previous NJARNG deployment in which Soldiers of all specialties retrained to perform detainee operations. "We put the 44th IBCT through the wringer to get to this point. Now they'll go out to the field to do their jobs. It's the reason they joined."

"Generational readiness to me means we have changed the trajectory of training in the state," Hughes concluded. "The New Jersey National Guard has the training, experience, and confidence to do the assigned mission. That's going to carry forward for years to come."

**"The eXportable  
Combat Training  
Capability was  
my second drill."**

**SPC. DANIELA S. VARGAS  
FIRE SUPPORT SPECIALIST  
3RD BATTALION  
112TH FIELD ARTILLERY REGIMENT**





# New Readiness Center unveiled

By Lt. Col. Agneta Murnan, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., The Adjutant General of New Jersey, center, and U.S. Rep. Christopher H. Smith, New Jersey District 4, cut the ribbon to officially open the National Guard Readiness Center at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Jan. 4, 2024. The nearly \$16 million military construction project, 40,762 square foot state-of-the-

art facility will provide the Soldiers of Bravo Company, 250th Brigade Support Battalion, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, with classroom training, administration, maintenance operations, and equipment storage. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

The New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs held a ribbon cutting ceremony opening the National Guard Readiness Center at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Jan. 4, 2024.

The event was attended by U.S. Rep. Chris Smith, 4th District; staff of U.S. Rep. Andy Kim, 3rd District; JBMDL mission partners; senior leaders of the New Jersey Army National Guard; design and construction leads from DRG Architects, AIA, Inc, DMD Contracting, LLC; and project managers from the NJDMAVA Construction & Facilities Maintenance Office.

“I am grateful for the support of the federal legislature and Governor Phil Murphy in prioritizing the funding for this project, and for the many teams that have guided this project from concept to reality

in the last five years,” said Brig. Gen Lisa J. Hou, D.O., The Adjutant General of New Jersey and Commissioner of Military and Veterans Affairs. “This facility gives our Soldiers a phenomenal foundation for the training that will prepare them for future calls of our state and nation.”

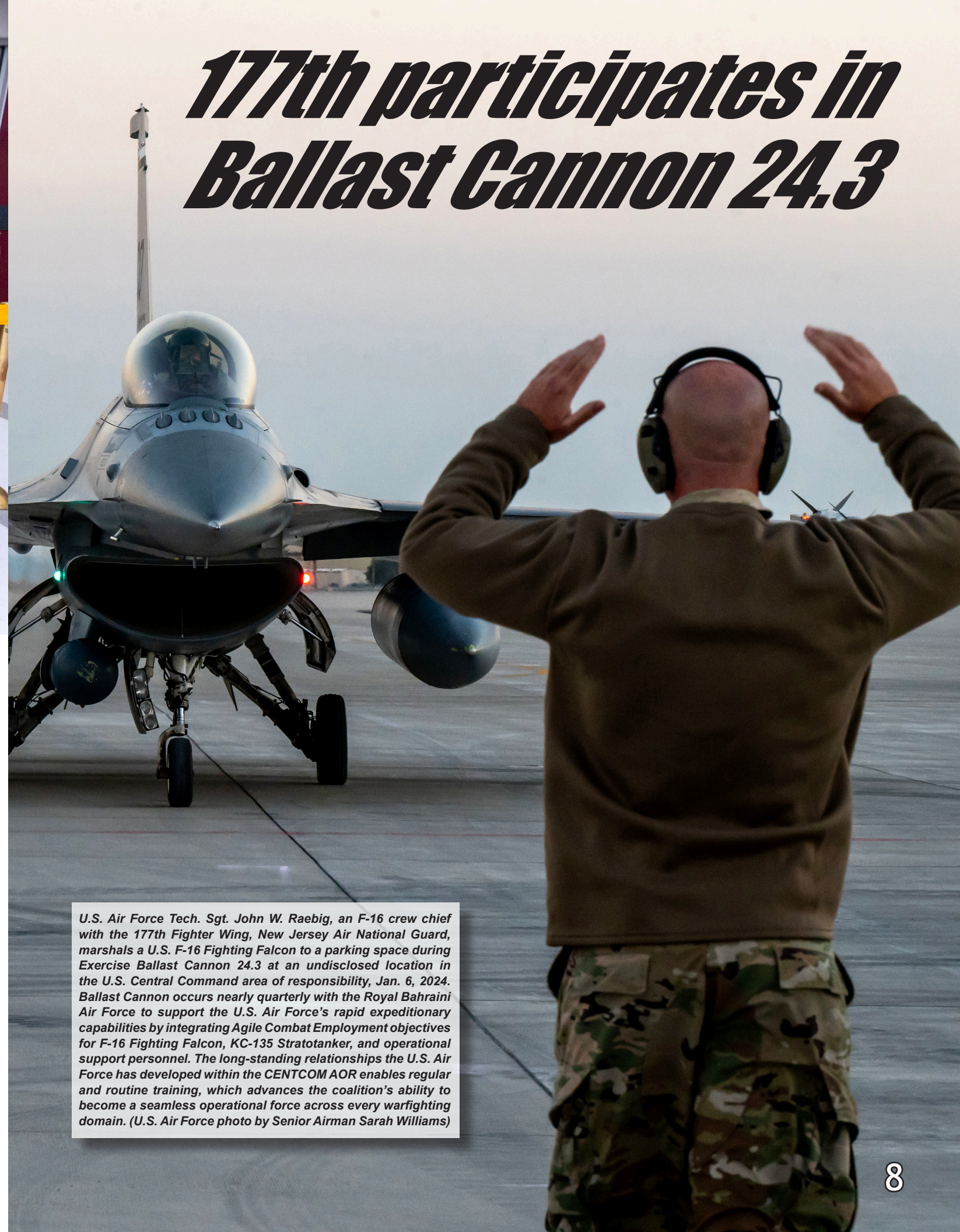
The nearly \$16 million armory provides the Soldiers of Bravo Company, 250th Brigade Support Battalion, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard with a modern, state-of-the-art facility for maintenance operations, equipment storage, classroom training, and administration. The federally funded military construction project broke ground in April 2022.

“The price of peace is eternal vigilance, and that is exactly what you are doing here,” Congressman Smith said,

addressing the Bravo Company command team. “Modern infrastructure like this new, 40,000-square foot Readiness Center is tangible evidence of the vital and ever-expanding role the Joint Base plays in defending freedom and ensuring the security of the United States.”

“It is great to see our federal investment carry such an important project from concept all the way to ribbon cutting. I look forward to seeing the positive impact this Readiness Center has on the work of servicemembers at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst for years to come and am proud to have been able to help get this project completed. We must continue to prioritize direct investments like this to deliver for our military community and our national preparedness,” said Congressman Kim.

# 177th participates in Ballast Cannon 24.3



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. John W. Raebig, an F-16 crew chief with the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, marshals a U.S. F-16 Fighting Falcon to a parking space during Exercise Ballast Cannon 24.3 at an undisclosed location in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, Jan. 6, 2024. Ballast Cannon occurs nearly quarterly with the Royal Bahraini Air Force to support the U.S. Air Force’s rapid expeditionary capabilities by integrating Agile Combat Employment objectives for F-16 Fighting Falcon, KC-135 Stratotanker, and operational support personnel. The long-standing relationships the U.S. Air Force has developed within the CENTCOM AOR enables regular and routine training, which advances the coalition’s ability to become a seamless operational force across every warfighting domain. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Sarah Williams)



# US, Bahrain showcase deployment capabilities

Story courtesy United States Air Forces Central

Ninth Air Force (Air Forces Central)’s 378th Air Expeditionary Wing and 379th Air Expeditionary Wing are executing Ballast Cannon 24.3 alongside the Royal Bahraini Air Force, Janu 6-12, 2024, in Bahrain.

As a routine exercise occurring nearly quarterly with the Royal Bahraini Air Force, this iteration supports the U.S. Air Force’s rapid expeditionary capabilities by integrating Agile Combat Employment objectives for F-16 Fighting Falcon, KC-135 Stratotanker, and operational support personnel.

The bilateral training focuses on strengthening the bonds between coalition forces and building a foundation for future engagements in support of the Combined Defense of the Arabian Peninsula. The training objectives benefiting both nations include aerial refueling, coalition command and control, and tactical integration.

“Through decades of collaboration and cooperation with our wonderful partners in the region, we have developed key relationships, bolstering our ability to integrate and employ airpower across the coalition,” said U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Quaid Quadri, 378th Air Expeditionary Wing Commander.

“Together with our allies and partners, we continue to maintain and propel forward enduring institutions and networks necessary to remain agile and effective,” Quadri continued. “By constantly integrating with our partners at the tactical edge, while still testing our expeditionary capabilities, we are building readiness and developing operational approaches that complicate the adversary’s problem as well as maintains our strategic advantage.”

The long-standing relationships the U.S. Air Force has developed within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility enables regular and routine training, which advances the coalition’s ability to become a seamless operational force across every warfighting domain.



**Top:** U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Jake Brodbeck, an F-16 crew chief with the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, inspects a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon at an undisclosed location in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility as part of Exercise Ballast Cannon, Jan. 6, 2024. **Middle:** U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Michael Ortolani, left, an F-16 Fighting Falcon crew chief with the 177th Fighter Wing, and Tech. Sgt. Jonathan Bollock, a logistics readiness squadron Airman, perform preflight checks during Exercise Ballast Cannon 24.3, Jan. 7, 2024. **Bottom:** U.S. Air Force Capt. Eliot Shapleigh, an F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot with the 177th Fighter Wing, prepares to board an F-16 Jan. 7, 2024. The exercise allowed Total Force Airmen to generate unique solutions in austere environments. (U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Sarah Williams)

# NJNG hosts SPP conference

By Lt. Col. Agneta Murnan, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

The New Jersey National Guard hosted the State Partnership Program directors of the six U.S. states whose National Guards are partnered with the Adriatic charter nations: Albania (New Jersey), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Maryland), Croatia (Minnesota), Montenegro (Maine), and North Macedonia (Vermont) at the National Aerospace Research and Technology Park, Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey, Jan. 23-24, 2024.

“As state National Guard SPP directors, we have worked closely together for years,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Kevin

“Being able to collaborate and speak to other SPP directors that have been doing the job, getting their best practices, is very, very helpful,” said U.S. Army Maj. Elise Dent, incoming SPP director for Maryland.

Murphy explained that he hopes to continue the conference annually, rotating between the A-5 partner states. This would include Ohio and Iowa National Guard representatives, who are partners with A-5 observer states Serbia and Kosovo, respectively, and could not attend this year due to scheduling conflicts.



Murphy, New Jersey SPP director. “It’s rare, though, that we can all get into the same room to share best practices and discuss how we can support each other.”

U.S. Army Maj. Patrick Enriquez, Vermont SPP director described a Western Balkans regional cyber security exercise as one such example of the programs’ interoperability.

“There are certainly times in a region like the Adriatic five region or the Balkans where we can pool resources, we can leverage one another’s expertise, and in many cases, create multilateral events to support strategic priorities for the combatant command,” said Enriquez.

“We’re trying to integrate our efforts for better efficiency, getting more done with less,” added Murphy, noting the benefits of steady and deliberate coordination. “We’re trying to get after it ourselves and do some integration before we get into the very, very big exercises.”

One of the large-scale exercises ahead includes U.S. European Command’s “DEFENDER-Europe 2025” exercise.

**U.S. Army and Air National Guard members of the State Partnership Program discuss plans to integrate efforts with partner nations at the National Aerospace Research and Technology Park, Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey, Jan. 24, 2024. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Connor Taggart)**

The Department of Defense’s State Partnership Program is managed and administered by the National Guard Bureau. It is a U.S.-sponsored security cooperation program that supports the security cooperation objectives of the United States and the geographic combatant commands by developing enduring relationships with partner countries and carrying out activities to build partner capacity, improve interoperability, and enhance U.S. access and influence while increasing the readiness of U.S. and partner forces to meet emerging challenges. The State Partnership Program began in 1993 with 13 partners. Thirty years later, the program has grown to more than 100 partner nations and is a key U.S. security cooperation tool that facilitates collaboration across all aspects of civil-military affairs.





# 141st aircrew delivers newest KC-46

*Photos and story by Donna Jeffries 108th Wing Public Affairs Office*

Citizen-Airmen with the 141st Air Refueling Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, flew the 18th KC-46 Pegasus to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Jan. 14, 2024.

Aircraft Tail Number 19-6010 is the first KC-46 to be picked up and delivered from the Boeing Everett Factory in Seattle, Washington, by an all-National Guard aircrew from the 108th Wing.

To recognize the newest additions to the Joint Base KC-46 fleet, Boeing has the crew chiefs on each delivery mission place a plaque on a commemorative board hanging in its office. Each plaque is engraved with the tanker tail number, call sign, delivery date, and the crew chiefs' names.

On this particular mission, 108th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron crew chiefs Master Sgt. Brittany Bounds and Tech. Sgt. Jesse Scala performed that honor.

The crew and wing leadership were given a tour of the factory and other facilities related to KC-46 production followed by an official handover ceremony.

The trip was a milestone for the 108th in its ongoing conversion to the KC-46 and represents an important step forward in the tanker unit's active-duty association the 305th Air Mobility Wing.

**Above: U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jesse Scala and Master Sgt. Brittany Bounds, both flying crew chiefs with the 108th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard, place a plaque depicting the delivery of the 18th KC-46 at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Jan. 18, 2024. Below: closeup of the plaque.**



# Medical refocus boosts readiness

**Photo and story by Donna Jeffries 108th Wing Public Affairs Office**

Two years ago, the 108th Wing ranked at the bottom out of 93 Air National Guard organizations in individual Medical Readiness standings.

With the implementation of a refocus initiative, they are now in the top 20.

"IMR, like many programs, is a leadership responsibility, and unit commanders, along with unit health monitors are charged with ensuring their folks are medically ready to 'fight tonight,'" said Chief Master Sgt. Andre Lazaro, senior enlisted leader, 108th Medical Group.

A unit's IMR percentages increase as more members become current in immunizations, labs, dental, and Personal Health Assessment completions with a goal of 100 percent compliance. In January 2024, the effort began in earnest to improve the wing's standings.

"We developed a process that re-engages commanders and UHMs while supporting individual wing members," said Richard Lorraine, commander, 108th MDG.

"That process, originally named IMR Day, consisted of the medical staff identifying units that were in the yellow or red and targeting them first," said Lt. Col. Melody Yung, 108th MDG medical provider, and the driving force behind the IMR Day concept.

A team consisting of a provider and noncommissioned officers review the IMR issues and during the unit training assembly the medical staff spend a day assisting them to boost their medical readiness. This system allows unit members within the same squadron to reset their due dates across the board so going

forth, everyone is due at the same time.

IMR Day became known as 'IMR Refocus,' because efforts begin before the drill weekend with medical technicians looking to see who's due and overdue in all the areas, stated Aerospace Medical Technician Staff Sgt. Brandon Beslow.

"The first step is to notify the squadron commander and provide an IMR Focus brief. Together, we develop and plan how to get their squadron's numbers up and layout a schedule for accomplishment during the unit's assigned day during the UTA weekend. The UHMS are tasked to reach out to their overdue members prior to UTA and request action items be completed,

in direct contact with unit leadership.

The chief nurse gives credit to all the medical staff in making IMR Refocus work smoothly, from nursing services, medical providers, dentists, immunizations, and administration.

"We can't do it without every single person," said Rice.

"The team puts in lots of work before, during, and after IMR Refocus," said Lazaro. "We were not only improving readiness metrics for individual units and the wing, but we were also educating our customers and maintaining the higher metrics."

"I can honestly say the medical IMR Day event during the February UTA



documented and paperwork sent to the 108th MDG staff by a set deadline. If deadlines are missed the units must provide a get-well date," said Beslow.

During the UTA, members from the same unit are assigned to chalks and given a block of time to go to medical and accomplish their personalized checklist. When they arrive, escorts show them where to go.

Everyone must checkout before leaving, which provides medical personnel the opportunity to ensure that everything was completed. The process ends with members signing the checklist.

"The key components are getting the UHMS engaged in direct contact with members to meet deadlines, and leadership support for accountability," said Yung.

To help the units during the UTA, the 108th MDG Chief Nurse, Maj. Janet Rice, troubleshoots discrepancies and claims by members that checklist items were previously turned in or done by a civilian provider. She researches if paperwork is on file to substantiate claims and remains

helped the Logistics Readiness Squadron immensely in clearing up medical issues," said Col. Janal Thomas, commander, 108th LRS. "The personalized attention the 108th MDG staff provided to our members enabled our squadron's IMR statistics to increase by almost 20 percent, making our organization able to successfully support the Wing's mission."

"After the first UTA when we applied the process, we saw the difference in numbers from Saturday to Sunday," said Yung. "For example, one unit started in the low 70 percentile in readiness and by end of Sunday's drill they were in the mid-80s. Those standing alone pulled the wing up in its overall percentage."

"To see this process working and witnessing the rewards of our hard work is a morale builder," said Staff Sgt. Kasie Stanley, a 108th MDG aerospace medical technician. "It also serves as a motivator. We see what we can do, and now have a goal to reach the top 10 in readiness in the ANG."





**Hou receives second star**  
*U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., The Adjutant General of New Jersey, watches as her two-star general's flag is unfurled during her promotion ceremony at National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, Feb. 3, 2024. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)*



# THIS IS THE WAY



U.S. Army Spc. Juan N. Giraldo Estrada with Able Company, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, New Jersey Army National Guard, teach Cub Scouts how to properly fold the American flag at Conlon Hall, Bergen Field, New Jersey, Feb. 6, 2024. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Seth Cohen)

## Cyprus State Partnership begins new phase

By Capt John Hoeffcker, 204th Intelligence Squadron, 108th Wing

In February 2024, security cooperation and training between the New Jersey National Guard and Republic of Cyprus commenced in full swing.

New Jersey National Guard teams comprised of medical, cyber, civil engineering and information analysis visited Cyprus to train their Cypriot counterparts in their respective fields. Of note, is the specialized information analysis training team, comprised of certified air advisors from the 204th Intelligence Squadron, 108th Wing, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey.

traveled to Cyprus to conduct planning workshops, key leader engagements, and develop training plans.

“What is unique about our information analysis training team is that we are literally building the capacity of our Cypriot partners. Overall, the Cypriot military is ground-maneuver-based, and does not have an information analysis infrastructure built into their operations and planning,” said Hoff. “We’re essentially building the information analytics occupation specialty code for their joint National Guard.”

During last year’s working groups, the Cypriot National Guard general staff hand-picked 20 of their best and brightest from the Cypriot Army, Air Force, Navy, and Special Operations community.

“We will have the same 20 students all year long and have created a four-phased training program. Each phase consists of a one-week block of instruction. Phase one consists of critical thinking and structured analytical techniques; phase two consists of information preparation of the operating environment; phase three is current information briefs, threat reporting and military decision-making process; and phase four is fundamentals of open-source analysis. Upon completion of all four phases, students will be considered Basic Information Analyst qualified, and will serve as the initial group of cadre responsible for replicating this training into their respective branch of service,” said Hoff.

The National Guard State Partnership Program is a Department of Defense initiative that supports the Security Cooperation objectives of the United States by developing relationships with partner countries. State Partnership missions focus on building partner nation military capacity, improving interoperability and enhancing U.S. relations.

The program was established in 1993 and has grown to more than 100 partner nations from all parts of the world. The National Guard of each state is paired with a partner nation that shares similar missions, equipment, resources, and skills sets to work together and conduct military training, exercises, and key leadership engagements.



The first group of Cypriot students begin the Information Analysis Qualification training pipeline. Cypriot Army, Air Force, Navy, and Special Operations members submitted applications with 20 being selected to attend the year-long training program comprised of four, one-week courses covering critical thinking, information operations, current information and threat briefings, and military decision making processes. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Natalia Howard)

“An air advisor’s core mission is to impart professional aviation knowledge and skills to foreign partnership nations to improve their airpower capabilities to meet both U.S. and partner nation objectives. They must graduate from the four-week Air Advisor Qualification course, taught at JB MDL, where they receive specialized training to apply aviation support and operational experience to train, advise, assist, and equip partner nations,” said Capt. John Hoff, State Partnership Program Information Analysis officer-in-charge, 204th IS.

While training began in January, the stage was set in 2023 when the NJNG entered into a State Partnership agreement with Cyprus. The training lines of effort established within this partnership include all-source information analysis, explosive ordinance disposal, cyber security, and tactical medical training. Throughout last year, New Jersey Guardsman



Cypriot Military Students and NJNG Soldiers and Airmen pose for a group photo at the 20th Armored Brigade Headquarters, Nicosia, Cyprus, Feb. 9, 2024. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Natalia Howard)



# LIVE FIRE



**U.S. Army Soldiers of Charlie Battery, 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, conduct a live-fire exercise utilizing the M777 towed 155 mm howitzer, at Fort Bliss, Texas, Feb. 16, 2024. The 44th IBCT is conducting training exercises at multiple sites at Fort Bliss. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Capt. Kyle Marr)**



**Above: U.S. Army Soldiers of 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, load a projectile into a M777.**

**Below: Charlie Battery Soldiers fire an M777. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis)**





# SHADOW LAUNCH



U.S. Army Soldiers of Delta Company, 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, prepare to launch the AAI RQ-7 Shadow unmanned aerial vehicle, at McGregor Base Camp, New Mexico, Feb. 19, 2024. The 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, is conducting training exercises at multiple sites at Fort Bliss, Texas in preparation for deployment in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis)



# COMBINED LIVE FIRE EXERCISE

U.S. Army Soldiers of Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, and 1st Battalion, 181st Infantry Regiment, Massachusetts National Guard, joined forces for day and night live fire exercises at Fort Bliss, Texas, Feb. 28-29, 2024. The exercise was part of a combined arms live fire exercise as the 44th IBCT prepares for deployment in support of U.S. Central Command's Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis)



# NJNG supports Albania’s new NATO Base

By 1st Lt. Tyshawn Jenkins, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office



KUÇOVA, Albania – Service members of the New Jersey National Guard and Albanian Armed Forces met March 4, 2024 to commemorate the inauguration of Republic of Albania’s NATO air base in Kuçova, Albania.

“The significance of the armed forces and the government to be an active partner increases the capacity of NATO, the U.S., and all our allies in the region to make the world a safer place,” said U. S. Air Force Colonel Yvonne L. Mays, Chief of Staff-Air, New Jersey Air National Guard. “Albania’s location, size, and will of the armed forces is crucial towards sustaining peace in the region.”

The inauguration ceremony, attended by high-ranking officials including Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, showcased the air base’s transformation into a state-of-the-art operational hub capable of hosting and training with various fighter jets.

The event saw a symbolic display of military proficiency with a flyover of two U.S. F-16s and two F-35s, alongside two Eurofighters from Aviano Air Base in Italy. This showcase was a collaborative effort between NATO allies.

“This base stands as a monument of cooperation, solidarity, cohesion and unity among the Allies and Albanian commitment to collective defense,” Rama said. “The construction of this base, as well as our engagement in NATO, are not only investments in our defense, but also in the future of our children and the generations that will come after us; they are proof of our commitment to work together with our allies to build a safer world for all.”

The base, equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and infrastructure, will be a hub for joint training exercises, intelligence sharing, and coordinated operations among NATO member states. Albania’s accession to NATO in 2009 and its candidacy for EU membership underscore its evolving role as a critical player in regional security dynamics.

“The inauguration of the NATO base in Albania marks

a significant milestone in the alliance’s ongoing efforts to strengthen cooperation and solidarity among member states, ensuring a credible and effective defense posture in an unpredictable security environment,” Mays said.

Kuçova is about 52 miles south of the Albanian capital of Tirana. The air base is a testament to Albania’s commitment to modernizing its defense infrastructure and enhancing its strategic position in the region.

“Albania is a valued ally with a long history of stepping up to support NATO allies and partners you contribute to the multi-national forces helping to deter any aggression,” said NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. “Albania also plays a key role in promoting stability and corporation across the Western Balkans a region of strategic important to NATO. All these strong contributions show Albania’s commitment to our alliance.”

The robust NJNG staff presence at the event underscored the State Partnership Program between New Jersey and Albania, which has grown over more than two decades since the fall of communism in the Western Balkans.

“This move adds to global security and further enforces democratic values through the support of the military,” said Col. Barbara Brown, director, J9 Joint Resiliency, NJNG.

The Department of Defense's State Partnership Program is managed and administered by the National Guard Bureau. It is a U.S.-sponsored security cooperation program that supports the security cooperation objectives of the United States and the geographic combatant commands by developing enduring relationships with partner countries and carrying out activities to build partner capacity, improve interoperability, and enhance U.S. access and influence while increasing the readiness of U.S. and partner forces to meet emerging challenges. The State Partnership Program began in 1993 with 13 partners. Thirty years later, the program has grown to more than 100 partner nations and is an essential U.S. security cooperation tool that facilitates collaboration across all aspects of civil-military affairs.

# 170th Air Refueling Squadron activated

Story by 1st Lt. Michael Hong, 108th Wing Public Affairs Office

The New Jersey Air National Guard’s 108th Wing activated its newest unit – the 170th Air Refueling Squadron – at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, March 7, 2024.

Guided by the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, the new unit’s nearly 60 Citizen-Airmen will perform aerial refueling missions in association with the active duty 305th Air Mobility Wing. Through this arrangement, the 170th Air Refueling Squadron, alongside the 108th Wing's 141st Air Refueling Squadron, will provide aircrew to help operate the KC-46 Pegasus tankers.

The two squadrons now join the 305th's two squadrons to complete an embedded classic association, with each of the wings contributing two squadrons toward the overall conventional and strategic efforts.

“These are exciting times,” said Col. Eric A. Guttormsen, 108th Wing commander. “I have no doubt our Airmen will serve with character and a great sense of purpose, establishing strong foundations and supporting our forces’ global mobility with excellence.”

The numeric unit designation of the 170th Air Refueling Squadron was derived from the 170th Air Refueling Group previously based at McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey. The squadron itself, however, explained 108th Operations Group



U.S. Air Force Col. William Liess, commander, 108th Operations Group, left, presents the 170th Air Refueling Squadron guidon to Lt. Col Matthew Secko, right, the 170th ARS first commander, during the 170th assumption of command ceremony March 7, 2024 at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Tech. Sgt Anna-kay Ellis)

Commander Col. William A. Liess is new.

“The history of the 170th Air Refueling Squadron starts today,” said Liess. “There were countless individuals involved with getting the unit to this point of activation. Now we have a tremendous opportunity to serve our state and nation with the Air National Guard’s newest squadron and its newest tanker aircraft.”

During the ceremony, Liess introduced the squadron’s first commander, Lt. Col. Matthew J. Secko. “It is a privilege and an honor to start this squadron,” said Secko. “Our first members bring talents and experience to the squadron from many backgrounds, and they will each make a difference.”

At the end of the ceremony, Secko presented unit members with the new squadron patch, which was selected from a wing-wide design contest.

“It’s a good day,” said Liess. “This is a team day.”



Members of the 170th Air Refueling Squadron receive their squadron patches from Lt. Col Matthew Secko, 170th ARS commander, left, during the 170th assumption of command ceremony at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, March 7, 2024. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Tech. Sgt Anna-kay Ellis)



# JOINT AGENCY TURNOUT FOR CST TRAINING

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARK C. OLSEN  
NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

U.S. Army Sgt. Eric J. Boyer, survey team member, 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team, New Jersey National Guard, surveys the CURE Insurance Arena during the Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High Yield Explosives Characterization, Exploitation, and Mitigation Course – JCCEM in Trenton, New Jersey, March 28, 2024.



The New Jersey National Guard’s 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team stare at the CURE Insurance Arena in Trenton, New Jersey.

In just a few hours, more than 10,000 people will crowd the facility to listen to the vice president of the United States.

The FBI has just received intelligence that a well-resourced domestic terrorist group has planted bombs, including one with cesium-137 – a radioactive isotope –in the arena.

The entire structure, from the catwalks crisscrossing above the floor; the various rooms and suites; the concession stands; the service areas; everything has to be searched.

The clock is ticking. Fortunately, the threat isn’t real. This time.

Four days of interagency training, March 25-28, 2024, brought together the 21st WMD-CST with Soldiers and Airmen from the 31st WMD-CST, Delaware National Guard, and the 101st WMD-CST, Idaho National Guard; explosive ordnance disposal technicians from the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard; U.S. Coast Guardsmen from the Atlantic Strike Team; New Jersey State Police; New Jersey Department of Corrections, and FBI special agent bomb technicians and a FBI weapons of mass destruction coordinator in a Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High Yield Explosives



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Russell J. Bongiovanni, explosive ordnance disposal technician, 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, places a pulsed X-ray generator in front of a simulated explosive device during the Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High Yield Explosives Characterization, Exploitation, and Mitigation Course at the CURE Insurance Arena in Trenton, New Jersey, March 27, 2024. The participants were placed in multi-agency teams and sent to investigate mock simulated CBRN situations and then work through a solution to address the hazards.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Robert Wittig, right, and Senior Airman Russell J. Bongiovanni, both explosive ordnance disposal technicians with the 177th Fighter Wing, NJANG, review an X-ray of a simulated explosive device at the CURE Insurance Arena in Trenton, New Jersey, March 27, 2024.

Characterization, Exploitation, and Mitigation Course. “The whole intent of the course is interoperability at the operations level,” said Carrie Hiser Sivley, president, Eniwetok Group, LLC – the contractor running the course. “We’re talking about the folks that are on the ground that are actually out doing the work, that do the sweeps, that do the responses.”

That means, when WMD-CST units do their sweeps and come across certain hazards, they know who to reach back to remedy those hazards so that they can continue their sweeps.

The participants spent the first two days of the National Guard Bureau-funded course in the classroom reviewing responses to chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive threats.

On March 27, the participants, which divided into four groups, assembled at the CURE Insurance Arena for the practical, hands-on training.

“It’s going to be focused on

realistic situations that have already happened,” said U.S. Army Sgt. Eric J. Boyer, survey team member, 21st WMD-CST.

Units involved in a domestic weapons of mass destruction response must be synchronized in their response and actions.

“They’re doing a parking lot sweep training lane that has a radiation component,” said Mark Stewart, a trainer with the Eniwetok Group. “They’re doing an improvised explosive lane; a biological toxin lane, and chemical dispersal lane.”

Each group discusses how they would respond to the threat each training lane poses, what actions they would take, and what they would do to mitigate the threat. Essentially, resolve any issues before an actual incident.

In the case of the 177th Fighter Wing explosive ordnance disposal technicians, that meant putting on their EOD-10E bomb suit and placing a pulsed X-ray generator between a simulated explosive device and a sensor panel. Once the panel is exposed it transmits an image to a laptop that shows what is inside the package. From there, the 177th EOD technicians discuss courses of action with their New Jersey State Police counterparts.

“The biggest take away is the level of communication necessary for these kinds of operations and how important it is to fully understand the capabilities of these other units and what assets might be available to you when something bad happens,” said U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Russell J. Bongiovanni, EOD technician, 177th Fighter Wing.

The last day was the practical exercise. “We’re gonna be doing a JHAT, which is a joint hazardous assessment team,” said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Nicky Lam, survey team chief, 21st WMD-CST. “We’re gonna be clearing the CURE Arena of all potential hazards that can pertain to CBRNE. We’re going to work with the FBI and state police.”

The Delaware, Idaho, and New Jersey WMD-CST survey team members, along with the Coast Guardsmen sweep the arena



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Nicky Lam, survey team chief, left, watches as Sgt. Eric J. Boyer, survey team member, center, both with the 21st WMD-CST, NJNG, uses a spectroscopic personal radiation detector while Staff Sgt. Russel L. Fiske, 31st WMD-CST, Delaware National Guard, uses a hand-held detector at the CURE Insurance Arena in Trenton, New Jersey, March 28, 2024.

with handheld detection equipment. Once they locate simulated devices, New Jersey State Police; FBI special agent bomb technicians and a weapons of mass destruction coordinator are brought in to respond and mitigate the device.

**“It’s going to be focused on realistic situations that have already happened.”**

**SGT. ERIC J. BOYER  
SURVEY TEAM MEMBER  
21ST WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION-  
CIVIL SUPPORT TEAM**

of responsibility – their backyard – to ensure one of the most important lessons from the class is effectively implemented.

“I would like to take back some point of contacts so that we have more opportunities to train with other units and other agencies throughout the region,” said Lam.

“This simulated a Joint Hazard Assessment Team sweep of the CURE Insurance Arena that was designed to make sure that there were no threats that could be encountered if a VIP, in this case, notionally the vice president, were to be attending an event here,” said Sivley. “They did find three threats here and there were problems to solve that were radiological in nature. We had a hostage situation as well.”

The WMD-CST must be able to work with local, state, and federal partners in their area



# Opening Day flyover



Two U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons with the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, perform a flyover while the 177th's Honor Guard present the colors during the national anthem at the Philadelphia Phillies Opening Day ceremony at Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 29, 2024. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Schwenk)





## 44th IBCT takes command of Task Force Guardian

**Photo and story by  
Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis  
Combined Joint Task Force  
Operation Inherent Resolve**

The transfer of authority for Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve's Task Force Guardian was conducted between

the commands of the New Jersey Army National Guard's 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team and 10th Mountain Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team at Erbil Air Base, Iraq, April 4, 2024. The ceremony was presided over by Maj. Gen. J.B. Vowell, CJTF-OIR commander.

The 44th IBCT, commanded by Col. Brian J. Stramaglia, assumed command of Task Force Guardian from the outgoing 2nd BCT, 10th Mountain Division commander, Col. Scott D. Wence. This command provides force protection and helps to advise, assist, and enable partner forces to defeat Daesh in designated areas of Iraq and Syria as part of the CJTF-OIR mission, setting the conditions for long-term security and stability in the region.

"This is a great responsibility that I'm confident in meeting.

*U.S. Army Col. Brian J. Stramaglia, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, second from left, assumes command of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve's Task Force Guardian at Erbil Air Base, Iraq, April 4, 2024.*

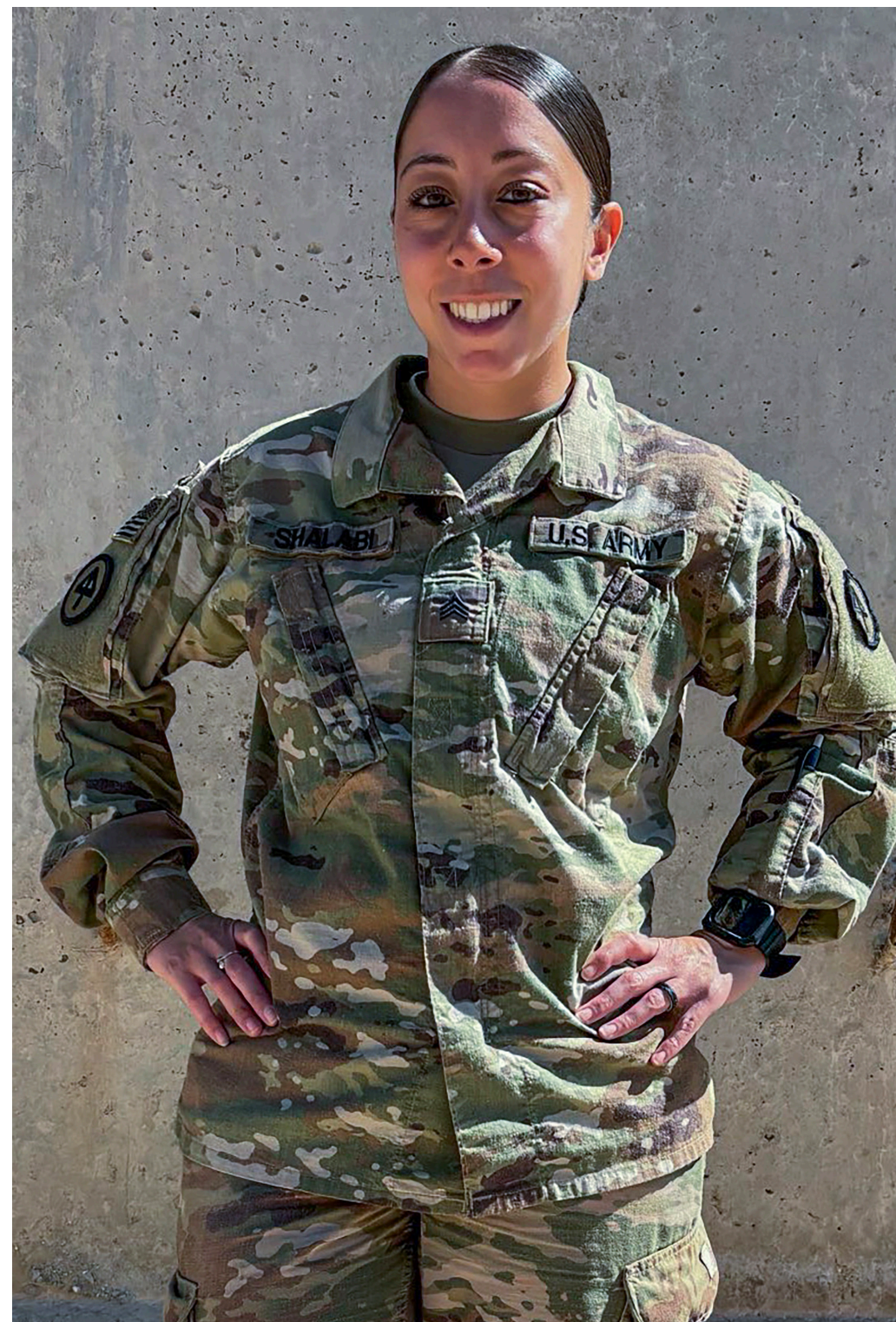
This is our brigade's largest deployment since 2008, and we're ready to meet the challenges in front of us in order to continue the great legacy of our organization," said Stramaglia. "I look forward to continuing the excellent work of Col. Wence, as well as our ongoing partnership with our host nation and coalition partners during our time here. Our work will go a long way in ensuring long-term security and prosperity for the people of Iraq and Syria. We are absolutely one mission, many nations."

"We need leadership who can perform and adapt under external pressure in an environment like this, and these two are the epitome of that and they performed superbly," said Vowell. "Nobody is in contact across the globe like this unit. This leadership unit had to adapt, had to overcome, had to improvise, and innovate during all this contact, and that is a testament to the leadership of these individuals."

"In the Jersey Blues – their tradition dating back to the Revolutionary War – with Col. Stramaglia and CSM Kirkpatrick, we have an incredible team who have done this before. I am confident that they are proven, competent, and committed to continue this mission and the legacy of those before them, and I know they are up to the task."

## Guardisman saves contractor's arm in Syria

**Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis, Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve**



Picking up her meal at a market in Northeast Syria, U.S. Army Sgt. Lauren Shalabi wasn't expecting chaos.

Her daily routine on March 24, was abruptly interrupted when the market owner rushed over to her asking for help because one of his workers was severely injured.

Shalabi, an automated logistical specialist with the 250th Brigade Support Battalion, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, was quick to respond, finding the man with his severely damaged right arm stuck in a generator. Utilizing her experience and tactical combat casualty care training, she pulled the man from the generator, rendered aid, and moved him to safer location, all the while communicating in Arabic.

A six-year veteran police officer with the Jersey City Police Department, Shalabi continued to treat the victim while her teammates ran to get help from the medical personnel at the nearest coalition medical facility. When help arrived, she continued to assist as a translator and got the casualty transported to the facility for treatment.

"My civilian and military training really came together. Our very own Staff Sgt. Polanco provided an incredible class when responding to any medical emergencies and as a police officer in Jersey City, I have encountered many gunshot wounds, stabbings, and other medical emergencies which require me to learn and act quickly under pressure," said Shalabi. "I feel thankful that I could help another person. Thanks to our good team at the Role 1, this man has made a full recovery and is able to work again."

For her heroic actions, Shalabi was awarded an Army Commendation Medal.

"Sgt. Shalabi represents the best of the 250th BSB, 44th IBCT, and the New Jersey Army National Guard," said Lt. Col. James Brettell, 250th BSB commander. "She exemplifies the capability that part-time National Guard Soldiers bring with them.

She used her skills acquired as a Jersey City police officer to undoubtedly save that man's arm, and possibly his life. She was on ground for less than a month and already proved herself a hero. Words can't express how proud I am of her and her actions."



# BECOMING THE BEST WARRIOR



## Coalition partners perform emergency surgery

*Story and photos by Capt. Kyle Marr, Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve*

U.S. Army Lt. Col. Karl J. Coutinho and coalition partners performed a significant surgical feat at coalition medical facility, Erbil Air Base, Iraq, April 19, 2024.

Coutinho led a team of Operation Inherent Resolve coalition surgeons in the first emergency surgery at Erbil's medical facility in more than three years, an exploration and bilateral orchiopexy. The procedure demonstrated the coalition forces' interoperability and commitment to delivering medical care under challenging circumstances.

The U.S. service member was transported by aircraft from Baghdad to Erbil in order to be treated by Coutinho, who is a the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team's brigade surgeon and a practicing urologist in New Jersey. Along with Sgt. 1st Class Samantha C. Kirk, also with the 44th IBCT, U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdrs. Julianne Oates and Justin Frisenda, and German Army Lt. Col. Sebastian Fischer, the team performed a successful two-hour procedure. The service member was discharged from EAB's medical facility shortly after the completion of the surgery, and is expected to make a full recovery.

"It was a pleasure to be a part of this patient's care, it was great to see our operating room in action, and to see our hard work and training come to fruition," said Oates who served as a nurse anesthetist.

The precise nature of the procedure reaffirms the multi-national coalition's ability to maintain skilled medical teams and provide advanced healthcare at a moment's notice.

Fischer, an anesthesiologist, highlighted the significance of international cooperation, stating: "I'm proud and happy to be part of a multinational surgery and work with my international colleagues."

As Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve continues its mission, the surgical milestone at Erbil Air Base stands as a testament to the professionalism of its medical personnel and their collective determination to provide excellent care in emergency circumstances.

"Medicine during a deployment requires a multidisciplinary approach," said Coutinho. "A cross coalition and multi-branch surgical team seems complex, but rehearsals and exercises prepared us to work as one unit. Regardless of where we are from, we all speak the same language of medicine."



**Surgeons U.S. Army Lt. Col. Karl Coutinho, left, and U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Justin Frisenda perform an exploration and bilateral orchiopexy on a U.S. service member at Erbil Air Base, Iraq, April 19, 2024. The procedure was a rare emergency surgery conducted at EAB by coalition partners of the U.S. Army, Navy, and German Army.**



**U.S. Army Sgt. Evan D. Bostrom, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, treats a simulated casualty during the stress shoot/warrior tasks portion of the New Jersey Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, April 24, 2024. During the competition – April 22-25 – the six Soldiers and five noncommissioned officers demonstrate their adaptiveness, resilience, lethality, and the readiness to respond to future threats. The top Soldier and NCO will challenge seven other states' winners at Region I Best Warrior Competition at Camp Smith, New York, May 13-16, 2024. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)**





**Above:** U.S. Army Sgt. Shaun A. Hollenkamp, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, fires an M4 carbine during the M4 and M17 qualification at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, April 23, 2024.

**Below:** U.S. Army Spc. Kristopher Piowarczyk, 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, returns fire during the stress shoot/warrior tasks portion April 24, 2024. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)



**Above:** U.S. Army Soldiers compete in the 12-mile ruck march – the final event of the New Jersey Army National Guard's's Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, April 25, 2024.

**Below:** NJARNG Best Warrior Competition winners Sgt. Shaun A. Hollenkamp, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, second from left, and Spc. Michael J. Schweyher, 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion, center, pose for a photo April 25, 2024. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Sgt. Michael Schwenk)



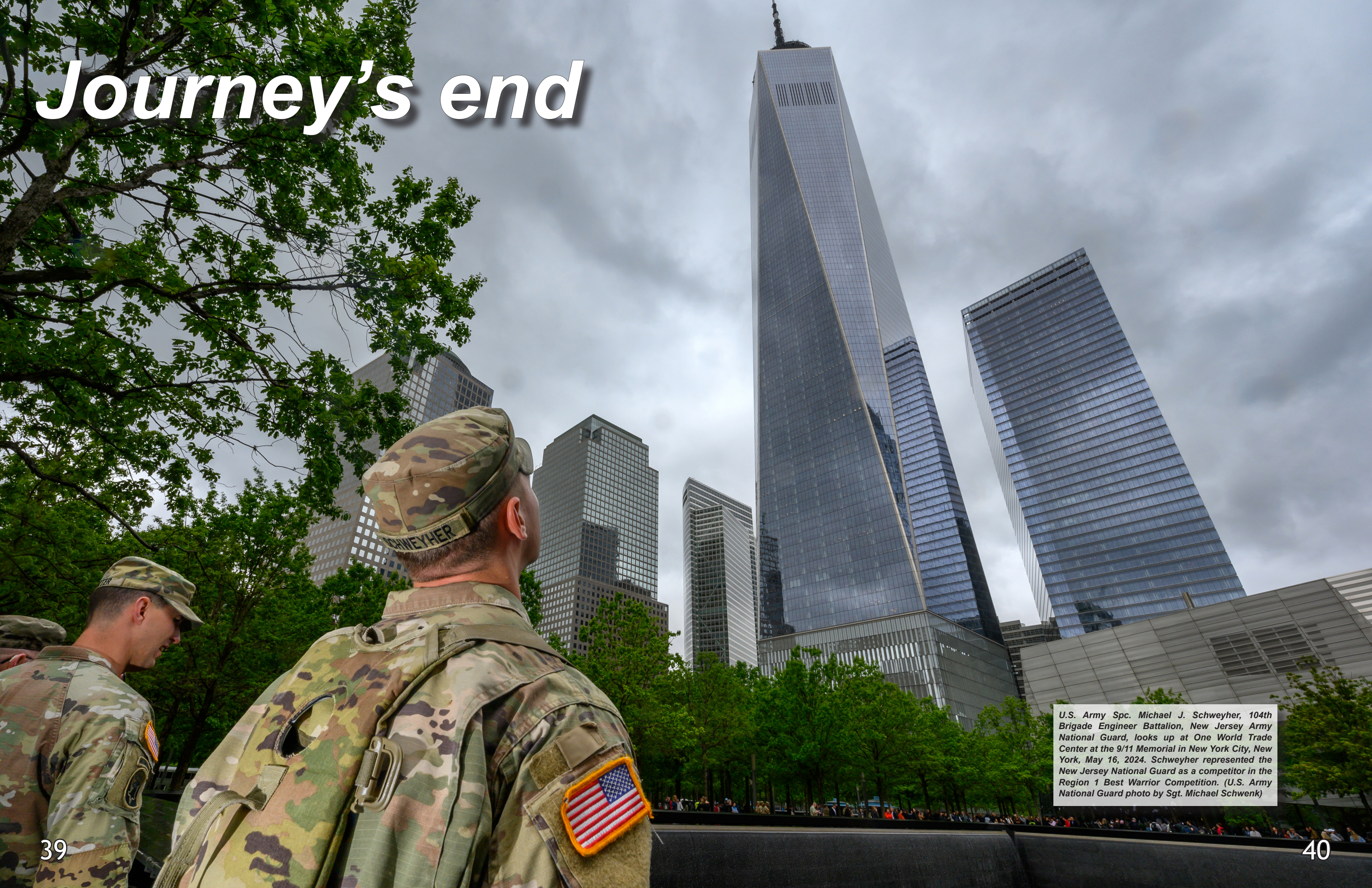


# PATCHING CEREMONY



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Task Force Guardian conduct a deployment patching ceremony in northern Iraq, April 29, 2024. The patching ceremony is a military tradition in which each Soldier, on their deployment, receives the shoulder sleeve insignia of their respective unit commonly referred to as a 'deployment patch.' The patch is worn on a Soldier's right arm underneath the American flag and represents having served on a designated deployment. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis)





# *Journey's end*

*U.S. Army Spc. Michael J. Schweyher, 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion, New Jersey Army National Guard, looks up at One World Trade Center at the 9/11 Memorial in New York City, New York, May 16, 2024. Schweyher represented the New Jersey National Guard as a competitor in the Region 1 Best Warrior Competition. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Schwenk)*



# AERIAL GUNNERY TRAINING

PHOTOS BY SGT. MICHAEL SCHWENK  
NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE



*U.S. Army Spc. Michael Hicks, a UH-60 crew chief with the 1st Battalion, 150th Assault Helicopter Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, familiarizes with the M240H machine gun mounted on a UH-60M Black Hawk on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, May 17, 2024. Crew chiefs conduct Table VI to qualify in aerial gunnery.*



*Above: U.S. Army Sgt. John D. Whritenour, a UH-60 crew chief with the 150th Assault Helicopter Regiment, prepares 7.62mm ammunition for the M240H machine gun before aerial gunnery training on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, May 17, 2024.*

*Below: U.S. Army Sgt. John D. Whritenour fires a M240H machine gun from a UH-60M Black Hawk on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, May 17, 2024. Crew chiefs conduct Table VI to qualify in aerial gunnery.*





# Task Force Redleg LFX



*U.S. Army Soldiers of Bravo Battery, 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, conduct a live-fire exercise with the M119 howitzer, in Iraq, May 28, 2024. The exercise was conducted in order to maintain proficiency and readiness in sup-port of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis)*



# 177TH PARTICIPATES IN SENTRY ALOHA

PHOTOS AND STORY BY  
AIRMAN 1ST CLASS CONNOR TAGGART  
177TH FIGHTER WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE



The 177th Fighter Wing, alongside aviation units from across the United States, participated in Sentry Aloha 24-2 from May 27 to June 14 at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

The exercise, facilitated by the 154th Wing, Hawaii Air National Guard, integrated Air National Guard forces and fostered collaboration with active-duty Air Force assets and other Department of Defense components.

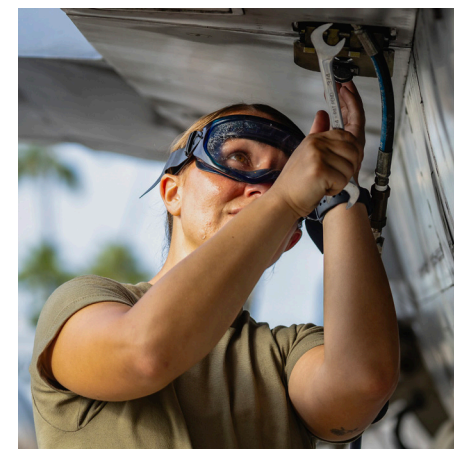
This year's second iteration of Sentry Aloha was built around distributed mission planning and operations. This concept enabled participants to operate with heightened levels of autonomy as warfighters accomplished a series of combat objectives.

U.S. Air Force Maj. Michael Oliver, Sentry Aloha exercise director, said this strategic shift challenged participants to employ decentralized and flexible practices in dynamic combat environments while facing the threat of advanced enemy aircraft.

Daily sorties conducted during Sentry Aloha centered on intensive air-to-air combat simulations, engaging adversarial and friendly forces.

"Sentry Aloha provided us with incredible training we wouldn't have otherwise received while at home-station, such as fighter integration tactics between F-16s, F-22s and F-35s," said Lt. Col.

*Above: A U.S. Air Force crew chief with the 177th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard, signals an 177th Fighter Wing F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot to hold prior to takeoff at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, June 5, 2024. Below: U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Erin C. Levari, a crew chief with the 177th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, prepares an F-16 for takeoff June 6, 2024.*



Michael Long, 119th Fighter Squadron commander, 177th Fighter Wing. "It's been a terrific blend of aircraft, with the right number of fighters in the sky to optimize training."

The exercise also provided a testing ground for Agile Combat Employment techniques, enabling units to disperse across multiple locations on the Hawaiian Islands.

"It allowed us to keep our forces separated and safe in a contested

environment, preparing us to meet up effectively in airspace and execute missions," said Capt. Joe Pitts, 119th Fighter Squadron F-16 pilot.

"Unlike Red Flag exercises, where operators are constrained based on the number of aircraft participating, Sentry Aloha permitted pilots to fully train to Mission Design Series-specific tactics in a multi-MDS environment," Long stated.

Sentry Aloha prepares U.S. forces for combat ensuring they are ready to respond to any challenge with the effective integration of joint forces.

Each 177th member at Sentry Aloha displayed the "One Team, One Fight," philosophy committing themselves to the team's overall success keeping aircraft and aircrews operational and getting airpower where it was needed the most.

"It takes everyone as a team to get together to make these airplanes fly and to get American airpower downrange where we need it," said Pitts.

For the 177th, Sentry Aloha not only enhanced operational readiness but also strengthened members' ability to collaborate across military branches.

"Participating in exercises like Sentry Aloha allows us to perfect our techniques and integrate seamlessly with other DoD assets, paving the way for effective joint operations in future missions," said Pitts.



# Securing the future

Story and photo by Tech. Sgt. Anna-kay Ellis, 108th Wing Public Affairs Office

Every year, millions of Americans have their personal data compromised online. On June 8, 2024, the 140th Cyber Operations Squadron held an open house to educate unit members on the common cyber dangers they may encounter.

The event, held at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, also served as an opportunity to engage with members who are interested in a cyber career. "We are always on the lookout for members who are interested in joining our mission," said Senior Master Sgt. Christopher Motta, 140th COS senior enlisted leader.

Cybersecurity careers are expected to grow by 32 percent from 2022-2032, according to the U.S. Bureau of labor statistics.

Held during the 108th Wing's June Unit Training Assembly, the open house was a collaboration between the Wing's Mentoring Council and the 140th COS. The forum included two briefings on the unit's mission, followed by demonstrations with real-world devices used by adversaries. The attendees learned that constant accessibility to Wi-Fi, while undoubtedly a great convenience, can be easily exploited by malicious actors.

Motta stated that these professional networks "use a variety of tactics, techniques, and procedures to capitalize on vulnerabilities, gain unauthorized access, exfiltrate data, disrupt services, or cause damage to systems and networks."

Most pointedly, creating rogue access points use small hardware devices like a Wi-Fi Pineapple. Rogue access points are illegitimate Wi-Fi networks designed to mirror legitimate ones, thereby luring unsuspecting users into connecting.

"Connecting to a Wi-Fi Pineapple can have serious consequences," said Motta.



**U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Michael Gavin, 140th Cyber Warfare Operator, New Jersey Air National Guard, presents at the 140th Cyber Operations Squadron Open House at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, June 8, 2024. The open house event included interactive demonstrations promoting cybersecurity and safety online.**

"Attackers can intercept and manipulate your network traffic. It can expose sensitive information, compromise your device, and enable unauthorized access to your online accounts."

The risk and challenges of cyber-attacks are omnipresent. So much so that the Office of the National Cyber Director presented its first-ever report on the cyber security posture of the United States to the President and Congress. The 2024 report identified challenges including the increased risk to critical infrastructure and supply chain, and increased incidents of ransomware that pose significant threats to U.S. national security, public safety, and economic prosperity. To stymie such challenges, the Biden-Harris administration recommends recruiting and positioning the best talent in cyberspace, in both the public and private sector, amongst other measures.

As one of 16 Air National Guard

Cyber Protection Teams that defend networks and systems against threats, the 140th COS has proven itself to be a formidable ally in the fight against cyber-attacks. Recognized in Congress for its work with State Partner Nation Albania, the unit is accustomed to conducting workshops in an effort to build global resilience in cybersecurity.

Even if you're not a cybersecurity expert, "it is important to be cautious when connecting to Wi-Fi networks, especially public ones," said Motta. "You should always use strong passwords, enable encryption, and avoid transmitting sensitive information over unsecured networks. Additionally, you should regularly monitor your devices for signs of infection and take appropriate security measures, such as using antivirus software and keeping your software up to date."



# PINEY DEVIL TESTS CIVIL ENGINEERS

Story by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Merlock  
Photo by Senior Airman Darion Boyd  
177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office

Civil engineer Airmen from the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, and the 171st Air Refueling Wing, Pennsylvania Air National Guard, participated in the Piney Devil Prime Base Engineer Emergency Force (Prime BEEF) exercise at the 177th Fighter Wing June 6-9, 2024.

The exercise consisted of both classroom lectures and the performance of taskings to test their ability to provide the engineering support required to establish an airbase and bed down both people and aircraft.

"We're a Prime BEEF squadron. Our Job is to go repair bases. If it's not there, we're going to make it," said Lt. Col. Lucas Smith, commander of the 177th Civil Engineer Squadron. "So as a Prime BEEF team, we have to do a 96-hour training event roughly every four years. This exercise allows us to provide Prime BEEF training to the members that were excused from last year's training in Alaska and the members that are new to our squadron."

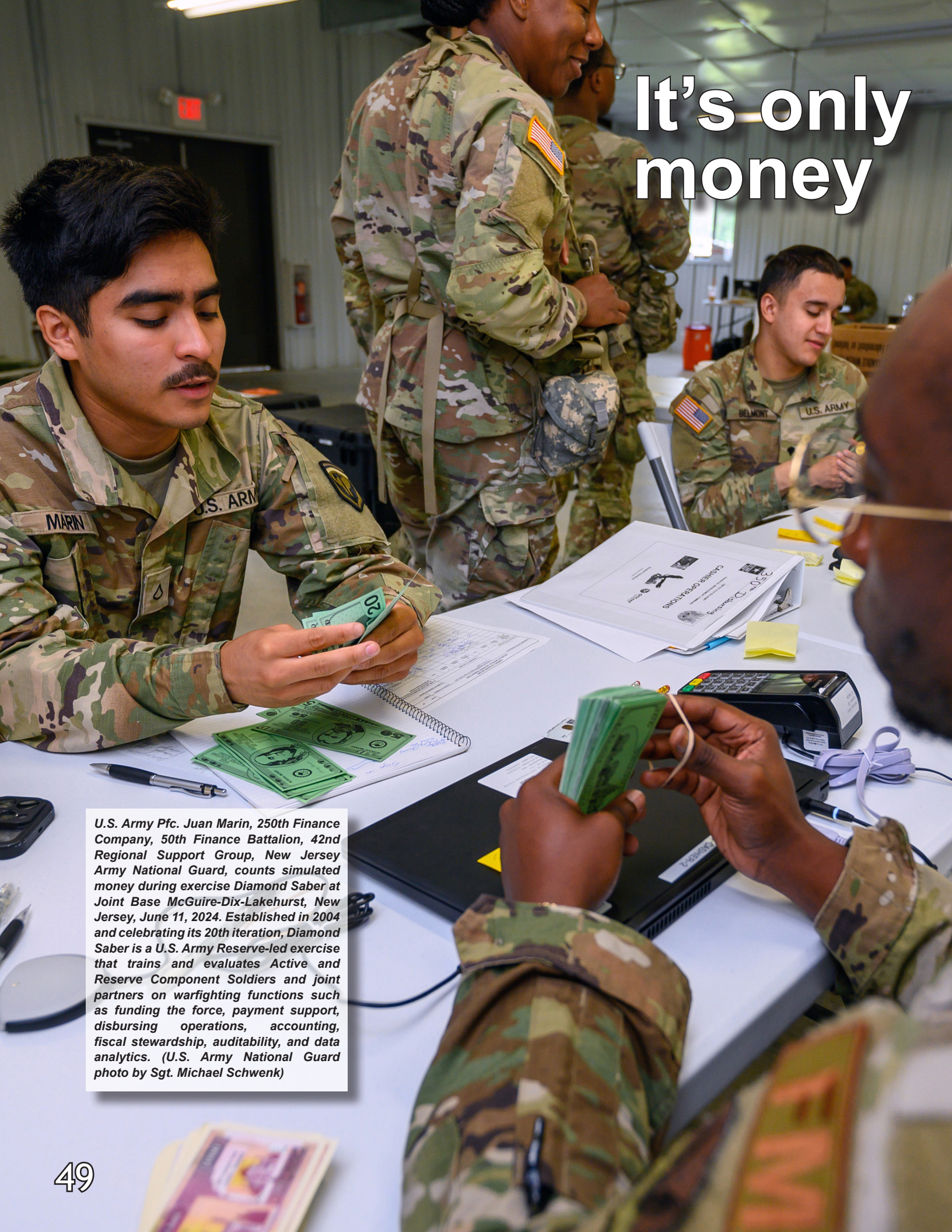
During the exercise, Airmen also erected a Disaster Relief Beddown System tent and traveled to Warren Grove Range on UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, where they performed land navigation and simulated combat exercises against peer-level opposing forces.

"They have to leave the base and do land navigation through the Pinelands to find somebody, with a compass and a map," said Smith. "They're going to be in an unfamiliar environment and have to deal with the weather and fatigue. They're going to be competing against opposing forces and another team that's trying to do the same thing, and if the teams bump into each other, we'll see who wins."

In addition to the practical exercises, Airmen provided a briefing to a simulated base commander, detailing their plan for the initial set-up of an airbase. Col. Brian Cooper, 177th Maintenance Group commander, served as the simulated base commander and provided feedback after the briefing.

"It was an awesome, collaborative effort," said Cooper. "These are great exercises with different Air National Guard units because it enables them to learn and work together in a great training environment to bring more realism to what we will be doing in the future with agile combat employment as a deployed combat wing."





# It's only money

U.S. Army Pfc. Juan Marin, 250th Finance Company, 50th Finance Battalion, 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, counts simulated money during exercise Diamond Saber at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, June 11, 2024. Established in 2004 and celebrating its 20th iteration, Diamond Saber is a U.S. Army Reserve-led exercise that trains and evaluates Active and Reserve Component Soldiers and joint partners on warfighting functions such as funding the force, payment support, disbursing operations, accounting, fiscal stewardship, auditability, and data analytics. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Schwenk)



# 177th hosts Cyprus EOD team

By Staff Sgt. Hunter Hires  
177th Fighter Wing  
Public Affairs Office



Explosive Ordnance Disposal team technicians with the 70th Combat Engineer Battalion, Republic of Cyprus National Guard, visited the 177th Fighter Wing under the New Jersey National Guard’s State Partnership Program June 4 - 14, 2024.

The 70th CEB EOD technicians and 177th Civil Engineer Squadron EOD team technicians observed exhibitions and participated in a variety of exercises.

“There are four initiatives to the State Partnership Program,” said Master Sgt. David Bernal, 177th CES EOD team leader. “There’s intelligence, cyber, noncommissioned officer development, and EOD.”

During their visit, the Cypriot and American EOD technicians exchanged their tactics and techniques within their shared field.

“I believe the State Partnership Program will enhance their response capabilities and give them a greater understanding of the EOD mission sets,” said Master Sgt. Phillip Douglass, 177th CES EOD team flight chief.

The 177th EOD team demonstrated counter-improvised explosive device operations, unexploded ordnance clearance and render-safe procedures, x-ray interpretation skills, night operations and air base recovery after simulated attack. They also experienced demonstrations of rapid explosive hazard mitigation, disposal of unserviceable munitions, exploitation of first-found ordnance, Category A incident response, and defense support to civil authorities with the Atlantic City Police Department bomb squad.

“I think the State Partnership Program will guide some decision-making as they continue to grow their EOD battalion over the next several years,” said Douglass.



***Above and previous page: U.S. Air Force 177th Civil Engineers Squadron Explosive Ordnance Disposal team technicians and 70th Combat Engineer Battalion of the National Guard of the Republic of Cyprus EOD technicians, prepare explosive charges for detonation June 11, 2024, at the Warren Grove Gunnery Range, Warren Grove, New Jersey. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Hunter Hires)***

***Below: U.S. Air Force Airmen with the 177th EOD team and 70th Combat Engineer Battalion personnel walk away from C4 explosives detonating at Warren Grove Range, New Jersey, Apr. 13, 2024. The explosives were detonated during a training event that simulated clearing a runway of explosives dropped by enemy forces. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Connor Taggart)***



# MULTI-CAPABLE AIRMEN ACE EXERCISE

**STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
AIRMAN 1ST CLASS CONNOR TAGGART  
177TH FIGHTER WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE**

Two U.S. Air Force Multi-Capable Airmen assisted the 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron Petroleum, Oils and Lubricants fuels management flight in downloading Jet A with Additives fuel over multiple deliveries to the 177th Fighter Wing, Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, New Jersey, June 12, 2024.

The fuel was supplied by the 418th Quartermaster Battalion, Silverbell Armed Forces Reserve Center, Marana, Arizona, and shipped by the 298th Transportation Company, Franklin United States Army Reserve Center, Franklin, Pennsylvania, and the 705th Transportation Company, LaPointe United States Army Reserve Center, Dayton, Ohio, temporarily operating out of field conditions and a bladder farm on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey.

The Defense Logistics Agency - Energy Quartermaster Liquid Logistics Exercise 2024 – DLA-E QLLEX 2024 – is an exercise used to practice the DLA-E Concept of Operations alternate fuel delivery method to ensure continuous fuel sustainment for homeland defense or disaster response.

“This exercise demonstrated the ability to sustain liquid logistics operations and be a viable bulk petroleum transportation capability for DLA Energy Americas in the event of a disruption in commercial transportation nodes,” said Ray Juré, DLA Energy Americas Operations Officer.

The collaboration between Army Reserve soldiers and the MCA demonstrates the U.S. armed forces’ preparedness in fueling the fight.

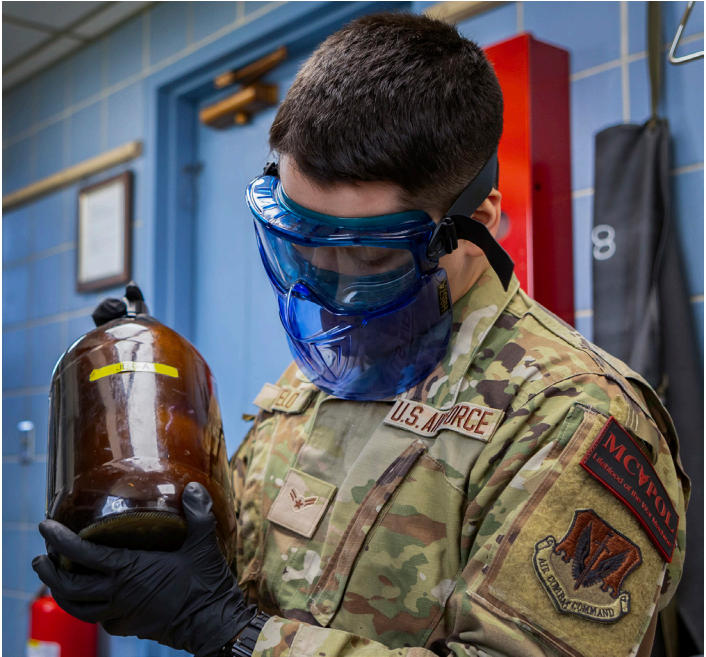


***U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Oliver D. Boch, left, 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants fuels mobile distribution supervisor, guides Airman 1st Class Gabriel Sotelo, 177th Medical Group commander support staff member and 177th LRS POL Flight's Multi-Capable Airmen class graduate, with pouring out Jet A with Additives fuel for test sampling into a glass mason jar at the 177th Fighter Wing, Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, New Jersey, June 12, 2024. Sotelo supported DLA-E QLLEX 2024, downloading fuel from 10 Army tank trailers.***

The Air Force is actively working to shift the mindset of its people to be multi-capable while identifying advanced training for specific career specialties to prepare Airmen for Force Generation deployments in support of Agile Combat Employment operations. During the 177th POL Multi-Capable Airmen familiarization training, Airmen from different career fields learned R-11 Refueler operation and maintenance, cryogenic operations, fuels laboratory operations and basic fuel service center operations. After the course has been completed, the Airmen are qualified to assist POL when needed.

The fuels management team brought two Multi-Capable Airmen over to POL to assist in the fuel drops. POL MCA class graduates’ Staff Sgt. Kaitlin R. Delucca, 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron chief inspector, downloaded fuel from 14 Army tank trailers, while Airman 1st Class Gabriel Sotelo, 177th Medical Group commander support staff member, downloaded fuel from 10 Army tank trailers.

“The Multi-Capable Airmen provided the manpower to assist the fuels management flight in downloading JAA fuel over multiple deliveries,” said Tech. Sgt. Charles A. Zingrone, 177th LRS fuels flight chief. “They also used this exercise to requalify on the tasks they learned during last year’s MCA training.”



***U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Gabriel Sotelo, 177th Medical Group commander support staff member and one of 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants Flight's Multi-Capable Airmen class graduates, shakes a glass container filled with Jet A with Additives fuel for test sampling.***





Above: U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Gabriel Sotelo, left, 177th Medical Group commander support staff, and Army Spc. Taylor Jersey, a petroleum supply specialist with the 298th Transportation Company, Franklin United States Army Reserve Center, Franklin, Pennsylvania, disconnect an offloading hose from a U.S. Army tank trailer at the 177th Fighter Wing, Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, New Jersey, June 12, 2024. Below: U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to the 298th Transportation Company, and 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants Flight Airmen and a Multi-Capable Airman, have their photo taken at the 177th Fighter Wing, Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, June 12, 2024. The collaboration between Army Reserve soldiers, who serve as a reliable means of transporting Jet A with Additives fuel, and MCA, who are trained to excel in multiple career fields, demonstrates the U.S. armed forces' preparedness in fueling the fight.

***“This exercise demonstrated the ability to sustain liquid logistics operations and be a viable bulk petroleum transportation capability for DLA Energy Americas in the event of a disruption in commercial transportation nodes.”***

**RAY JURÉ  
ENERGY AMERICAS OPERATIONS  
OFFICER  
DEFENSE LOGISTICS AGENCY**

## **NGB legal community holds training event**

**Story and photo by Donna Jeffries, 108th Wing Public Affairs Office**



Above: Military legal professionals take a group photo at the start of the National Guard Northeast Region Legal Event held June 21-22 at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. Below: Participants check-in at the start of the National Guard Northeast Region Legal Event. The meeting enabled Guardsmen to share their knowledge and build skills to enhance future collaboration.

What happens when a roomful of legal professionals meets? The answer is a lot!

In the case of the National Guard Northeast Region, the meeting was a two-day training event held at the 108th Wing on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, June 21-22, 2024.

Close to 60 Air and Army judge advocates, legal administrators, and paralegals spent time honing their skills, increasing their level of communication, and building camaraderie.

The Northeast Region comprises Guardsmen from Maine to New Jersey and includes Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. While collaborating is nothing new to them, the training event was the perfect forum for them to network and to receive in-person support from leadership and from each other.

Brig. Gens. Jaimie A. Areizaga-Soto, Principal Deputy General Counsel, and Sue Ellen Schuerman, Director of the Office of Complex Investigations, both from the National Guard Bureau, along Maj. Gen. Bobby L. Christine, Office of the National Guard Bureau General Counsel, addressed the group.

Attendees were given updates in the legal arena and were briefed by subject matter experts in various areas of interest like Air and Army Defense Counsel Programs; tetrahydrocannabinol – delta 8 issues; Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act and Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, and the Office of Complex Investigations.







# FLY

A U.S. Army Soldier with the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, throws an RQ-11 Raven unmanned aerial system into the sky, at Fort Bliss, Texas, Feb. 17, 2024. More than 1,500 NJARNG Soldiers will deploy in support of U.S. Central Command's Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve. This is the largest deployment of New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers since 2008. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis)