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ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

Click on a title to jump to the full story

STAPLES

Take it from the Top p. 5

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd talks mentoring our nation's youth

Remembering Our Fallen p. 96

Remembering our Fallen Heroes who died in service to our nation

This Day in History p. 108

Highlighting important dates in the Illinois National Guard's history

NEWS

NGB Selects Illinois, Portugal for SPP p. 6

A State Partnership Program has been announced between the Illinois National Guard and the Portuguese Armed Forces

Springfield Based Unit Mobilizes p. 8

Approximately 70 Soldiers from the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion deploy in support of Operation Global Competition

404th MEB Welcomes Roman p. 10

Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Carroll passed responsibility of brigade to Command Sgt. Maj. Sarah Roman

New Title for BG Michael Eastridge p. 12

The Illinois Army National Guard's Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge has been selected as the Deputy Commanding General for U.S. Army South

Air Guard Trains in Germany p. 18

Airmen from the 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron and 126th Communications Flight deployed for training to Ramstein Air Base, Germany

Cyber Shield - A Joint Exercise p. 24

Cyber Shield brings together approximately 900 National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, Guardians and civilian cyber professionals from 28 states and territories and 15 countries

ILNG, Polish train in cyber defense p. 25

The Illinois National Guard and Polish Territorial Defense Force trained side by side during Cyber Shield 2025, the longest running, and largest Department of Defense cyber defense exercise

Polish Delegation Visits Springfield p. 32

Visit marked another milestone in the partnership between Illinois and Poland, with a focus on enhancing cooperation and identifying new opportunities between the Polish Air Operations Center-Air Component Command in Warsaw and the 183rd Air Operations Group

State Partner Visits 126th ARW p. 34

Members of the Polish Air Force, Illinois National Guard's state partners, flew on a 126th Air Refueling Wing KC-135 Stratotanker to see an F-35 flown by a Polish pilot get refueled

Training at Fort McCoy p. 39

Illinois National Guard Soldiers are among thousands training at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin annually

Honoring 37 Years of Service p. 52

Colonel Milton Ware Credits Long Career to God's Plan

Celebrating a 31-year Career p. 54

Ceremony marked the conclusion of a distinguished 31-year military career that included two overseas deployments

The Sky's the Limit p. 56

Senior Airman Taylor Sula balances life between military air traffic operations and college coursework, but it's her volunteer leadership with a student veterans group at Illinois State University that is making a powerful difference in the campus military-connected community

Sharpens Combat Edge p. 74

The 182nd Airlift Wing participated in a Combat Readiness Inspection (CRI) Training Rodeo

Taking Aim at Readiness p. 77

Sustainment Soldiers from across the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and 34th Division Sustainment Brigade leveled up their lethality during a two-day M2 Machine Gun Academy

Dad, Daughter Promotions p. 80

The Dad-Daughter duo of Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Browning and U.S. Navy Hospitalman 3rd Class Ashley Harris were able to participate in the other's promotion during recent ceremonies

Engineers Tour Busch Stadium p. 82

The 126th Civil Engineer Squadron took a facilities tour of Busch Stadium in St. Louis, Missouri, as part of a strategic goal for community outreach and build partnerships

Building Communities p. 98

In a joint effort to combat homelessness on O'ahu, the Air National Guard, alongside the Air Force Reserve and modular home makers, have united to build permanent housing in Wai'anae

Ready at a Moment's Notice p. 100

The 183rd Wing successfully conducted a Ready Airman Training (RAT) Summer Camp, bringing together personnel to complete critical readiness tasks and reinforce core deployment capabilities

Unit Captures SPO Cup p. 103

Soldiers of the 1244th actively participated in IED Defeat Lanes, convoy operations, weapons qualifications, and the first time ever the battalion SPO Cup

Enhancing Warfighter Readiness p. 104

The 3625th Classification and Inspection Company Soldiers operated in field conditions and executed mission-focused training to enhance warfighter readiness during annual training

Guard, Reserve Soldiers Unite p. 106

Soldiers from the U.S. Army Reserve's 389th Engineer Vertical Construction Company, based in Davenport, Iowa, joined the Illinois National Guard's 123rd Engineer Battalion for hands-on training

EIS Leads War Cry Lite training p. 115

Members of the 217th, as well as the 183rd Communications Squadron, attended numerous training sessions to better prepare them for future deployments

MPAD Returns from Overseas p. 118

Ten Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's Chicago-based 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment returned in June from a deployment supporting U.S. Special Operations Command Europe and conducting public affairs operations across the continent

Dixon Aviator Takes Final Flight p. 120

Nearly 20 years after first putting on a U.S. Army uniform, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Zac Swedberg, of Dixon, Illinois, flew his final flight as an aviator in the Illinois Army National Guard

Wings Team up for Flight p. 126

The 182nd Airlift Wing partnered with the 183rd Air Operations Group to provide an orientation flight to Airmen with the AOG

Flight highlights relevance p. 127

AOG members experienced firsthand the tactical training and coordination involved in a two-ship tactical flight – a mission essential to executing modern air mobility operations.

Parking Lot Extension p. 136

Soldiers from the Sparta-based 2118th Asphalt Detachment worked on a parking lot extension at Sparta Training Area as part of their annual training

710th MCAS Trains Down Under p. 144

Soldiers from the 710th Medical Company Area Support was among the more than 35,000 service members from around the world to participate in Talisman Sabre 2025 in Australia

Firefighting Soldiers Hone Skills p. 146

Firefighting Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard conducted hands-on structural fire training at the Peoria Fire Training Academy

Harris graduates War College p. 155

Lt. Col. Joseph (Joe) Harris, a native of Normal, Illinois, graduated June 12 from the National War College on Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.

Ground Refueling Exercise p. 160

When you think of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, you think of aerial refueling. In June, the wing's focus was on refueling aircraft on the ground from a 50,000-gallon bladder

Celebrating 250 years of Chaplains p. 166

The U.S. Army Chaplain Corps celebrated 250 years of ministering to Soldiers

1644th Conducts Patriot Press p. 168

The Rock Falls-based unit executed a long haul ammunition transport mission spanning 3,200 miles across six states

Warrants Celebrate 107th p. 172

The Illinois Army National Guard Warrant Officer Cohort celebrates 107 years of service in U.S. Army

Up the Ladder of Success p. 174

Col. Jeffrey Hicks was promoted to colonel in a ceremony at the Illinois State Military Museum

Exchanging Critical Knowledge p. 176

Illinois National Guard and Polish Territorial Defense Force training events, coined Critical Knowledge Exchanges, have been common throughout the Illinois National Guard's 32-year State Partnership with Poland

PHOTO SPREADS

Leaders visit Horn of Africa p. 13

Senior Illinois Army National Guard leaders visit troops downrange in the Horn of Africa

All Aboard! p. 21

Soldiers from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team head to annual training aboard a 182nd Airlift Wing C-130

Welcome to the Team p. 35

Two future Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers with a familiar surname enlist in the Illinois National Guard

33rd IBCT hosts Boss Lift 2025 p. 48

Employers Get Boots-on-Ground View of Training as they connect with the Soldiers they employ

34th DSTB Annual Training p. 58

Annual training focused on the basics of Army Warrior Tasks

Leaders visit Illini Thunder p. 63

Air Guard leaders visit Airmen participating in exercise in Mississippi

Ceremony honors nation's fallen p. 70

Chicago Hosts Annual Memorial Day Parade, Wreath Laying Ceremony to Honor Illinois' Fallen

Loadmasters at the Ready p. 83

169th Airlift Squadron conduct training regularly to promote readiness and simulate deployed scenarios

2-106th Cavalry Comes Home p. 88

Approximately 155 'Guardians of Nation's Liberty' arrive in Illinois after a deployment to U.S. Africa Command

108th MMB Reacts to Scenarios p. 112

Events were designed to simulate real life medical emergencies

Prairie Dirt Classic Flyover p. 123

The Illinois Army National Guard was able to show off their own high-performance vehicles in the sky in honor of our nation just before the race began

Security Forces Conduct FTX p. 124

During this exercise the squadron engaged force generation, agile combat employment, and integrated defense

182nd AW ESGR Boss Lift p. 129

The 182nd Airlift Wing event showcases the Illinois Air National Guard MPs participate in Wet Gap Ops p. 130

933rd MP Company supports 34th DSB in joint combined arms wet gap operations

Heading to the range p. 141

Soldiers from the 123rd Engineer Battalion spent time on the range at Marseilles Training Center

Lifelong Learners tour Wing p. 150

The 182nd Airlift Wing held a civic engagement tour to showcase the Wing's mission for Bradley University Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

Promoted in the Heat of Training p. 152

Sgt. Andrew Watts and Sgt. Bryan Bennett were promoted amid the flames of training and camaraderie of their firehouse brothers and sisters

CAP Cadets Learn Equipment p. 162

While at their summer training at Marseilles Training Area, about 100 Civil Air Patrol cadets learned about some of the equipment used in the Illinois National Guard

CAP Cadets Graduate Camp p. 163

The Civil Air Patrol weeklong Summer Encampment program is designed to provide the cadets with a military-like environment

Flash Bang Training p. 164

The 126th Air Refueling Wing Security Forces shine bright during training

Fireboat Tour Healing p. 179

Chicago Fireboat Tour for the Illinois Families of Fallen Service Members gives the families a chance to socialize, have fun, spend time with each other, and connect with military leaders

One Obstacle at a Time p. 182

Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidates clear the hurdle of Phase III training prior to commissioning

Leadership Workshop p. 186

Illinois Air National Guard Airmen participate in Enlisted Leadership Workshop

FEATURES

New ILNG General Officer p. 14

Surrounded by family, friends, and fellow Soldiers, Col. Jorge M. Fonseca was promoted to brigadier general and appointed as the Illinois National Guard's next Director of the Joint Staff

Osberg gets second Star p. 16

Justin Osberg of Geneva, Illinois, was promoted to Major General

Honoring D-Day Heritage p. 22

The 126th Air Refueling Wing honors its D-Day heritage with a new paint job reminiscent of its 1944 look

LCA Director Retires p. 26

Maurice Rochelle led with vision and passion

661st Eng Co preps for mission p. 28

More than 150 soldiers of the 661st Engineer Construction Company completed two weeks of training at Marseilles Training Center in Illinois to prepare for a deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility

Soldier Honored by GSM p. 31

Maj. Candace White, Assistant Operations Officer for the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, was recognized by the Gold Star Mission during a ceremony

Blackwell elected VFW commander p. 36

Col. (ret.) Eugene Blackwell, who served in the Illinois Army National Guard from 1983 to 2009, was elected as the state commander of the Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars

Walking where others have trod p. 40

A new generation of Illinois Army National Guard leaders walked in the footsteps of history at Fort Donelson during the OCS Staff Ride

New Berlin Soldier now a 2nd Lt. p. 42

The Illinois Army National Guard welcomed Thomas Luca II from New Berlin as its newest second lieutenant in a commissioning ceremony

Marshal Reflects on Service p. 47

Sgt. 1st Class Hussein Mashal is reflecting on nearly two decades of service, having checked a lot of Army boxes – service in all three components – active, Reserve, National Guard – Ranger school, airborne school, stateside missions, and deployments around the world

44th Chem Bn trains p. 60

The 44th Chemical Battalion assisted Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment while conducting chemical training at Fort McCoy

The Ability to Rapidly Mobilize p. 62

The 183rd Medical Group demonstrated its readiness and capability to deploy in support of United States Air Force and Department of Defense global objectives during a comprehensive exercise

Honoring the Resistance in WWII p. 64

The Illinois National Guard presented the Illinois Military Medal of Valor to members of the Polish Resistance who fought against the Nazis in World War II

Building Leadership p. 66

The 631st Engineer Construction Company began building the first phase of a leader reaction course at Marseilles Training Center

Feeding an Army p. 68

128th Field Feeding Platoon Supports Feeding Missions for 650 Illinois Soldiers on Annual Training

Drainage by Design p. 72

Soldiers from the 123rd Engineer Battalion are trained on new equipment and making improvements to the Marseilles Training Center's running track

Embattled on Independence Day p. 79

July 4 marks the anniversaries of Siege of Vicksburg, the Battle of Gettysburg, and the Battle of Hamel, all of which the Illinois National Guard participated

Swept and Sampled p. 84

Soldiers from the 444th Chemical Company based in Galesburg, and the 445th Chemical Company based in Shiloh, conducted a hazardous assessment and site exploitation exercise

Rinsed, Cleared, Deployed p. 86

Soldiers from the 44th Chemical Battalion based in Bloomington, Illinois conduct operational decontamination on vehicles from the 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment

Sentry North 25 p. 90

Members from the newly established 182nd Contingency Response Group, part of the 182nd Airlift Wing teamed up with the 156th Contingency Response Group from the Puerto Rico Air National Guard during Exercise Sentry North 25 to build and refine their new mission capabilities

Supporting Readiness p. 95

Staff Sgt. James Upson, a full-time Security Forces member serving as a federal technician at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, brings not only professional skill to the mission but also a deep sense of community spirit

First Sergeants - a steady presence p. 102

At the 183rd Wing, being a first sergeant isn't just another job. They're a steady presence in the lives of hundreds of airmen

709th conducts annual training p. 116

709th MCAS trains to provide Role II Medical Care in Large Scale Combat Operations

One Tough Old Bird p. 117

Richard the Rooster is the 4-foot fowl mascot of Bartonville's 709th Medical Company Area Support. Richard first appeared out of the South Dakota Badlands during Golden Coyote 2016. No one really knows why he decided to roost with the unit

Wilson Arms Championship p. 122

Two Soldiers from Illinois Army National Guard finish 12th in Winston P. Wilson Championship

Enhancing Skills p. 132

198th CSSB's Annual Training focuses on enhancing collective and individual Soldiers' skills

Conducting Critical Training p. 134

Soldiers conducted more than 20 critical trainings opportunities

Undercover Colonel p. 139

126th ARW Leaders Become Undercover Colonels to Learn about Squadron Missions

Deployment Command p. 140

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion assumed command of sustainment operations in support of U.S. Army Europe and Africa's Assure, Deter, and Reinforce mission

Securing each step p. 142

Honing their carpentry skills, Soldiers from the 616th Engineer Utilities Detachment, based in Macomb, repair staircases at Marseilles Training Center

Civic Leader Flight p. 143

126th ARW conducts orientation flight for civic leaders to experience refueling flight

The Wrestler p. 148

After Middle East Deployment Joe Braunagel Returns to NCAA Division 1 Athletics at UIUC

Antenna Boosts Tactical Comms p. 153

Antenna Setup Boosts Tactical Comms at Combined Arms Collective Training Facility

Command Post Training p. 154

Soldiers execute a tactical convoy from cantonment to the Combined Arms Collective Training Facility

Training in Urban Terrain p. 156

Soldiers from the 661st Engineer Construction Company and the 2118th Asphalt Detachment ran through battle drills at "Military Operations on Urban Terrain" site at Marseilles Training Center

Focusing on Readiness p. 158

Training included tactical convoy operations, IED defeat lanes, weapons qualification, radio communication, react to contact drills, and vehicle towing

Opposing Forces p. 169

The 725th Transportation Company played the role of opposing forces as part of the 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion's field training exercise during the unit's annual training

Happy Birthday America p. 170

144th Army Band Hits High Notes During Independence Day Celebrations around Illinois

Mechanics in Action p. 173

Wheeled vehicle mechanics from the 631st Engineer Support Company practiced using the material handling crane on a Forward Repair System and performing routine maintenance checks on military vehicles

Take it From the Top:

Senior Leaders' Corner

Mentoring is vital to future of Illinois National Guard



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard

Mentoring

Character matters - and it is developed. Both Army and Air Force doctrine address character because it is vital to effectively support and defend the U.S. Constitution.

ADP 6-22 defines character as the "moral and ethical qualities of an individual revealed through their decisions and actions."

Weapon systems and tactics change, but moral and ethical standards - our military values - have fed the American fighting spirit for 250 years. Our fortitude and endurance, our ability to adapt and overcome, and our strength is all built upon this righteous foundation. We are a force of good with each of us willing to sacrifice our lives for liberty and justice.

We can build character within ourselves through self-reflection and thought. (There is a reason why "humility" is highly valued

in both Army and Air Force doctrine!) We can also help develop character in others and ourselves through mentorship.

Mentoring is vital to the future of our organization. It benefits both the mentee and the mentor, developing leadership characteristics in both. It supports both recruiting and retention. It promotes growth and positive change. It ensures we have future generations of service members with the moral fiber to stand up to "all enemies, foreign or domestic."

The Illinois National Guard is fortunate to administer a program that gives outstanding mentorship opportunities at Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy. This program is designed to give youth the opportunity to learn life skills through a military-type environment. Each of these young people has faced challenges in high school and has volunteered for the program to make a positive change in their lives.

You can help.

They need positive role models and mentors, and our Soldiers and Airmen have much to offer. In the coming months, we are going to explore programmatic ways to increase the interaction between our service members and our LCA cadets. But don't wait. Reach out to LCA today.

Learn more about becoming a mentor for an LCA cadet by visiting <https://www.lincolnschallenge.org/become-a-mentor/>.

You can make a positive difference in a young person's life - and they can make a positive difference in yours.

Illinois National Guard to Partner with Portugal as Part of National Guard Bureau State Partnership Program

The National Guard Bureau and the U.S. Department of Defense has announced the establishment of a State Partnership Program (SPP) between the Illinois National Guard and the Portuguese Armed Forces.

"We are incredibly proud of the role the Illinois National Guard has played in security cooperation around the world," said Illinois Governor JB Pritzker. "This new partnership with Portugal offers an extension of that global reach as well as new opportunities for the State of Illinois."

"We plan to leverage our well-established experience with the SPP program to help increase security cooperation with our new partners in Portugal," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, noting that the Illinois National Guard has shared a 32-year SPP partnership with the Polish military, which is considered the gold standard of the state partnerships. "There are a multitude of existing areas where both nations' armed forces will now work together to increase our shared levels of interoperability, global deployability, combat-projection capability, and civilian and military organizational capacity," added Boyd.

"Our cooperation with the United States is long-standing, credible, and strong. We are very honored to be establishing this partnership between Illinois National Guard and the Portuguese Armed Forces. We are committed to further deepening our enduring relationship," the Portuguese Ministry of Defense said in a statement.

The United States and Portugal, both founding members of NATO, have a strong existing security relationship and share an unwavering commitment to global security, rooted in decades of partnership and shared global deployments. Portugal's

strategic location and contributions to NATO missions have made it an important player in safeguarding transatlantic security.

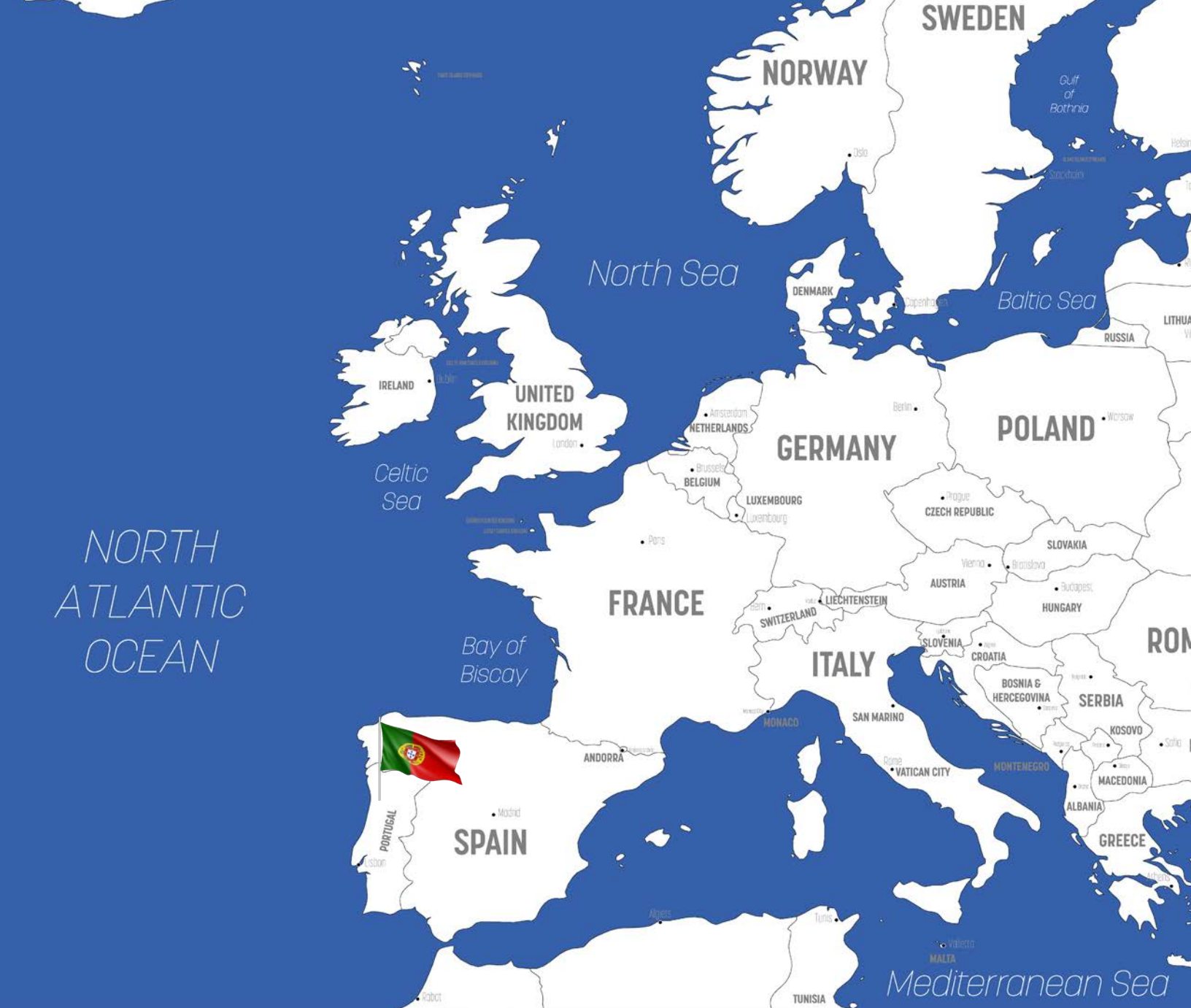
"Illinois is the clear choice for this new Portugal partnership" Governor Pritzker wrote in his letter endorsing the partnership. Notably, Illinois is home to approximately 12,000 Portuguese-Americans including more than 13 percent of the population of Sammons Point in Kankakee County.

Portugal's ties to America predate the founding of the United States. There is also a unique history between Illinois and the Portuguese island of Madeira. Notably, the Founding Fathers toasted the signing of the Declaration of Independence with Madeira wine. Seventy years later, a number of Portuguese immigrants facing religious persecution left

Madeira for Morgan County, becoming the first Portuguese immigrants to settle permanently in Illinois. Their descendants continue to enrich the cultural fabric of Illinois to this day, with the largest percentage of the population claiming Portuguese ancestry residing in Cook County.

Potential areas of cooperation between Portugal and the Illinois National Guard through the SPP partnership include enhancing mutual cyber capabilities to address national and regional threats and increasing interagency coordination; supporting crisis response and disaster preparedness; leveraging complementary strengths in agriculture, infrastructure, and academia; conducting joint environmental research initiatives in soil management and water usage;





and developing operational space capabilities. The U.S. National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program has been successfully building relations for more than 30 years and now includes 110 partnerships with 119 nations around the globe.

The SPP evolved from a 1991 U.S. European Command decision to set up the Joint Contact Team Program in the Baltic Region with Reserve component Soldiers and Airmen. A subsequent National Guard Bureau proposal paired U.S. states with three nations emerging from the former Soviet Bloc and the SPP was born, becoming a key U.S. security cooperation tool, facilitating cooperation across all aspects of international civil-military

affairs and encouraging people-to-people ties at the state level.

This cost-effective program is administered by the National Guard Bureau, guided by State Department foreign policy goals, and executed by the state adjutants general in support of combatant commander and U.S. Chief of Mission security cooperation objectives and Department of Defense policy goals. With a budget of approximately \$48 million, the State Partnership Program has an outsized return on investment for the Department of Defense's security cooperation capacity building.

Through SPP, the National Guard conducts military-to-military engagements in support of defense

security goals but also leverages whole-of-society relationships and capabilities to facilitate broader interagency and corollary engagements spanning military, government, economic and social spheres.

The State Partnership Program embodies a collaborative approach to strengthening defense capabilities and warfighting readiness. Through sustained engagement and shared training, the SPP moves beyond transactional relationships, cultivating genuine partnerships where partner nations are empowered to shoulder more of the security burden in this challenging global environment.



Soldiers with the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion hold the Illinois State Flag during their mobilization ceremony June 7 at the West Side Christian Church in Springfield. The unit will deploy overseas for several months in support of logistics operations.

Soldiers from Springfield-based 232nd CSSB Mobilizes for Deployment to Europe

Story and Photos by Spc. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

Approximately 70 Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB), based in Springfield, were honored during a mobilization ceremony June 7 at West Side Christian Church as they prepare to deploy in support of Operation Global Competition.

"Thank you for all you've done to prepare for and now execute this mission," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "You've already answered our nation's most sacred call – to serve, protect, and

defend. Be proud of that, because we are proud of you. Every deployment is different, but each begins the same way: with Soldiers selflessly raising their right hand to serve something greater than themselves. Only 1.6 percent of Americans wear the uniform today. Less than 6 percent have ever worn it – that's the veteran community. What stands before us today represents the best of our nation."

Williams also acknowledged the essential role of military families. "To our families: these Soldiers cannot do what they do without your love, support, and sacrifices. Be proud

of what your Soldiers are about to accomplish."

The ceremony brought together military leaders, families, and supporters to recognize the Soldiers' readiness and commitment as they prepare for a complex and critical mission abroad. With the support of their loved ones and leaders behind them, the unit now turns its focus to the challenges ahead in a dynamic global environment.

"This is where service moves from theory to reality," said Col. Elizabeth Roxworthy, Commander of the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade. "The uniforms these Soldiers

wear represent not only legacy and tradition, but also the responsibility of defending freedom and accomplishing the mission.”

Lt. Col. Daniel Johnson, the battalion commander, emphasized the unit’s deliberate focus on readiness. “We focused on three things: people, training, and readiness,” Johnson said. “We found the right people, gave them the right training, and put them in the right positions. Two-thirty-second, you are some of the finest Soldiers I’ve served with in my career. You are trained, you are ready, and you are prepared.”

Before deploying overseas, the unit will complete additional training and administrative processing. The Soldiers are expected to be deployed for several months, providing critical logistical support to operations in their assigned region. As a multifunctional logistics headquarters, the 232nd CSSB is capable of overseeing transportation, maintenance, supply, field services, and mission command functions across a broad operational area.

Williams challenged the deploying Soldiers to uphold the legacy of the 232nd. “Do more than is asked. Lead with integrity. Take care of one another. If you do that, you’ll succeed – not only in your mission, but in honoring the legacy of those who served before you.”



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, commended the Soldiers’ service and offered words of encouragement as they deploy.



Soldiers of the Illinois Army National Guard’s 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion stand in formation during their mobilization ceremony June 7 at West Side Christian Church in Springfield. The ceremony honored the unit as they prepare for an overseas deployment in support of U.S. operations abroad.

Mattoon Command Sergeant Major Relinquishes Responsibility of 404th MEB

Story by Spc. Charles Michaels, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Public Affairs

Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Carroll of Mattoon, Illinois, the Command Sergeant Major of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade passed responsibility to Command Sgt. Maj. Sarah Roman, of Palatine, Illinois, at Normal Readiness Center in Normal, Illinois, May 18.

"It's an especially proud day for the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade," said Col. David Helfrich, the Commander of the 404th MEB. "Today we gather to honor a leader, a command sergeant major, a warrior, Command Sgt. Maj. Carroll, as he transitions out of the responsibility of being my senior enlisted advisor."

Carroll deployed with the 233rd Military Police Company in support of Operation Desert Shield, Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. His previous assignments include Operations Sergeant Major for the 33rd Military Police Battalion,

Command Sergeant Major for the 33rd MP BN, and the Senior Enlisted Leader for the Combined Joint Task Force, Horn of Africa. Carroll's next role will be as Commandant Command Sergeant Major of the 129th Regional Training Institute.

"I've served alongside many outstanding NCOs, each with their own strengths, but few have demonstrated the same dedication to mentoring, teaching and genuinely caring about Soldiers across all ranks," said Helfrich. "Command Sgt. Maj. Carroll leads from the front."

Carroll's awards include the Combat Action Badge, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, and the Joint Service Achievement Medal.

"In the time that I was here, we had 12 deployments and 17 state domestic operations as a team," said Carroll. "I had [military policemen] who had less than two and a half years in and had

seen up to five state activations. That was your tireless effort, and I will be eternally grateful for the drive and the motivation that you all show during these exercises and operations."

During the ceremony, Carroll was awarded the Legion of Merit for exceptionally meritorious service while serving as the brigade command sergeant major.

The award's citation reads, "Command Sgt. Maj. Carroll's dedication to duty, selfless service and outstanding professionalism contributed greatly to the mission success within the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. His leadership and dedication were key to the development of Soldiers and noncommissioned officers throughout the brigade. Command Sgt. Maj. Carroll's actions reflect distinct credit upon himself, the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and the Illinois



Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Carroll passes the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade's colors to Col. David Helfrich, brigade commander, relinquishing responsibility as the senior enlisted leader during a ceremony May 18.

Army National Guard.”

“On behalf of the entire 404th, Soldiers, NCOs, warrant officers, and officers, I’d like to thank you, Command Sgt. Maj. Carroll, and welcome you, Command Sgt. Maj. Roman,” said Helfrich.

Roman has participated in eight large scale exercises, including two overseas training missions, and served one tour in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. She has completed all levels of the noncommissioned officer education system and is a graduate of the United States Army’s Sergeant Major Academy. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Northern Illinois University and a Master of Science from DePaul University.

Roman’s awards include the Afghanistan Campaign Medal with one campaign star, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the NCO Professional Development Ribbon with numeral five.

“I spent a lot longer standing in this formation than I’ll ever get to spend standing in front of it,” said Roman, addressing Soldiers of the 404th MEB. “I don’t step into this position lightly, so with everything that I do, I’m going to be trying to represent your interests, making sure that as a leader, you’re all empowered to lead so that Soldiers can get training, and we can continue to be the greatest brigade.”



Command Sgt. Maj. Sarah Roman stands in front of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade’s formation after becoming the brigade’s senior enlisted leader in a ceremony May 18.



Col. David Helfrich, Commander, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, passes the brigade’s colors to Command Sgt. Maj. Sarah Roman as she becomes the brigade’s senior enlisted leader in a ceremony May 18.

Deputy Assistant Adjutant General Selected as Deputy Commanding General for U.S. Army South

The Illinois Army National Guard's Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge has been selected as the next Deputy Commanding General for U.S. Army South.

Eastridge assumed his duties as U.S. Army South's Deputy Commanding General June 16. He is simultaneously serving as the Illinois Army National Guard's Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, a position he has held since February 2024.

As U.S. Army South's Deputy Commanding General, Brig. Gen. Eastridge will assist the Commanding General, Maj. Gen. Philip Ryan, as U.S. Army South protects the United States by providing responsive, adaptive, agile and flexible land forces able to rapidly respond to contingencies in the Western Hemisphere. The command also builds regional capability by working with partner nations and other stakeholders to enhance security and defend the U.S. homeland.

"U.S. Army South plays a vital role in the defense of the Western Hemisphere. I look forward to joining the U.S. Army South team while also fulfilling my duties and responsibilities within the Illinois Army National Guard," Eastridge said. "I'm excited to be part of the team that implements changes to make us a more dynamic and lethal fighting force both in U.S. Army South and in the Illinois Army National Guard."

"Brigadier General Eastridge is a traditional National Guard officer who, in addition to more than 35 years of military service, has also served as an executive in the finance and automotive industries," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "Mike's civilian management experience will help in his new role at U.S. Army South as it has helped the Illinois National Guard for decades. This speaks to the added value the Citizen-Soldier brings to our national defense."

As the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General of the Illinois Army National Guard, Eastridge serves as the advisor to Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard and Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard. Eastridge advises Williams in all matters pertaining to supervision and management of Illinois Army National Guard, which consists of 10,000 Citizen-Soldiers.

Eastridge began his service in 1988 and achieved the rank of staff sergeant prior to receiving his commission in 2000 through the Illinois Military Academy Officer Candidate School where he was the distinguished honor graduate. His notable assignments include a mobilization to Germany in 2002 with Task Force Santa Fe as a Platoon Leader for Company A, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment conducting force protection operations. In 2004, Eastridge mobilized to Fort Polk, LA with the 1st Battalion, 131st Infantry Regiment as the Opposing Force Military Intelligence Officer. In 2005, he commanded Troop C, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment followed by a second command in 2007 for Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment. Eastridge then mobilized a third time and deployed in 2008 to Afghanistan as a team chief for an Afghan Border Police Embedded Training Team. While deployed, he assumed command of the 333rd Military Police Company conducting decisive



Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge
Deputy Commanding General for U.S. Army South

action operations. After serving in multiple key and developmental staff positions, Eastridge commanded the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment from 2015 to 2017 and then commanded the 33d Infantry Brigade Combat Team with the responsibility for preparing the brigade for future decisive action operations supporting federal missions and domestic operations supporting state missions.

Eastridge's professional military education includes the Infantry Officer Basic Course, Maneuver Captains Career Course, Combined Arms Exercise Course, Intermediate Level Education course, the Advanced Operations Course and he is a 2019 graduate of the United States Army War College with a master's degree in strategic studies.

His notable military awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Expert Infantryman

Badge, Combat Action Badge and Air Assault Badge.

As a traditional guardsman, Eastridge has more than 20 years with Mercedes-Benz Financial Services

and is the MBFS Marketing and Sales Support Manager for the United States.

Eastridge grew up in Wheaton, Illinois. Having raised three

children; Tim, Rachel and Megan into adulthood, he now resides in Plymouth, Michigan, with his spouse, Mary, and her two sons, Gavin and Karter.

ILARNG leaders visit troops in the Horn of Africa



U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Michael J. Eastridge, Illinois Army National Guard Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, recognizes Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 296th Infantry Regiment for outstanding achievement at Manda Bay, Kenya, May 1, 2025. Nominated by their leadership, the Soldiers were recognized for their dedication, hard work and commitment to the mission. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ivan Mendez-Roman)



U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Michael J. Eastridge, Illinois Army National Guard Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, talks with a Soldier during a battlefield circulation of the Horn of Africa at Baledogle Military Airfield, Somalia, April 29. Eastridge visited Soldiers assigned to the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team in different locations across the region to recognize and thank them for their hard work. (Courtesy photo by U.S. Army 1st Lt. Colin Edward)



Command Sgt. Maj. Michael R. Kelly, Illinois Army National Guard State Command Sergeant Major, presents a coin to Spc. Enrique Velez Pina for outstanding achievement at Manda Bay, Kenya, May 1, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ivan Mendez-Roman)

Fonseca Promoted to Brigadier General, Appointed Director of ILNG Joint Staff

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Surrounded by family, friends, and fellow Soldiers, Col. Jorge M. Fonseca was promoted to brigadier general and appointed as the Illinois National Guard's next Director of the Joint Staff during a formal ceremony in Chicago on June 21 that honored his decades of service, sacrifice, and trailblazing leadership.

Born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, and raised in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood, Brig. Gen. Fonseca has dedicated more than 30 years to public service in both the military and law enforcement. His promotion marks a historic milestone – he is believed to be the only Hispanic-American general officer in the more than 300-year history of the Illinois National Guard. (Demographic tracking of Hispanic heritage in service records only began 22 years ago.)

Fonseca began his military career in 1991 as an enlisted combat medic in the U.S. Army Reserve before earning his commission in 1996 through the Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School as a Medical Service Corps officer. In 1999, he transitioned into military intelligence and has served as a career intelligence officer, bringing strategic insight and operational expertise to complex missions around the globe.

After graduating from the U.S. Army War College resident program in 2019 with a Master of Strategic Studies, Fonseca began serving at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) as Chief of Intelligence Operations, Plans, and Readiness for the Europe-Eurasia Regional Center. In this role, he led a team that provided strategic guidance and operational planning across the Intelligence Community and U.S. European Command. His work ensured the readiness and synchronization of intelligence efforts supporting U.S. and NATO interests across a complex and evolving regional landscape.

From 2021 to 2023, Fonseca served

as the first commander of the newly established U.S. Army Garrison Poland in Poznań – America's easternmost garrison in Europe. Tasked with standing up a brand-new permanent installation in support of U.S. and NATO strategic objectives, Fonseca led a multinational team during a pivotal time in European security. His leadership helped establish enduring infrastructure and partnerships to support rotational forces in the region and reaffirm the United States' unwavering commitment to NATO allies in the face of Russian aggression.

"That command was not just a professional challenge – it was a personal honor," Fonseca said. He has worked with the Polish Armed forces for over 15 years and deployed with them twice to Afghanistan. "It was about building trust, presence,



Brig. Gen. Jorge M. Fonseca delivers remarks following his promotion to brigadier general during a ceremony held June 21, 2025, at the Kedzie Armory in Chicago.



Brig. Gen. Jorge M. Fonseca is pinned by his wife, Andrea Fonseca, and their daughters during his promotion ceremony June 21, 2025, at the Kedzie Armory in Chicago.

and capability in one of the most important theaters in the world right now.”. Fonseca said.

Following his command in Poland, Fonseca served as Chief of Staff at DIA’s Middle East and Africa Regional Center in Washington, D.C., where he led staff integration efforts across DIA, combatant commands, interagency partners, and foreign counterparts. His recent roles at DIA reflect decades of experience in the intelligence community and highlight his ability to lead complex, joint, and multinational operations.

“Jorge Fonseca is an authentic leader of character who has had success leading large, multi-national, joint, dynamic, and complex organizations,” said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “His national, international, combatant command, and law enforcement networks uniquely position him to excel as our next Director of the Joint Staff.”

During the ceremony, Brig. Gen. Fonseca’s wife, Andrea, and their daughters performed the pinning of his new rank – an emotional and symbolic moment reflecting the importance of family throughout his career.

“I am honored to represent my family, my community, and the Illinois National Guard as the Director of the Joint Staff,” Fonseca said. “Serving in the U.S. military has opened countless doors for me and my family, shaping our lives in extraordinary ways.”

The Illinois National Guard’s Joint Staff oversees all domestic operations within the state and advises the Adjutant General on matters impacting more than 13,000 Soldiers and Airmen. Brig. Gen. Fonseca assumes the role from Brig. Gen. Justin Osberg, who was selected for a new assignment with U.S. Forces Korea.

In addition to his military service, Fonseca has spent more than 28 years in law enforcement and serves as a sergeant in the Illinois State Police’s Criminal Investigation Division. In 2018, he was named to the Illinois Governor’s Honor 200 list, recognizing military veterans who



Brig. Gen. Jorge M. Fonseca and his wife, Andrea Fonseca, unfurl his one-star flag during his promotion ceremony June 21, 2025, at the Kedzie Armory in Chicago, as Command Sgt. Maj. Michael R. Kelly, State Command Sergeant Major of the Illinois Army National Guard, looks on. The ceremony marked Fonseca’s promotion to brigadier general and his appointment as Director of the Joint Staff.

demonstrate exceptional service to their communities.

The ceremony concluded with the playing of the Army Song and a strong sense of pride among attendees, marking the elevation of a leader whose life reflects the power of service, perseverance, and representation.

“This promotion isn’t just about me – it’s about everyone who was here along the way,” Fonseca said. “I will continue to serve with honor, represent our communities with pride, and mentor the next generation of leaders in uniform.”



Brig. Gen. Jorge M. Fonseca embraces his mother and presents her with a bouquet of roses during his promotion ceremony at the Kedzie Armory in Chicago, June 21.

Osberg Promoted to Major General

Justin Osberg of Geneva, Illinois, was promoted to Major General on June 7 at Cantigny Park in Wheaton with his spouse, Jessica, and two youngest children, 7-year-old Evan and 4-year-old Juliana, pinning his second star on his Army dress uniform.

Maj. Gen. Osberg was selected as the Deputy, Combined Rear Area Coordinator, Combined Forces Command, U.S. Forces Korea, United States Indo-Pacific Command, in February paving the way for his promotion near the 1st Infantry Division Museum in Cantigny Park.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, presided over Osberg's promotion and administered his Oath of Office. Boyd thanked Osberg's family and the fellow Veterans. "Without our family, our support network, we – all the men and women in uniform – can't do what we need to do," Boyd said.

General Osberg has a joyous nature and knows how to get things done, Boyd said. "He is always smiling, and everyone is always laughing around him. But when it is time to get serious, he gets to business."

When Osberg was the Illinois Army National Guard's Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, he



Illinois Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Justin Osberg watches as his son, 7-year-old Evan, and daughter, 4-year-old Juliana, pin his second star on his uniform with help from his spouse, Jessica, during the general's promotion ceremony, June 7, in Cantigny Park in Wheaton.



Maj. Gen. Justin Osberg speaks during his promotion ceremony to major general, June 7, in Cantigny Park in Wheaton.

was put in charge of a task force to confront harmful behaviors such as sexual harassment and sexual assault. "It was a difficult assignment, and he leaned on his civilian experience as a project manager," Boyd said. The task force helped the Illinois National Guard confront these harmful behaviors. "People now know that if you are going to commit these harmful behaviors such as sexual assault or sexual harassment, you are not going to be standing in our formation anymore."

Osberg said that being part of the Illinois National Guard has enriched his life with experiences, opportunities and, most importantly, relationships. He recalled his Army Basic Training experience. "We were all different with different childhood experiences," he said. "Being with them, learning about their lives, taught me empathy and perspective. We had the benefit of going through the same challenging

experience and becoming a team."

In his new position, he is responsible for the Korean rear area under the 2nd Infantry Division/ Republic of Korea – U.S. Combined Division. The 2nd Infantry Division deters aggression and maintains peace on the Korean Peninsula; and if deterrence fails, "Fight Tonight" in support of the U.S.-Republic of Korea Alliance. General Osberg also coordinates with the U.S. 8th Army.

General Osberg was appointed as the Director of the Joint Staff for the Illinois National Guard in February 2024 overseeing the Illinois National Guard's domestic operations and international relationships. He previously served as the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General - Army. He has had a long and distinguished career in the Illinois Army National Guard holding key command and staff positions including command of the Chicago-based 108th Sustainment

Brigade, which has since been redesignated as the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade.

General Osberg is also a combat veteran with two tours in Iraq and one tour in Afghanistan where he served as a key advisor to coalition forces including the Illinois National Guard State Partnership Program partner, Poland. He joined the Army in 1993 as a CH-47 Medium Helicopter Mechanic with the Illinois Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment and now has 32 years of service. He attended the Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School and received his commission in August 1997 as an Army Signal Corps Officer.

In his civilian career, he is a Senior Manager for Ernst & Young, LLP where he is responsible for consulting company executives in change management.

"I am incredibly grateful to both my family and to my civilian employer for their support of my military career," Osberg said. "Without the support of both, I could not continue to serve my state and nation for so long."

Maj. Gen. Boyd said that Brig. Gen. Osberg is a great example of how a traditional Illinois National Guard Soldier can excel in both military and civilian careers. "It takes commitment, the support of families and the support of employers. Being part of the Illinois National Guard can also enhance family life and civilian careers in addition to the education and financial benefits of service," General Boyd said. "I am personally grateful for General Osberg's advice, friendship of many years and for the example he has set for the 13,000 Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen."

General Osberg was awarded the Legion of Merit twice and the Bronze Star Medal twice. He has numerous other awards and decorations including the Polish Army Medal (Bronze) awarded by the Polish Armed Forces. He was also awarded the Combat Action Badge meaning he engaged the enemy in direct combat.

General Osberg is a native of Arlington Heights, Illinois. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Finance from the University of Illinois and a Master of Business

Administration from the University of Illinois. He lives in Geneva, Illinois, with his spouse, Jessica and has three daughters, Chloe, Ava, Juliana, and a son, Evan.



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, administers the Oath of Office to Maj. Gen. Justin Osberg during Osberg's promotion ceremony to major general, June 7, in Cantigny Park in Wheaton. (U.S. Army photos by Lt. Col. Brad Leighton)



Illinois Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Justin Osberg and his spouse, Jessica, unfurl his Two-Star General Officer Flag.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Chace Stewart, right, 126th Vehicular Equipment Maintenance, leads a training session at Ramstein Air Base, Germany with Master Sgt. Darien Jacobs, 1st Sergeant, 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, 126th Air Refueling Wing, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. Jacobs had the opportunity to learn about the repairs Stewart made on a Joint Light Tactical Vehicle during a moral visit to the maintenance repair shop June 10.

Illinois Guard Training in Germany Builds Relationships, Strengthens Readiness

Story and Photos by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Lang, 126th Air Refueling Wing

The 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron (LRS) and 126th Communications Flight of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, recently deployed for training to Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

They worked alongside the 86th Logistics Readiness Squadron and the 721st Aerial Port Squadron.

Annually, all Guardsmen are required to complete two weeks of training to maintain duty standards and ensure readiness if called upon to support military contingency operations, extend humanitarian aid or provide natural disaster relief efforts stateside and around the world.

"Benefits of the 126th training at the 86th [are] that we have a unique opportunity to embed ourselves in a unit that has a vastly larger operation than the one we have at home," said Senior Master Sgt. Justin Thiessen, operations superintendent, 126th LRS. "It's a unit that also has a very unique mission that supports U.S. Air Forces Europe, U.S. Air Forces Africa and U.S. Central Command."

To support the massive workflow, Ramstein Air Base is home to the largest population of Americans outside of the U.S., with about 56,000 personnel.

Two of the many differences between the 126th LRS and the 86th

LRS are a heavy aircraft parts store that exists only at Ramstein Air Base and a warehouse inventory team whose requirements include counting more than 800,000 individual items.

"The 126th has an annual requirement to count 48,000 items," Thiessen said.

While in Germany, the Airmen stationed at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, worked alongside 86th Airlift Wing personnel in five duty sections across eight locations to build upon their skills in an environment that fosters interoperability.

The training promoted collaboration and allowed practical application and problem-solving.

The LRS Transportation Management Office checked in 18,000 pounds of inbound cargo and learned the functions of the Deployable Automated Cargo Measurement System.

LRS Ground Transportation executed a tractor-trailer supply run, delivering 90,000 pounds of bare base emergency lighting valued at \$23.5 million in support of the 406th Air Expeditionary Wing's U.S. Africa Command mission.

LRS Material Management validated and inspected storage requirements worth more than \$4 million and received, tagged and stored seven C-17 main wheel assemblies at the heavy aircraft parts store.

LRS Vehicular Equipment Maintenance completed open service bulletins on Joint Light Tactical Vehicles and observed and reviewed best practices for fleet management of more than 1,800 vehicles assigned to 79 units.

The 126th Communications Flight's training included a field exercise in which they set up and configured a mobile communication package using Starlink and military satellite connections to enable secure data and voice at a remote location.

"All in all, the mission was a resounding success," said Tech. Sgt. Brian Jarvis, information assurance manager with the 126th Communications Flight.

"It was truly impressive the amount of training we were able to fit into six days, as well as the drive that our junior enlisted brought to the fight," Jarvis said. "Our active-duty counterparts from the 86th Communications Squadron proved their professionalism by taking time out of their schedule to welcome us with open arms. The training they provided was second to none, and I hope we get a chance to work with them again."

"Our Airmen came to Germany and learned what the 86th does on a



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Rashaad Adams, 126th Transportation Management Office, 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, nails together shoring while deployed for training at Ramstein Air Base, Germany June 5.



Illinois Air National Guard Master Sgt. Jaron Bridges, left, 126th Air Transportation, 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, and Airman 1st Class Isaiah Mango, Ramp Specialist, 721st Aerial Port Squadron, U.S. Air Force, Ramstein Air Base, Germany offload a liquid oxygen tank from a C-130 onto a 60K Tunner at Ramstein AB June 9. Illinois Air National Guardsmen are in Germany working alongside the 721st military personnel and local nationals during their annual deployment for training to ensure the units effectiveness in providing robust logistics support during contingency operations anytime anywhere.

larger scale, and that is one of the biggest takeaways from this DFT — a better understanding of large-scale operations and the sheer size of the work the unit accomplishes,” said Capt. Justin Högmänn, troop commander for the deployment for training (DFT). “This was an opportunity to learn a lot more about my folks on a personal level.”

“During drills, we have a lot to do and don’t always get the opportunity to connect deeply with folks,” said Chief Master Sgt. Jessica Walden, senior enlisted leader, 126th LRS. “These trips afford a lot of team-building opportunities to really chat one-on-one.”

“We also get to network, make friends, and create relationships. It’s a small Air Force; this allows us to build camaraderie in our own group,” Thiessen said.

“Building those personal relationships is important in building trust. You can’t take care of people if you don’t know what’s going on and what their needs are,” Walden said. “DFTs help build buy-in and appreciation for the unit, which hopefully creates an environment in which members feel comfortable coming to me as a senior leader with any questions, concerns or ideas for improvement within the unit.”



Senior Airman Dakota Gates, Client Systems Technicians, 126th Communications Flight, 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, connects a category 5 cable to a network stack as he works to setup the AIRBUS Ranger 1200 Flyaway Satellite Communications system during an exercise at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, June 6.



Senior Airman Dakota Gates, left, Airman 1st Class Rodger Wyatt, center, and Airman 1st Class Jack Laughlin, Client Systems Technicians, 126th Communications Flight, 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, pause work to take an environmental portrait after completing setup of the AIRBUS Ranger 1200 Flyaway Satellite Communications system during an exercise at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, June 6.



All Aboard!

33rd IBCT Travels to Annual Training Aboard C-130



Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers in the Urbana-based Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team arrive at Willard Airport in Savoy, Illinois, June 14 to travel to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, for annual training. The unit traveled to annual training aboard an Illinois Air National Guard C-130 from the Peoria-based 182nd Airlift Wing. The partnership between the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and the 182nd Airlift Wing lent an additional element of realism to the start of annual training. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt Dejuan Patterson, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

126th Air Refueling Wing, KC-135 Stratotanker is sanded down in preparation for the D-Day invasion stripes at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, Dec. 18, 2024. The 126th ARW can trace it's roots back to the 344th Bomb Group who participated in the 1944 D-Day invasion.



A 126th Maintenance Group Airman sands down a 126th Air Refueling Wing, KC-135 Stratotanker in preparation for painting D-Day invasion stripes at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, Dec. 18, 2024. The 126 ARW can trace it's roots back to the 344th Bomb Group who participated in the 1944 D-Day invasion. (Illinois Air National Guard photos by Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)

126th ARW Honors it's D-Day Heritage with new paint job

The 126th Air Refueling Wing has a long history that goes back prior to the formation of the Air Force in 1947, when it was the 344th Bombardment Group.

The bombardment group was activated Sept. 8, 1942. The 344th flew combat operations over occupied France, Belgium, and Holland, helped prepare for the Normandy invasion by striking vital bridges in France, and attacked the coastal batteries at

Cherbourg during D-Day operations. The 126th Air Refueling Wing traces its lineage directly to the formation of the 344th.

To honor that heritage the 126th Maintenance Group painted a KC-135R Stratotanker in the style known as the Normandy invasion stripes, recalling the B-26 Marauder the bomb group flew.

"I don't know how many people throughout the wing even know that

our unit was part of the D-Day invasion," said Master Sgt. Derek Jones, a 126th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron flying crew chief.

"I hope it brings a little bit more pride than what they already have and feel like they are a part of something way bigger," said Jones.

It took 14 Airmen over 10 days to sand and paint aircraft 7981 to resemble a B-26 Marauder.

"It was a process,"

said Master Sgt. Mathew Mehring, a 126th Maintenance Squadron aircraft structural maintenance supervisor. "We just took our time and tried to make it as good as we could."

The Aircraft Structural Maintenance shop is responsible for painting planes for corrosion prevention measures.

"We're functional painters," said Mehring. "As good as we are capable



Part of the 126th Maintenance Group team who painted plane 7981 a 126th Air Refueling Wing, KC 135 Stratotanker, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, Feb. 1, 2025. The Illinois Air National Guard wing can trace its roots back to the 344th Bomb Group who participated in the 1944 D-Day invasion.

of, I think we nailed it"

To get approval to paint a plane takes several layers of approval. It starts at the maintenance group level and goes through the wing commander while heading to the National Guard Bureau for final approval.

Several proposals for a paint scheme were brought to the maintenance group commander for approval.

"I had to provide all the backstory, all the proof and legitimacy of it," Jones explained. "We weren't doing racing stripes just to be cool. There was a premise and a purpose behind it. So, for them to be on board, I think was huge."

Jones went on to say that he hopes it boosts morale in the wing.



A 126th Air Refueling Wing, KC-135 Stratotanker takes off from Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, June 2.

Cyber Shield 2025: A Joint Force Exercise

The extensive Cyber Shield 2025 exercise, held in June at the Virginia National Guard State Military Reservation, emphasized the critical role of inter-service collaboration in strengthening national cybersecurity defenses.

The longest-running and largest Department of Defense cyber exercise, Cyber Shield brings together approximately 900 National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, Guardians, and civilian cyber professionals from 28 states and territories, and 15 countries.

Participants are engaged in rigorous training courses and a sophisticated cyber range designed to hone their skills in computer network internal defense measures and cyber incident response. A significant focus this year is on the diverse talent pool contributing to the exercise's success.

U.S. Army Maj. Spencer Loem, commander for the 176th Cyber Protection Team, Illinois Army National Guard, highlighted the realistic nature of the training.

"This year's Cyber Shield Red Team has been really outstanding," Loem said. "They've done a great job at using realistic techniques that you would see in modern environments. They've been able to integrate cloud and Industrial Control Systems data, like operational technology, which are things that are very difficult



U.S. Army Maj. Spencer Loem, left, commander for the 176th Cyber Protection Team, Illinois Army National Guard, U.S. Space Force Tech. Sgt. Sjohn-Curtis Stegall, from Space Delta 6 Detachment 2, U.S. Space Force and Gunnery Sgt. Wesley Owens, from 2nd Reconnaissance Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps work together as Red Team members during the 2025 Cyber Shield exercise held at the Virginia National Guard State Military Reservation in Virginia Beach, Virginia May 30-June 13. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Joe Roudabush, North Carolina National Guard)

to replicate in an exercise type environment."

Loem, who is participating as a Cyber Shield Red Team member and works as a Red Teamer in his civilian

career, underscored the collaborative spirit within the simulated conflict.

"From the Red Team perspective it's not about Red versus Blue," he explained. "That's why every single day we've been able to do hot washes with the Blue Teams and talk about what we did and how they can protect their network better."

The joint environment is a key takeaway for many participants. Loem noted the diversity on his own team.

"A great part about Cyber Shield is that we have National Guard, Reserves, and Active Duty all in the same room. On my team I've got a Space Force guy, I've got a Marine



Illinois National Guards members work together during the annual Cyber Shield training event held at the Virginia National Guard's State Military Reservation in Va. Beach, May 30 - June 13.

and I'm Army; right next to me we've got Air Force." Loem said. "Bringing talent from the different forces is such a great part of this exercise because everyone's got a very diverse set of experiences."

U.S. Space Force Tech. Sgt. Sjohn-Curtis Stegall, from Space Delta 6 Detachment 2, U.S. Space Force, echoed the sentiment, noting this is the first year Space Force has participated in this capacity on the Red Team.

"This has been a good experience. Being able to come into this environment where you have National

Guard, Reserve, Active Duty, people that are doing this in their civilian life, people that are doing this for the Department of Defense, you get a melting pot of experience."

Stegall praised the training scenarios, stating they were "hands down better than 90 percent of the cyber training I've done. We're actually implementing effects and we get to go talk to our blue teams to see what they look like from their perspective." He also emphasized the unique benefits of a multi-branch environment.

"I love the joint environment.

When you're in the same branch, you're all Air Force, all Space Force, etc, you tend to have a similar mentality," Stegall said. "It's nice sitting next to a Gunnery Sergeant from the Marines and listening to his perspective on things because there's a stark difference between his perspective and mine. You get to pick and pull from different people's experiences to make yourself better."

Cyber Shield 2025 has a mission to develop, train, and exercise cyber forces in the areas of computer network internal defense measures and cyber incident response.

Polish Forces, Illinois National Guard Train Together at Cyber Shield

The Illinois National Guard and Polish Territorial Defense Force trained side-by-side during Cyber Shield 2025, the longest-running and largest Department of Defense cyber defense exercise, in Virginia Beach, May 30 to June 13.

This was the first year the TDF's Cyber Division participated in the exercise and the third year that Polish forces have participated. Like the National Guard, the TDF has dual state/territory and federal missions.

The Illinois National Guard has shared a State Partnership Program with the Polish military since 1993 with Poland emerging from behind the former USSR's "Iron Curtain" to becoming a member of NATO and a staunch U.S. Ally.

Polish and Illinois National Guard Soldiers co-deployed into combat first to Iraq and then to Afghanistan for 19 consecutive years.



The Illinois National Guard and Polish Territorial Defense Force trained side-by-side during the annual Cyber Shield defense exercise May 30 to June 13.



Retiring Lincoln's Challenge Academy Director Led With Vision and Passion

Lincoln's Challenge Academy Director Maurice Rochelle understands the Cadets who enter the academy are looking for direction, a new start, and a way to change their lives for the better.

He lived it. Rochelle grew up in the 'Wild 100s' on the South Side of Chicago. "When I was young, I had temper and an attitude. I would not listen to most people."

Rochelle retired June 23 after three years of leading the academy. He leaves the academy with better educational and vocational programs. In 2024, Lincoln's Challenge Academy earned national academic accreditation for the high school credit program and added various high school credit classes. Rochelle also oversaw the addition of three vocational training programs and put several policies and initiatives in place to improve the Cadet experience during the residential program.

"LCA has become a better organization administratively and academically under Maurice Rochelle's leadership," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard.

"Under his passionate leadership and vision, the academy added vocational programs and improved the curriculum. He focused on the Cadets and dedicated himself to improving the academy for their benefit. Maurice believed in every young man and woman who hoped to change their life for the better."

Rochelle is an ordained Christian minister, and said his faith gives him his passion and guidance. "Jesus rescued me from my ways in the hood ... I went from the streets of Chicago to serving nearly 40 years in the Illinois Army National Guard and retiring as a colonel."

Rochelle said he drew from his experience growing up, being mentored, serving in the community, and, most of all his faith, when

working with the LCA cadets. He encouraged cadets to grow and develop holistically during their time in Lincoln's Challenge Academy. That includes developing their faith, no matter what religious background they come from.

He built bridges between Lincoln's Challenge Academy and faith communities including a local mosque, a Catholic Church, Spanish-speaking churches, and others who could help the cadets find meaning and purpose within their religious backgrounds.

"I've been down this road they're traveling, and I can give them the directions to a better future to avoid the bumps, potholes, and dead ends. I've been through a lot, and I can help Cadets achieve the greatness they're destined for. I believe each and every one of us are created to achieve some form of greatness. We all have a greater purpose and finding it is what helps makes us become the best

versions of ourselves. These cadets are the future of this nation, and we are



Lincoln's Challenge Director Maurice Rochelle is set to retire after three years of leading the Illinois National Guard-administered youth life skills and education program.



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, awards the Illinois Distinguished Service Medal to Col. (retired) Maurice Rochelle during Rochelle's retirement ceremony as Lincoln's Challenge Academy Director June 23 at the LCA campus in Rantoul.

teaching them a foundation to build upon now.”

Almost four years ago, retired Col. Maurice Rochelle came to Lincoln’s Challenge Academy as the Deputy of Operations following 39 years in the Illinois Army National Guard. After only a few months as a Deputy Director, he would take the reins and become Program Director in May 2022.

Rochelle oversaw the graduation of more than 600 Cadets, awarded more than 170 GEDs and 30 high school diplomas, and coordinated nearly 30,000 hours of community service. Thirty-one Cadets and one staff member enlisted in the military under Rochelle tutelage. More than 150 cadets (25 percent) and some staff also achieved milestones within their religious backgrounds, such as baptisms and confirmations, during Rochelle’s tenure as LCA Director.

Rochelle said the last three years has been a significant milestone in his life and career. Helping youth find purpose and direction while gaining education and life skills has been a way to give back and influence the future generation.

“It’s been an awarding time,” said Rochelle. “It’s not always easy working with youth. Unteaching bad habits and re-aligning them to think bigger so they have the confidence to achieve. We accomplish this by changes in the operations of the academy addressing the needs of education, life skills, and character development with discipline and a military structure.”

As Rochelle prepares to retire, he feels confident in the program the future director will receive and continue to build on to the legacy of LCA.

“The academy and the outstanding

staff have so much support and assistance to offer to our youth,” said Rochelle. “The future of LCA is bright. The academy has been an important chapter in the lives of more than 16,000 thousand graduates, the families, and communities they are a part of. I know the future Directors will continue to make LCA a premier academy.”

Rochelle said he will miss his time as Director, but LCA will always have a place in his heart as he will continue to advocate for the program after his retirement.

“This place has been a huge part of my life,” said Rochelle, “I know this was God’s plan for me to be here, and help add to the legacy of LCA, and help the young men and women through life lessons, faith, and helping them be the best them they can be. I plan to still be connected to LCA and help it to be the best version it can be.”



Lincoln’s Challenge Academy Director Maurice Rochelle is set to retire after three years of leading the Rantoul based life skills and education program.



Spc. Garrett Drane, assigned to 2nd Platoon, 661st Engineer Company, 123rd Engineer Battalion, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Illinois National Guard, securing the perimeter with a M249 Squad Automatic Weapon and providing security during the building of a new road. The unit is training to deploy to the U.S. CENTCOM area of responsibility. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Capt. A.J. Peskuski)

Illinois Army National Guard Engineer Company Prepares for Deployment

More than 150 soldiers of the 661st Engineer Construction Company, 123rd Engineer Battalion, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, completed two weeks of intensive training May 31 to June 13, at Marseilles Training Center in Illinois to prepare for a deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

And while accomplishing this vital training, the Engineers also improved the infrastructure at Marseilles Training Area making it a better place for Soldiers to train well into the future.

"For this annual training, we are completing our external evaluation and are preparing for our mobilization," said Capt. Larnell Brown, Company Commander. "We will be going overseas to support CENTCOM doing engineering operations to increase and aid survivability operations overseas. Not only will it give our Soldiers opportunities to do their jobs, but in the future the local population, and any Soldiers stationed there, will have more sustainable living habitat and sound infrastructure."

1st Lt. Michael Raymond served

as an Infantryman with the 82nd Airborne. "In 2009 and 2010, I was deployed to Baghdad, Iraq," said Raymond. "I was previously enlisted as an E-3, and I was working primarily as base security in Baghdad. The biggest change for me is going from lower enlisted to a leader. I'll be the executive officer of an engineer construction company as a commissioned officer. Now, I'm leading Soldiers and making them successful." His mission has also changed from his last deployment to the Middle East. "Instead of being primarily security, as part of

Operation Iraqi Freedom, we're going over there doing a base buildup," he said.

The 661st Engineer Company and 123rd Engineer Battalion honed their construction skills at Marseilles Training Center by continuing to improve an area that they have worked in before. The 661st Engineer Company and 631st Engineer Support Company worked together to complete a new leader's reaction course near a battalion-built rappelling tower. They also worked together to build a new gravel road turnaround, a tank ditch, and tank and Infantry vehicle fighting positions using bulldozers, graders, compactors and other engineering equipment.

The unit's surveyors measured the elevation of several projects using Trimble S7 survey equipment including a battalion-built running track. The 661st Engineers were evaluated on their ability to complete these tasks while maintaining perimeter security and responding to enemy probes and threats.

Their fellow units in the battalion completed additional projects. The 631st Engineer Support Company used over 2,500 tons of rock to expand a parking lot near a rifle range tower.

The battalion had previously built the rifle range tower. During this annual training, they installed a French Drain in a parking lot. A French Drain diverts standing water away from infrastructure. Meanwhile, the 616th Engineer Detachment made repairs to the stairs and balconies of the Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain training site.

And the Soldiers trained on the individual tasks they need to survive in combat.

"We've got Army Warrior Tasks and drills going," said 1st Sgt. Jacob Stegall of Rio, Ill, "We are training on medical response, tactical situational training exercises, improvised explosive device identification, individual weapons qualification and many other tasks ... It's important for Soldiers to know the basics like medical evacuation reports. We hope not to be in contact with the enemy downrange, but it's important that they know these things for any mission."

The 661st Engineers conducted a

Soldier readiness program, a physical health assessment, individual weapons qualifications, practiced land navigation, troop leading procedures and other Army Warrior Tasks to hone their individual and collective readiness and prepare for their deployment.

The 661st Engineer Construction Company is part of the 123rd Engineer Battalion that has horizontal construction and engineering capabilities, as well as firefighting capabilities. The 404th Maneuver Enhanced Brigade has a dual responsibility to support the Illinois Governor for domestic operations, such as disaster relief, and can also be mobilized in support of the President of the United States for federal military support.



U.S. Army Soldiers of 3rd Platoon, 661 Engineer Company, 123rd Engineer Battalion, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Illinois National Guard, providing security with a M249 Squad Automatic Weapon during repairs to the Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain training site at Marseilles Training Center, Ill. Jun 5 during training to deploy to the U.S. CENTCOM area of responsibility. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Capt. A.J. Peskuski)



U.S. Army Soldiers of 1st Platoon, 661st Engineer Company, 123rd Engineer Battalion, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Illinois National Guard, training to evacuate wounded during lanes training June 5 while providing security for the digging of survivability positions at Marseilles Training Center, Illinois.

Illinois Army National Guard Senior NCOs Finish Top of U.S. Army Sergeant Major Academy Class

Illinois Army National Guard Master Sgt. Jonathan Brewer of Springfield was the Distinguished Honor Graduate of Class 50 of the Sergeants Major Academy and three other Illinois National Guard Soldiers finished in the top tier of the class.

The Sergeants Major Academy graduated more than 1,130 noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in Class 50 on April 26 at Fort Bliss, Texas. Most of the class was conducted through distance learning with the last two weeks in Texas. Brewer serves in the Illinois National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters in Springfield as the Operations Noncommissioned Officer-in-Charge. He was the top graduate of the

class as the Distinguished Honor Graduate. Sgt. Maj. James Davis of Springfield, who also serves in Joint Force Headquarters, was an Honor Graduate. Both made the Commandant's List reserved for the top 20 percent of the class.

Command Sgt. Maj. Brad Gregory of Lake Zurich and Command Sgt. Maj. Norman Simard of Charleston were both cited for "Superior Academic Achievement" for Class 50. Gregory is the senior noncommissioned officer in the 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry based in Kewanee. Simard is the senior noncommissioned officer in 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment based in Peoria.

The U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy develops senior enlisted leaders to be agile, adaptive, and competent leaders of character capable of leading and advising organizations at the operational and strategic level. It prepares master sergeants and sergeants major to elevate from a tactical level of thinking to an operational and strategic perspective thus preparing them for leadership positions in organizations executing unified land operations. The distance learning course is conducted through three phases over an 18 to 24-month period. The Sergeant Major Academy course includes more than 1,480 hours of instruction.



From left is Command Sgt. Maj. Norman Simard of Charleston, Sgt. Maj. James Davis of Springfield, Master Sgt. Jonathan Brewer of Springfield and Command Sgt. Maj. Brad Gregory of Lake Zurich. The four Illinois Army National Guard senior noncommissioned officers finished in the top tier of the U.S. Army Sergeant Majors Academy Class 50 at Fort Bliss, Texas, on April 26.

Soldier Honored for Work in Supporting Gold Star Mission, Fallen Illinois Service Members

Maj. Candace White, Assistant Operations Officer for the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, was recognized by the Gold Star Mission during a ceremony May 18 at the Normal Readiness Center in Normal, Illinois. White received a challenge coin and a commemorative gift from Chuck Kitson, Assistant GSM Director of Operations, and Barry Tobias, President of GSM, featuring medals distributed during the Gold Star Mission Run for the Fallen, which she directed from 2019 to 2023.

Gold Star Mission is a nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring and remembering Illinois' fallen service members and supporting their Gold Star families. The Run for the Fallen, held in White's hometown of Rockford, Illinois, includes a half marathon, 5K and 3K events.

During the ceremony, Col. David Helfrich, commander of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade,



Maj. Candace White, Assistant Operations Officer for the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, was recognized by the Gold Star Mission during a ceremony May 18 at the Normal Readiness Center in Normal, Illinois.

thanked White for her support of the Gold Star Mission beyond her military duties. He also encouraged others in

the brigade to find ways to serve and give back to their communities outside of wearing the uniform.



Vipers Make Pit Stop at 182nd AW

U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Joshua Butcher, F-16 Viper Demonstration Team maintenance non-commissioned officer in charge, shows one of the Viper team's aircraft to Airmen from the 182nd Airlift Wing May 15, 2025, at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois. The 182nd Airlift Wing is hosting the Air Force F-16 Viper Demonstration Team while they perform at air shows in Illinois. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Katherine M. Jacobus)

Polish Delegation Visit Strengthens Illinois State Partnership Program at 183rd Air Operations Group

Brig. Gen. Robert Cierniak, Deputy Director of Poland's Air Operations Center–Air Component Command (AOC-ACC), led a delegation of 10 Polish military officers to Illinois.

The visit marked another milestone in the longstanding partnership between Illinois and Poland through the State Partnership Program (SPP), with a focus on enhancing cooperation and identifying new opportunities for interoperability between the Polish AOC-ACC, Warsaw Poland & the 183rd AOG, Springfield, IL.

The delegation's focus was on deepening operational ties and exploring future training opportunities between the Polish AOC-ACC and the 183rd Air Operations Group (AOG) in Springfield. During the delegation visit, stops included the 183rd AOG, the 618th Air Operations Center and the 126th Air Refueling Wing at Scott Air Force Base, where Polish officers received mission briefings and engaged in strategic discussions with senior leadership.



Polish Air Force Brig. Gen. Robert Cierniak, the deputy director of the Polish Air Operations Center Air Component Command, asks U.S. Air Force Capt. Jon Kent, the director of operations for the 183rd Maintenance Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, questions during a Polish delegation visit to the 183rd Wing, Springfield, Illinois May 28.



U.S. Air Force Capt. Jon Kent, the director of operations for the 183d Maintenance Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, explains the Centralized Repair Facility's mission and outputs to a Polish delegation during their visit to the 183d Wing, Springfield, Illinois May 28.

A highlight of the weeklong exchange was an incentive flight aboard a KC-135R Stratotanker from the 126th Air Refueling Wing. During the mission, the delegation observed a midair refueling operation involving a Polish Air Force F-35A Lightning II fighter jet. The aircraft, piloted by a Polish officer, showcased the increasing integration of Poland's fifth-generation fighter capabilities into NATO operations.

A key component of the visit was a leadership roundtable where the Polish delegation met with The Adjutant General of Illinois, the Assistant Adjutant General-Air, and commanders and staff from all three Illinois Air National Guard wings. The leaders discussed current and future training events, focusing on expanding interoperability, developing joint exercises, and strengthening readiness through continued bilateral engagement.

"This visit wasn't just about sharing operational knowledge and strategy. It was about building long-lasting friendships and mutual trust. That's the true strength of any State Partnership Program. By learning from one another, we deepen our partnership and strengthen our collective ability to face challenges together," said Maj. Erica M. Perrey, 183d State Partnership Program Director.

Established in 1993, the Illinois-Poland partnership under the SPP has grown into one of the most robust bilateral defense relationships in the National Guard program. This recent visit underscores the shared commitment to advancing interoperability and mutual security interests.

The delegation concluded their visit at the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Chicago. There, they engaged with diplomatic staff and

discussed the broader role of Polish American relations in the Midwest.

This visit not only reinforced the operational bonds between the Illinois National Guard and the Polish

military but also celebrated decades of cooperation, highlighting the enduring friendship between Illinois and Poland.



U.S. Air Force Col. David Keck, the commander of the 183d Air Operations Group, Illinois Air National Guard, speaks to Polish Air Force Brig. Gen. Robert Cierniak, right, the deputy director of the Polish Air Operations Center Air Component Command, during a Polish delegation visit May 28, to the 183rd Wing, Springfield.



Members of the Polish Air Force, U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army pose for a group photo with, left to right, Illinois State Representative Brandun Schweizer, Rep. Dave Severin, House Minority Leader Tony McCombie, Rep. C.D. Davidsmeyer and Rep. Mike Coffey during a visit to the Illinois State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois May 28.

Polish Air Force Visits with 126th Air Refueling Wing to witness refueling of Polish-piloted F-35



Members of the Polish Air Force, Illinois National Guard's state partners, flew on a 126th Air Refueling Wing, KC-135 Stratotanker, May 30, 2025, to see an F-35 flown by a Polish pilot get refueled.





Helfrich commits to Illinois Army National Guard

The newest recruits into the Illinois Army National Guard has a surname familiar to his fellow Soldiers in the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. Noah Helfrich, who enlisted as a 12N (Horizontal Construction Engineer) into the Sparta-based 631st Engineer Co., is the son of brigade commander Col. David Helfrich. His proud father swore his son into the Army on July 2 at MEPS in St. Louis. He will attend Army Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training next summer before starting college.



Welcome to the Illinois Army National Guard team!

Maddox Helfrich recently enlisted as a 15W Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Operator. He will attend Basic Combat Training at Fort Benning, Georgia, followed by Advanced Individual Training at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. Maddox was sworn in by his uncle, Col. David Helfrich, commander of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade — making the moment even more meaningful as he continues the family legacy of service.

Former Guard Member Elected to Lead State Combat Veterans Organization

Eugene Blackwell Served in Illinois Army National Guard from 1983 to 2009

A former Illinois Army National Guard member who retired from the U.S. Army Reserves in 2014 is continuing his service to his fellow veterans, this year as the commander of the Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Col. (ret.) Eugene Blackwell, of Frankfort, Illinois, who served in the Illinois Army National Guard from 1983 until 2009, was elected and installed as commander during the Illinois VFW's 106th annual State Convention June 7.

Blackwell joined the U.S. Army Reserves in 1982 before transferring to the ILARNG in 1983. He served in various medical units, including the 108th Medical Battalion, the 508th Medical Company, commander of the Health and Dental Clinic, and commander of the 108th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, before transitioning to the USAR in 2009, ultimately retiring from military service in 2014 with 32 years of service.

Blackwell deployed with the 108th MMB to Afghanistan in 2008 and served as an advisor to the Afghan Corps' surgeon. After he returned from Afghanistan in 2009, Blackwell was invited by fellow Guard member Col. (ret.) Nick Johnson to join the VFW at the Benjamin O. Davis Post 311 in Richton Park.

"Nick Johnson and I served together in Afghanistan. I was the battalion commander and he was my intelligence and security and operations and training officer," Blackwell said. "His brother-in-law was the commander of Post 311 at the time. When we returned, I got a call from Nick and he told me I should join the VFW at Richton Park."

Prior to Blackwell's deployment in 2008, he was working with Emergency Preparedness and was responsible for stocking the crash carts throughout the country in case of emergencies.

Blackwell's theme for his year as Department Commander is 'Serving



Then Lt. Col. Eugene Blackwell, and then-Maj. Nick Johnson, deployed to Afghanistan.



Eugene Blackwell delivers remarks as the newly elected and installed commander of the Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars.



Eugene Blackwell, newly elected State Commander of the Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars, and other elected and appointed officers take the oath of office.

with Resilience in Our Community,' a nod, he said, to the impact VFWs at the local level have in their community.

"Post 311 is very active in the Richton Park community and during my year as post commander, I made sure every event in which the members participated was recognized on the Illinois VFW's Community Activities reporting system," he said. "During that year, we were selected as a National Community Service Post of the Year and the post was recognized with a road sign. That sign stands outside of Richton Park as a testament to what the VFW does in their local communities."

Since joining the VFW in 2009, Blackwell has served at the local, district, and state levels, including a term as the Department Surgeon. Blackwell took the leap to run for Department Junior Vice Commander in 2023, the first position leading up to Department Commander. His decision to seek the leadership position was based on his successes as post and district commanders.

"I wanted to offer my experiences from when I served as the post and

later district commander to others seeking those positions," he said. "I wanted to serve as a mentor to those who seek to be leaders at those levels."

As a department officer, Blackwell also wanted to work to make the Veterans Foundation of Illinois, the Illinois VFW's 501-c3 foundation functional.

"When I was the department surgeon, I was at a national convention where the Texas VFW Foundation was a sponsor," he said. "I wondered why can't the Veterans Foundation of Illinois function in that same manner. My ultimate goal is to someday get it functional and better equipped to assist veterans in Illinois."

At the national level, Blackwell has served on the National VFW Bylaws Study Group since 2020. The Bylaws Study Group meets regularly to study the organization's bylaws and make recommendations each year to change, modify, or add new bylaws.

Blackwell, who served as a traditional Guard member and Reserve Soldier, earned his Doctor



Lt. Col. Eugene Blackwell and wife Mattie before Blackwell deployed to Afghanistan.

of Pharmacy from the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy and worked at the Department of Veterans Affairs, first at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center and later at the Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital, both in Chicago.

"When I retired from the VA in February, I worked at the National Acquisition Center at Hines working with contracting officers to reduce the cost of pharmaceutical products for federal government agencies," Blackwell said.

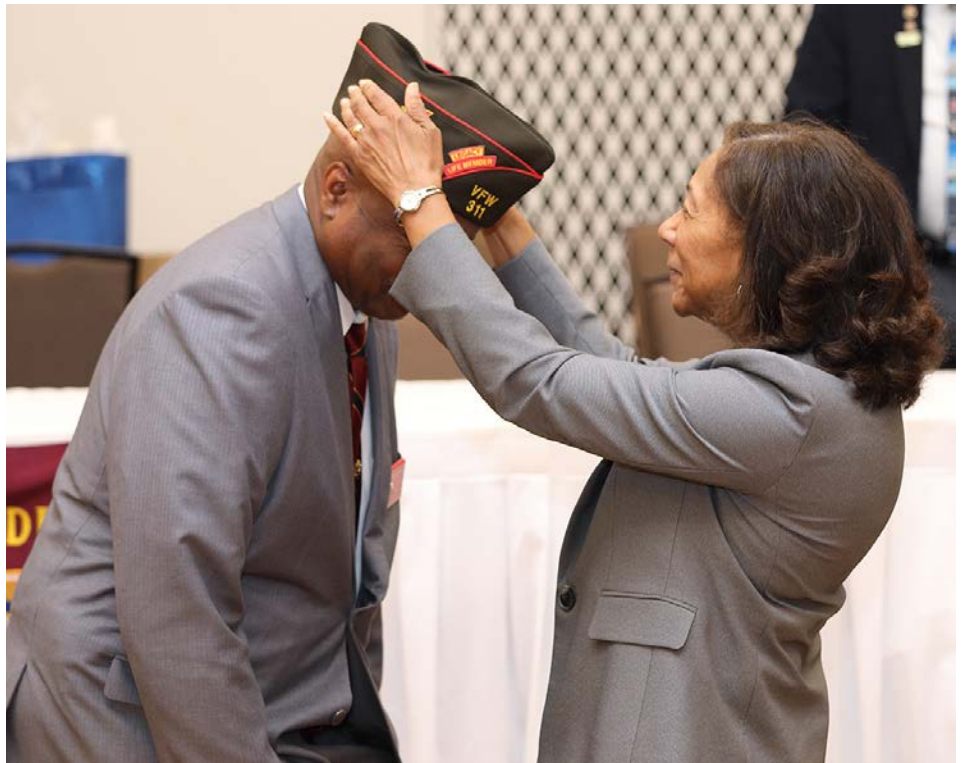
Besides the VFW, Blackwell is also active in his local church and fraternity. He is a member of New Faith Baptist Church, where prior to his increased responsibilities in the VFW, he contributed to the Music Ministry and Christian Education.

He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha

Fraternity, Inc., Theta Mu Lambda Chapter, and has served as a past president and is the chapter's financial secretary. He also chairs the Theta Mu Lambda Charitable Foundation which awards 10-20 scholarships annually to high school graduates pursuing higher education. The Foundation also has a mentoring program which meets at Prairie State College.

"Our purpose is to mentor young men to become better citizens in their community," he said. "We teach leadership, SAT prep, and hold a Mock Trial with the John Marshall Law School in Chicago. Through our Ties that Bind program, we teach young men how to tie a necktie, how to sit at a table and how a table is laid out when attending a formal function. Through Nick Johnson and an aviation program, our young mentees learn how air traffic controllers function and how airplanes are flown."

Blackwell, and his wife of almost 35 years, Mattie, have three adult children and three grandchildren.



Mattie Blackwell, wife of Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars Commander Eugene Blackwell, caps her husband during the installation ceremony in June.



Yemm Honored for 39 Years of Service

U.S. Air Force Maj. Cody Anderson, 182nd Force Support Squadron commander, presents a certificate of appreciation to Chief Master Sgt. Jeffrey Yemm, 182nd Force Support Squadron superintendent, during his retirement ceremony at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, June 7.

Yemm retired with 39 years of dedicated service to the Air National Guard. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Avery Litton)

Illinois National Guard Soldiers among many completing annual training at Fort McCoy in June

Story and Photo by Scott Sturkol, Fort McCoy Public Affairs Office

Thousands of troops trained at Fort McCoy in June, including Marines, Soldiers, Airmen, and more.

Some of the units with larger numbers of troops training on post were with the Illinois National Guard.

Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers with the Urbana-based Headquarters and Headquarters Co., 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team flew on a C-130 Hercules from the Peoria-based 182nd Airlift Wing from Willard Airport in Savoy, Illinois, to Fort McCoy on June 14 for annual training.

The unit traveled to annual training aboard the Illinois Air National Guard C-130 from the Peoria-based 182nd Airlift Wing.

The partnership between the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and the 182nd Airlift Wing lent an additional element of realism to the start of annual training.

Overall, according to statistics kept by the Fort McCoy Directorate of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security (DPTMS), more than 1,100 Soldiers connected to the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team trained at Fort McCoy in June.

Also training at Fort McCoy in June were Soldiers with the 108th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, which is headquartered in North Riverside, Illinois.

On June 26, many of the Illinois Guard troops were leaving Fort McCoy after completing their training. Troops departed in several convoys to head back.

Illinois National Guard Soldiers have been training at Fort McCoy for many years. In 2024, for example, Soldiers with the 106th and 216th Cavalry Regiments of the Illinois



Training operations are shown at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, on June 26, that includes Soldiers with the Illinois National Guard wrapping up annual training. Each year, thousands of troops train at Fort McCoy during weekend training, institutional training, and for exercises and events.

National Guard trained on a live-fire range at Fort McCoy on Aug. 29, 2024, where they honed their skills using live TOW missiles, a long-range precision anti-tank weapon system.

The TOW missile is a wire guided missile that is launched from a tube, Army facts show. The missile has a conventional layout with the warhead at the front, cruciform wings in the middle, four control vanes and single-stage solid propellant rocket motor at the rear.

Training like this also contributes to the economic impact Fort McCoy has on local economies. Fort McCoy's total economic impact for fiscal year (FY) 2024 was an estimated \$1.6 billion, and a lot of that contribution was thanks to the 73,991 troops who trained at Fort McCoy in FY 2024.

Larry Sharp, chief of the Fort McCoy DPTMS Training Coordination Branch, said the training numbers

include Army Reserve Soldiers; National Guard service members like Illinois National Guard troops; and active-duty troops from not just the Army but also other services, such as the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force.

Training statistics also reflect many types of training opportunities that take place at the installation by active- and reserve-component forces and other governmental agencies, according to DPTMS.

Fort McCoy's motto is to be the "Total Force Training Center."

Located in the heart of the upper Midwest, Fort McCoy is the only U.S. Army installation in Wisconsin.

The installation has provided support and facilities for the field and classroom training of more than 100,000 military personnel from all services nearly every year since 1984.

Future Illinois Army National Guard Officers Walk the Civil War Battlefield at Fort Donelson

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

On the historic grounds of Fort Donelson, Tennessee, where Union and Confederate forces once clashed during the Civil War, a new generation of Illinois Army National Guard leaders walked in the footsteps of history. Officer Candidate School Class 70-25 from the Illinois Army National Guard traveled to the battlefield May 16-18 to study leadership, reflect on history, and strengthen their skills as they prepare to become commissioned officers.

The three-day staff ride is part of the Officer Candidate School curriculum and combines military history with leadership development. Each officer candidate researched a historical figure from the Battle of Fort Donelson, then presented a battlefield brief at key terrain features associated with their leader's actions.

"The purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of the tactical, political, and historical significance around Fort Donelson," said Officer Candidate John Winkler of Alton. "Understanding that the great leaders of the past were once in our shoes provides valuable perspective."

The Battle of Fort Donelson, fought in February 1862, was a critical early victory for the Union and showcased one of the first joint operations between land and naval forces. The location also carries special meaning for Illinois Soldiers, including those who served under Colonel Isham Haynie, who lived in Illinois and fought at the battle.

"For me, the biggest lesson was the importance of unity of command," said Officer Candidate Drennen Kessinger of Marine. "Being on the same ground where leaders made life and death decisions puts everything we've learned into perspective."

Officer Candidate Maggie Mui of Chicago said the trip made history feel personal and relevant.

"This experience gave me a framework for how to analyze



Officer Candidates with the Illinois Army National Guard listen as David Hatfield, a park ranger with the National Park Service, explains the historical significance of the terrain during a staff ride to Fort Donelson National Battlefield in Dover, Tennessee, May 17.



Officer Candidate Amy Feher points out tactical positions on a historical battlefield map as part of a guided discussion during the Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School staff ride at Fort Donelson National Battlefield in Dover, Tennessee, May 17.

battlefield decisions and how those lessons apply to our modern roles as officers," she said. "Even without military experience before this, I felt like I was stepping into something meaningful."

Maj. John Tracy, the Officer Candidate School company commander and a graduate of the same program, said the staff ride tests the candidates' ability to plan and execute real-world missions.



Officer Candidates from OCS Class 70-25 with the Illinois Army National Guard pose for a group photo overlooking the Cumberland River at Fort Donelson National Battlefield in Dover, Tennessee, March 16, 2025. The three-day staff ride served as a culminating event in their leadership development, combining historical research, battlefield analysis, and presentations on military leadership during the 1862 Civil War battle.

"Fort Donelson is a master class in large scale combat operations and joint force coordination," said Tracy. "Our officer candidates learn not only about warfighting functions, but about mission command, logistics, and leadership under pressure."

Tracy commissioned through the Accelerated Officer Candidate School in 2014 and now helps shape the next generation of leaders. "To return as cadre and serve as the OCS company commander is a privilege," he said. "This program shaped me, and now I get to help shape them."

Beyond historical analysis, the staff ride created opportunities for mentorship and team building in a less formal environment. Candidates coordinated the full scope of the trip, from lodging and meal planning to communication, scheduling, and transportation.

"The staff ride allows for learning to happen outside the classroom," said

Tracy. "You can really see candidates start to think and lead like Army officers."

Capt. Anthony Kurien, Senior TAC Officer, supported the staff ride by reinforcing classroom instruction with battlefield context.

"Officer candidates gain a lot by walking the battlefield," he said. "They use tools like mission analysis and terrain analysis to put themselves in the shoes of commanders from that era."

Kurien added that Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's leadership style remains a valuable case study.

"General Grant's offensive tenacity and his treatment of surrendering forces show the character of a commissioned officer," he said.

The weekend concluded with a formal dinner and the class branching ceremony, where each candidate received their Army officer branch. It was a milestone moment that marked

a major step in their transformation from candidates to future leaders.

"That dinner marked the transition from officer candidate to future Army leader," said Kessinger.

"It was a proud moment for all of us."

Mui reflected on the group's visit to the Fort Donelson National Cemetery, calling it the most powerful moment of the trip.

"It reminded us of the cost of leadership and the sacrifices of those who came before us," she said.

With commissioning just months away, the lessons learned on the battlefield continue to echo as Class 70-25 prepares to take the next step in their military careers.

"For future OCS classes, I'd say take this seriously," said Winkler. "We are incredibly fortunate to be trusted with the responsibility of leading Soldiers, and it is a privilege to learn from those who came before us."

New Berlin Soldier Commissions as Officer in Illinois Army National Guard

The Illinois Army National Guard welcomed its newest second lieutenant in a commissioning ceremony May 17 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.

Thomas Luca II of New Berlin, Illinois, who graduated from the Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School in August, was commissioned as an Adjutant General officer.

"This is a big day for Luca," said Lt. Col. Lance Frail, Commander, Recruiting and Retention Battalion. "He has spent many years as a noncommissioned officer, rising all the way to sergeant first class. Now he's transitioning to an officer. It kind of starts over for him."

Frail said that while Luca starts at the 'bottom of the barrel,' he will be looked at as the standard bearer of discipline.

"You have to live it everyday," he said. "It's a big deal to put on that bar and work your way up. It's also a big deal to say I'm moving over from enlisted to the officer side, or as some would say 'the dark side.'"

Frail said he doesn't look as commissioning as 'going to the dark side.'

"I look at it as a transition to the light," he said. "You're now standing in the light, always being watched. Someone is always looking at you. I know you will do the right thing all the time."

Frail thanked Luca's family.

"It's been a long road," he said. "He did phenomenal in Officer Candidate School and I know it will transition well to what he'll do for us in Recruiting and Retention and life after RRB."

Luca said it's kind of a surreal moment being commissioned as a second lieutenant.

"It was an emotional time as I ripped off all the stripes in preparation for this day," he said. "I've spent 23 years as an enlisted Soldier only to strip off the stripes and pin on bars."



Jolene, Audriana and Thomas Luca III, the wife and children of newly commissioned 2nd Lt. Thomas Luca II, pin on his new rank during a commissioning ceremony May 17 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, in Springfield. Luca graduated from the Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School in August and commissioned into the Adjutant General Corps.

"This is an honor I do not take lightly," Luca said. "Twenty-three years of serving beside the best men and women this country has to offer."

Luca said he never envisioned himself becoming a commissioned officer.

"Never in my earliest days in the Army when I was trying to keep up in basic training, did I ever imagine my path would lead to this day," he said. "If you asked me even two years ago if I ever envisioned myself as an officer, the answer would be no. I thoroughly enjoyed being a noncommissioned officer – the backbone of the Army and training Soldiers."

Luca said serving Soldiers is his passion.

"This has been a long road filled with challenges, victories and setbacks, and lots of growth," Luca said. "Through it all I've been blessed with leadership, mentorship, and friendship that has kept me going."

Luca thanked his family, including wife, Jolene, daughter, Audriana, and son, Thomas Luca III, for their support.

"My wife has always been there for me, through all the training and the time of me being gone," he said. "To my children, you mean the world to me and you have sacrificed your time. I've missed some big moments in your lives. Your love and support gave me the strength to push through, even on the hardest days."

Luca also thanked some of those he served alongside.

"To the noncommissioned officers I've served alongside. Thank you for showing me what real leadership looks like. The backbone of the Army is not just a phrase, it's a reality," he said. "I will carry the lessons I've learned as an NCO into this next chapter as an officer."

"To the officers who saw something in me, mentored me, challenged me, and never let me settle, thank you," Luca said. "Your trust and encouragement made this next step possible. I will do everything in my power to live up to that and exceed the standards you have set for me."

"My Soldiers have been my purpose," Luca said. "Every decision, every hard call, every sleepless night, has been with you guys in mind."

You've inspired me more than you know. I will always strive to earn the right to lead from the front, shoulder to shoulder, with the values and integrity you deserve."

Luca said the promotion isn't just a new rank, but also a new responsibility.

"This is a new opportunity and a new promise," Luca said. "I promise to lead with humility and serve with honor. I may wear gold bars now, but I'll never forget the stripes that shaped who I am."

Luca said he knows the road ahead will also have challenges.

"I welcome these challenges because I know I'm not walking alone," Luca said. "I know I'm surrounded by warriors, by patriots, and my family, both in uniform and out of uniform, who believes in this mission as deep as I do. Here's to the next chapter of continued service and here's to the journey that brought me here."



Newly commissioned 2nd Lt. Thomas Luca II thanks family, friends, and fellow Soldiers for their support, leadership, and mentorship



Lt. Col. Lance Frail, Commander, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, administers the oath of office to newly commissioned 2nd Lt. Thomas Luca II during a commissioning ceremony May 17 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.

U.S. Army Sgt. Michael Rojas, a cavalry scout with C Troop, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, Illinois Army National Guard, assists a Polish Territorial Defence Force soldier with leveling a sniper scope at the Territorial Defence Forces Training Center in Toruń, Poland, June 4.



Illinois Army National Guard trains with Polish Territorial Defence Force

Story and Photos by Staff Sgt. Amber Peck, National Guard Bureau

Soldiers with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Illinois Army National Guard, recently spent two weeks in Toruń, Poland, training alongside members of the Polish Territorial Defence Force.

Since 1993, the Illinois National Guard and Poland have been partners in the Department of Defense National Guard State Partnership Program – an

initiative that pairs Guard elements with partner nations worldwide for joint military training and subject matter expert exchanges.

The two-week training in June focused on sniper operations, combat medical care, the Javelin anti-tank weapon system, and remote observer techniques.

For the sniper teams, the goal

was to strengthen leadership skills in employing and overseeing sniper sections as well as developing advanced sniper expertise.

“Our goal as a training team is to ensure we are equipping the Polish snipers with the tools to employ themselves against drones and thermal environments,” said Sgt. 1st Class Hussein Mashal, an infantryman



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Soloff and Staff Sgt. Nicholas Brodin, infantryman with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Illinois Army National Guard observe Javelin anti-armor ambush training with the Polish Territorial Defence Forces at the TDF Training Center in Toruń, Poland, June 11.



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Garza, an infantryman with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Illinois Army National Guard, talks with a Polish Territorial Defence soldier about camouflage and concealment techniques during Javelin anti-armor ambush training.



U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Illinois assistant adjutant general – Army, and Brig. Gen. Krzysztof Stańczyk, commander of the Polish Territorial Defence Force, observe culminating training events conducted by the Illinois Army National Guard and Polish TDF at the TDF Training Center in Toruń, Poland, June 12.

with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment. “By merging our techniques with theirs and the lessons learned from the Ukrainian war, we hope to strengthen their sniper employment capabilities and survivability.”

In the medical realm, Soldiers with the Illinois Army Guard’s Charlie Company, 634th Brigade Support Battalion shared casualty care treatment procedures - from the point of injury to the final point of care.

This iteration included complex training scenarios that allowed participants to triage and evaluate casualties in a realistic, stressful simulated combat environment.

“It’s always worth it working with the National Guard,” said Polish TDF 2nd Lt. Jakub Piotrowski, a medical

team member and instructor. “We do the same things in different ways so it’s worthwhile to see how a different army is doing the same thing and then be able to cooperate with it.”

Javelin instructors echoed that sentiment.

“The Polish soldiers were extremely motivated and eager to learn,” said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Nicholas Broden, a training noncommissioned officer with C Company, 1st Bn., 178th Inf. Regt. “They were always asking questions and were very hands on with the equipment.”

Previous training exchanges meant many of the Polish soldiers already had foundational knowledge of the Javelin systems. That allowed the training to advance quickly to more



Staff Sgt. Nicholas Broden, an infantryman with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Illinois Army National Guard inspects the Javelin Field Tactical Trainer to ensure proper performance during Javelin anti-armor ambush training with the Polish Territorial Defence Forces.

strategic and tactical discussions, said Broden.

For the forward observer teams – or remote observers – the focus was on establishing the fundamental skills for indirect fire coordination, a capability the TDF is actively strengthening as they expand artillery capabilities.

“We started off pretty basic with basic call for fire and then basic joint fires observer skills,” said U.S. Army Master Sgt. William Aitken, an operations NCO with the 33rd IBCT. “It’s kind of an abbreviated forward observer program for the TDF.”

The training also included high tech capabilities – such as employing small drones – combined with improvised concealment techniques to help Polish soldiers observe from a distance while staying hidden.

The team practiced setting up hasty observation posts, coordinating drone feeds with command elements, and minimizing visual and electronic signatures – skills directly influenced by lessons learned from the war in Ukraine.

Overall, the training helped strengthen and continue the 30-plus year partnership.

“Our partnership with Poland, which began in 1993 and included 19 years of co-deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq, is the gold standard of deployments,” said U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. “We learn, we teach, and we develop new tactics and techniques together with each critical knowledge exchange event. Our capabilities have improved, we’ve expanded our capacity, and our partnership has grown even stronger the past two weeks.”



Staff Sgt. Bruno Rios, a sniper with Charlie Troop, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry Regiment, Illinois Army National Guard, confirms that the weapon of his Polish counterpart is clear following the completion of a shooting drill at a range near Toruń, Poland



Polish Territorial Defence Force soldiers secure U.S. Army 1st Sgt. David Scanlan of Charlie Company, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, Illinois Army National Guard, to a litter during casualty evacuation training.



Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Soloff, an infantryman with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Illinois Army National Guard, observes Polish Territorial Defence soldiers as they prepare range cards necessary for Javelin deployment during Javelin anti-armor ambush training at the TDF Training Center in Toruń, Poland, June 11. The Illinois National Guard and Poland are partners in the Department of Defense National Guard State Partnership Program, which pairs Guard elements with partner nations worldwide for mutual training and subject matter expert exchanges.

A Career of Service:

Illinois Army Guard Soldier Reflects on Time in Active Component, Army Guard, and Army Reserve

Story and Photo by Staff Sgt. Amber Peck, National Guard Bureau

Sgt. 1st Class Hussein Mashal, an Illinois Army National Guard Soldier with nearly two decades of service, has checked a lot of Army boxes – service in all three components – active, Reserve, National Guard – Ranger school, airborne school, stateside missions, and deployments around the world.

“I started in 2005 on a four-year ROTC scholarship at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois, but left the program a year later to enlist active duty as an infantryman,” he said. “I didn’t want to miss the surge, and I wanted more control over my career.”

That decision kicked off a winding path that included airborne school, a long-range surveillance deployment in Iraq, a deployment to Afghanistan with the 82nd Airborne Division, and assignments with both the Illinois and California Army National Guard.

His 15-month deployment to Iraq was a key moment from his time in the active component.

“Conducting LRS operations on deployment was one of my favorite memories,” he said. “It’s one of those jobs that gives you the feeling you’re making an actual impact.”

He later deployed to Afghanistan. Those two deployments and the overall time he spent in the active component gave him insight that he carried with him while serving in the Army Reserve and Army National Guard.

“My active time gave me a better understanding of how to structure and deliver training to increase the lethality of my Soldiers and my organization in the reserve component,” he said.

He’s also learned how to tap into the unique capabilities Army Guard Soldiers bring to the fight.

“On the Guard side, you get people who bring in all this civilian expertise,” he said. “It’s a different kind of asset, but when you use it right, it makes the unit better.”

Since returning to the Illinois Army Guard in 2022, he’s deployed to Jordan and participated in subject



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Hussein Mashal, an infantryman with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Illinois Army National Guard, listens to questions from troops about sniper training at a range near Toruń, Poland, June 7, 2025.

matter expert exchanges in Poland. The latter was part of the Department of Defense National Guard State Partnership Program, which pairs Guard elements with partner nations worldwide for mutual training and subject matter expert exchanges. The Illinois Guard and Poland have been paired in the program for more than 30 years. Taking part in that has been a highlight, he said, that stands out in a long list of Guard memories.

“The ability to share knowledge, not only with a partner force but a counterpart element so similar to the National Guard, highlighted to me the larger impact that reserve component Soldiers can and will play in the LSCO [large-scale combat operations] environment,” he said. “It has forever changed my understanding of our influence on the battle field.”

While his path in the Army included attempts to pursue specialized training that didn’t pan out, he’s not one to dwell on what didn’t happen. Instead, he continues to seek out experiences that make him more well-rounded — both as a

Soldier and a leader.

“I’ve had multiple experiences that shaped me into who I am,” he said. “Even if someone’s path looks different, I try to pass on what I’ve learned.”

He admits switching components so often came with trade-offs — slower promotions, constantly needing to reprove himself — but doesn’t regret it.

“My biggest advice is to do what’s best for you and your family,” he said. “Don’t let anyone guilt you into staying or switching. At the end of the day, we’re all on the same team.”

Mashal is still figuring out what’s next, including whether to retire.

“Deciding to retire and hang up the uniform is something we all think about,” he said. “But once it’s in front of you, it’s a hard thing to comprehend.”

For now, he’s staying focused on being the kind of leader he would’ve looked up to earlier in his career — and keeping the door open to whatever comes next.

Employers Get Boots-on-Ground View of Training Through Employer Support of Guard, Reserve Boss Lift

Employers from across Illinois flew aboard CH-47 Chinooks to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin for Boss Lift 2025, an event designed to connect civilian employers with the Soldiers they support

Hosted by ESGR and facilitated by the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the visit included live-fire demonstrations, hands-on equipment briefings, and a tour of key brigade operations like the Mobile Command Post and Subterranean Command Post.

From tactical vehicles to thermal optics, Boss Lift gave employers a firsthand look at the skills, structure, and leadership their Citizen-Soldiers bring back to the workplace.









Soldier Retires After 37 Years of Military Service

Colonel Milton Ware Credits Long Career to God's Plan

Col. Milton Ware told family, friends, and fellow Illinois National Guard members that if someone had asked him if he saw himself serving in the military for 37 years he would have told them no. But, he said, "God had other plans for my life."

The nearly four decades of service of the retiring Illinois Army National Guard Soldier was front and center during a retirement ceremony, June 20, at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, where family, including Ware's parents, and his 101-year-old grandmother, Jesse, came to celebrate his career, with fellow members of the Illinois Army National Guard.

"Thirty-seven years is a long time," said Maj. Gen. (ret.) Eric Little, who Ware chose to officiate the ceremony. "Those 37 years is a big deal because over those years, you miss family events."

Little thanked Ware's family for enduring that sacrifice, those events with Ware's presence, and for being a strong support system for him.

"The sacrifices made by the family cannot be measured," he said. "But he couldn't do any of the stuff we've talked and laughed about without your support."

Little told Ware the transition to retirement will be difficult, but offered words of encouragement.

"It won't be easy because you won't be an Army guy anymore," he said. "When you walk out of here never forget who you are. You will always be a colonel. You will have always served 37 years, and you sacrificed a lot for this country. Congratulations on a great career."

Ware, a native of Chicago, and the Senior National Guard Advisor to Army Contracting Command in Huntsville, Alabama, served in a variety of positions throughout his career.

Ware previously served as the Supervisory Contract Specialist for the Illinois Army National Guard, and the Army National Guard Contracting Branch Chief to the National Guard Bureau, Arlington, Virginia, and as a



Col. Milton Ware thanks family, friends, and fellow Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers, for their support during a retirement ceremony June 20 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield. Ware retired from the Illinois Army National Guard with 37 years of military service.

Contracting Team Lead to the Army National Guard Contracting Branch.

Ware deployed to Afghanistan in support of Illinois Army National Guard contracting missions as the Contracting Officer team lead for 1965th Contingency Contracting Team.

Ware, who branched as an Infantry officer after completing Officer Candidate School, served as the Battalion Commander, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Commander, Company D, 1-178th Infantry, and Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-178th Infantry.

He mobilized and deployed in

support of Operation Enduring Freedom to Europe as a platoon leader of Company B, 1-178th Infantry, and later to Afghanistan as the logistics and sustainment officer (S-4) for 1-178th Infantry Battalion in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, operating mainly in RC-East, providing sustainment to the Provincial Reconstruction Team security forces.

Brig. Gen. Kendrick Traylor, the military deputy to the Director of Acquisitions at the National Guard Bureau, who served with Ware over the years, called Ware a rock, a team player, and a very humble man.

"You did a lot for the National Guard Bureau and the world of acquisitions," Traylor said. "You were instrumental in developing the Contingency Contracting Teams, not just for Illinois, but across the 54 states, territories, and Washington, D.C."

"I didn't think I was going to be able to be here today, but I'm where I'm supposed to be," he said. "Thank you for your service to your state, and your nation, and for your support."

Traylor thanked Ware's family.

"You're getting him back, make him cut some grass," he said with a laugh. "Put him to work."

Ware thanked fellow Guard members, peers, and noncommissioned officers he's served with throughout his career for their mentorship and friendship.

"We had a lot of good times coming up the ranks together," he said. "To my NCOs, officers can't get anything done without NCOs and I'm nothing without my NCOs."

Ware also thanked his family for their support.

"It's hard to do what we do," he said. "It's good to know I have so many cheerleaders in my family."

Ware shared a story about his grandmother, Jesse, who he calls "very competitive."

"Over my years in the military, I've developed a knack for ironing my shirts," he said. "She would make it a competition to out-iron me ironing my own shirts. And she would win."

Ware thanked his dad for pushing him toward joining the military.

"He's the reason I'm here today," he said. "He recommended I join the Army and then suggested I attend Officer Candidate School."

He also thanked his mother for her support.

"She knows what's good for me even if I don't know," he said. "I am here literally because of things she's done for me."

Ware said he's relied on faith throughout his career.

"It didn't matter what I thought I was going to do or what I was going to become, God had another plan for my life," he said. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I kept the faith."



Col. Paul Metzдорff, Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard, presents Col. Milton R. Ware with the Order of St. Maurice, awarded to Infantry Soldiers for significant contributions to the Infantry community.



Maj. Gen. (ret.) Eric Little presents Col. Milton R. Ware with the Legion of Merit during a retirement ceremony June 20 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.



Master Sgt. Francis Sarnecki shares a laugh during remarks from Lt. Col. Allison Jacobs, commander of the 634th Brigade Support Battalion, at his retirement ceremony held June 6 at the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield. Jacobs reflected on their years of friendship and Sarnecki's legacy of dedication and service throughout his 31-year career with the Illinois Army National Guard.

Illinois National Guard Honors Master Sgt. Francis Sarnecki's 31 Years of Service

Story and Photos by Spc. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

Surrounded by his wife, loved ones, and fellow Soldiers, Master Sgt. Francis Sarnecki retired from the Illinois Army National Guard during

a ceremony June 6 at the Illinois State Military Museum.

The event marked the conclusion of a distinguished 31-year military

career that included two overseas deployments, 22 years of service with the Illinois National Guard Counterdrug Program, and a long



Master Sgt. Francis Sarnecki addresses family, friends, and fellow Soldiers during his retirement ceremony at the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield, June 6. Sarnecki thanked attendees for their support throughout his 31-year career with the Illinois Army National Guard.

record of dedicated support to the Guard's mission. Sarnecki was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for his more than three decades of honorable and dedicated Army service.

Lt. Col. Allison Jacobs, commander of the 634th Brigade Support Battalion, praised Sarnecki for his unwavering commitment.

"You're a nice guy, you're happy – but he's dedicated in everything he does," said Jacobs. "He's dedicated to his wife and family. He's dedicated to the military – 30 years, obviously, that takes a lot of dedication to stick with one career."

Jacobs reflected on their time in service together, adding, "There is not a single time anyone in this office or in this room could not count on Frank. He will always be there to lend a hand. Frank will put everyone else first, and that dedication has been shown throughout his life."

Sarnecki expressed heartfelt gratitude to his family, friends, and colleagues for their support and shared a final piece of advice.

"My advice is time. Time is the most valuable thing we have. Once it's gone, you can't get it back, borrow it, or save it," said Sarnecki. "We give a lot of our time to this mission – late nights, missed appointments, birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays – and our families shoulder that burden without complaint. Never forget that while this career is a huge part of our lives, it's not the only part. Be fully present with your families. That's what I'll focus on now, and I couldn't be more thankful for the chance to do so."

Sarnecki was born in Champaign, Illinois, and raised in southern California before relocating to Illinois, where he graduated from Beardstown High School in 1995. In his junior year, he enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard to help pay for college. He completed Basic Combat Training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and Advanced Individual Training at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, as a track vehicle mechanic.

In 2003, Sarnecki was mobilized in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom with the 126th Maintenance Company.



Lt. Col. Allison Jacobs, commander of the 634th Brigade Support Battalion, presents Master Sgt. Francis Sarnecki with a certificate of retirement during a ceremony held June 6 at the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield. Sarnecki retired after 31 years of dedicated service in the Illinois Army National Guard, including two deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and 22 years with the Illinois Counterdrug Task Force.

In June 2004, he began full-time service with the Illinois Counterdrug Task Force as a case support analyst. From 2008 - 2009, he deployed again to Iraq with the 1844th Transportation Company.

Throughout his 31 years of military service, Sarnecki served in multiple roles across various units, consistently demonstrating leadership, technical expertise, and unwavering dedication. His awards and decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Army Good Conduct Medal (10th award), Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal (3rd award), National Defense Service Medal with Bronze Service Star, Iraqi Campaign Medal with Campaign Star, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War

on Terrorism Service Medal, NCO Professional Development Ribbon (3rd award), Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, Army Overseas Training Ribbon, Armed Forces Service Medal with "M" Device, Illinois Long and Honorable Service Medal (7th award), Illinois Military Attendance Ribbon (15th award), and Illinois State Active Duty Ribbon (3rd award).

With his retirement from military service, Sarnecki plans to relocate to Colorado and begin a new chapter in law enforcement while spending more time with his wife, Angela Sarnecki.



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Taylor Sula, an all-domain command and control operations specialist with the 182nd A-Staff, Illinois Air National Guard, writes on a whiteboard in the Command Post at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, June 18, 2025. All-domain command and control operations specialists are responsible for command and control facilities in the air, on the ground and on the move.

The Sky's the Limit

How One Illinois Airman Is Building New Partnerships for Veterans in the Illinois State University Campus Community

Story by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Taylor Sula balances life between military air traffic operations and college coursework, but it's her volunteer leadership with a student veterans group at Illinois State University that is making a powerful difference in the campus military-connected community.

Sula, an all-domain command and control operations specialist with the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing, serves as the social media chair — and incoming president — of

the university's chapter of Student Veterans of America (SVA). The registered student organization supports military-connected students by connecting them with community, resources and purpose.

"We're an RSO whose main goal is outreach, to let veterans and newcomers know what resources they have," Sula said. "And it's really just a way to kind of connect within a veteran community on campus."

Following a campus-wide lull in veteran programming during the

COVID-19 pandemic, the Illinois State SVA chapter has grown rapidly, recently ranking third in chapter population nationwide. From informal gatherings at local breweries to organizing blood drives, cookouts, food bank ruck marches and a planned campus war memorial, Sula and her fellow volunteers are advancing SVA's core mission: service and connection.

The chapter's events focus on informality and inclusion.

"We like to plan and organize a



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Taylor Sula, an all-domain command and control operations specialist with the 182nd A-Staff, Illinois Air National Guard, (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus)

bunch of different events to where it's more of an informal setting, so people don't feel pressured when they go," Sula said. "We want to have it be fun and entertaining."

Although the group receives no compensation for their efforts, members say their work is deeply rewarding. Sula recalled one veteran who attended a meeting and admitted he had no one nearby to connect with.

"I was like, 'Welcome! We're your new family,'" Sula said. "He's always at our veteran center now, just hanging out with whoever's there. It's just so amazing to see. It melts my heart."

Beyond camaraderie, the chapter has ambitious goals. Sula is helping lead efforts to designate Illinois State as a Purple Heart University, which would expand tuition benefits for families of service members wounded or killed in combat. The group is also working with the Wounded Warrior Project to construct a memorial for service members on campus.

The chapter's outreach extends even beyond campus, however.

In early 2024, members attended the Student Veterans of America National Conference in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where they met with military leaders and



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Taylor Sula, an all-domain command and control operations specialist with the 182nd A-Staff, Illinois Air National Guard, speaks into a radio in the Command Post at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, June 18.

influencers from across the country, including U.S. Army 1st Lt. Austin von Letkemann, better known as MandatoryFunDay, and retired U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Israel Del Toro, the Air Force's first 100% disabled reenlistee.

At the conference, Sula and her team received feedback on their community impact.

"We were ranked third in population for a chapter, and we've only been active for two years," Sula said.

While summer slows down

activities, Sula is preparing to lead the chapter into a new academic year.

"I just got handed the reins of presidency," she said. "We're still collecting new members, filling them in."

For Sula, the work isn't about recognition. Rather, it's about creating a support network where student veterans feel seen and at home.

"It goes to show that you definitely made a difference in someone's life, at least one person," she said. "To me, that's all that matters. That's what it's all about."



34th DSTB Annual Training Focuses on basic Warrior Tasks

Soldiers with the 34th Division Sustainment Troops Battalion and the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade's Headquarters and Headquarters Company conducted annual training at Marseilles Training Center, Illinois.

This year's annual training focused on the basics of Army Warrior Tasks, including squad movements, communication via hand and arm signals and Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System (SINCGARS), mask confidence training, and water survival.







44th Chemical Battalion Enhances Unit Readiness with Joint Chemical Training

Story by Spc. Charlie Michaels, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Public Affairs

Soldiers from the 44th Chemical Battalion based in Bloomington, Illinois, assisted Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment based Milan, Illinois, while conducting chemical training at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, June 10, 2025.

The Soldiers first went through a gas chamber filled with CS gas. CS gas, also known as 2-chlorobenzylidene malononitrile, is a type of tear gas commonly used for crowd control. It is nonlethal but causes discomfort or irritation.

Soldiers entered the chamber wearing an M50 Joint Service General Purpose Mask, which they removed once inside, experiencing the effects of the gas with and without their respirators.

"It's basically a confidence test to let them know that their masks work should they ever need them," said Lt. Col. Matt Dodsworth, Commander of the 44th Chemical Battalion.

After filing through the chamber, the 2-123 Field Artillery Soldiers



went through a decontamination line with members of the 44th Chemical Battalion performing the decontamination, providing training and experience for both battalions.

The decontamination line consisted of six stations. At the first station, Soldiers turned in their equipment to be decontaminated and then delivered to the cold zone, an area free from contamination.

At the second station, Soldiers used a brush to scrub contaminants off of each other, starting with the head and working their way down to the boots. The brush is disinfected in a “kill” bucket to ensure there is no cross-contamination.

Once at the third station, Soldiers worked together to simulate doffing their Mission Oriented Protective Posture gear down to the protective boots, gloves and mask.

Soldiers began the fourth station by entering the shuffle pit, a shallow pit or container filled with a decontaminant solution, meant to decontaminate the soles of boots. They then removed their gloves and boots, stepping to the other side of the liquid control line, a marked boundary that separates the dirty area from the clean area, as they become free of the gear.

Joint Chemical Agent Detectors were used at the fifth station to



monitor Soldiers and ensure that all contaminants were removed. JCADs are handheld, pocket sized systems designed to detect, identify and alert Soldiers to chemical warfare agents and toxic industrial chemical vapors.

At the sixth and final station, Soldiers were assisted in removing their protective masks, and the masks were thoroughly cleaned.

This collaboration is nothing

new to the two battalions. The 44th Chemical Battalion and 2-123 Field Artillery have worked together on a variety of exercises throughout their annual training periods.

“It’s a great opportunity for both parties, and I think we’d be fools not to leverage that with us being in the same location at the same time,” said Dodsworth. “Hats off to the FA for working with us. It’s been a pleasure.”



183rd Medical Group Demonstrates Ability to Rapidly Mobilize, Respond to Emergent Threats

The 183rd Medical Group demonstrated its readiness and capability to deploy in support of United States Air Force and Department of Defense global objectives during a comprehensive exercise held May 3.

The exercise, conducted at the Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport, tested the group's ability to rapidly mobilize, respond to emergent threats, and provide critical medical support in a simulated deployment environment. Scenarios included responding to mass casualty events, operating in chemically contested environments, and maintaining mission-essential medical operations under challenging conditions.

Airmen from the 183rd Medical Group donned full Mission Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) gear, simulating response to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats. The exercise required participants to perform medical triage, casualty evacuation, and decontamination procedures, all while maintaining operational security and communication protocols.

The event is part of a broader commitment by the



(Photos by US Air National Guard Senior Airman Danielle Dillard)

Illinois Air National Guard's 183rd Wing to maintain a high level of operational readiness. Previous exercises, such as Exercise HYDRA STRIKE, have similarly focused on preparing Airmen for operations in degraded and contested environments, reinforcing the unit's capability to deploy and sustain medical operations under adverse conditions.

By conducting these rigorous readiness exercises, the 183rd Medical Group continues to demonstrate its ability to support national defense objectives and respond to global challenges with professionalism and expertise.





ATAG-Air Visits Illini Thunder Exercise

Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air, escorted by Colonel Nick Henschel, 126th Air Refueling Wing, commander, visited the 126th Maintenance Group exercising DFT: Illini Thunder at CRTC Gulfport, MS.

Maj. Gen. McDonough observed multiple training moments including a successful hot pit refueling and various cross-capability engagements where airmen expanded their skillset.

During his visit McDonough dined with select airmen, briefed personnel regarding the state of the Illinois Guard, and toured the base facilities as consideration for future training operations.

His time speaking directly with wing members including a question and answer forum shows his care for members concerns and his exemplary leadership mentality.



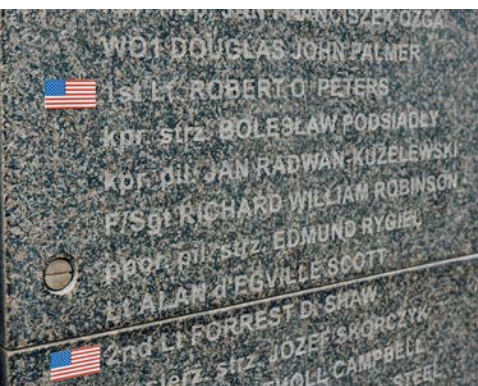


Illinois National Guard Presents Military Medal of Valor to Members of World War II Polish Resistance

Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army and the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard presented the Illinois Military Medal of Valor to members of the Polish Resistance who fought against the Nazis in World War II.

Williams visited Poland as part of the Illinois National Guard's State Partnership Program with the Polish military.

Our partnership program with Poland, established in 1993, is considered the "gold-standard" of SPP partnerships. Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers co-deployed with Polish Soldiers first to Iraq and then to Afghanistan for more than 17 consecutive years.







Building Leadership One Obstacle at a Time

Story by Spc. Charlie Michaels, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Public Affairs

Soldiers from the 631st Engineer Construction Company are building a leader reaction course at Marseilles Training Center, Marseilles, Illinois, June 7, 2025. The Soldiers began construction on the first phase of a planned larger project, which consisted of six obstacles.

"The Marseilles Training Center gave us a rough idea on what they wanted built, and then our team took it from there and gave it dimensions so we could actually construct the structures," said Staff Sgt. Kyle Wesolowski, a construction supervising engineer with the 631st ECC.

Despite the project being only the second time his eight-person crew

has worked together, Wesolowski expressed pride in their teamwork and care for each other.

"Because this project's a little smaller, we've actually given them the opportunity to take initiative and lead," said Wesolowski. "The past three days, we have appointed a new squad leader to oversee the entire project site."

Wesolowski also voiced his enthusiasm for continuing to work alongside his team on similar projects.

"Our platoon absolutely looks forward to doing projects like this in the future," said Wesolowski. "This is a perfect size project for the duration we've been given, and we're looking forward to the next one."



Feeding

128th Field Feeding Platoon Supports Feeding Mi

For two weeks at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, and Camp Grayling, Michigan, two 12-member teams from the 128th Field Feeding Platoon successfully completed Annual Training in support of more than 650 Soldiers across three dining facilities, as well as remote feeding missions and

field cooking operations for the 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 2-123 Field Artillery, and the 444th Chemical Battalion.

Each team conducted training on Mobile Kitchen Trailer (MKT) operations, field feeding sanitation, drivers training,



an Army

missions for 650 Illinois Soldiers on Annual Training

weapons familiarization, radio etiquette, and convoy operations.

During a four-day battalion field training exercise, one team sustained full food service operations from an MKT, overcoming austere field conditions while maintaining

high levels of performance, morale, and mission readiness. Additionally, two Culinary Specialists demonstrated exceptional technical and operational skill by earning first place in the Truck Rodeo competition.





A Soldier from the 144th Army Band salutes while leading the ensemble during the Chicago Memorial Day Parade on May 24, 2025. The Illinois Army National Guard band performed patriotic music in honor of fallen service members and in support of Gold Star families and parade attendees. (U.S. Army photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters - Illinois National Guard)

Chicago Hosts Annual Memorial Day Parade, Wreath Laying Ceremony to Honor Illinois' Fallen



Cadets from Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy in Rantoul, Illinois, march with pride during the Chicago Memorial Day Parade on May 24, 2025. The Illinois National Guard-supported program provides structure and mentorship for youth seeking academic and personal growth.



Jean Harris, Gold Star stepmother of Sergeant Joshua W. Harris, delivers heartfelt remarks on behalf of Gold Star families. Her words honored the enduring legacy of her stepson and all who have made the ultimate sacrifice in service to the nation.



Junior ROTC cadets and community members lead the Memorial Day Parade with a banner honoring Illinois' Gold Star Families, downtown Chicago, May 24, 2025. The parade serves as a tribute to families who have lost a loved one in military service.



Members of the 8th Infantry Illinois National Guard Association ride in a military vehicle during the Chicago Memorial Day Parade on May 24, 2025. The association honors the legacy of "Cold Steel," America's first unit led entirely by African Americans.

Drainage by Design

123rd Engineer Battalion Puts New Tools to Work

Story by Spc. Charlie Michaels, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Public Affairs

Soldiers from the 123rd Engineer Battalion are training on new equipment and making improvements to the Marseilles Training Center's running track.

On June 7, they used advanced surveying tools to map out drainage paths to prevent water from pooling around parts of the track.

The track, constructed by the 661st Engineer Construction Company and the 2118th Asphalt Detachment in 2023, was built on a level plane, but dirt piled higher than the track on either side has caused minor flooding during heavy rains.

"We are creating the avenue to allow this water to drain, and we have chosen the back side of the track to do this," said Sgt. Aaron Connor, a technical engineer with the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 123rd EN BN.

Connor used the Trimble S7

Robotic Total Station, MT1000 Active Track Prism and TSC7 Data Controller to assess elevation levels, allowing Sgt. Andrew Hopkins, a horizontal construction engineer with the 631st Engineer Support Company, to make physical adjustments based on this data.

"The big picture is that we can give our leaders and commanders a digital three-dimensional picture of the area they're working with," said Connor.

The Active Track Prism acts as a target that a total station locks onto and follows. It reflects the instrument's laser beam so the system can constantly measure the prism's location, and reports the location back to the data controller, allowing for precise layout or measurement as the operator walks.

"We cut out all the high spots with the bulldozer, and then I took the grader and got it down to more

of a final grade," said Hopkins. "Now, Connor is checking the current elevation that we've cut out to make sure we are down to the correct grades. If not, I'll make a few more swipes at it."

Connor explained that once data is collected, it is processed through Trimble Business Center, AutoCAD and Civil 3D, programs that allow the raw data to turn into something tangible.

Maj. Adam Cunico, the 123rd EN BN Executive Officer, explained that the equipment is brand new to the battalion, having only been acquired late last year.

"Not only does the equipment provide new training opportunities across the battalion, but as far as projects throughout the state, it allows us to deliver superior products," said Cunico.







Airmen with the 182nd Airlift Wing receive instruction on performing a head-tilt chin-lift maneuver for Tactical Combat Casualty Care during the Combat Readiness Inspection Training Rodeo at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, June 7. The training focuses on validating and increasing effectiveness on three critical performance areas: Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive threat response, Tactical Combat Casualty Care and weapons familiarization. (Photos by Senior Airman Avery Litton, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs)

182nd Airlift Wing Sharpens Combat Edge

Story by Tech. Sgt. Paul Helmig, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Airmen with the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, participated in a Combat Readiness Inspection (CRI) Training Rodeo on June 6 and June 7, 2025, during drill weekend in Peoria, Illinois.

The purpose of the CRI training was to increase the effectiveness and proficiency of Air Force core skills in Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC), Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive (CBRNE) threat response and Force Protection.

To assess the wing's preparedness for deployment, the training event centered on combat fundamentals using scenario-based drills modeled after operational conditions. The training provided a comprehensive review of skills training completed over the previous four months.

"The CRI training is being conducted in two phases, the training phase and the validation phase,"



Airmen with the 182nd Airlift Wing respond to simulated fire during the weapons familiarization training block of the Combat Readiness Inspection Training Rodeo at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, June 7.

said Master Sgt. Codi Baner, the installation emergency manager with the 182nd Civil Engineering Squadron. "Both of these phases focused on three critical performance areas: weapons handling, TCCC and CBRNE. The first phase equipped our Airmen with the guidance to practice honing these skills, while the second phase validates the training using realistic scenarios and ensures our Airmen are prepared to fight when called upon."

Designed as a "Skills Rodeo," the event allowed Airmen to showcase their ability to respond to complex, hostile environments using a structured, scenario-based format. Participants were selected from units slated for future mobilization and were observed by evaluators who assessed performance under pressure, teamwork and adherence to protocol.

The first block of the Skills Rodeo exercise began with a simulated chemical agent release, requiring rapid detection, identification and decontamination. Airmen donned Mission Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) gear and executed Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) detection, personal decontamination and contamination containment procedures at the designated zone transition point.

CBRNE response teams were tested on field identification of threats, setting up decontamination corridors and operating effectively in hazardous environments. Participants navigated Personnel Accountability Routes (PAR) to simulate movement through areas affected by unexploded ordnance, casualties and chemical agents.

The second segment of the CRI training shifted to immediate response and TCCC training, involving simulated hostile engagements and casualty management. Airmen responded to a mock breach of base security, returning simulated fire, securing the area and initiating emergency medical care for multiple injuries.

TCCC exercises included realistic simulations of gunshot and blast trauma casualties. Teams applied tourniquets, packed wounds, and conducted MARCH assessments—addressing massive hemorrhage,



Airmen with the 182nd Airlift Wing perform Tactical Combat Casualty Care on a mock battlefield casualty during the Combat Readiness Inspection Training Rodeo at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, June 7.



An Airman with the 182nd Airlift Wing packs a leg wound with gauze on a mock battlefield casualty during the Combat Readiness Inspection Training Rodeo at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, June 7.



Airmen with the 182nd Airlift Wing perform Tactical Combat Casualty Care under simulated fire during the Combat Readiness Inspection Training Rodeo at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, June 7.

airway, respiration, circulation, and head injury/hypothermia – before executing casualty evacuations under simulated fire, reinforcing the urgency and accuracy required in combat care.

One scenario required Airmen to treat a thoracic gunshot wound with speed and precision, simulating a drag to cover while maintaining life-saving interventions. Another involved managing complex trauma, such as facial injuries and compound fractures, emphasizing airway management and full trauma assessment.

A critical element of the second phase involved Force Protection, where Airmen sharpened defensive tactics and perimeter security under duress. Airmen reacted to enemy contact by engaging moving and static targets from Defensive Fighting Positions (DFPs), delivering SALUTE (Size, Activity, Location, Uniform, Time, Equipment) reports and employing battlefield smoke when available.

Weapons manipulation drills challenged participants to perform under pressure, completing tactical reloads, clearing malfunctions and engaging targets using simunition rounds. These exercises reinforced the muscle memory and weapon-handling skills essential in combat scenarios.

“Ultimately, this training is establishing a solid foundation of warfighter skills for the 182nd Airlift Wing,” said Baner. “Airmen routinely train on their specific job, but what happens when we add in sensory deprivation wearing chemical gear or reacting to gunfire? We are training our Airmen to operate in environments that push them beyond the norm and making them as skilled as possible in uncomfortable conditions.”

Throughout the training, base observers evaluated Airmen on procedural adherence, decision-making and communication. The focus was not only on individual performance but also on how teams coordinated and executed tasks under stress.

The training balanced realism with risk management, preparing Airmen for the harsh conditions of real-world combat. By training with proper protective gear and adhering to strict safety protocols, participants could engage in high-intensity scenarios that closely resembled operational environments while minimizing the chance of injury. Measures like hydration stations and structured scenario controls ensured the training remained both challenging and focused on long-term readiness.

The CRI Rodeo also served as a morale booster for participating Airmen. Realistic training helps instill confidence, fosters team cohesion and prepares units for the complex realities of deployed environments. The event was designed not only to validate technical skills but also to increase awareness of their practical application in high-stress scenarios.

“This rodeo is designed to evaluate the warfighter skills training the wing has received over the past few months,” said Lt. Col. Randy Fasig, the commander of the 182nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron and wing combat training skills team lead. “This will allow us, as a wing, to evaluate these core skills needed to survive in a contested environment and see which skills are needing improvement. Not only does this prepare the wing for the upcoming readiness inspection, these skills are also essential warfighter skills to be prepared for the next conflict. This is also designed to be a confidence booster for members to be able to effectively operate in these conditions.”

The CRI Rodeo served as both a readiness check and a developmental opportunity for warfighter skills across the wing. By evaluating performance in combat-based scenarios, leaders can refine training methods, adjust equipment requirements and tailor future exercises to ensure Airmen are better prepared for the demands of real-world missions.

Through the validation of combat skills in TCCC, CBRNE response and Force Protection, the 182nd Airlift Wing continues to build a force that is capable, confident and mission-ready. Hands-on exercises like this not only enhance individual and unit readiness but also reflect the wing’s ongoing commitment to excellence in defense of national and global security.



Airmen with the 182nd Airlift Wing establish a simulated battlefield casualty collection point during the Combat Readiness Inspection Training Rodeo at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, June 7.

Sustainment Soldiers Take Aim at Readiness

At Fort McCoy, sustainment Soldiers from across the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and 34th Division Sustainment Brigade and 34th DSB leveled up their lethality during a two-day M2 Machine Gun Academy led by Troop B, 2-106th Cavalry.

With expert instruction from Cav's own heavy weapons leaders, 62 novice and experienced gunners got hands-on with the .50 cal – learning components, optics, and engagement techniques before heading to the range for both day and night fires.

The course wasn't just about pulling the trigger – it was about building confidence, sharpening skills, and preparing Soldiers to take what they learned back to their units. Mission: accomplished.

U.S. Army photos Sgt. Adam Stroh, B Troop, 2/106th Cavalry





Pausing to Remember the Sacrifices Made

Sgt. Luigi Cabantog, a recruiter with the Illinois Army National Guard, participated in the Memorial Day parade and ceremony in Glenview, Illinois, May 26 as the community paused to remember and pay tribute to the brave men and women who gave their lives in service to our nation. Pictured are, from left, Jim Bland, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army, Sgt. Luigi Cabantog, and Rear Admiral Matthew Pottenburgh, Commander, Naval Service Training Command.



144th Army Band Supports ISP Graduation

The Illinois Army National Guard's 144th Army Band was honored to support the Illinois State Police graduation at the West Side Christian Church in Springfield July 11. The Illinois National Guard work together every day through the Counterdrug Program and many other ways to protect the people of Illinois. There are also many Illinois State Police troopers who are also Illinois National Guard Soldiers or Airmen. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. David Ervin, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Illinois Army National Guard)



182nd Airlift Wing honors next generation of enlisted leaders in inaugural NCO induction ceremony

The 182nd Airlift Wing's newest noncommissioned officers (NCO) pose for a group photo with wing commander Col. Rusty Ballard and wing command chief Chief Master Sgt. Micheal Price after an induction ceremony in Peoria, Illinois, May 2. The wing held its inaugural NCO induction ceremony at May's regularly scheduled drill to recognize and honor its next generation of enlisted leaders. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs)

Embattled on Independence Day

July 4 Marks Anniversaries for Illinois Soldiers

In addition to marking the independence of the United States, the Illinois National Guard is also marking the 162nd anniversary of the Siege of Vicksburg and the Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War and the 107th anniversary of the Battle of Hamel during World War I (WWI).

Three Illinois units participated in the Battle of Gettysburg, the 8th Illinois Cavalry, four companies of the 12th Illinois Cavalry, and the 82nd Illinois Infantry.

"At 7:30 a.m. on July 1, 1863 Lt. Marcellus Jones with the 8th Cavalry fired the first shot of the Battle of Gettysburg and the first Union Soldier to die in the battle were from the 12th Illinois Cavalry," said Adriana Schroeder of Springfield, the Illinois National Guard command historian.

Two days later, the 82nd Illinois Infantry participated in the Union defense of the infamous Pickett's Charge.

Hundreds of miles and several states away, Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant laid siege to Vicksburg, Miss., with nearly one-third of his entire force consisting of Illinois Soldiers.

"The turning point in the Civil War came July 4, 1863 when Confederate fighters surrendered at both Gettysburg and Vicksburg," said Schroeder. "Gettysburg marked the last push into Union territory for the Confederates. After Vicksburg, the Union Army controlled the Mississippi River and cut the Confederacy in two."

Fifty-five years later, in July 1918, Soldiers from the 131st and 132nd Illinois Infantry Regiments were attached to Australian brigades in France during WWI.

"These Illinois Soldiers were the first of the 33rd Division to fight in the war and possibly the first Americans to fight under the command of another country," said Schroeder. "On July 4, 1918, they successfully took out German trenches in the Hamel Woods, which had previously dominated

Australian forces."

On Aug. 12, 1918, George V, the King of England, arrived at 33rd Division Headquarters and awarded 19 officers and enlisted men with the Distinguished Service Cross, the Military Cross and the Military Medal for acts of bravery.

Cpl. Thomas A. Pope, a Norwood Park, Illinois, native, served with Company E of the 131st Infantry Regiment and received the Medal of Honor at Hamel. His citation reads, "At Hamel, July 4, 1918...Corporal Pope's company was advancing behind the tanks when it was halted by hostile machine gun fire. Going forward alone, he rushed a machine gun nest, killed several of the crew with his bayonet, and, standing astride his gun, held off the others until reinforcements arrived and captured them."

The Illinois State Military Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday



Cpl. Thomas A. Pope

from 1 to 4 p.m. It is located adjacent to Camp Lincoln at 1301 N. MacArthur Blvd. in Springfield. Admission and parking are free.



Cpl. Charles M. Palmer from Pecatonica, Illinois., served with Company M, 8th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry during the Battle of Gettysburg.

Military Service is in their blood

Dad, Daughter Play Role in Each Other's Promotion Ceremonies

In October, Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Browning's daughter, U.S. Navy Hospitalman 3rd Class Ashley Harris, traveled from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii to pin on his new rank during his promotion ceremony at Camp Lincoln.

On June 12, Browning, Maintenance Control Noncommissioned Officer, Illinois National Guard, traveled to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, to participate in the promotion ceremony for Harris to Hospitalman 2nd Class.

"It was very special when she was able to pin my new rank on. My father retired as an E-7 and when I was a kid I wanted to grow up and be like my dad, so to get promoted to E-7 was huge for me," Browning said. "But for me to get to pin E-5 rank on her was the highlight of anything I've done in the military."

Browning said military service in his family dates back to at least the Civil War.

"I've been able to trace our military roots back to the Civil War, when one of our ancestors served in the Illinois Militia," he said. "My dad was a Korean War veteran and retired from the Maintenance Company in the Illinois National Guard in the mid-1970s."

Harris' husband, Hospitalman 2nd Class Reece Ryden was deployed to the Philippines and wasn't sure he would make it back to Pearl Harbor for the ceremony.

"He got back the night before the ceremony, so we both were able to participate in the pinning ceremony," Browning said.

Browning said he and his daughter share a special bond with their military service.

"We both enlisted on September 6," he said. "I enlisted in 2006, and she enlisted in 2019. In fact, I also had the honor of swearing her into the military."



Newly promoted U.S. Navy Hospitalman 2nd Class Ashley Harris' father Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Browning, center, and husband U.S. Navy Hospitalman 2nd Class Reece Ryden, right, secure her new rank during a promotion ceremony June 12.



Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Browning, Maintenance Control NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer), is pinned by his daughter, U.S. Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Ashley Harris Oct. 2 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield. (U.S. Army photo by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters - Illinois National Guard)



Riverboat Cruise Connects Families of Fallen, Keeps Memories Alive

The Missouri National Guard Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Charles Hausman, and the Illinois National Guard's Assistant Adjutant General - Air, Maj. Gen. Dan McDonough, joined the U.S. Army's Survivor Outreach Services of Illinois and Missouri for the 5th Annual Mark Twain Riverboat Cruise in Hannibal, Missouri, June 1.

The cruise helps keep the Families of fallen Warriors connected to the military and to each other. It also helps connect our Survivors with organizations that support them such as Gold Star Mission and America's Gold Star Families.

The SOS program builds a unified program that embraces and reassures Survivors that they are continually linked to the military community. SOS coordinators support Survivors long-term and work closely with benefit coordinators, casualty assistance officers, and other agencies who provide services to Survivors.

Maintaining this connection with Survivors also builds the esprit de corps of our fighting men and women by knowing that our nation will never forget the sacrifices of those who came before them and who gave their "last measure of devotion" to defend our great nation.

The Survivors, which included 19 Families from Illinois and 17 Families from Missouri, also had a great time on the cruise!



33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Launches Annual Training with RSOI at Fort McCoy

Annual Training 2025 kicked off with Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration (RSOI), simulating how units are processed and accounted for in a deployed environment. The 33rd IBCT's Headquarters and Headquarters Company administration and personnel section in-processed more than 600 Soldiers from across the brigade—including four battalions and four support companies from the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade - using the Tactical Personnel System to track duty status and location. Their efforts established a strong foundation for accountability and readiness across the formation.



Members of the 126th Civil Engineer Squadron pose in the St. Louis Cardinals dugout during a Busch Stadium facilities tour at St. Louis, Missouri, May 22, 2025. CES toured the stadium as part of a way to bolster knowledge sharing of best practices for facility management and repair. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)

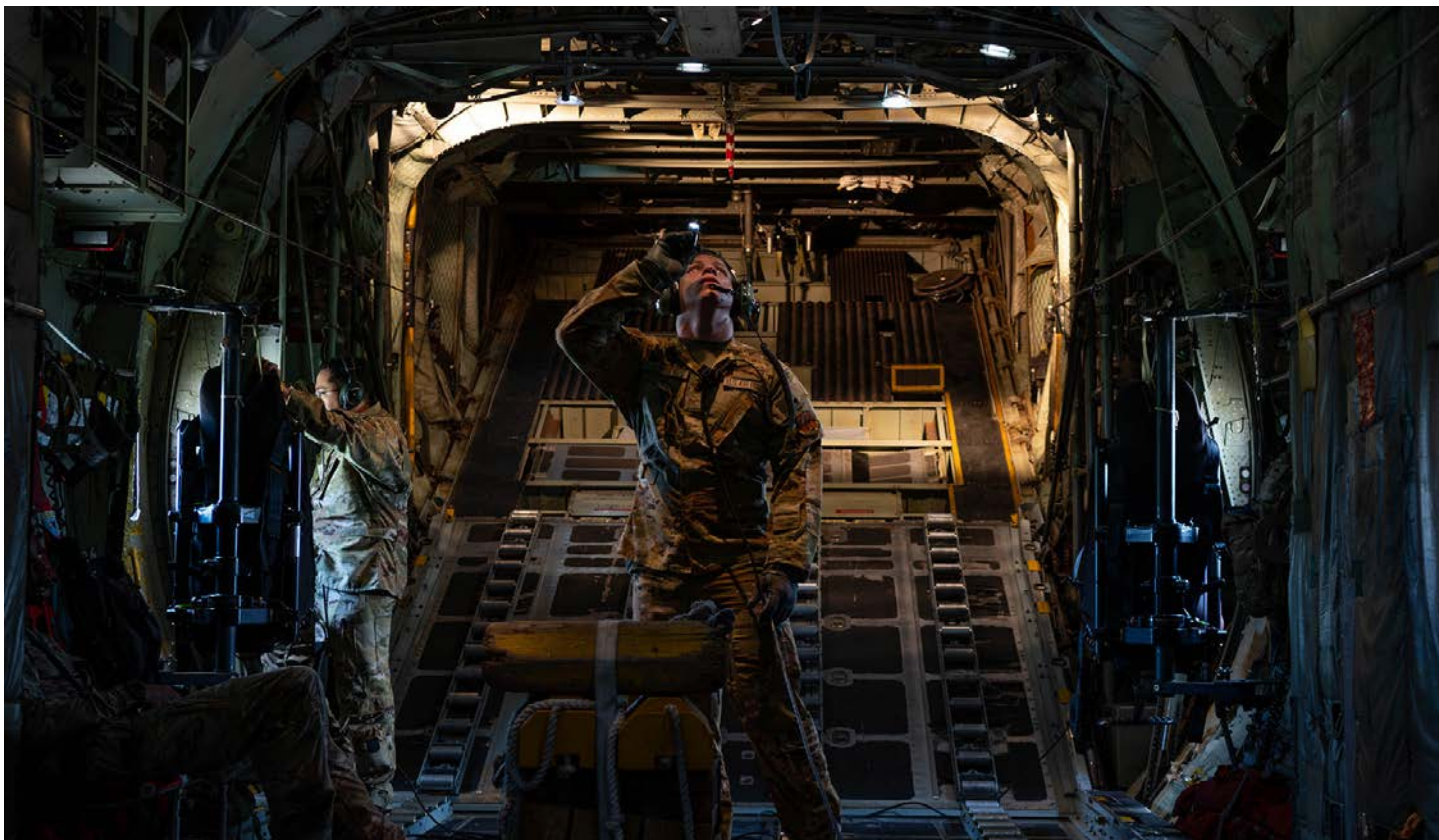
126th CES Takes Facilities Tour of Busch Stadium

The 126th Civil Engineer Squadron took a facilities tour of Busch Stadium in St. Louis, Missouri, as part of a strategic goal for community outreach and build partnerships.

They also looked for ways to bolster knowledge sharing of best practices for facility management and repair.



Hosei Maruyama, center, St. Louis Cardinals senior director, facility operations and planning explains the operation of the incident command center in center-field at Busch Stadium, May 22, St. Louis, Missouri. The 126th Civil Engineer Squadron toured the stadium as part of a way to bolster knowledge sharing of best practices for facility management and repair.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Lincoln Dorsey, a loadmaster with the 169th Airlift Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, conducts pre-flight safety checks aboard a C-130H Hercules, assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, in Peoria, Illinois, July 10. Aircrew from the 169th Airlift Squadron conduct training regularly to promote readiness and simulate deployed scenarios. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus)

Loadmasters Conduct Readiness Training



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Nixon Flores, a loadmaster with the 169th Airlift Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, throws a sand bag out a paratroop door of a C-130H Hercules, assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, to simulate a personnel drop in Peoria, Illinois, July 10, 2025. Aircrew from the 169th Airlift Squadron conduct training regularly to promote readiness and simulate deployed scenarios. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus)



Swept and Sampled

444th, 445th Chemical Companies Conduct Hazardous Assessment Exercise at Fort McCoy

Soldiers from the 444th Chemical Company based in Galesburg, and the 445th Chemical Company based in Shiloh, conducted a hazardous assessment and site exploitation exercise at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, June 11.

Soldiers were informed that a certain building was a “hot zone” for chemical agents, and two initial entry teams were sent in to identify where to sample.

“They go in, figure out the ‘hot spots’ of the building and tag them,” said Capt. Tess Kliethermes, commander of the 445th Chemical Company. “They perform recon on

the building from a blind picture, and they try to debrief the next team to continue their mission.”

The next set of teams, the sample teams, are responsible for visiting the contaminants marked by the initial entry teams, taking a sample of the unknown substance, packaging it safely and taking it off site for testing.

After each iteration, the participating team goes through a decontamination line, ensuring they are free of any possible contaminants.

The units also used the exercise as an opportunity to train on self-recovery, decontamination of downed Soldiers and using their chemical

detecting robot.

“We implement our robot to help get real time photography and video surveillance back to the tactical operations center and the secondary team so the secondary team can get a visual rather than a verbal brief,” said Kliethermes.

This kind of practical application is exactly what leaders hope to see during exercises like this.

“I love when they can get hands-on, real-world training,” said Kliethermes. “When you can get hands-on training, especially in a training environment like Fort McCoy, I think it’s very beneficial.”



Rinsed, Cleared, Deployed

44th Chemical Battalion conducts operational decontamination on Field Artillery vehicles

Soldiers from the 44th Chemical Battalion based in Bloomington, Illinois conduct operational decontamination on vehicles from the 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment based in Milan, Illinois, at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, June 10, 2025.

Soldiers first rinsed down the

vehicles to physically remove any chemical agents before using Joint Chemical Agent Detectors to check for remaining contamination.

The process is meant to be quick and performed in an operational environment, allowing the vehicles to be decontaminated and continue the mission.



182nd Airlift Wing Honors Retirees

The 182nd Airlift Wing color guard conducts the missing man table ceremony during the 2025 retirement ceremony at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, May 3. The color guard is a ceremonial representation of those that protect the flag during ceremonies, parades and other events. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Avery Litton)



Welcome Home...and Goodbye

The 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade command team visited Fort Bragg, North Carolina to welcome home part of 6th Battalion, 54th SFAB's Logistics Advisory Team 6620 from their recent deployment to Djibouti, while also bidding farewell to 6th Battalion, 54th SFAB's Logistics Advisory Team 6640 as they depart for their deployment to Djibouti.



Welcome Home 2-106th CAV

Soldiers arrive in Illinois following deployment

U.S. Army photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs







U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Alberto Ramos receives assistance from Tech. Sgt. Jose Morales, both from 156th Contingency Response Group, Puerto Rico Air National Guard, marshalling a C-130H Hercules aircraft assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, in support of Sentry North 25 at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Michigan, June 1, 2025. Sentry North 25 is a joint military exercise that simulates realistic combat environments, including future battlefields. The training is customized to meet specific unit goals and provides advanced, joint exercises and unique opportunities not typically available at their home bases. (Illinois Air National Guard photos by Master Sgt. Scott Thompson)

182nd Contingency Response Group teams up with Puerto Rico CRG during Sentry North 25

Members from the newly established 182nd Contingency Response Group, part of the 182nd Airlift Wing of the Illinois Air National Guard, teamed up with the 156th Contingency Response Group from the Puerto Rico Air National Guard during Exercise Sentry North 25 to build and refine their new mission capabilities.

The 182nd CRG is a newly activated unit designed to improve rapid deployment and turnaround capabilities for a wide range of missions.

"The Contingency Response Group is one that can deploy within a 72-hour notice," said Master Sgt. Craig Thurman, a loadmaster with the 182nd Contingency Response Group. "This allows for contingency operations,

open airfields to hurricane relief, natural disasters, and we can work in both jungle and arctic environments."

The addition of this unit expands the mission potential of both the 182nd Airlift Wing and the Air Force as a whole.

"Think of Contingency Response as an airfield in a box," said Staff Sgt. Matthew Nichols, a petroleum, oils and lubricants specialist with the 182nd Contingency Response Group. "There are around 30 to 40 different jobs in the unit, and with that, it allows for many different capabilities for setting up an air base."

This variety of specialties within one unit makes the group highly adaptable, with diverse skill sets that support mission objectives in any environment.

"I believe the 182nd Airlift Wing getting this Contingency Response unit is going to open us up to worldwide training capabilities," said Master Sgt. Derek Wolfe, a Security Forces officer with the 182nd Contingency Response Group. "Because of this, the sky is the limit."

The activation of this unit is expected to expand the 182nd Airlift Wing's global reach and deployment readiness.

During Exercise Sentry North 25 in Alpena, Michigan, the 182nd CRG operated alongside members of the 156th CRG from the Puerto Rico Air National Guard. Training included close-quarters battle operations and maneuvers, tactical combat casualty care under simulated fire, and a variety of other real-world scenarios

reflecting deployed mission objectives.

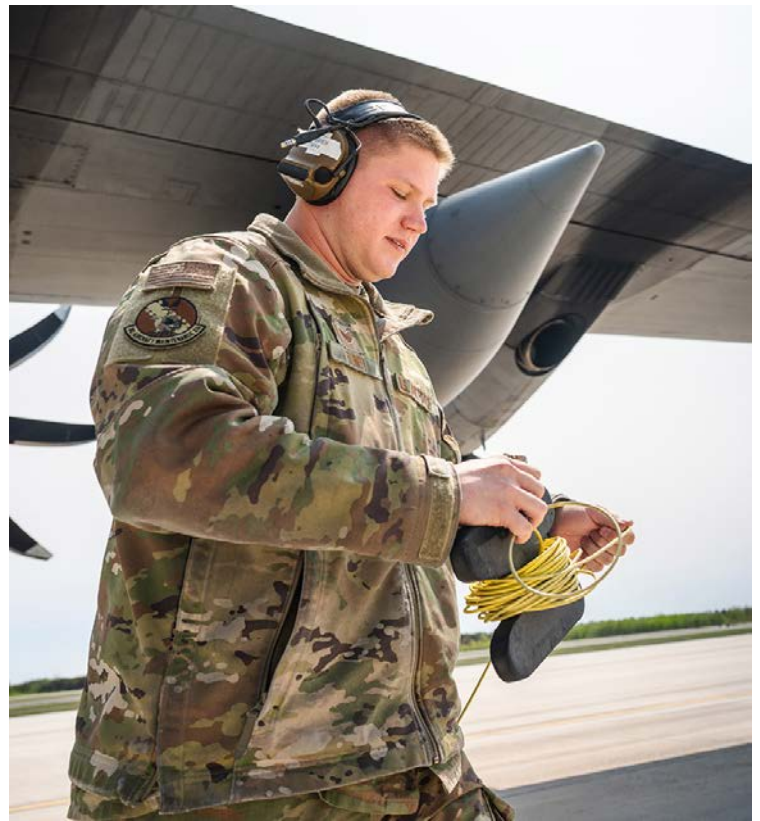
"The people of the 156th CRG are great. They always are," said Thurman. "Doing Sentry North 25 alongside that group has been a great relationship builder, and we look forward to working with them in the future."

The 156th CRG, established Jan. 1, 2020, brings years of operational experience that will help guide the 182nd as it builds out its capabilities.

"That group really treated us like we were one of their own," said Nichols. "Doing CQB training with them was one of my favorite parts of the trip because they really opened up and allowed us to integrate right into the ranks with them."

With continued joint training opportunities and a group of dedicated, mission-ready Airmen, the 182nd Contingency Response Group is gearing up to support a wide range of global missions with readiness and lethality as a priority.

Right, U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Garrett Bundy, crew chief, 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, unravels a grounding line to attach to a C-130H Hercules assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, in support of Sentry North 25 at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Michigan, June 1.



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Craig Thurman, left, directs a forklift to offload cargo, along with Senior Master Sgt. Don Reay, middle, and Tech. Sgt. Justin Miller, all from 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, from a C-130H Hercules aircraft assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, to support Sentry North 25 at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Michigan, June 1. Sentry North 25 is a joint military exercise that simulates realistic combat environments, including future battlefields. The training is customized to meet specific unit goals and provides advanced, joint exercises and unique opportunities not typically available at their home bases.



U.S. Air Force Maj. John Tilotson and Capt. Lukasz Bokun, pilots, and Master Sgt. Stacey Greening, flight engineer, 169th Airlift Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, fly to support a forward arming refueling point mission to pick up a tactical airfield fuel disposing system and Marines with the Detachment, Bulk Fuel Company B, 6th Engineer Support Battalion, Green Bay, Wisconsin, on a C-130H Hercules aircraft assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, to support Sentry North 25 at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Michigan, June 2.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Toni Bussell, fuels specialist, 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, helps install a hose connection. The fitting connects all the hoses together as part of a tactical airfield fuel disposing system for the forward arming refueling point in support Sentry North 25, June 2.



U.S. Air Force Maj. John Tilotson and Capt. Lukasz Bokun, pilots, 169th Airlift Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, look at details of the flight plan for a forward arming refueling point mission at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Michigan, June 2.



U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Lucas Lynn, fuels specialist, 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, hands of a hose connection to a Marine from Detachment, Bulk Fuel Company B, 6th Engineer Support Battalion, Green Bay, Wisconsin, the fitting is part of a tactical airfield fuel disposing system for the forward arming refueling point in support Sentry North 25 at Fort McCoy Army Airfield, Wisconsin, Michigan, June 2, 2025.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Nichols, fuels specialist, 182nd Contingency Response Group, Illinois Air National Guard, carries a fuel hose with Marines from Detachment, Bulk Fuel Company B, 6th Engineer Support Battalion, Green Bay, Wisconsin. The hose is part of a tactical airfield fuel disposing system for the forward arming refueling point in support of Sentry North 25, June 2.



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Blake Thompson, loadmaster, connects a fueling hose as Master Sgt. Matisynn Ciardini, loadmaster, both from 169th Airlift Squadron and Tech Sgt. Barrett Mings, crew chief, 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, support to offload fuel from the C-130H Hercules aircraft assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, as part of a tactical airfield fuel disposing system for the forward arming refueling point in support of Sentry North 25.



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Justin Miller, airfield manager for the 182nd Contingency Response Group and Master Sgt. Derek Wolfe, air traffic controller for the 182nd Contingency Response Group, perform a simulated opposing forces building sweep exercise at Sentry North 25, at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Michigan, June 5.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Nichols, petroleum, oil and lubrication specialist for the 182nd Contingency Response Group, and Master Sgt. Derek Wolfe, security forces officer for the 182nd Contingency Response Group, perform a "shoot and move" training exercise on a firing range at Sentry North 25. (Illinois Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Noah Hardin)



Members of 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, and Marines from Detachment, Bulk Fuel Company B, 6th Engineer Support Battalion, Green Bay, Wisconsin, wait for the C-130H Hercules aircraft assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, to connect a fuel hose to offload fuel.



U.S. Air Force service members from the 182nd Airlift Wing Illinois Air National Guard contingency response group run through a Tactical Combat Casualty Care scenario while under simulated fire.



Members from the 182nd Contingency Response Group, Illinois Air National Guard, and members from the 156th Contingency Response Group, Puerto Rico Air National Guard, stand on a short distance firing range to practice tactical reload.



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Justin Miller, airfield manager for the 182nd Contingency Response Group, performs a room sweep exercise at Sentry North 25, at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Michigan, June 5.

Security Forces Airman Supports Readiness at Alpena

Story by Airman 1st Class Noah Hardin, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

A new member of the Illinois Air National Guard is proving to be a key asset in ensuring both operational excellence and local impact. Staff Sgt. James Upson, a full-time Security Forces member serving as a federal technician at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, brings not only professional skill to the mission but also a deep sense of community spirit.

Upson began his military career on active duty, serving four years in the same role. His assignments took him from local stations to posts overseas, including England, and eventually to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois. But after years away, he felt a strong pull back to his roots.

"I wanted to come back home and build on the life that I had left here when I joined active duty," Upson said.

That decision was made easier when a change in stationing policy for his career field prompted him to transition into the Illinois Air National Guard.

Returning to his hometown of Knoxville, Illinois, Upson not only continued his service in the same job but also fulfilled a longtime personal dream.

"It has always been a dream of mine to be a high school football coach," he said. "But I would only want to do it as a volunteer. I enjoy giving back."

Now more than a year into his role with the 182nd, Upson seamlessly balances his federal technician responsibilities at the base with his role as a volunteer football coach at a local high school.

"This is my first time being to Alpena," Upson noted while



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. James Upson, a security forces officer with the 182nd Security Forces Squadron attached to the 182nd Airlift Wing, poses for a portrait, on the flightline at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Michigan, June 4.

supporting Exercise Sentry North 25. "But I can tell this is going to be my favorite TDY so far."

At Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center, Upson and his fellow Security Forces members are tasked with real-world support, safeguarding the flightline and protecting the C-130H Hercules aircraft involved in the joint exercise. Their presence ensures operations remain secure and compliant with safety protocols, forming the backbone of a successful training environment.

"We get to do our work and focus on the skills that we have learned

in real-world application," Upson explained.

Exercises like Sentry North 25 are vital to building combat readiness. They allow Airmen to test and sharpen their operational capabilities in environments that mirror actual deployment conditions, fostering adaptability, vigilance and precision.

Whether he is patrolling the airfield or coaching from the sidelines, Staff Sgt. James Upson is leading by example and proving that service to country and community are not exclusive.



Remembering Our Fallen



MAY



Sgt. Lukasz Saczek

10 2009: Sgt. Lukasz D. Saczek, 23, of Lake in the Hills, Illinois, died May 10 in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained from a non-combat related incident. He was assigned to 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Woodstock.



*Sgt. 1st Class
William D. Chaney*

18 2004: Sgt. 1st Class William D. Chaney, 59 of Schaumburg, Ill. died May 18, in Landstuhl,

Germany due to a non-combat related injury.

Initial reports indicate that Chaney was medically evacuated from Iraq to Germany for surgery due to appendicitis. He died from complications after surgery.

Chaney was assigned to the Illinois Army National Guard, Company B, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, Chicago.



Spc. Jeremy Ridlen

23 2004: Spc. Jeremy L. Ridlen, 23, of Maroa, died May 23 in East Fallujah, Iraq, from small arms fire after a dump truck on the side of the road was detonated a his military convoy passed by. Ridlen was assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company, Paris.



Spc. Brian Romines

6 2005: Army Spc. Brian M. Romines, 20, of Simpson, died June 6 in Baghdad, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his HMMWV.

Romines was assigned to the Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery, Milan.



*Staff Sgt. Joshua
Melton*

19 2009: Staff Sgt. Joshua A. Melton, 26, of Carlyle, died June

19 in Kandahar, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained when his vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device.

He was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, Marion.



Staff Sgt. Paul Smith

19 2009: Staff Sgt. Paul G. Smith, 43, of East Peoria, died June 19 in Kandahar, Afghanistan of wounds sustained when his vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device.

He was assigned to 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry, Aurora.



1st Lt. Derwin Williams

6 2009: 1st Lt. Derwin I. Williams, 41, of Glenwood, died July 6 in Konduz, Afghanistan of wounds sustained when his vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Troop B, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry based in Dixon.



Sgt. Chester Hosford

6 2009: Sgt. Chester W. Hosford, 35, of Ottawa, Ill., died July 6 in Konduz, Afghanistan of wounds sustained when his vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Troop B, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry based in Dixon.



Sgt. Christopher Talbert

7 2009: Sgt. Christopher M. Talbert, 24, of Galesburg, died July 7 in Shindad, Afghanistan of wounds sustained when his vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry based in Marion.



Sgt. Gerrick Smith

29 2009: Sgt. Gerrick D. Smith, 19, of Sullivan, died July 29 in Herat, Afghanistan, of injuries sustained from a non-combat related incident. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, Illinois Army National Guard, Marion.



It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they have, thus far, so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom; and that this government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

~ Abraham Lincoln

182nd Civil Engineering Squadron Helps Build Communities Through Training and Teamwork

Story by Rachel Blaire, State of Hawaii, Department of Defense, Public Affairs Office

In a joint effort to combat homelessness on O‘ahu, the Air National Guard, alongside the Air Force Reserve and modular home makers, have united to build permanent housing in Wai‘anae. Building on earlier phases, this mission seeks to deliver lasting shelter and stability for those living unhoused in Pu‘uhonua ‘O Wai‘anae (The Village).

On O‘ahu near the Wai‘anae Small Boat Harbor, the Village, is home to approximately 200 individuals, including children, elders and working families. The community has built a unique and self-sustaining village rooted in traditional Hawaiian values of kuleana (responsibility) and communal care.

This partnership not only supports the local community but provides Guardsmen with meaningful, hands-on experience — delivering hundreds of training hours while completing essential Air Force training requirements.

“It’s a humanitarian mission that we’re helping with, they get the labor from us, we get training” said Capt. Shawn Van Horn of the 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard. “It’s a win for everyone.”

This initiative is part of the Department of Defense’s Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) program, which enables National Guard units to engage in real-world missions that enhance readiness while serving communities. The 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron of the Illinois Air National Guard has been instrumental in coordinating the project’s construction logistics and ensuring training objectives are met efficiently.

“I think this is great all of our airmen get to come out, they get to work inside their specialty, outside their specialty and grow as a team. We got Guardsmen working and doing things that they are not normally doing during drill weekend,” said Maj. Scott Perry of the 182nd Civil



The 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard wrapped up their Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) rotation at Pu‘uhonua ‘O Wai‘anae (The Village) in Wai‘anae, Hawai‘i in late June. In a joint effort to combat homelessness on O‘ahu, the Air National Guard, alongside the Air Force Reserve and modular home makers, have united to build permanent housing in Wai‘anae. This partnership not only supports the local community but provided the Illinois Guardsmen with meaningful, hands-on experience, delivering hundreds of training hours while completing essential Air Force training requirements. (State of Hawai‘i Department of Defense Public Affairs photo by Ruben Duldulao)

Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard.

“We’re here for two weeks I believe there’s seven rotations between the Army, Air Reserve, and Air Guard. We’re taking a section, then the next group will come in they take over what we do and then just keep building and building,” said Van Horn. “It’s a good mission and something that we look forward to because we don’t normally get these kind of projects back in Illinois. It helps us do some things that’s out of our comfort zones. It also allows to cross train, to work together and

figure out solutions.”

The effort to establish permanent housing for the Village began in 2018 when the community, under the threat of state-led eviction, took steps to secure their future. With the support of the former state governor and a successful community-led fundraising campaign, they purchased a 20-acre parcel in Wai‘anae Valley in 2020. This site now serves as the foundation for the new Village, which is projected to provide homes for nearly 300 residents once fully completed.

With development and operational costs projected to remain below those



The 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard wrapped up their Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) rotation at Pu‘uhonua ‘O Wai‘anae (The Village) in Wai‘anae, Hawai‘i in late June.

of traditional affordable housing projects, Pu‘uhonua ‘O Wai‘anae is emerging as a pioneering model for community-driven, cost-effective housing solutions. In the current phase of construction, the Guardsmen are continuing work on new “hale” (homes), expanding on those completed in the previous year in alignment with the site’s long-term master plan.

Staff Sgt. Caleb Schacherbauer, an Engineering Assistant with the 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard does a lot of the prep work designing the blueprints of the hale and surveying the land for placement.

“We’re doing a lot of the layout, and it’s structured a bit differently, we’re using a lot of laser leveling. We post our laser level on certain areas to make sure the ground is level where we’re building,” Schacherbauer said. “Everyone that’s been here has worked very hard and has put in a ton of effort to make sure that they’re doing the best that they can. We’re gaining a lot of hands-on training and it’s been a very beneficial trip so far.”

Airman 1st Class Ivonne Estrada a Structures Civil Engineer with the 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard focused on framework carpentry. Since this phase of construction focuses on using modular buildings, Estrada has been working on the foundation pouring concert blocks and digging support

pillars reinforced with crushed coral.

“It’s nice to get knowledge on other trades,” said Estrada. “I’ve been getting a lot of experience and knowledge from everybody here; it’s been a great working especially being fresh out of tech school. I was a little nerve-wracked, but I’ve enjoyed my time here, especially with all the teaching material.”

Estrada and Schacherbauer’s experiences reflect the broader impact of the mission — not only as a training

ground for developing technical skills, but as a powerful example of what service to community can accomplish.

This joint effort underscores the strength of collaboration between government agencies, the armed forces, and grassroots organizations in addressing pressing community challenges. As construction of the new hale progress, the Village remains a powerful symbol of commitment, resilience, and hope for a stronger future in Wai‘anae.



The 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard wrapped up their Innovative Readiness Training rotation at Pu‘uhonua ‘O Wai‘anae in Wai‘anae, Hawai‘i in late June. In a joint effort to combat houselessness on O‘ahu, the Air National Guard, alongside the Air Force Reserve and modular home makers, have united to build permanent housing in Wai‘anae.

183rd Wing Conducts Ready Airman Training Summer Camp to Enhance Deployment Readiness

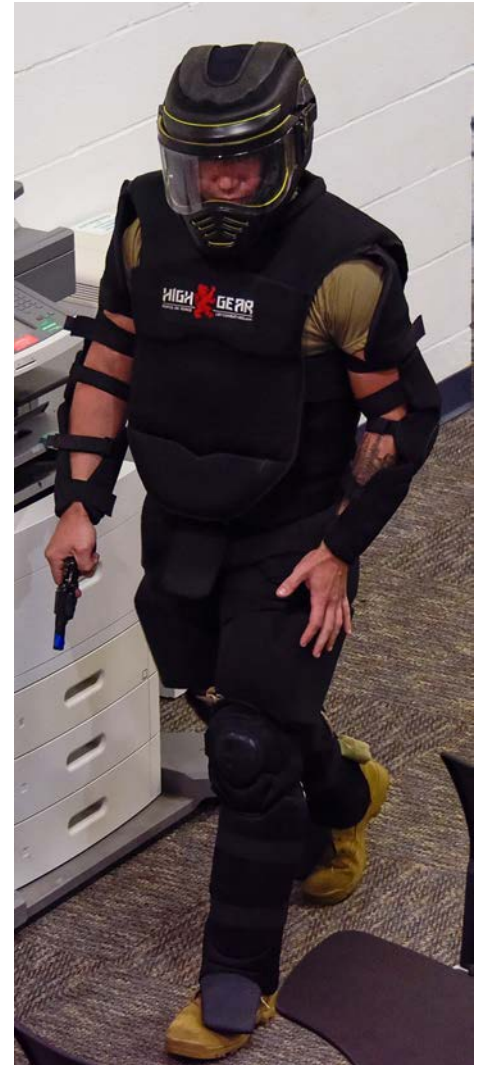
From June 23–27, the 183rd Wing successfully conducted a Ready Airman Training (RAT) Summer Camp, bringing together personnel from across the Wing to complete critical readiness tasks and reinforce core deployment capabilities.

Throughout the week-long event, Airmen engaged in a

wide range of hands-on training designed to meet Department of the Air Force readiness requirements. This included training such as Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive (CBRNE), Active Threat Response, Weapons refreshers, Basic Communications, and

several other mission-essential readiness components.

The objective of RAT Summer Camp is to ensure that every Airman remains fully qualified and prepared to deploy at a moment's notice. This centralized training approach streamlines mission requirements and fosters a culture of preparedness, resilience, and operational excellence across the Wing.





A Visit with Illinois Legionnaires

Brig. Gen. Jorge M. Fonseca, the Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff, delivered remarks to the Department of Illinois American Legion during its annual Convention July 11 at the BOS Convention Center, Springfield. Fonseca thanked the Legionnaires for all they do on behalf of servicemembers and provided an overview of the Illinois National Guard missions over the past year. Fonseca, a life member of the American Legion, visited with American Legion members following his remarks.



New Chaplain at 126th ARW

U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Pete Landers, right, 126th Air Refueling Wing chaplain, stands with the wing's newest chaplain, 1st Lt. Matthew Scheibel. Landers administered the oath of office to Scheibel, May 14, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois.



183rd Medical Group Showcases Unity in Formation Run

Airmen from the 183rd Medical Group laced up their running shoes for a spirited formation run at the 183rd Wing, demonstrating their commitment to fitness, teamwork and esprit de corps. The event was led by Col. Alan Kilbourne, commander of the 183rd Medical Group, who set the pace and called cadence as the group moved in unison across the base. Kilbourne motivated the group with rhythmic cadence, reinforcing the importance of discipline and cohesion within the unit. This formation run not only promoted physical wellness but also strengthened camaraderie among the Airmen, reflecting the group's ongoing commitment to supporting the 183rd Wing's mission and maintaining a high level of operational readiness.

First Sergeants Are Steady Presence for Airmen

Wing Senior Enlisted Advisors Ensure Mission Readiness

Story by Senior Airman Alexandria King, 183rd Wing Public Affairs

At the 183rd Wing, being a first sergeant isn't just another job. They're a steady presence in the lives of hundreds of airmen. They're the ones who notice when something's off. The ones who quietly offer a word of encouragement or a firm reminder of standards. And sometimes, they're the ones standing at a hospital bed or on the phone with a family, helping hold lives together during tough times.

"Our main responsibility and role is to be the key personnel to the commander, work directly with the commander, and ensure the morale, health, wellness, discipline, and standards within the squadrons," explains Master Sgt. Brandon Foxx, 183rd Mission Support Group (MSG) First Sergeant. "We just go check on our people, make sure they're doing okay, check on the ground and deal with any issues they may bring to us."

The 183rd Wing operates differently from traditional flying wings. Its mission focuses on providing support to the Air Force and Air National Guard with an Air Operations Group, Centralized Engine Repair Facility, Medical Group, Mission Support Group, and an Engineering and Installation Squadron. With multiple different lines of effort comes a different kind of stress, and a different rhythm to daily life. Airmen here aren't necessarily climbing into cockpits. They're building and defending networks, coordinating operations, and preparing to deploy across the state or nation with little notice. That's where the first sergeant comes in. Their role blends counselor, disciplinarian, mentor, and morale booster.

"You build a connection with the people underneath you, because they're expected to trust you. They'll come to you with things they don't want other people to know, situations they've been put in, and they need somebody to be there to help them through these things," said Master Sgt. Blake Davis, 183rd Civil Engineering Squadron (CES) First Sergeant. "In the military, you're kind of macho to

a degree, and they need to know the softer side, the more vulnerable side. Somebody will relate to that and be able to help them with whatever they need."

The position of first sergeant isn't one that is in the spotlight, but they're in the heart of every promotion ceremony, every disciplinary board, and every late-night phone call.

Master Sgt. Tom Kanwischer, 183rd Air Operations Group (AOG) First Sergeant, defines the importance of his role further. "In order to have mission capability, you need ready airmen. For an airman to be ready, they have to be resilient, prepared and supported which all fall under my responsibilities. An airman doesn't do the job alone, there are families that serve alongside them and first sergeants are the conduit between them and the unit."

In the 183rd Wing, where federal and state missions meet community defense and disaster response, the first sergeant ensures that readiness isn't just measured in equipment or training — but in people who are

prepared, resilient, and supported.

"Any airman that has ever thought about being a first sergeant should consider doing it," Kanwischer encourages. "Airmen can go to any first sergeant and request more info or shadow to see what it's all about. There are also opportunities for Additional Duty first sergeants who assume some of the responsibilities of the position but maintain their AFSC responsibilities."



183rd First Sergeants

SMSgt Feliciano, Oscar – 183rd Wing
MSgt Kanwischer, Thomas – 183rd AOG
MSgt Silva, Jose – 183rd MDG
MSgt Foxx, Brandon – 183rd MSG
MSgt Davis, Blake – 183rd CES
MSgt Morys, Andrew – 183rd MXS
MSgt Klomps, Jessica – 183rd SFS
MSgt Moreth, Patrick – 217th EIS

183rd Additional Duty First Sergeants

MSgt Lawler, Aaron – 183rd CS
TSgt McKinney, Chad – 183rd LRS



1244th Transportation Company Brings Home SPO Cup During Annual Training in Michigan

The 1244th Transportation Company conducted annual training at Camp Grayling, Michigan along with the rest of 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion for a collective battalion field training exercise.

Throughout the training, Soldiers of the 1244th actively participated in IED Defeat Lanes, convoy operations,

weapons qualifications, and the first time ever the battalion SPO Cup.

Several Soldiers from the 1244th were recognized for excellence by Brigadier General Michael Eastridge and the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade Colonel Elizabeth Roxworthy and Command Sergeant Major Heather Blakemen.

This training reinforced the key Soldiering skills, built unit cohesion, and working together as a battalion.





3625th Classification and Inspection Company Participates in Battalion-level Field Exercise

Soldiers Execute Mission-Focused Training to Enhance Warfighter Readiness

The 3625th Classification and Inspection Company conducted annual training at Camp Grayling, Michigan, alongside the 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion as part of a collective battalion-level field exercise. For two weeks, Soldiers operated in field conditions and executed mission-focused training to enhance warfighter readiness.

Soldiers trained on SSA operations, convoy operations, IED defeat lanes, weapons qualification, and tactical vehicle recovery. Additional training included NVG training, SINCGAR proficiency, and maintenance operations to reinforce sustainment fundamentals and technical proficiency.

This training improved unit cohesion, strengthened Soldier-level skills, and reinforced the 3625th's ability to support large-scale combat operations as part of the 198th CSSB.







Guard Members, Reservists Unite for Training at Marseilles Training Center

Soldiers from the U.S. Army Reserve's 389th Engineer Vertical Construction Company, based in Davenport, Iowa, joined the Illinois National Guard's 123rd Engineer Battalion for hands-on training at Marseilles Training Center (MTC), Marseilles, Illinois, June 7.

The 389th Soldiers worked side by side with the 123rd Engineer Battalion, helping accomplish some crucial tasks that benefit both MTC and training sites throughout Illinois.

1st Lt. Brandon Nelson, a platoon leader with the 389th Engineer Vertical Construction Company, led a team of Soldiers in creating wooden barricades for the last two positions of the M4 rifle qualification standards which were implemented in 2019.

The current standards issue Soldiers four 10-round magazines to engage 40 pop-up targets from five shooting positions. Soldiers begin in the standing position before moving to the prone unsupported, then prone supported, kneeling supported and finally, the standing supported position.

Nelson explained that the unit consisted of carpenters, plumbers, and electricians, meaning that the work was unfamiliar to some members of his platoon, but it also provided an opportunity for cross-training.

"I'm usually pulling wire through walls instead of making the walls," said Pfc. Dylan



Dean, an electrician with the 389th EVCC. "It's a little different, but it's a great experience to branch out of my comfort zone and learn something new."

Nelson also explained that the unit is in the process of being deactivated, with the 389th Soldiers preparing to be sent off to new units across Iowa.

"It's kind of like our last hurrah," said Nelson. "Our annual training was canceled this year, so everybody in my company is getting sent to different companies to do AT with them."

Aside from allowing the 389th an opportunity to work together before deactivation, unit leadership expressed excitement about the opportunities their collaboration with the 123rd may bring.

"Cross-leveling with another organization, I think, is a good skill to have," said Capt. Omar Espinosa, Commander of the 389th EVCC. "As they say, the Army is a small world, and engineers are a small world. In the Reserves, I know that to be true, as I'm sure it is in the Guard."

Even as the unit prepares to disband, Espinosa is determined to find a way to further the bonds built through this joint effort.

"Any relationships we're able to build here, we're definitely going to take into the future and try to foster," said Espinosa. "Maybe we'll come back as a battalion."

I'm usually pulling wire through walls instead of making the walls

Pfc. Dylan Dean, U.S. Army Reserves' 389th Engineer Vertical Construction Company



THIS DAY IN ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD HISTORY



MAY

Four Illinois regiments took part in an attack on Port Gibson, Mississippi

1 **1863:** Port Gibson, a vital Confederate supply depot on the Mississippi River, needed to be captured before any further advance could be made on Vicksburg 30 miles to the north. While advancing over hilly swampland, the Union troops under Generals Ulysses S. Grant and John A. McClernand came under attack on their flank.

Confederate Brigadier General John S. Bowen failed to stop the Union advance, and he retreated from the field. The Federals reached Port Gibson at midnight. A heavy Confederate counterattack at 5:30 am failed to turn the tide, and the rebels withdrew with 787 casualties.

The North sustained 861 casualties. The 20th, 33rd, 45th, and 99th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiments participated in the heavy fighting.

This sword was used by Captain William B. Seymour of Company H, 45th Illinois Volunteer Infantry and is in the collections of the Illinois State Military Museum.



Illinois National Guard Birthday

9 **1723:** The history of the roots of the Illinois National Guard began with the French. On January 1, 1718, Businessman John Law obtained a charter from the French King that granted him monopoly of French trade in the area known as the Illinois Country. Royal orders dictated that a provision for civil government be arranged for the new province of Illinois. During the summer of 1718, the green officials set out from Louisiana and journeyed to their new home. Among other governing associates, the party included Pierre Duque, Sieur de Boisebriant,

Commandant; Captain Diron, Dartaguiette; two Second Lieutenants and a company of 100 Soldiers.

Among the tall grasses of the Illinois prairie, rose the first resemblance of an organized militia, under the French regime. This small unit of French Soldiers had the responsibility of: investigating the number of men capable of bearing arms in each village, determining the amount of powder and lead available, forming companies of militia and arranging a signal system from settlement to settlement. By 1721, Fort De Chartes became the first military structure dedicated to the protection of the community.

As the population of settlements grew, militia companies began popping up among each community, under the tutelage of the French. Looking back on his time in Illinois, the inspector of Troops, Dartaguiette wrote in his diary, "I called together all the inhabitants of this village [Kaskaskia] to whom I said that I had an order from the King to form a company of militia for the purpose of putting them in a position to defend themselves with greater facility against the incursions which the Indians, our enemies, might attempt, so I formed a company, after having selected four of the most worthy among them to put at the head. This company being under arms, I passed it in review the same day." Under the shade of the White Oak, the militia rested, having completed the first drill on May 9, 1723.



Guardsmen help citizens during flooding in East Peoria

23 1927: On May 23rd, 1927, the sheriff of Tazewell county and the mayor of East Peoria requested the assistance of the Illinois National Guard due to excessive flooding. Guardsmen helped the citizens protect their property from water damage.

Guardsmen use diplomacy to talk down WWI Veterans

23 1932: Men from the Bonus Expeditionary Force took over the freight trains in the East St. Louis Stockyard. (WWI Veterans who sought to receive an early payment of \$1,000 early from the Government due to inability of finding jobs during the Great Depression. The "bonus" payout was originally slated for 1945.)

The Veterans sought transport to Indiana to argue their case. The Train Company would not allow the veterans to ride on the trains. So, they halted train movement. These trains carried iced perishables.

The sheriff of St. Clair County could not protect the property or move the trains, so he called on the state for assistance. Twenty-five officers and 166 men handled the situation through diplomacy. Civil authorities arranged transportation to the Indiana border and the trains returned to St. Louis for icing.

This state duty lasted until May 25.

Illinois naval militiaman fought dutifully aboard sinking Union ship

27 1863: The Union naval blockade of Vicksburg, Mississippi traded heavy fire with Confederate shore batteries. Amongst the hardest hit, the USS Cincinnati sank after taking several direct hits.

Boatswains Mate Henry Dow of Illinois continued to man the guns right up until the deck had disappeared below the waterline. For his heroic effort he received the Medal of Honor.

Black Hawk War

27 1832: Abraham Lincoln enlisted as a Private at Fort Johnson in LaSalle County. It marked the second time Lincoln had enlisted in the Illinois militia during the Black Hawk War.

General John A. Logan faced enemy envelopment at the Battle of Pickett's Mills

27 1864: Still suffering from the heavy blow struck at New Hope Church two days earlier, Union Major General William Tecumseh Sherman attempted to reverse his circumstances at Pickett's Mills, Georgia. Major General Oliver O. Howard hit the right flank of Confederate General Joseph Johnston's army. However, Confederate Major General Patrick Cleburne predicted this attack, and soundly defeated Howard. The Union retreated with 1,600 casualties. The rebels lost 500 dead and wounded.

This defeat further endangered the position occupied by Major General John A. Logan near Pumpkinvine Creek.

JUNE

President Theodore Roosevelt dedicated the Springfield Arsenal

4 1904: In what marked his third visit to Springfield, President Roosevelt dedicated the old state armory at Second and Monroe Streets in Springfield before 8,000 spectators. In his remarks he stated, "It is a good thing for us, by speech, to pay homage to the memory of Abraham Lincoln, but it is an infinitely better thing for us in our lives to pay homage to his memory in the only way in which that homage can effectively be paid, by seeing to it that this republic's life, social and political, civic and industrial, is shaped now in accordance with the ideals which Lincoln preached, and which all his long life he practiced." Roosevelt had previously been to Camp Lincoln in 1901, for a dinner as Vice President. Within fifteen days of this visit, President McKinley would be assassinated, and Roosevelt would assume the office of President of the United States. Fire destroyed the building in 1934. The Illinois State Military Museum stands today as a mini replica of the old Springfield Arsenal.



The 131st, 132nd and 130th Restore Order in Herrin

22 **1922:** The Southern Illinois Coal Company attempted to operate a strip mine with non-union labor a few miles from Marion. By the 22nd law and order could no longer be maintained. An armed mob attacked the employees, killing and wounding several. Five companies of the 130th Infantry, three of the 131st Infantry and the entire 132nd Infantry spent 48 hours restoring order in Herrin, Illinois.



*Significant act of bravery earned
an Illinois Soldier the Medal of Honor
at Vicksburg, Mississippi*

25 **1863:** Eager to eliminate the last elements of Confederate resistance in the besieged city of Vicksburg, Major General Ulysses S. Grant's Union Army attacked the outer defenses. Sergeant Henry H. Taylor of Company C, 45th Illinois Infantry succeeded in being the first to plant the American flag on the captured rebel works. His action served to inspire the Federal troops, and the city fell within days. For his action, he received the Medal of Honor.



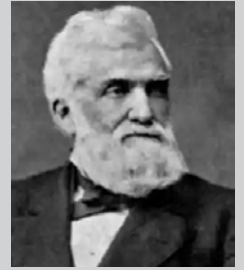
The 106th Cavalry left England for France

29 **1944:** The WWII service of the 106th Cavalry Group began with landings at Utah and Omaha Beaches in Normandy, France. The unit entered combat on July 4th attached to the 1st Army, VIII Corps under General Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. As part of the campaign they mopped up pockets of German resistance in the Normandy peninsula. Though their light armored vehicles were not fitted for the rugged Normandy hedgerows, the unit fought well. The 106th finished the campaign by helping to close the Falaise Gap. The unit went on to see combat in northern France, the Rhineland, and Central Germany. Prior to liberating King Leopold of Belgium, the 106th had the honor of being the first allied armored unit to enter Salzburg, Austria in May 1945.

JULY

Famous Guardsman: John Beveridge

1 **1863:** Major John Beveridge of the 8th Illinois Cavalry observed as one of his troopers, Second Lieutenant Marcellus Jones of Company E fired the first shot of the Battle of Gettysburg.



He had raised Company F shortly after enlisting in 1861. He recruited the 17th Illinois Cavalry in January 1864, serving as its colonel. He served at the Alton Prison Camp, and played a part in the 1864 Missouri Campaign to stop Confederate Major General Sterling Price. At the close of the war his posting in St. Louis put him in charge of military court martials.

He served as state senator for Illinois in 1870, and governor in 1873. His governorship made him the first to occupy the current capitol building.

President Chester A. Arthur appointed him Assistant U.S. Treasurer in 1881. Beveridge died in 1910.

Army Aviation emerged in the ILNG

1 **1927:** The largest and oldest of the three Illinois Air National Guard units, the 126th Air Refueling Wing, traces its history and lineage back to 1927 when the 108th Observation Squadron, 33rd Division Aviation, Illinois National Guard organized at the 131st Infantry Armory at 16th Street and Michigan Avenue.

On July 1, 1927, the unit obtained federal recognition and received its first aircraft, PT-1's, during its first encampment later that year at Camp Grant, near Rockford, Illinois. The unit had an initial compliment of 16 officers and 74 enlisted men from among the hundreds of World War I veterans in Chicago.

Camp Lincoln is officially established

6 **1886:** In 1885, Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby decided that the Illinois National Guard needed a permanent base of operations.

Oglesby appointed a five-man military board that sought out an appropriate piece of land. The group looked at areas in Highland Park,

Waukegan, Wilmington, Oregon, Quincy, Ottawa, Kankakee and Springfield. After Springfield was chosen, the city shocked the public with the speed of construction to accommodate the needs of the Illinois National Guard.

On July 6, 1886, by order of Governor Richard J. Oglesby, Adjutant General Joseph W. Vance issued General Order 14. It read, "The permanent camp and rifle range established for the Illinois National Guard, near Springfield, is hereby designated and will be known as Camp Lincoln."

The camp consisted of 160 acres, is a mile long and a quarter mile wide and is just a half mile from President Abraham Lincoln's tomb. The land originally cost \$18,100. The citizens of Springfield raised \$3,100 and the city paid for the remainder \$15,000. The city council passed an ordinance on April 7, 1886 to extend the city water mains to the camp at no cost and the military post received its water free of charge.

The city also agreed to extend more than a mile of track for street cars. The first buildings cost \$8,030.55 for a stable to house 100 horses, a quartermaster house, and an icehouse. The first encampment took place on July, 1, 1886.



The 33rd Division arrived in Hawaii for training as part of their combat deployment

12 1943: The bulk of the 33rd Infantry Division arrived in Hawaii on July 12th for civil defense duties and jungle warfare training. The lush tropical Hawaiian climate offered a realistic jungle environment that the training camps in mainland America could not. Soldiers learned to adapt to the warm and unpredictable jungle weather, as well as how to fight offensively in inhospitable terrain. Within a year of their arrival in Hawaii, the 33rd had joined the New Guinea Campaign of General Douglas

MacArthur. Their first battle against the Japanese occurred on the island of Morotai.

The Illinois National Guard starts State Partnership with Poland

14 1993: Since July 14, 1993, the Illinois National Guard has enjoyed partnership with Polish military forces through the State Partnership Program.



The purpose of the State Partnership Program (SPP) is to link the National Guard states and territories with partner countries to foster mutual interests and establish long-term relationships across all levels of society. The SPP with Poland was one of the first SPP relationships initiated between the National Guard and the former Soviet Eastern Bloc countries.

The partnership conducts military-to-military engagements and facilitates broader interagency engagements. The SPP has allowed hundreds of Illinois National Guard members to participate in exchanges with Polish forces.

The partnership helped Poland prepare for membership in NATO, with the European nation becoming a NATO member in March 1999. Poland has become a staunch U.S. ally.

Coolness under fire earned Illinois Soldier the Medal of Honor at the Battle of Peachtree Creek, Georgia

20 1864: The three pronged Union advance on Atlanta took a direct hit by the Army of Tennessee under Confederate General John Bell Hood. Desperate fighting broke out at Peachtree Creek, and the Federal troops of Major General George H. Thomas were strained nearly to the point of fracture. Lieutenant Colonel Douglas Hapeman of the 104th Illinois Infantry remained calm and refused to allow his men to retreat. Though under concentrated enemy fire he maintained his composure and reformed his men to mount a counterattack. This attack repulsed the Confederate infantry assault, and helped save the Union force from being overrun. For his heroic conduct under fire Hapeman received the Medal of Honor.





108th MMB Conducts Medical Training

A military vehicle accident
resulting in injured servicemembers.

A generator explosion with
servicemembers receiving burns.

A fight between servicemembers
resulting in injuries, both physical and
emotional.

While these scenarios were staged
at the Illinois Army National Guard's
Marseilles Training Center, the
events were part of Role 1 and Role 2
training for the Soldiers in the 108th
Multifunctional Medical Battalion,
headquartered in Chicago, May 30-31.

The scenarios were designed to
simulate real life medical emergencies
the Soldiers could encounter during
drill status, annual training events,
and deployments. During the training,
Soldiers were evaluated on their
response to the medical emergencies,
and the treatment offered for each
injury.

**Photos by Barb Wilson,
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs**







U.S. Air Force KC-135 Stratotanker aircraft assigned to the Illinois Air National Guard, top, and the 92nd Air Refueling Wing, prepare to take off in support of exercise Resolute Force Pacific at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, July 13, 2025. Mobility aircraft provide critical airlift, air refueling, aeromedical evacuation, and command and control to project, connect, maneuver, and sustain the Joint Force during the Department-Level Exercise Department of the Air Force series, including REFORPAC. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Owen Davies)



Reenlisting on the U.S. Army's 250th Birthday

President Donald Trump re-enlisted 250 Soldiers including three Illinois Army National Guard Noncommissioned Officers, Sgt. Nina Harris of the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade, Sgt. Stevie Barton of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, and Sgt. Patrick Murray of the 65th Troop Command Brigade, during the Army's 250th Birthday event on June 14 in Washington, D.C. The Soldiers were selected by their brigade leadership for the honor.



217th EIS Conducts Readiness Training in Puerto Rico

The 217th Engineering Installation Squadron led readiness training, War Cry Lite, June 2-6, at U.S. Army Reserve Center Ramey Base, Aguadilla, Puerto Rico.

Members of the 217th, as well as the 183rd Communications Squadron, attended numerous training sessions to better prepare them for future deployments. These trainings

included Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) training, suicide prevention training, emotional intelligence training, effective communication training, Ready Airman Training (RAT), ancillary training and team building exercises.

The 217th Engineering Installation Squadron is a unique unit with both a broad and specialized set of

skills and AFSCs that work together toward one mission. They specialize in building and extending cyberspace infrastructure for all areas of the Department of Defense and operate at both the operational and tactical levels.

Readiness training is essential for ensuring airmen are prepared and mission ready at all times. These training opportunities strengthen the unit's ability to be a fully deployable package of people, tools, and equipment. War Cry Lite also helped to strengthen the morale within the unit and share that same spirit with other units at the 183d. When asked to sum up this training exercise, Master Sgt. Christian Leonhard, the noncommissioned officer in charge of logistics management for the 217th, said in one word, "family".

"When you have morale, you have family. And when you have family, you have people who will do anything for each other — and hold each other to the highest standard," Leonhard said, "That's who we are and what we strive for here when we plan these trips at the 217th."





709th MCAS trains to provide Role II Medical Care in Large Scale Combat Operations

The 709th Medical Company Area Support (MCAS) conducted their Annual Training at Camp Dodge, Iowa, in July to focus on providing Role II Medical care in a Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) environment.

They started off the training with the Leader's Reaction Course to build further cohesion between their Treatment, Ancillary Services, Evacuation and HQ teams.

The 709th then moved to the field to stand up their Role II Hospital before performing multiple jumps into non-medical buildings while taking patients to simulate current conflicts around the globe. This not only had Soldiers thinking outside the box on loading their equipment, but also patient flow, tracking and evacuation operations to ensure they're prepared to provide the best care possible wherever the ILARNG is called to serve.

The unit had visits from both the 34th DSB Command Team, as well as ILARNG State Command Sergeant Major CSM Kelly and ILARNG Command Chief Warrant Officer Chief Warrant Officer 5 Black. They coined a number of soldiers for their stellar performance in moving a full hospital twice and boosting the team's morale along the way.





Richard the Rooster - One Tough Old Bird

Meet Richard the Rooster, the 4-foot fowl mascot of Bartonville's 709th Medical Company Area Support. Richard may look a little rough, but unit members – present and past – assure us that he's a tough old bird.

Richard first appeared out of the South Dakota Badlands during Golden Coyote 2016. No one really knows why he decided to roost with the unit. Perhaps he was attracted to the sharp scent of isopropyl alcohol or other cleaning agents. Or, maybe, more macabre – the coppery smell of blood.

Regardless, Richard has been with the unit through flood duty, COVID-19 response, annual training across the nation, and deployment in Kuwait and Iraq. He's been steadfast – well, except for that one time he may have flown the coop.

Witnesses claim he was kidnapped during that annual training and even formulated stories of the unit's Soldiers, equipped with night vision goggles and body armor, rescuing Richard at O'dark thirty.

Sceptics say that Richard went out late at night looking for chickens and hoping for something to crow about come dawn.

The rooster is featured on the Army Medical Department's Regimental Insignia and is a symbol of the Greek God of Healing, Asclepius. The ancient Greeks believed that a rooster's morning crowing could ward off evil spirits and disease – although there have been no scientific studies to verify that claim.



Public Affairs Detachment Soldiers Return Home After Deployment With Special Operations Command

Ten Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's Chicago-based 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment (MPAD) returned in June from a nearly year-long deployment supporting U.S. Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) and conducting public affairs operations across the continent.

"They are a small unit but made a significant impact to those they supported during this deployment," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "Public affairs is a small community but what they do is vitally important. They keep our troops and our Allies informed, use information to deter potential adversaries, and combat enemy misinformation in conflict."

Commanded by Maj. Patrick Clark with 1st Sgt. Colin Prendergast, the unit was activated in July 2024. Once in theater, they formed small teams that would support operations across 14 European nations. The unit supported 43 missions and delivered U.S. Department of Defense and NATO messaging throughout the



Maj. Patrick Clark, Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard's 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, addresses his Soldiers during their deployment to Europe. The unit deployed in support of Special Operations Command Europe in July 2024 and returned to Illinois in June. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Danielle Rayon, U.S. Special Operations Command Europe)

continent. The unit also supported nine SOCEUR "uniquely different" operations and exercises where they helped deter potential future conflict by demonstrating the lethality and power of U.S. and Allied Special Forces.

The unit created and uploaded over 300 unique videos, photos, captions, and written stories into the Defense Visual Information Distribution System (DVIDS), garnering over 200,000 views and over 5,000 downloads.

All 10 Soldiers received the Joint Service Commendation Medal for their accomplishments during the deployment. Three Soldiers (Clark, Staff Sgt. Lucas Snow, and Sgt. Xzavier Marte) received Joint Service Achievement Medals for their work during Steadfast Deterrence 2025 in May, a NATO exercise involving nearly 5,000 personnel from all 32 NATO nations.

Four soldiers (Staff Sgt. Kyle Odum, Sgt. Xzavier Marte, Spc. Kristel Cordero, and Spc. David Ervin) received Army Achievement Medals for their actions in support of Exercise Dark Lightning in the United Kingdom in September 2024. Dark Lightning was a joint interoperability exercise between the United Kingdom's Royal Air Force and the U.S. Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). The exercise focused on enhancing the capabilities of the Chinook helicopter crews and personnel from both nations.

Odum also received the Army Achievement Medal for his work improving the unit's physical fitness program. All the Soldiers in the unit passed the Operational Security Level 1 course. Staff Sgt. Snow completed the Norwegian Foot March, receiving the Marsjmerket badge, a recognized foreign military award for completing the required 18.6 mile ruck with a 24 pound ruck. Prendergast graduated from the Tactical Information Operations Planners Course. 1st Lt.





Above, the Illinois Army National Guard's 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment deployed in support of Special Operations Command Europe in July 2024 and returned to Illinois in June. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Danielle Rayon, U.S. Special Operations Command Europe)

Rachel Kim graduated from the Defense Information School's Public Affairs and Communication Strategy Qualification Course, becoming a qualified U.S. Army public affairs officer.

The unit also planned and facilitated the first SOCEUR MPAD Pre-Deployment Site Survey (PDSS), which will assist future public affairs units deploying to Europe.

"Not many National Guard units get the opportunity to work with the Special Forces community," Clark said. "To work alongside those teams, operators and leadership brought out the best of our Soldiers. We were trusted to tell the stories of this close-knit community and the amazing things they do with our European partners. The 139th stepped up, adapted and performed an extraordinary job in capturing content and promoting DoD messaging throughout the deployment."

The Illinois Army National Guard's 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment deployed in support of Special Operations Command Europe in 2024 and received several awards for their work in the U.S. Special Operations Europe area of responsibility. The unit returned Illinois in June. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Danielle Rayon, U.S. Special Operations Command Europe)





Chief Warrant Officer 3 Zac Swedberg, of Dixon, is greeted by family and friends after his final flight as an Army aviator June 12. Swedberg is retiring from the Illinois Army National Guard after 20 years of service.

Dixon Aviator Flies Final Flight Ahead of Retirement

Nearly 20 years after first putting on a U.S. Army uniform, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Zac Swedberg, of Dixon, Illinois, flew his final flight as an aviator in the Illinois Army National Guard, June 12, as he prepares for retirement later this year.

The final flight, or Fini flight, is an aviation tradition in which a pilot flies a final flight prior to retirement.

Swedberg, a traditional Illinois National Guard member, enlisted as a 13D, Field Artillery Fire Direction Control in 2005, and will complete 20 years in September. His current plans are to retire in October.

It was during a deployment to Afghanistan from 2008-2009 that Swedberg decided he wanted to become a helicopter pilot.

"I kept seeing these helicopters flying over and thought 'they're going to a way nicer place at the end of the day than I am, and I'm tired of walking'," he said. When Swedberg returned from deployment, he put in the paperwork for Warrant Officer Candidate School.

Swedberg said it took about a year and a half to submit the paperwork and get selected to attend Warrant Officer School. Once selected as a



Family and friends watch as Chief Warrant Officer 3 Zac Swedberg flies by to complete his final flight as an Army aviator June 12.



Chief Warrant Officer 3 Zac Swedberg, of Dixon, walks through a water salute following his final flight as an Army aviator June 12. Swedberg is retiring from the Illinois Army National Guard after 20 years of service.

Warrant Officer Candidate, it took about another year and a half to complete the school. Swedberg graduated from Warrant Officer Candidate School in 2011 and completed flight school in 2012.

Fast forward 13 years and Swedberg said it is the people he will miss the most when his time in uniform ends.

"I'll miss the friends I've made over the years and the new people coming

in that I would get to train," he said. "I'll miss the camaraderie the most."

After spending nearly 20 years in uniform, Swedberg offered advice to his fellow service members.

"Show up and work hard every single time," he said. "There's always more you can do. If you haven't been

given a task, make a task."

Swedberg won't step completely away from aviation once he retires, however. He's a software engineer for Urbana-based Frasca, a flight simulator company.

He and his wife, Jenny, have two young daughters.

Photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Zac Swedberg, of Dixon, is greeted by family and friends after his final flight as an Army aviator June 12. Swedberg is retiring from the Illinois Army National Guard after 20 years of service.



Team Participates in Winston P. Wilson Championship

1st Lt. Kyle Korb and Staff Sgt. Jeremiah Alvarez, both from the Illinois Army National Guard's 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade, participated in the Winston P. Wilson Championship at Robinson Maneuver Training Center, North Little Rock, Arkansas June 23-27.

Korb, a surgical nurse, and Alvarez, a maintenance advisor, placed 12th out of 22 teams in the machine gun competition.

The Winston P. Wilson Championship is conducted annually, and involves the rifle, pistol, machine gun, and combined arms disciplines.



Aerial View

106th Aviation Regiment Performs Flyover at Fairbury's Prairie Dirt Classic Car Race



UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters from the Illinois Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment based in Decatur conducted a flyover for the Fairbury Speedway's Prairie Dirt Classic on July 26, the state's biggest dirt car race.

The race was won by Brian Shirley of Chatham, but the Illinois Army National Guard was able to show off their own high-performance vehicles in the sky in honor of our nation just before the race began.

Flyovers allow our pilots and crews to practice their military skills and give the National Guard more visibility as the state's military force.



*U.S. Army photos by Sgt. Gabriel Rivera
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

126th Security Forces Conduct Training Exercise



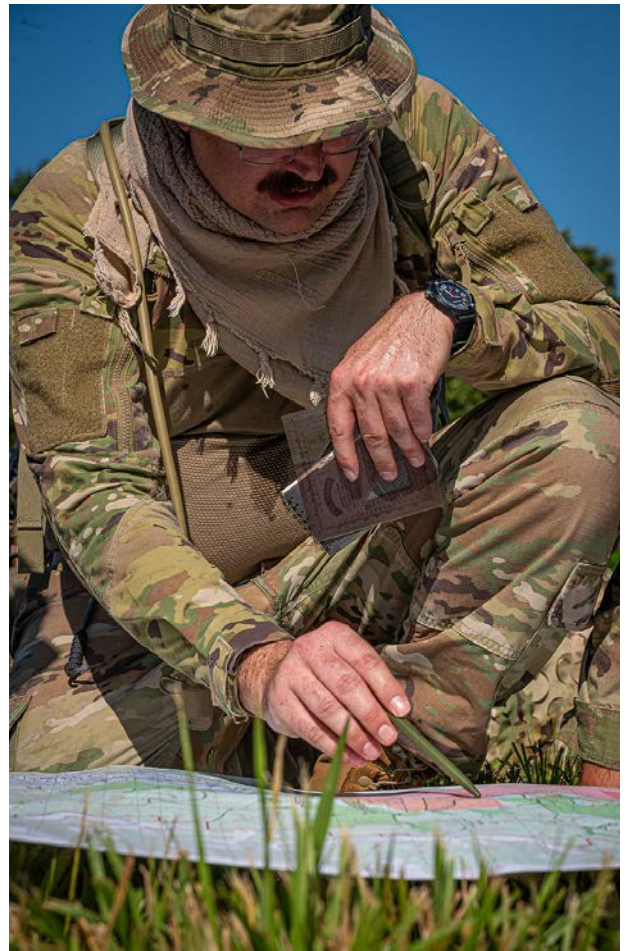
126th Security Forces conducted Field Training Exercise Tanglewood at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, July 12.

Many may think security forces just sits at gates and watchtowers, but don't know the detailed training and tasks involved in their overall mission of protecting Air Force personnel, assets, and defending U.S. interests.

During this exercise the squadron engaged force generation, agile combat employment, and integrated defense.

Some major training goals include provide command and control operations, maintaining situational awareness analyzing information and providing strategic planning aimed to protect personnel and critical resources.





*Illinois Air National Guard photos by
Tech. Sgt. Ces White*





Airmen from the 183rd Air Operations Group and 183rd Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, pause for a group photo in front of a C-130H Hercules, assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, during their visit to the 182nd in Peoria, July 10. The visit included an incentive flight for 183rd members and promoted military interoperability and interpersonal connections between members of the units.

182nd Airlift Wing, 183rd Air Operations Group Team Up for Orientation Flight

Story by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

The 169th Airlift Squadron, 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, partnered with the 183rd Air Operations Group, 183rd Wing, July 10, 2025, to provide 183rd AOG Airmen an orientation flight on one of the C-130H Hercules assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois. The flight and visit to the 182nd provided Airmen from both units the opportunity to increase knowledge of tactical, operational and strategic levels of their unique Air Force missions.

The 169th Airlift Squadron provides tactical airlift and airdrop capabilities, an essential function of modern Air Force mobility operations. The 183rd AOG delivers command and control (C2), planning and execution of air operations.

Eight Air Force Specialty Codes were represented among the 10 Airmen from the 183rd AOG. During their visit, 183rd Airmen interacted with 169th pilots, navigators and loadmasters, as well as 182nd Operations Support Squadron personnel.

"This orientation flight served as a powerful bridge between the Air Operations Center (AOC) and the aircrew, providing AOG personnel with real-time exposure to flight operations," said U.S. Air Force Maj. Erica Perry, the assistant director of operations for the 183rd Air Mobility Operations Squadron (AMOS), 183rd AOG. "The experience highlighted the operational relevance of their C2 duties and how critical synchronization with aircrews is to the success of every mission."

In flying with the 182nd Airlift Wing, 183rd Airmen were able to see how their strategic level operations in the AOC are tactically executed while gaining insight into the operational tempo and crew operations which contribute to successful mobility missions.

"Opportunities like this flight are invaluable for our Airmen," said Lt. Col.

Matthew Cain, the commander of the 183rd AMOS. "Seeing air mobility operations up close reinforces how every role in the Air Operations Center directly contributes to



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Lauren Bailey, an aerospace management technician with the 183rd Combat Operations Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, aboard a C-130H Hercules, assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, during an incentive flight July 10.

mission success. It's about building perspective, strengthening collaboration and ensuring we're always ready to execute with precision."

Some members of the 183rd AOG were also included in pre-flight briefings, which enriched cohesion between members of the units. It also fostered an understanding by contextualizing the role both units have in operational success, with the

183rd AOG as planners and the 169th Airlift Squadron as executors of such plans.

"This type of hands-on exposure is critical to building a well-rounded understanding of joint operations," said Perry. "When our Airmen see the mission in action, from the cockpit to the coordination, it sharpens their operational awareness and reinforces the importance of every piece of the puzzle."

Opportunities like the orientation flight can enhance interoperability and foster stronger interpersonal relationships between units, reinforcing the Total Force concept. Integrating capabilities and interoperability are key factors to posturing Agile Combat Employment, according to recent Air Force policies on maintaining superiority in the Great Power Competition.



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Nicholas Groeper, an aircrew flight equipment specialist with the 182nd Operations Support Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, briefs members of the 183rd Air Operations Group on aircrew survival equipment during their visit to the 182nd Airlift Wing.

C-130H Orientation Flight Reinforces How Each AOC Role Contributes to Mission Success

Story by Maj. Erica Perrey

This month, 10 Airmen from the 183rd Air Operations Group (AOG) had the unique opportunity to participate in a C-130H orientation flight with the 169th Airlift Squadron, 182nd Airlift Wing, based in Peoria.

Representing eight different Air Force Specialty Codes, these AOG members experienced firsthand the tactical training and coordination involved in a two-ship tactical (TAC) flight—a mission essential to executing modern air mobility operations.

The C-130 Hercules, a cornerstone of tactical military airlift, plays a vital role in transporting supplies, deploying forces, and enabling specialized missions in dynamic environments.

"Opportunities like this flight are invaluable for our Airmen," said Lt. Col. Matthew V. Cain, Commander of the 183rd Air Mobility Operations Squadron (AMOS). "Seeing air mobility operations up close reinforces how every role in the Air

Operations Center directly contributes to mission success. It's about building perspective, strengthening collaboration, and ensuring we're always ready to execute with precision."

This orientation flight served as a powerful bridge between the Air Operations Center (AOC) and the aircrew, providing AOG personnel with real-time exposure to flight operations. The experience highlighted the operational relevance

of their C2 duties and how critical synchronization with aircrews is to the success of every mission.

Maj. Erica M. Perrey, Assistant Director of Operations for the 183rd AMOS, emphasized the developmental value: "This type of hands-on exposure is critical to building a well-rounded understanding of joint operations. When our Airmen see the mission in action, from the cockpit to the coordination, it sharpens their operational awareness and reinforces the importance of every piece of the puzzle."

By stepping out of the AOC and into the aircraft, these 10 Airmen gained more than just flight hours—they gained insight into the operational tempo, crew dynamics, and strategic impact of mobility missions. Experiences like this deepen joint understanding, improve mission planning, and strengthen the Total Force.



Airmen from the 169th Airlift Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, brief Airmen from the 183rd Air Operations Group during their visit to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, July 10, 2025. The visit included an incentive flight for 183rd members and promoted military interoperability and interpersonal connections between members of the units.



Civilian employers and Illinois Army and Air National Guard members smile for a photo in front of a C-130H Hercules, assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, after a flight during an Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Boss Lift event hosted at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois May 7. (Photos by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs)

182nd Airlift Wing hosts ESGR Boss Lift



Master Sgt. Sean McDonough, a crew chief with the 182nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, interacts with civilian employers during the ESGR Boss Lift event.



Mike McCarthy, the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Central West North Area chair, speaks to civilian employers and Illinois Army and Air National Guard members.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Joel Wainman, left, and Master Sgt. Ryan Lane, both loadmasters with the 182nd Airlift Wing, observe the tail C-130H Hercules.



Civilian employers interact with Airmen from the 182nd Airlift Wing during an Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Boss Lift event.

933rd Military Police Company Conducts Joint Combined Arms Wet Gap Operation

The 933rd Military Police Company participated in a joint, combined arms wet gap crossing operation on June 9 in support of the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade and the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade at Camp Ripley, Minnesota. This operation is a once in a lifetime opportunity for most and one that will build operational readiness throughout the formation.

*(U.S. Army National Guard photos
by Col. David Helfrich, 404th MEB Commander)*





198th CSSB's Annual Training Focuses on Enhancing Individual, Collective Skills

For two weeks in , the 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB) conducted Annual Training at Camp Grayling, Michigan, focusing on enhancing individual and collective skills, led by Lt. Col. Linden Allen and Command Sgt. Maj. Nicholas Fordham.

Training included weapons qualification, defensive operations, communication, tactical convoy operations, and fieldcraft.

Units participated in the inaugural SPO Cup, competing in events such as the Truck Rodeo, Maintenance Rodeo, fighting position construction, and Individual Weapons Qualification (IWQ). The 1744th Transportation Company took home the SPO Cup after a tie break with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 198th CSSB, and proudly added the streamer to the unit guidon.

The Field Training Exercise (FTX) featured complex attacks by an opposing force (OPFOR), CBRN attacks, and seven drones deploying Nerf balls to simulate munitions.

Despite challenging weather and long days, Soldiers successfully completed all tasks and injects with resilience and determination.

Numerous Soldiers were recognized for excellence by the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade command team, Col. Elizabeth Roxworthy and Command Sgt. Maj. Heather Blakeman, after their faces were painted by Spc. Ethan Nitsche (3625th CICO) and Spc. Lheanne Inocentes (1970 QM).





HHC, 198th CSSB Soldiers Conduct Critical Training During Field Exercise

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, led by Capt. Megan Bellone and 1st Sgt. Edith Aviles, completed battalion wide annual training at Camp Grayling, Michigan.

The Soldiers conducted more than 20 critical trainings opportunities including how to don Mission Oriented Protective Posture gear, Unmanned Aircraft Systems sighting, and react to contact which prepared them to lead base defense during the field training exercise.

HHC's entry control point was top notch protection as even the battalion command team and staff were not given a free pass through.

The company skillfully executed many diverse tasks. Soldiers conducted staff operations that ranged from configuring logistics packages to creating and tracking all operations. They also executed their first Army Fitness Test.

HHC participated in the inaugural SPO Cup. Despite being a smaller unit, HHC came in second after an exciting tie breaker. All Soldiers performed incredibly well, including several junior Soldiers who participated in the commander's update briefs.

Spc. Emily Huerta and Spc. Runnelivan David were also recognized for their dedication to the profession and received coins from the Brigade Command team. Throughout the duration of annual training, the morale of the company was unwavering.







Asphalt Detachment Extends Parking Lot at Sparta Training Area During Annual Training

Soldiers from the Sparta-based 2118th Asphalt Detachment worked on a parking lot extension at Sparta Training Area, Sparta, Illinois, June 2, as part of their annual training.

The Soldiers laid two base layers of asphalt, working with machinery such as an asphalt paver, roller-compactor, and skid-steer loader.

"Normally we're operating at 35 to 40 Soldiers," said Sgt. Brett Winegarner of Carlyle, Illinois. "We're kind of figuring out now that 14 is probably about our minimum."

With much of the unit attached to the 661st Engineer Construction Company, based in Macomb, Illinois, and preparing for deployment at Marseilles Training Center, Marseilles, Illinois, the 14 remaining rear-



detachment Soldiers were challenged with completing the large project.

"It's definitely a little more stressful, but everybody gets a little bit more stick time to operate," said Spc. Justin Carpenter of Mount Carmel, Illinois. "So that's kind of nice, and everybody gets to jump around to different jobs and figure out how the project works and what to do. Ultimately, everybody learns everything about the project, which makes future projects a lot more successful in the long run."

The 2118th, named for President Ulysses S. Grant, the former commander of the 21st Illinois Volunteer Regiment and the 18th President of the United States, is one of less than ten asphalt units in the entire U.S. Army, all of which exist within the National Guard or Reserves.

With the elimination of the Concrete and Asphalt Equipment Operator military occupational specialty and the transition to the Horizontal Construction Engineer MOS, Soldiers no longer work with asphalt in their advanced individual training, meaning that for some, the process was completely foreign. To help with this, the detachment has created a system to help familiarize Soldiers.

"The idea is to get them with the



ground crew at first," said Winegarner. "That way they can get a demonstration of how asphalt works, and the way we work it. And after that we can put them on the paver."

In addition to helping sharpen the detachment's skills, the project provides a more practical purpose: providing extra parking space for Soldiers travelling to drill, something that becomes a necessity when all three Sparta-based units' training weekends intersect.

"Since I joined the 2118, one thing I've noticed is that Soldiers like to stay here," said 1st Lt. Brenton Atchison, the commander of the 2118th. "And I think that comes down to, for one, the Soldiers enjoying and taking pride in the work that they do."

The parking lot extension not only benefits the Soldiers of the 2118th Asphalt Detachment, but also every unit that comes to the Sparta Training Area, one of the few training sites in Illinois where Soldiers can perform weapons qualifications.

"It's really nice to add on to our training area," said Carpenter. "I learned not too long ago that essentially everything behind this armory and firehouse was built in the last 18 years by our unit. To be able to add on to it makes me feel really good."

This sense of pride is found not only in the minds of the lower-enlisted Soldiers of the unit but in the command team's as well.

"Work ethic goes a long way and these are some of the hardest working soldiers that you could find," said Atchison. "They're always positive and I couldn't be more proud of them."



126th ARW Leaders Become Undercover Colonels to Learn about Squadron Missions



Col. Nick Henschel, Commander, 126th Air Refueling Wing, went undercover in the 126th Security Forces Squadron (SFS) to learn how they train and equip for Air Base Ground Defense (ABGD) in protection of USAF and ANG assets against threats. During the training, Henschel employed flash bang grenades to breach a building as part of the SF annual training requirements. These non-lethal explosive devices are often used for close quarters combat, door breaching, and riot control to temporarily disorient an enemy's senses.

"Our Security Forces defenders maintain qualifications in multiple different weapon systems, and they are trained in a wide spectrum of military operations so they are ready every minute of every day. I'm incredibly grateful that these professionals are serving on our team!" said Henschel.



Col. Nick Henschel, 126th Air Refueling Wing, commander, went undercover in the 126th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron to learn about Production Superintendent ("Pro-Super") duties.

Master Sgt. Ryan Taylor, the Lead Pro-Super, coordinates the maintenance, scheduling, and production of KC-135s, crews chiefs, and all associated equipment. He also manages daily pre-flight inspections, utilization rates, and fleet health. Taylor had the Henschel perform a daily inspection, review the aircraft forms for discrepancies, and complete the Exceptional Release for the daily missions.

"Our Pro-Supers do an outstanding job juggling all the maintenance and inspection requirements against increasing mission demands. They oversee hundreds of safe launches every year ensuring our wing can accomplish its global mission Anytime...Anywhere" said Henschel.



Col. Nick Henschel, 126th Air Refueling Wing, commander, went undercover in the 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron with Senior Master Sgt. Ronnell Freeman, Master Sgt. Roberto Aguilar, and Tech Sgt. Rashaad Adams from the Traffic Management Office team. They put the Colonel to work in the Shipping and Receiving departments where he prepared multiple high priority items for shipment. The Colonel also opened, logged, and delivered mail to the Aerospace Ground Equipment shop. Finally, the team demonstrated several different IT systems used throughout the process.

"Amazing to see how this small team manages every single piece of mail, cargo, and equipment that leaves or arrives in our wing...thousands of transactions every year! They are an integral part of our Wing's award-winning logistics and supply chain operations." said Henschel.

HHC, 232nd CSSB Assumes Command of Sustainment Operations During Deployment

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion assumed command of sustainment operations in support of U.S. Army Europe and Africa's Assure, Deter, and Reinforce mission on July 14.

The ceremony took place at the Zagan Palace of Culture in Zagan, Poland.

The 232nd CSSB relieved Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 110th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion of the Georgia Army

National Guard, after their successful rotation.

The 232nd CSSB will remain in Poland throughout the duration of their deployment to enhance military alliances throughout Europe.



123rd Engineer Battalion Conducts Training



Soldiers assigned to the 123rd Engineer Battalion, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Illinois National Guard, getting feedback on the zero range Jun. 10 at Marseilles Training Center, Ill. during the unit's annual training. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. A.J. Peskuski, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)



Members of the Headquarters Company, 123rd Engineer Battalion, raised a DRASH tents under red lights to establish a field headquarters Jun. 6 during support of 661st Engineer Company preparation for deployment and the Battalion's annual training at (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Icem Cook)



Engineers of the 123rd Engineer Battalion, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Illinois National Guard, at the zero range Jun. 9, at Marseilles Training Center, Ill. during the unit's annual training. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. A.J. Peskuski, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)



Securing Each Step

Soldiers from the 616th Engineer Utilities Detachment, based in Macomb, Illinois, conduct staircase repairs at Marseilles Training Center, Marseilles, Illinois, June 7.

Honing their carpentry skills, the Soldiers cut planks to size, replacing and securing each step to ensure the stairs meet safety standards and remain safe for all Soldiers training at MTC.



126th ARW Conducts Civic Leader Flight

The 126th Air Refueling Wing provided an orientation flight in May for civic leaders in the area to experience an aerial refueling flight. This was a total force effort of Scott AFB wings from the Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve and United States Air Force.

Two 932nd Airlift Wing Honorary Commanders, Herb Roach, Mayor of O'Fallon, 932nd AW honorary commander, and Linette Warnecke, 932nd Operations Group honorary commander, were part of a group of 15 Team Scott Air Force Base Honorary Commanders who recently rode onboard a KC-135 Stratotanker during an orientation flight on May 20.

All honorary commanders saw the core aerial refueling capabilities of the United States Air Force through an in-flight aerial refueling of a C-17 Globemaster III.

The flight was flown and operated by a total force, Air Mobility Command and Air National Guard aircrew assigned to the 126th Air Refueling Wing.

The 126th ARW mission is to provide global air refueling, command and control, and critical services to safeguard the homeland, serve our communities, and execute global operations.

By fostering strong relationships between military leaders and local community leaders, the Team Scott Honorary Commander Program has created a network of dedicated individuals who are passionate about supporting the Air Force and Team Scott and their respective missions.





710th MCAS Participates in Multinational Exercise Talisman Sabre 25 in Australia

Soldiers from the 710th Medical Company Area Support, based in Chicago and led by Maj. Kevin Spears and 1st Sgt. James Kinsey, completed Overseas Duty Training from 7-21 July in Townsville, Australia, as part of Talisman Sabre 2025.

The 710th provided medical support to 2nd Brigade, 11th Airborne Division for their night jump into Australia, and Role II medical care during their follow-on maneuver.

During the exercise, the 710th evacuated and treated 38 personnel from the United States, Australia, France, and Germany.

Soldiers from the 710th went beyond the standard from start to finish, as the only unit to receive a first-time go at DAFF operations, ensured life support contracts were complete, supplied emergency fuel re-supply, delivered meals, ready to eat, and water, and provided mechanical expertise to 2-11 ABN.

More than 35,000 U.S., Australian, and other international military personnel participated in exercise Talisman Sabre July 13 to Aug. 4, in Australia and Papua New Guinea to strengthen relationships and interoperability among key Allies and partners, enhancing our collective



capability to respond to a wide array of potential security concerns and maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Conducted biennially since 2005, Talisman Sabre is the United States' largest military exercise with Australia. This exercise demonstrates the strong U.S.-Australia alliance, which has sustained cooperation and trust throughout decades of operating,

training, and exercising together.

Jointly sponsored by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and Australian Defence Force Headquarters Joint Operations Command, this year's exercise incorporated U.S. Space Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Coast Guard, and Australian Defence Forces as well as other government

agencies from each country. Participating nations include Australia, Canada, Fiji, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Tonga, United Kingdom, and United States.

The exercise included a field training exercise which incorporated force preparation, theater-setting and sustainment activities; amphibious landings; land forces maneuver; urban operations; air operations; maritime operations; space operations and special forces activities.

Along with the opportunity to hone military skills, involvement from United States and Australian government agencies made this a collaborative whole-of-government effort.

The U.S. and Australia train and work together in a variety of exercises and missions throughout the year, including humanitarian and civic assistance missions in the Indo-Pacific.

This exercise is meant to illustrate the closeness of the U.S.-Australia Alliance and the strength of the military-to-military relationship. This is the tenth iteration of the exercise.





Firefighting Soldiers Hone Skills in High-Pressure Training Exercise

Story by Spc. Charlie Michaels, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Public Affairs

Soldiers from the Sparta-based 615th Engineer Detachment - Firefighting Headquarters, 661st Engineer Detachment - Firefighting Team and 662nd Engineer Detachment - Firefighting Team conducted hands-on structural fire training at the Peoria Fire Training Academy in Peoria, Illinois, June 5.

The 10 firefighters split into two teams of four, with one acting as a safety inside the building and a fire chief leading the exercise from the ground.

"We started with a RIT drill — a Rapid Intervention Team," said Sgt. Bryan Bennett, a crew chief with the 662nd FFT. "In this drill, we simulate a downed firefighter, and then we send in a team of two to remove him."

The Soldiers conducted multiple iterations of the RIT drill before moving on to an air consumption drill in which they practice breathing as their oxygen tanks get low, helping them gain confidence in their gear. Lastly, the Soldiers were challenged with an improvised drill that tested them on a variety of mental and physical skills.

"This event was the cumulative effect of everything we've done in the past week," said Sgt. 1st Class Chris Yenne, a fire chief

from the 615th FFHQ. "We've done everything from searches, fire attack, hose management, maydays, victim rescue, hydrant operations, pump operations — pretty much the whole game."

Soldiers appreciated being given the chance to apply their training to a realistic, high-pressure environment, one built on mentorship and mutual trust.

"With Sergeant First Class Yenne being a fire chief, he has a lot of knowledge and a lot of knowledge to spread with us," said Spc. Jaide Jones, a firefighter with the 661st FFT. "He gives us a lot of space to actually grow and learn things."

Between the heat, heavy gear, and demanding drills, the Soldiers were pushed to their limits, replicating the intensity and unpredictability of a real firefight.

"You've got to climb all these stairs, then move 120 to 150 feet of hose, then go into the fire, move things around, open windows and doors, and crawl around because you can't walk," said Spc. Logan Atterbury, a firefighter with the 662nd FFT. "It's a lot of movement."

Unit leadership said despite the difficulty, morale remained high among the Soldiers.



"We've burned every single day, so with this being our last hurrah for the week, it was really nice to put everything we've learned together and throw it all into one, and we did terrific," said Jones.

"These guys went and got beat up and had smiles," said Yenne. "That's exactly what you want."





Spc. Joe Braunagel, fights for control during a live drill with teammate Charlie Heydorn at a University of Illinois wrestling practice, June 17, 2025. Braunagel, a Soldier in the Illinois Army National Guard, brings combat-ready grit to the mat after returning from deployment.

The Wrestler

After Middle East Deployment Joe Braunagel Returns to NCAA Division 1 Athletics at UIUC

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouché, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Before he returned to the wrestling mat at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Spc. Joe Braunagel of O'Fallon, Illinois, returned from something much more intense — a military deployment to the Middle East with the Illinois Army National Guard.

Braunagel, a combat engineer, deployed with Kankakee-based C Co., 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment.

He returned in April after nearly a year deployed to the Middle East where he helped protect U.S. forces and assets and trained with U.S. allies in the region.

"This is a University of Illinois Division 1 NCAA college athlete who put both his academics and his college athletic career on hold to deploy into a volatile region of the world for nearly a year," said Brig. Gen. Lenny

Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard.

"He's an impressive young man with outstanding values and a great future ahead of him. I am deeply honored to serve with Spc. Braunagel and other Soldiers just like him, who are willing to sacrifice so much for our incredible nation."

His Army National Guard experience, paired with his background in athletics, forged a mindset built on grit, selflessness, and resilience. Now back on campus, Braunagel continues to defy expectations as a student-athlete and Soldier, balancing college life with military service and Division I athletics.

"I joined the Army National Guard because I wanted to give back to my country," said Braunagel, who has returned to his original unit, the Marseilles-based A Co., 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion. "I didn't want my parents to have to pay for college, so I started looking for scholarships. When I learned about the Illinois Guard Grant and GI Bill, it made perfect sense."

Enlisting on Feb. 24, 2020, Braunagel entered basic training just after graduating high school. Within months, he began classes at UIUC and joined the university's wrestling team, a demanding schedule made more intense by weekend drills, coursework, and early morning practices. But he never backed down



Spc. Joe Braunagel, right, and his older brother Zac Braunagel, left, square off during a training session at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, June 17. Zac, a former Fighting Illini wrestler and mentor, supports Joe as he balances service in the Illinois Army National Guard and Division I athletics.

from the challenge.

"Joe brings a level of discipline to the team that is a direct representation of his service in the military," said Austin O'Conner, assistant wrestling coach. "We have around 40 wrestlers

on the roster, but Joe stands out. He matured a lot after deployment. He exuberates the values we see in the military — loyalty, duty, respect, and selfless service."

Those values run deep in the Braunagel household. Joe is one of four brothers, all of whom have pursued paths in service and athletics. His older brother Zac is a recent UIUC graduate and a former wrestler who now mentors the current team. Another brother, Danny, wrestles at Illinois as well, and their eldest brother, Jarrid, serves in the U.S. Marine Corps.

"We grew up in a military family," said Zac Braunagel. "Our grandfather was in the Air Force, our dad served in the Navy, and now Jarrid and Joe are continuing that legacy. It was normal for us to talk about service, and we were raised to respect it."



At left, Spc. Joe Braunagel, right, and teammate Charlie Heydorn drill offensive techniques during wrestling practice at the University of Illinois, June 17. Braunagel applies Army values such as teamwork and determination to every match.

Zac said his brother's maturity and presence have noticeably grown since joining the Guard. "Joe brings great energy to practice," he said. "He knows how to boost morale and get others out of their shell. That discipline and mental toughness transfers from the Guard to wrestling."

That same discipline helped Joe stay focused throughout his recent deployment. His family kept in touch regularly, even if just to share moments through online games. "With Joe's deployment last year, our family was stressed," Zac recalled. "We relied on faith and supported him however we could. When he came home, it was a big relief."

Despite the stress of juggling multiple responsibilities, Braunagel said serving in the Guard has only strengthened his ability to manage his time and stay motivated. "Drilling once a month doesn't detract at all from school or wrestling," he said. "My professors and coaches are very supportive. I just stay ahead on my schoolwork and communicate when I need time off."

Sgt. 1st Class Elisha Capili, an Illinois Army National Guard recruiter in Champaign, said Braunagel sets the standard for what's possible. "Spc. Braunagel stands as a powerful example that college athletes can proudly serve in the Illinois Army National Guard while taking full

advantage of the Guard's benefits."

Braunagel is working on his degree in Recreation, Sport and Tourism. He believes both his education and his service will set him up for success after graduation. "Being part of the Guard and attending the University of Illinois has allowed me to meet people and network. I believe it'll open the door for job opportunities."

And while his future is still taking shape, Braunagel remains focused on the present by putting in the work both as a Soldier and as an athlete.

"In the Guard, we are a family," he said. "On the wrestling team, we are a family. I do what I can to help both teams. We work hard and build camaraderie along the way."

Bradley University Osher Lifelong Learning Institute learns about Illinois Air National Guard during Tour



Lt. Col. Bridget Zorn, the 182nd Mission Support Group commander, gives a base briefing to members of the Bradley University Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) during a base tour May 16.



Senior Master Sgt. Seth Tuggle, the aircrew flight equipment superintendent with the 182nd Operations Support Squadron, shows equipment during a civic engagement tour, designed to showcase the mission of the 182nd Airlift Wing.



Tech. Sgt. Traci Wilson, a crew chief with the 182nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, shows a C130H Hercules aircraft to a member of the Bradley University Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) during a tour May 16.



Senior Airman Kade Helm, a security forces specialist with the 182nd Security Forces Squadron, shows members of the Bradley University Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) weapons during a tour May 16

Illinois National Guard Firefighters Train in Peoria



Thermal imaging equipment being used by U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to the 615th Engineer Detachment - Fire Fighting Headquarters (FFHQ), and the 661st & 662nd Engineer Detachment - Fire Fighting Teams (FFT), based in Sparta, use thermal imaging equipment they conducted firefighter training June 4 at the at the Peoria Fire Training Academy, in Peoria.



A simulated victim being rescued from a training fire by U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to the 615th Engineer Detachment - Fire Fighting Headquarters (FFHQ), and the 661st & 662nd Engineer Detachment - Fire Fighting Teams (FFT), based in Sparta, and part of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Illinois Army National Guard as they conducted firefighter training June 4 at the at the Peoria Fire Training Academy, in Peoria.



Above and right, Sgt. Bryan Bennett, of Carbondale, facilitates search and primary fire attack training to find fire sources and locate potential victims during firefighter training June 4.

*U.S. Army National Guard
photos by
Capt. A.J. Peskuski,
139th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment*



Two Soldiers Promoted in the Heat of Training

Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's 615th Engineer Detachment – Firefighting Headquarters and the 661st and 662nd Engineer Detachments – Firefighting Teams, based in Sparta, Illinois, took advantage of a live fire evaluation to conduct a unique promotion ceremony to kick off Annual Training.

Congratulations to Sgt. Andrew Watts and Sgt. Bryan Bennett on their well-earned promotions amid the flames and camaraderie of their firehouse brothers and sisters.



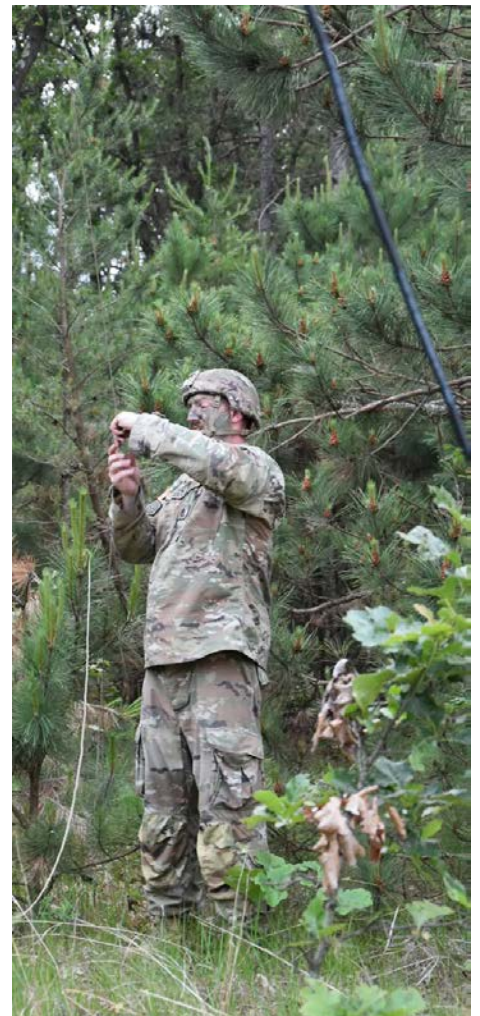
Antenna Setup Boosts Tactical Comms at Combined Arms Collective Training Facility

Shortly after arriving at the Combined Arms Collective Training Facility, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team section got to work setting up the COM201B—a lightweight VHF antenna built for fast field deployment.

Modular and efficient, the COM201B breaks down into five

parts and can be fully assembled in under a minute, making it ideal for rapid, mobile operations. Careful site selection ensured max elevation and signal reach to enhance tactical radio communications across the training area.

One of the team's first major field tasks, the setup highlighted the S6 section's coordination and technical proficiency—keeping the brigade connected and mission-ready.



Convoy Kicks Off Mobile Command Post Training in Large Scale Combat Operations Environment

Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Headquarters, with transportation support from 34th Division Sustainment Brigade (DSB), executed a tactical convoy from cantonment to the Combined Arms Collective Training Facility (CACTF) as part of Annual Training 2025.

The movement launched Mobile Command Post operations within a Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) scenario. Eighteen vehicles and 55 personnel were organized into three serials, with meticulous route planning, rehearsals, and safety checks conducted in advance.

The convoy stepped off on time and without issue, demonstrating disciplined execution and setting the stage for mission-focused training in a realistic field environment.



Harris Graduates National War College

Illinois Army National Guard Lt. Col. Joseph (Joe) Harris, a native of Normal, Illinois, graduated June 12 from the National War College on Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., and will be assigned as the executive officer for the National Guard Bureau's Joint 3/4 (Operations/Logistics) focusing on domestic operations, planning, and resource management.

"To graduate from National War College takes dedication, hard work, intelligence, and drive," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "It also takes tremendous family support. Congratulations to Joe, his wife Kate and the entire family!"

The National War College is a year-long Department of Defense graduate program for officers who have a demonstrated record of outstanding performance and have the potential for future growth in positions of senior strategic leadership. Upon graduation, Harris received a master's degree in National Security Strategy. Selection to attend the National War College is extremely limited. Harris' class only had three other Army National Guard officers.

"This past year has been an amazing journey, and it has been an honor to represent the Illinois Army National Guard at the National Defense University," Harris said.

The National War College mission is to educate joint, interagency, and international leaders and warfighters by conducting a senior-level course of study in national security strategy, preparing graduates to function at the highest levels of strategic leadership in a complex, competitive, and rapidly evolving strategic environment.

The curriculum emphasizes the joint and interagency perspective. Reflecting this emphasis, 59 percent of the student body is composed of equal representation from the land, air, and sea (including Marine and Coast Guard) Services. The remaining 41 percent are drawn from the Department of State, other federal departments and agencies, and



Vice Admiral Peter Garvin, the Commandant of the National Defense University, presents Lt. Col. Joe Harris with his diploma on June 12 in Washington, D.C. A native of Normal, Illinois, Harris will be assigned as the executive officer for the National Guard Bureau's Joint 3/4 (Operations/Logistics) focusing on domestic operations, planning, and resource management.

international fellows from a number of foreign countries.

Prior to being selected to attend the National War College, Harris served as the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion from 2022 to 2024. He is qualified as a senior human resources officer, multifunctional logistics officer and medical operations officer. He has held key staff positions both in the Illinois Army National Guard and at the national level, including the Capabilities and Integration Branch Chief for the Army National Guard's Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans from 2020 to 2023. He has commanded two companies, the 708th Medical Co. (Ground Ambulance) based in North Riverside, Illinois, from 2009 to 2012, and the headquarters detachment for the 108th

Multifunctional Medical Battalion in 2008.

Harris graduated from Normal Community High School in 2001 and went on to receive his bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Illinois State University, also in Normal. He also holds a master's degree in organizational leadership from Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia. He commissioned as an Army officer in 2005 through Illinois State University's ROTC program and has 22 years of military service.

He is a Knight of Columbus, Third Degree. He is also a Life Member of the National War College Alumni Association, a Life Member of the National Guard Association of Illinois, a Member of the National Guard Association of the United States, and a Member of the Reserve Officers Association.

Soldiers Conduct Training in Urban Terrain Setting

Members of the 661st Engineer Construction Company and the 2118th Asphalt Detachment ran through battle drills such as pulling soldiers to safety after being wounded (notionally), combat first aid, calling for a nine line medical evacuation on the radio, and moving as a squad while clearing throughout the entire “Military Operations on Urban Terrain” site at Marseilles Training Center in Marseilles, Illinois.







1744th Focuses on Readiness During Annual Training

The 1744th Transportation Company completed Annual Training at Camp Grayling, Michigan. Under the leadership of CPT Mharel Sturgus and 1SG Tamara Carlini, the unit focused on building individual and collective readiness.

Training included tactical convoy operations, IED defeat lanes, weapons qualification, radio communication, react to contact drills, and vehicle towing.

The 1744th is proud to bring home the SPO Cup after competing against other units in the 198th CSSB. Events included the Truck Rodeo, Maintenance Rodeo, fighting position construction, and Individual Weapons Qualification.

Several Soldiers were recognized for excellence by Brigadier General Michael Eastridge and the 34th DSB command team. Excellent work by all who contributed to a successful and impactful training.





126th ARW Leads Joint Ground Refueling Exercise

When you think of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, you think of aerial refueling. In June, the wing's focus was on refueling aircraft on the ground from a 50,000-gallon bladder.

The wing led a total force, week-long Quartermaster Liquid Logistics Exercise at the beginning of June, a readiness event known locally as Valiant Raptor.

The event is part of a larger U.S. Strategic Command-directed series of events designed to validate emerging and innovative tactics, techniques and procedures. It also assesses joint operational readiness and supports directed training events.

The QLLEX is a U.S. Army Reserve exercise for fuel and water distribution. It is meant to demonstrate the Army Reserve's capability, combat readiness, and lethality.

The fuel came from Grissom Air Force Base, Indiana delivered by the 316th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), Army Reserve, from Pennsylvania.

The Fuels Operational Readiness Capability Equipment issued by the 635th Materiel Maintenance Support Squadron, at Holloman AFB. The 635th MMSS is part of the 635th Supply Chain Operation Wing at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, which the 126th ARW has an active association.

The setup took a day and a half, which included unloading the equipment that arrived on tractor trailers, positioning the pumping and filtering equipment, hooking up hoses, and finally setting up the berm and the bladder.

Several Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants Airmen from the 375th Airlift Wing, 171st Air Refueling Wing, Pennsylvania Air National Guard, and crew chiefs with the 932nd Airlift Wing, Air Force Reserve, came to help with the exercise.

It took more than just POL troops to set up the refueling equipment, with more than 30 personnel helping to set-up for the refueling operation.

"Getting a team together from across the wing and accomplishing all this... wow, just wow," said Senior



U.S. Air Force Col. Jen Moore, left, 126th Operations Group, commander works with Master Sgt. Rob Walsh, 126th Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants, to attach a hose to an R-19 at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. June 2, 2025. The 126th Air Refueling Wing led a Quartermaster Liquid Logistics Exercise, which is part of a larger U.S. Strategic Command-directed series of events designed to validate emerging and innovate tactics, techniques and procedures (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)



Airman work to attach a "Y" connector to a hose during the set-up phase of the Quartermaster Liquid Logistics Exercise at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, June 2, 2025. The QLLEX is part of a larger U.S. Strategic Command-directed series of events designed to validate emerging and innovate tactics, techniques and procedures. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)



U.S. Air Force, Airman 1st Class Daniel Jones, 375th petroleum oil and lubricants technician, pours fuel into a container on the 126th Air Refueling Wing ramp during an exercise at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, June 6, 2025. The exercise, Quartermaster Liquid Logistics Exercise, provides service members preparatory training for remote location warfare and is part of a larger U.S. Strategic Command-directed series of events designed to validate emerging and innovate tactics, techniques and procedures. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez)

Master Sgt. Mike Jansen, 126th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

The exercise did have its obstacles to overcome, such as weather.

"The rain was a hindrance, but it didn't stop us," said Senior Master Sgt. Joshua Nilles, 126th POL Superintendent. "The real challenge was the wind when we were setting up the berm on Tuesday."

Over half of Thursday and all of Friday, June 5 & 6, the Airmen refueled 9 aircraft, dispensing more than 45,000 gallons of fuel or about 302,000 pounds of fuel.

"I am so impressed by all the talent that was brought to the success of Valiant Raptor," said Nilles.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Keith Eddy, 906th Air Refueling Squadron, petroleum oils and lubricants, hooks up a hose to a U.S. Army fuel truck at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, June 4. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Keith Eddy, 906th Air Refueling Squadron, petroleum oils and lubricants, inspects fuel coming out of a tanker truck before hooking up a hose to fill up a fuel bladder at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, June 4. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)



Civil Air Patrol Cadets Learn about Illinois National Guard equipment during summer training event

About 100 Civil Air Patrol cadets are conducting their summer training at the Illinois Army National Guard's Marseilles Training Area. July 16, Soldiers from the 33d Infantry Brigade Combat Team's 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion showed the young men and women some of the equipment they use in the Illinois National Guard. (U.S. Army photos by Staff Sgt. Kyle Odum, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)



CAP Cadets Graduate from Summer Encampment

Fonseca Addresses Youth After Weeklong Military-like Program

Brig. Gen. Jorge M. Fonseca, the Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff, spoke at the Civil Air Patrol, Illinois Wing, Summer Encampment graduation ceremony July 19 at the Illinois Army National Guard's Marseilles Training Center.

The weeklong Summer Encampment program is designed to provide the cadets with a military-like environment. The training included classroom instruction, hands on activities, team-leadership problems, and field exercises. Over the course of the week, cadets develop a greater understanding of the military and the Civil Air Patrol, develop leadership and interpersonal skills, develop time-management and teamwork skills, learn discipline and overcome challenges.

"You made the decision to spend part of your summer here at Civil Air Patrol Encampment," said Brig. Gen. Fonseca, "You may not fully realize it yet, but one day you'll look back on this week and recognize it as a defining moment, one that shaped your character and your future."



Photos by Staff Sgt. Kyle Odum, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



126th Security Forces Squadron Shine Bright During Flash Bang Training

Members of the 126th Security Forces Squadron, based at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, spent June 7 training with flash bangs as part of their deployment readiness domestic operations mission.

In addition to regular security forces participating in the training, Col. Nicolas Henschel took part in the training as part of his wing familiarization initiative, "Undercover Colonel."

*Photos by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez
126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs*





U.S. Army Chaplains Celebrate 250 Years of Ministering to Soldiers

The Illinois Army National Guard Chaplain Corps celebrated its 250th anniversary July 29 with a traditional cake cutting ceremony at the Illinois State Military Museum.

The Army recently celebrated its 250th birthday - two and a half centuries of defending the nation since standing up, June 14, 1775. Not long after, on July 29, 1775, the Army Chaplain Corps was established to provide ministerial support to those soldiers.

"The members of today's Army Chaplain Corps are sustaining and enriching a sacred legacy, which our predecessors began building even before our nation was founded in 1776," said Army Chaplain (Maj. Gen.) William Green Jr., the 26th Army chief of chaplains. "Gen. George Washington requested that chaplains be added to the Army to meet soldiers' religious and spiritual needs, and to

support good morals and morale."

At the request of Washington, the Continental Congress authorized one chaplain for each regular regiment of the Continental Army, Green said, adding that many of the militia regiments that served alongside those in the Continental Army also had chaplains.

Today, he said, the role of the Army Chaplain Corps remains as important as it was 250 years ago. The Chaplain Corps has evolved to include more than 3,000 chaplains, nearly 3,000 religious affairs specialists, more than 500 chaplain candidates and more than 50 directors of religious education across the regular Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard. They continue to provide important religious support and advice on spiritual matters to soldiers of all ranks.

"Our U.S. Army Chaplain



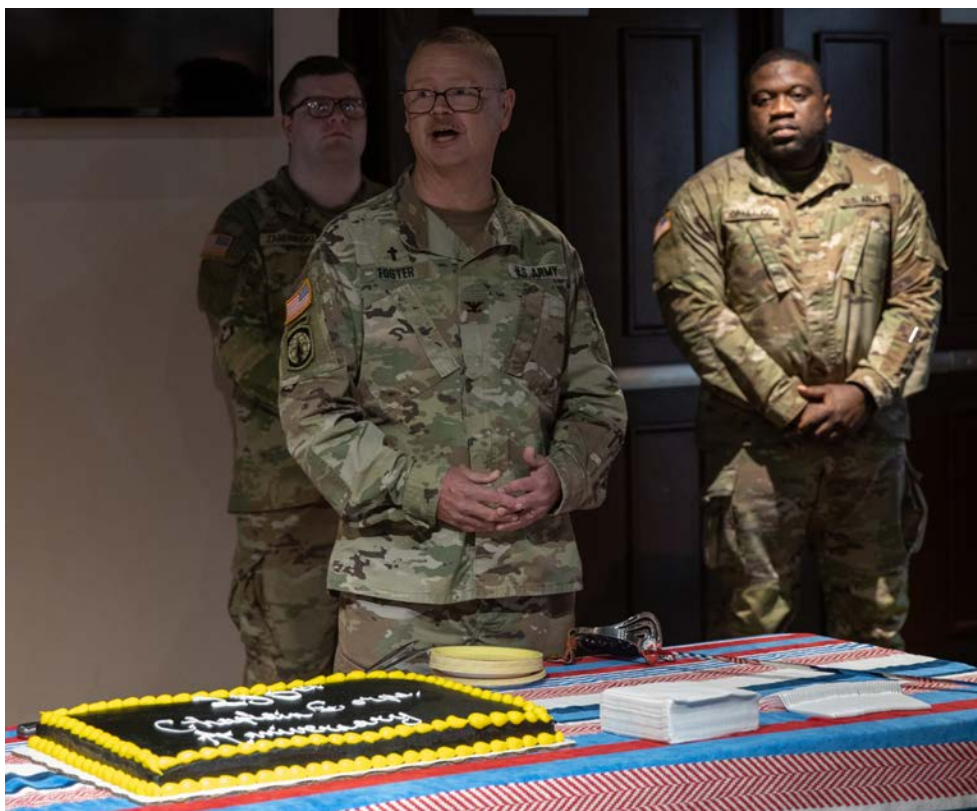
Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard Chaplain Corps gather at the Illinois State Military Museum to celebrate the Corps' 250th anniversary July 29. (U.S. Army photos by Sgt. Gabriel Rivera, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Corps is the most multifaceted and capable chaplaincy in history, and we will remain so, to support our Army's preparations to win during multidomain and large-scale combat operations in the years ahead," Green said. "Our corps is a unique branch of the total Army that remains a necessary, critical contributor to our nation's success on the battlefields of the future, just as it was on the battlefields during our nation's war for independence."

The U.S. Army Chaplain Corps' motto is "Pro deo et patria" which means "For god and country."

Throughout its 250 years of service, the Army Chaplain Corps has a total of eight Medal of Honor recipients. Seven chaplains: John M. Whitehead, Francis B. Hall, James Hill, Milton L. Haney, Emil J. Kapaun, Charles J. Watters, Angelo J. Liteky, and one chaplain assistant: Calvin P. Titus have all earned our nation's highest honor.

Pvt. 2 Aleksandr Zarembski, a religious affairs Soldier, and 2nd Lt. Payne Oparaugo cut the cake honoring the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps 250th anniversary July 29 at the Illinois State Military Museum.



Illinois Army National Guard State Chaplain (Col.) Steve Foster talks about the history of the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps during the 250th anniversary celebration July 29 at the Illinois State Military Museum.



1644th Conducts Operation Patriot Press across 6 States

The 1644th Transportation Company, based in Rock Falls, Illinois, and led by Capt. Issa Jones and 1st Sgt. Mathew Stufflebean, conducted Operation Patriot Press in support of Joint Munitions Command during their recent two week annual training.

The 1644th TC executed a long haul ammunition transportation mission spanning 3,200 miles across six states from Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia, transporting containers of ammunition from one storage depot to another.

The conditions in which the 88M truck drivers traversed would include mountainous terrain, steep uphill and downhill grades, several hours of rain, fog and very hot weather reaching the mid-upper 90s, this often times occurred during hours of low visibility in the early morning and late evening.

The unit also provided support to 2-123 Field Artillery Batteries A and B, transporting HMMWVs, LMTVs, and multiple M777 cannons from Fort McCoy, Wisconsin back to Milan and Springfield.





725th Transportation Company Conducts Annual Training As Opposing Forces



The 725th Transportation Company held their 2025 Annual Training at Camp Grayling, Michigan, alongside the rest of the 198th Combat Support Sustainment Brigade. During the collective battalion field training exercise, they played the role of opposing forces (OPFOR).

During OPFOR exercises, the Soldiers of the 725th TC planned and executed various battle drills antagonizing adjacent units. The resulting training proved both engaging and insightful for all those involved.



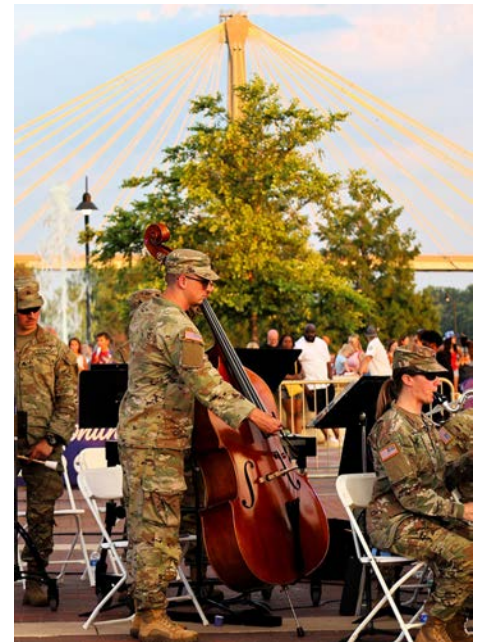
Happy Birthday America

144th Army Band Hits High Notes During Independence Day Celebrations around Illinois



The Illinois Army National Guard's 144th Army Band returned to Alton, but this time the Soldiers weren't filling sandbags or watching the levees. The band was rocking the Alton Ampitheater on July 3 for the community's Independence Day celebration.

The 144th unveiled its new ensemble, The Big Band, and played everything from Bruno Mars to John Legend, to Stevie Wonder. Of course, they played many Patriotic songs, including our National Anthem, and they honored all the Veterans and military services.



The 144th Army Band performed during a postcard-perfect evening at Pantan Mill Park, and a spirited kick-off to the Independence Day holiday weekend in South Elgin!

A special shout-out to the Illinois National Guard for recruiting such a talented, friendly and kind group of musicians.

Their engagement and interaction with the crowd before and after the performance meant as much to the veterans and folks in attendance as their cracklin' musicianship; great ambassadors for our state and country.



The Illinois Army National Guard's 144th Army Band helped Bond County celebrate Independence Day in Greenville at the Bond County 4th of July Festival with the band's Lincoln Land 5-Star Brass Ensemble.

The band also performed at the festival with their Rock Band, Woodwind Quintet, and Jazz Band.



Warrant Officers Corps Celebrate 107th Birthday

The Illinois Army National Guard celebrated the U.S. Army Warrant Officer Corps' 107th birthday July 9 with a cake cutting ceremony.

The Illinois Army National Guard has more than 160 warrant officers amongst its ranks ranging in rank from Warrant Officer 1 through Chief Warrant Officer 5, encompassing 35 different specialties across 13 different branches.

Though warrant officers' service in the Armed Forces dates back to the Revolutionary War, the Warrant Officer Corps was born July 9, 1918, the date the Army Mine Planter Service was established. Early warrant officer specialties included personnel technician, supply technician, and bandmaster.

In May of 1921, the Eagle Rising was approved as the warrant officer distinctive insignia. After World War II, the corps grew as warrant officers



Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black, Command Chief Warrant Officer, talks about the history of the U.S. Army Warrant Officer Corps during a 107th birthday celebration July 9 at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.

made their mark as technical experts. Today there are approximately 13,000 warrant officers on active duty, and 12,000 in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve.

Army warrant officers are technical experts, combat leaders, trainers and advisors.

"Today and the future warrant officer cohort is what you make it," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black, Command Chief Warrant, Illinois Army National Guard. "This is your cohort and your organization."

Black said there is always room for improvement.

"We've come a long way since I've stepped into this position and we're going to keep going a long way," he said. "Some of you young warrant officers will carry the torch forward."

Black told his fellow warrant officers the Corps is intensifying its focus on operational readiness.

"As the National Guard strengthens its role in an operational force and design to deliver combat soldiers, the warrant officer corps is intensifying its focus on operational readiness."

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, thanked the Warrant Officer Corps for the expertise they possess.

"You are the technical experts," he said. "Across all the services that have warrant officers, you are highly respected, always the 'go to person', and always above reproach. So congratulations on 107 years of service. Continue to do what you do as Soldiers and as Warrant Officers."

Boyd said warrant officers are the best recruiters to increase their numbers.

"Our Soldiers see you and say 'I want to be like him or her'," he said. "They are impressed with what you bring to the table and that makes them interested in becoming warrant officers."

As an Army tradition, the birthday cake was cut by Boyd, and Warrant Officer 1 Christopher Burbach, the newest warrant officer in attendance. Burbach, who serves with the 661st Engineer Company, received his appointment as a warrant officer in 2023.



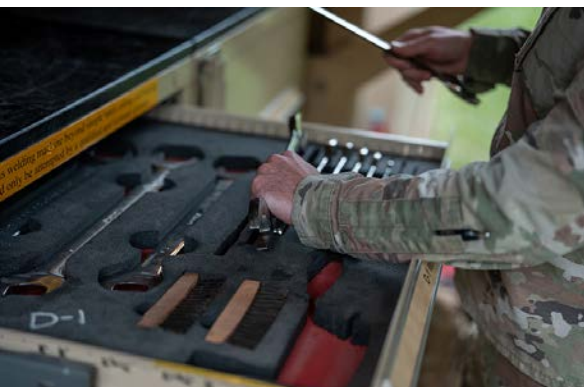
Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, joins Warrant Officer Christopher Burbach to cut the cake at the Warrant Officer Corps 107th birthday celebration July 9. Burbach was the newest warrant officer in attendance.



Lifting, Checking and Repairing: Mechanics in Action

Wheeled vehicle mechanics from the 631st Engineer Support Company, based in Sparta, Illinois, practice using the material handling crane on a Forward Repair System and performing routine maintenance checks on military vehicles at Marseilles Training Center, Marseilles, Illinois, June 7, 2025.

These hands-on tasks ensure that Soldiers are prepared to support missions wherever equipment needs to be moved or maintained.



Hicks Pins on Colonel During Ceremony

The Deputy U.S. Property and Fiscal Officer – Army was promoted to colonel in a ceremony at the Illinois State Military Museum, Springfield, July 18.

Newly-promoted Col. Jeffrey Hicks enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard, spending four years as an enlisted Soldier with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, before graduating from the accelerated Officer Candidate School in 2006, commissioning as an infantry officer.

"It is an honor and privilege to promote Lieutenant Colonel Hicks to colonel today," said Brig. Gen. (ret.) Mark Alessia. "Our paths intersected about 15 years ago and I watched him grow up from a lieutenant to colonel."

Alessia called getting promoted to colonel a 'big stepping stone for officers.'

"Less than one half of one percent of Illinois Army National Guard

Soldiers wear the rank of colonel," he said. "You are at a level now where your decisions impact the entire organization and at the national level. I know no one better qualified for that role than Jeff Hicks."

Alessia said Hicks has done some amazing things in his career.

"He has deployed twice, once to Iraq, and once to Afghanistan where the job he performed was always filled by a major or a senior captain. He filled it as a lieutenant," Alessia said. "Today's promotion is unique in that he's not only getting promoted on what he has accomplished, but what he is going to help the Illinois National Guard accomplish. I look forward to seeing your accomplishments."

Hicks said the promotion ceremony was more for the people he's served with throughout his career.

"I never dreamed of making colonel," Hicks said. "This is probably



Newly promoted Col. Jeffrey Hicks, Deputy U.S. Property and Fiscal Officer - Army, thanks friends and family for their support.

my last promotion that I will see. I appreciate everyone who's been along for the ride."

The newly-promoted colonel thanked his family for their support throughout his career.

"From day one, my family has always been supportive of my endeavors," he said. "I've brushed off a lot of military accomplishments over the year, however my family is prouder than words can express."

Hicks said he and his father, Steve, had a lot of discussions over the years about his military service.

"He was always excited for my next assignment," he said. "When I thought there was a chance of making colonel, my dad's tone changed. This is probably the most serious he had been since I enlisted. He often said if you think you can make colonel, you need to stick around and do it. And I thought if my dad is telling me this he has confidence in my abilities and leadership and I needed to stay."

He also thanked his wife, Katarzyna, and son, Eli, for their support.

"What a ride it's been. I really have no words to describe what we've been through and accomplished," he said. "I've been scolded more than a few hundred times over the last few years, mostly due to working constantly and holding multiple jobs."

"She and I share the same passion



The family of newly promoted Col. Jeffrey Hicks pin new on his new rank during a promotion ceremony July 18 at the Illinois State Military Museum.

in life. She never wavered when I needed to go or a Soldier needed something,” Hicks said. “She knows what Soldier care is. I’ve gained more resiliency and intestinal fortitude because of both of you.”

Hicks’ brother, Ben, has not attended one promotion or military event throughout Hicks’ career.

“With this promotion, I had one requirement and that was my brother be in attendance,” he said. “You don’t know how much your being here means.”

Hicks said he learned a lot from his grandparents.

“I don’t think I’d be pinning colonel on today without the life lessons, values, tenacity, work ethic, and patience they have all taught me,” he said.

Hicks shared a couple of quotes he learned early in his career.

“When things start sucking, don’t quit. Tell yourself you’ll quit tomorrow,” he said. “And lastly, can’t is not a word. If you’re not doing anything to improve a process or support a Soldier, walk out the door and don’t come return.”



Brig. Gen. (ret.) Mark Alessia administers the oath of office to newly promoted Col. Jeffrey Hicks during a promotion ceremony at the Illinois State Military Museum July 18. Hicks is the Deputy U.S. Property and Fiscal Officer - Army for the Illinois National Guard. (U.S. Army photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)

Col. Jeffrey Hicks' Principles to Live By

- 1. Never forget your roots.*
- 2. To face the challenges you must dig deeper, work harder, and do more. Our Soldiers depend on it.*
- 3. Correct issues and train hard. Don't wait for someone to tell you that you're jacked up.*
- 4. Lessons learned – every Soldier who has perished in combat, whether under your watch or someone else and every Soldier who has faced adversity and every challenge we experienced based on the mission in our decisions create important lessons that we cannot forget. We must learn from them. We must strive to be a better version of ourselves and a better unit.*
- 5. Serve with tenacity. Don't give up. Do not let the challenges you face prevent you from accomplishing your mission.*

Illinois National Guard, Polish Soldiers exchange critical knowledge

Story by Maj. Dutch Grove, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Illinois National Guard and Polish Territorial Defense Force training events, coined Critical Knowledge Exchanges, have been common throughout the Illinois National Guard's 32-year State Partnership with Poland.

The training exchanges have focused on cultivating the capabilities of Poland's Territorial Defense Force, which is similar to the U.S. National Guard, since the TDF was established in 2016.

In previous years Illinois National Guard Soldiers traveled to Poland on four separate trips, each focusing on one training topic: sniper training, forward observer training, medical training, and the tactical deployment of the Javelin shoulder-fired, anti-tank missile. This year all four topics were covered simultaneously June 2-13 at the TDF Training Center in Torun, Poland.

"Our partnership with Poland,

which began in 1993 and included 19-years of co-deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq, is the gold standard of the State Partnership Program," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General-Army and commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "We learn, we teach, and we develop new tactics and techniques together with each Critical Knowledge Exchange event. Our capabilities have improved, we've expanded our capacity, and our partnership has grown stronger these past couple of weeks."

Polish Maj. Andrzej Majcherek is the lead training officer at the TDF Training Center. With unmatched energy and enthusiasm, he buzzed around the training locations with a cell phone in one hand and a hand-held radio in the other. He effortlessly transitioned between speaking Polish and English, which he attributes to

his two deployments to Afghanistan embedded with Illinois National Guard Soldiers.

"Combining all four areas of this training into one exercise is the best idea because it's better for us to organize everything into one event," said Majcherek. "It is easier to plan, and I can have all of my instructors available to concentrate on the training."

Majcherek said the sniper, remote observer and Javelin training continued to advance and build upon previous training. He said the TDF wanted to go in a new direction with the medical training.

"The last three years we trained on individual skills, combat lifesaver and mass casualty with regular Soldiers," said Majcherek. "This year, we invited platoon commanders and squad commanders to teach them what medical support looks like on a modern battlefield and how to exercise leadership with medical issues on the battlefield."

Capt. Alyssa Hirsch, the executive officer of Company C, 634th Brigade Support Battalion based in Springfield developed the training materials and led the four-person team from Illinois.

"We introduced basic level first aid, self-aid and buddy-aid and inserted these tasks into more complex scenarios to help these platoon leaders learn to make impactful decisions based on the tactical situation and medical situation," said Hirsch.

Hirsch said her team integrated seamlessly with the Polish instructors. She said both sides were eager to observe how the other conducted specific tasks.

"Polish Soldiers use three different types of evacuation equipment. They are getting hands on experience with



Staff Sgt. Phillip Andrade, an Illinois Army National Guard sniper aims a Polish sniper rifle alongside Polish Territorial Defense Force snipers and spotters June 9 in Torun, Poland as part of a Critical Knowledge Exchange between the Illinois National Guard and Polish TDF. (Photo by Maj. Dutch Grove)

how to load casualties onto the equipment, how to secure them to the equipment, and how to pick them up and carry them,” said Hirsch. “We want to give them experience moving and carrying a casualty in different terrain to give them empathy for what they are going to ask their Soldiers to perform and to put it in the back of their mind as leaders when they’re planning for casualty evacuation.”

About 20 kilometers away from the medical training, nestled among lush forests and flourishing farmland in the Polish countryside, Illinois National Guard snipers conducted advanced sniper skills with TDF snipers and snipers from the Polish border guard and Polish police units.

Sgt. 1st Class Hussein Mashal, a scout sniper assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment based in Chicago, returned from a deployment to the Middle East earlier this year where he worked alongside French and German forces.

He said his sniper team benefitted by seeing where their skill sets ranked amongst partner forces.

“We incorporated some dismounted patrolling techniques, alternate shooting platforms and tripod shooting so they are better equipped when they come into contact with the enemy,” said Mashal. “We showed them some of the tactics we use so they can test them out and determine if those techniques are a fit for them or not.”

Mashal said the students helped translate between Polish and English, which he said was instrumental in developing the daily plan for training. He said the movement techniques will help the TDF snipers develop egress tactics moving forward.

“Getting them more experience with tripods and getting them more experience shooting off barricades in the course of moving between positions has increased their lethality,” said Mashal.

Four of the eight Illinois National Guard Soldiers who led the Forward Observer and Javelin teams previously deployed to Ukraine and drew from that experience.

Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Garza, an Infantry Soldier and platoon sergeant



Sgt. Joseline Sosa, a forward observer assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment takes notes as Polish Territorial Defense Force Soldiers conduct remote observer tasks June 4 in Torun, Poland as part of a Critical Knowledge Exchange between the Illinois National Guard and Polish TDF. (Photo by Maj. Dutch Grove)

assigned to Company D. 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment helped trained Soldiers from several nations to use the Javelin during a 2020-2021 deployment.

Garza said his team began the training in a classroom using the Javelin Basic Skills Trainer, which is similar to a video game where a modified Javelin is connected to a computer screen and gives the TDF students familiarization locking on targets and firing the missile.

“We then moved to the Field Tactical Trainer outside, which gives a more realistic environment,” said Garza. “We go through how to keep a low profile, how to move, how to communicate and how to get into a good position to fire the weapon effectively.”

This is the second year in a row Garza has participated in a Critical Knowledge Exchange with the Polish TDF.

“It’s been a very good experience. We’ve learned a lot about their tactics as far as getting into a hasty or deliberate fighting position. They responded well to our training, they were very receptive and very motivated to work alongside us,” said



A Soldier with the Polish Territorial Defense Force locks onto a target using the Javelin Basic Skills Trainer June 3 in Torun, Poland as part of a Critical Knowledge Exchange between the Illinois National Guard and Polish TDF. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Joshua Garza)

Garza.

The team of Forward Observers trained at a variety of tiny military

posts around Torun including at the ruins of a centuries-old castle along the Vistula River. The TDF doesn't have artillery assets assigned to it yet, so training is somewhat modified from what U.S. Army Forward Observers learn. They leaned heavily on incorporating small commercial drones into the scenarios.

Master Sgt. William Aitken, a Fire Support Officer assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team based in Urban, Illinois, previously participated in a Critical Knowledge Exchange with the TDF.

"The active-duty Polish Army's Joint Fires Officer program trains with the TDF students too, and that is a NATO program that the U.S. certifies every year. This ensures we are all doing things exactly the same way," said Aitken.

He said the TDF Soldiers have improved quickly and Illinois National Guard Soldiers are learning a lot from them too.

"In conflicts happening in certain regions of the world, we are seeing a lot of drone technology, a lot of targeting, a lot of artillery, a lot of smart technology," said Aitken. "So, we're using that to build what we do



Capt. Lucas Hugenberg, a nurse assigned to Company C., 634th Brigade Support Battalion in Springfield is loaded onto a litter by Polish Territorial Defense Force platoon leaders while conducting medical evacuation training June 4 in Torun, Poland as part of a Critical Knowledge Exchange between the Illinois National Guard and Polish TDF. (Photo by Maj. Dutch Grove)

as far as observation, targeting and building a complete picture for the commander to use as he decides what targets to engage and how to engage

them."

He said adding drones to the training was brand new for both Polish and Illinois Soldiers.

"We're using lessons learned from those conflicts," said Aitken. "Drone warfare is the future, so we have to figure out how to employ drones, how to protect our drone assets and how we are going to hide from enemy drones."

Majcherek said adding drones to the training was "mostly an experiment," but TDF wants to develop additional training using drones in the future.

"We want to organize some combined exercises," said Majcherek. "Maybe next year we will organize a two or three-day exercise to combine all four elements."

He said the Critical Knowledge Exchanges amount to more than simply teaching specific tactics and procedures.

"We have a lot of young Soldiers, so the cooperation with the Illinois National Guard gives them the opportunity to see how different Armies react, give orders, obey rules and so on," said Majcherek.



Polish Maj. Andrzej Majcherek (Right) briefs Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General-Army and commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, and Polish Brig. Gen. Krzysztof Stanczyk, the commander of the Polish Territorial Defense Force, June 12 in Torun, Poland, during the culminating training event of a Critical Knowledge Exchange between the Illinois National Guard and Polish TDF. (Photo by Maj. Dutch Grove)



Fireboat Tour Brings Together Families of Fallen

The Illinois National Guard and the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs participated in Survivor Outreach Services of Illinois' Chicago Fireboat Tour for the Illinois Families of Fallen Service Members.

The tour, which received support from the Allen J. Lynch Medal of Honor Veterans Foundation, Gold

Star Mission and, of course, Chicago Fireboat Tours; gives the Families of the Fallen a chance to socialize, have fun, spend time with each other, and connect with military leaders.

Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army

National Guard, participated this year along with IDVA Director Terry Prince.

Williams deployed to Afghanistan with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team in 2008 and 2009 and served on that deployment with many of the fallen Soldiers whose Families were on the tour.







Officer Candidates Tackle Final Obstacle Before Commissioning as Second Lieutenants



U.S. Army Officer Candidate Parker Meads, with the Illinois National Guard, crawls through the “Low Wire” event at the obstacle course during Officer Candidate School (OCS) Phase III at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, July 26. OCS Phase III is a culminating event hosted by the Washington National Guard’s 205th Regional Training Center that tests officer candidates on their leadership and critical thinking abilities before commissioning as second lieutenants. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Reyfield Betz)



U.S. Army officer candidates Irwin Leon-Cervantes, left, Illinois National Guard, and Matthew Villalobos, Oregon National Guard, use teamwork skills to pass along weapons to a designated area as part of a field leader’s reaction course during Officer Candidate School (OCS) Phase III, July 27. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Elaina Nieves)



U.S. Army Officer Candidate Linda Mora, with the Illinois National Guard, descends an obstacle as part of a confidence course during Officer Candidate School Phase III, July 26. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Abigail Clark)



U.S. Army Officer Candidates Charlie Mam, with the California National Guard, and Colton Grisham, with the Illinois National Guard, work together to roll a barrel of supplies over a simulated minefield as part of a field leader's reaction course during Officer Candidate School (OCS) Phase III. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Pfc. Brianna Castilla)



U.S. Army Officer Candidates Skye McEstes, and Joseph Grant, with the Illinois National Guard, listen to evaluators after successfully completing a squad simulated training exercise during Officer Candidate School Phase III at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, July 31. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Bianca Hayden)



Officer Candidate Parker Meads, with the Illinois National Guard, is exasperated after supporting his squad leader through a lengthy and successful squad situation tactical exercise lane during OCS Phase III July 30. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Virginia Johnson)



U.S. Army Officer Candidate Amy Feher, with the Illinois National Guard, provides security during a field leader's reaction course as part of Officer Candidate School Phase III, July 27. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Pfc. Brianna Castilla)



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Austin Haitt, an Officer Candidate School instructor, provides feedback to U.S. Army Officer Candidates Skye McEstes and Joseph Grant with the Illinois National Guard, while taking part in a squad simulated training exercise during OCS Phase III, July 31. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Bianca Hayden)



U.S. Army Officer Candidate John Winkler, with the Illinois National Guard, yells commands to his squad to push through an objective as part of a situational training exercise during Officer Candidate School Phase III, July 30, 2025. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Reyfield Betz)



U.S. Army Officer Candidate Cameron Cotterman, with the Illinois National Guard, gets into the prone position to pull security during Officer Candidate School Phase III, July 29. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Bianca Hayden)



U.S. Army Officer Candidates John Winkler, with the Illinois National Guard, and Qiyuan Zhou, with the California National Guard, prepare an operations order as part of a squad situational training exercise during Officer Candidate School Phase III, July 30. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Elaina Nieves)



U.S. Army Officer Candidate Benjamin Hunt, with the Illinois National Guard, takes a position of concealment with an M4 carbine as part of a situational training exercise during Officer Candidate School Phase III at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, July 30. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Reyfield Betz)



U.S. Army Officer Candidate Maggie Mui, with the Illinois National Guard, takes notes of an operations order as part of a situational training exercise during Officer Candidate School Phase III at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Reyfield Betz)



U.S. Army Officer Candidates John Winkler and Irwin Leon-Ceruantes, with the Illinois National Guard, and Erin Tracy, with the Wisconsin National Guard, discuss an operations order as part of a squad situational training exercise during Officer Candidate School Phase III at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, July 30. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Elaina Nieves)



U.S. Army Officer Candidates Lucero Zempoaltecatl and Cervantes Leon, with the Illinois National Guard, prepare for a squad situational training exercise during Officer Candidate School Phase III. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Reyfield Betz)



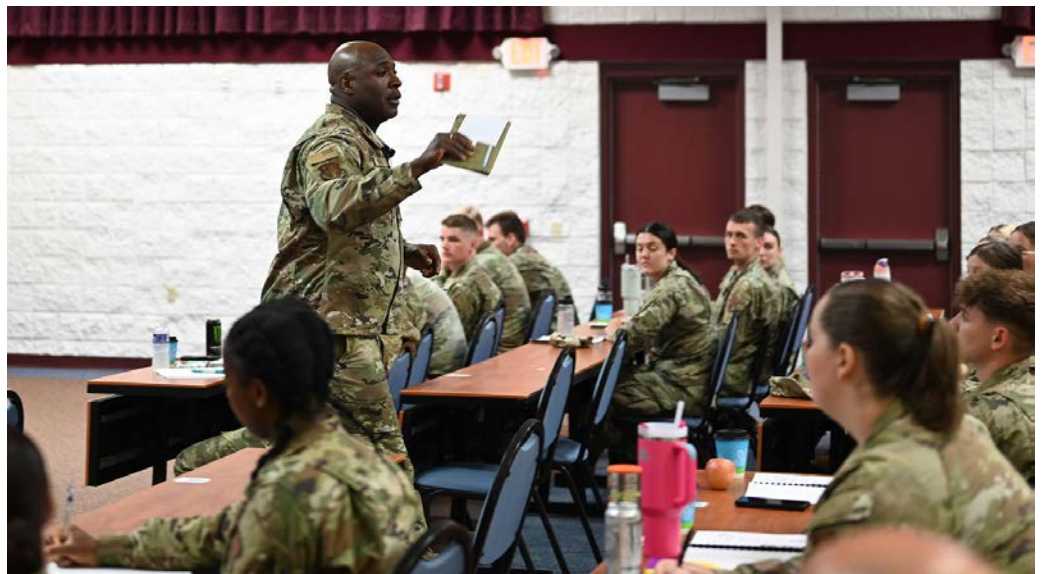
U.S. Army Officer Candidate George Hainer, with the Washington National Guard, and Officer Candidate Joseph Grant, with the Illinois National Guard, receive a briefing from Officer Candidate School Company Commander Capt. James Dunkley, before boarding a CH-47 Chinook as part of an air infiltration training exercise during OCS Phase III on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, July 29. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Elaina Nieves)

Illinois Air Guard Members Participate in 2025 Enlisted Leadership Workshop



U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, Illinois Air National Guard, talks to Airmen during the 2025 Enlisted Leadership Workshop on July 22, 2025, at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, Camp Douglas, Wisconsin. The Enlisted Leadership Workshop is a biannual workshop series designed to foster deliberate development within the enlisted corps in a continuous journey of growth, learning and adaptation for Airmen at all levels. The workshop was founded in 2015 by Airmen from the 183rd Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, who recognized a need for continual growth and development within the Guard and has since expanded to include Airmen from multiple states and wings. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Master Sgt. Shelly Stark)

U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Marlon Burton, the command chief of the Illinois Air National Guard, welcomes Airmen to the 2025 Enlisted Leadership Workshop on July 22, 2025, at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, Wisconsin.



U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Steve Hedges, the command chief at the 183rd Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, answers questions during the Chief's Panel during the 2025 Enlisted Leadership Workshop.



U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Jennifer Howard and Command Chief Master Sgt. Steve Hedges, both with the 183rd Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, talk while waiting for the 2025 Enlisted Leadership Workshop to begin.



U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Joshua Moore, the command chief of the Air National Guard, talks to Airmen at the 2025 Enlisted Leadership Workshop on July 23, at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, Camp Douglas, Wisconsin.



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Aaron Lawler, Tech Sgt. Cole Plogger and Senior Airman Jolen Sutheard, all with the 183rd Communications Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, pose for a photo at the 2025 Enlisted Leadership Workshop on July 22, at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, Camp Douglas, Wisconsin.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrea Duncan, from the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, talks with a seat mate while waiting for the 2025 Enlisted Leadership Workshop to begin.



U.S. Air Force Command Chief Master Sgt. (ret.) Rebecca Velazquez, from the 183rd Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, answers a question during the Chief's Panel during the 2025 Enlisted Leadership Workshop.

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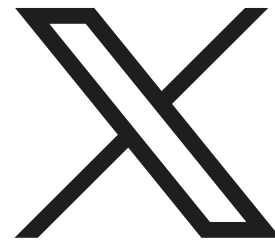
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