

RESPONDING TO DISASTER

Washington National Guard members rapidly respond to historic flooding in Skagit, Snohomish and King County





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COMMANDER IN CHIEF
WASHINGTON STATE GOVERNOR
The Honorable Bob Ferguson

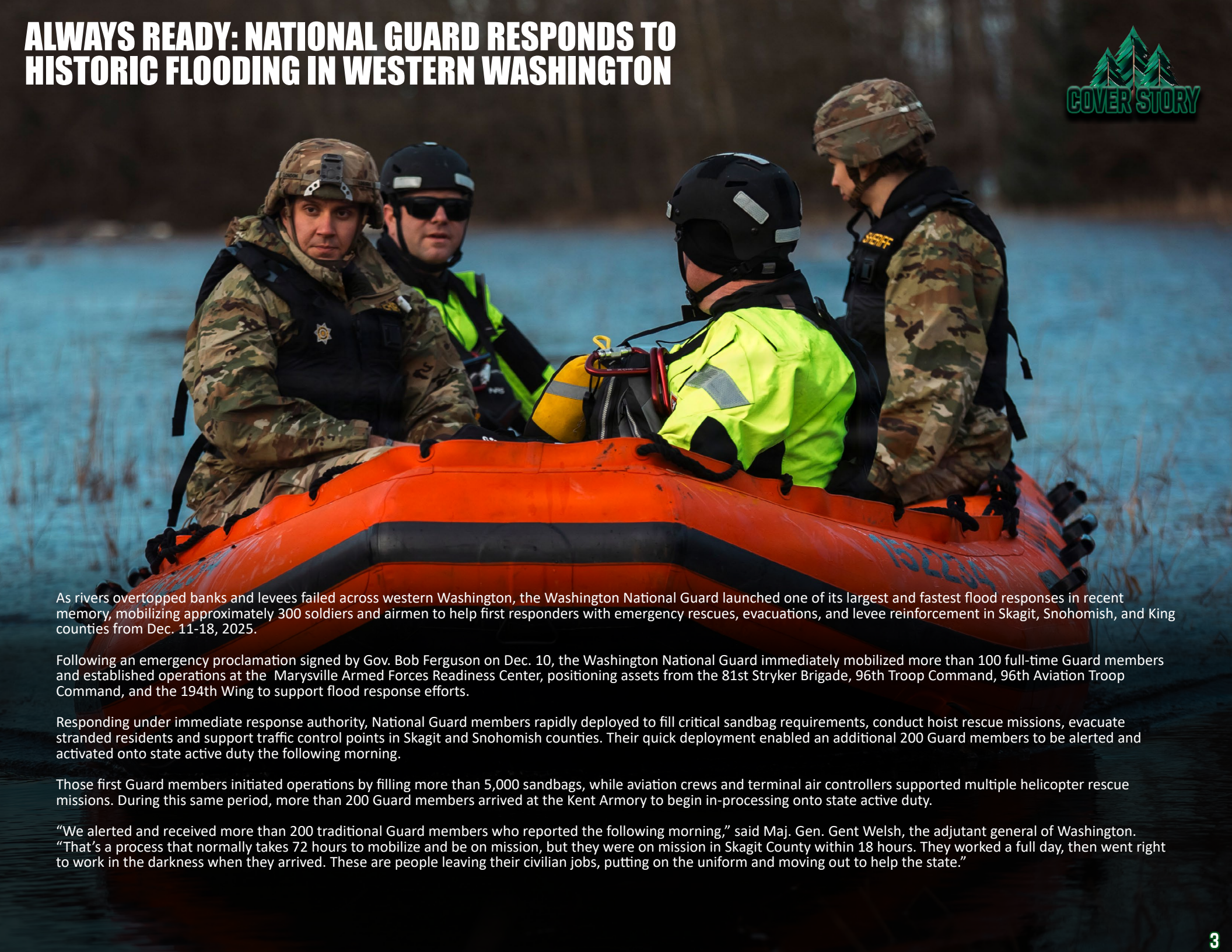
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ALWAYS READY: NATIONAL GUARD RESPONDS TO HISTORIC FLOODING IN WESTERN WASHINGTON



As rivers overtopped banks and levees failed across western Washington, the Washington National Guard launched one of its largest and fastest flood responses in recent memory, mobilizing approximately 300 soldiers and airmen to help first responders with emergency rescues, evacuations, and levee reinforcement in Skagit, Snohomish, and King counties from Dec. 11-18, 2025.

Following an emergency proclamation signed by Gov. Bob Ferguson on Dec. 10, the Washington National Guard immediately mobilized more than 100 full-time Guard members and established operations at the Marysville Armed Forces Readiness Center, positioning assets from the 81st Stryker Brigade, 96th Troop Command, 96th Aviation Troop Command, and the 194th Wing to support flood response efforts.

Responding under immediate response authority, National Guard members rapidly deployed to fill critical sandbag requirements, conduct hoist rescue missions, evacuate stranded residents and support traffic control points in Skagit and Snohomish counties. Their quick deployment enabled an additional 200 Guard members to be alerted and activated onto state active duty the following morning.

Those first Guard members initiated operations by filling more than 5,000 sandbags, while aviation crews and terminal air controllers supported multiple helicopter rescue missions. During this same period, more than 200 Guard members arrived at the Kent Armory to begin in-processing onto state active duty.

“We alerted and received more than 200 traditional Guard members who reported the following morning,” said Maj. Gen. Gent Welsh, the adjutant general of Washington. “That’s a process that normally takes 72 hours to mobilize and be on mission, but they were on mission in Skagit County within 18 hours. They worked a full day, then went right to work in the darkness when they arrived. These are people leaving their civilian jobs, putting on the uniform and moving out to help the state.”

As the sun rose on the morning of Dec. 12, the full extent of the flooding became apparent. In the city of Burlington, hundreds of homes were under Level 3 (Go Now!) evacuation orders, and the Skagit River levee near Lyman and Concrete remained fragile. Guard members went door to door in Burlington to help evacuate residents from potential danger, while others filled nearly 8,000 sandbags, which were transported to Lyman to reinforce the levee. Guard members also supported rescue operations in Snohomish County, assisting fire departments with calls involving motorists stranded on flooded roads.

“Just some incredible work from National Guard service members assisting with evacuations and rescues, filling sandbags, delivering supplies and much more,” Ferguson said.

A brief break in the weather over the weekend allowed rivers to recede; however, anticipating another incoming storm, Guard members in Skagit and Snohomish counties remained on mission and ready to respond.

“We have a supportive governor, outstanding cooperation between state and federal officials, and community members seeing their National Guard in action, maybe for the first time,” Welsh said. “I couldn’t be more proud of this team.”

As with many state activations, conditions continued to evolve. On the afternoon of Dec. 15, a levee breached near the city of Tukwila, allowing water from the Green River to spill into an industrial area. Sixteen full-time Guard members from the 56th Theater Information Operations Group were quickly activated under immediate response authority and moved to the Kent Armory to prepare for the mission. These Guard members worked alongside a King County repair crew to prevent further breaches and stop the flow of water.

Tuesday morning brought another emergency as Guard members supported the King County Sheriff’s Office Marine Unit in rescuing a stranded motorist who had driven past road closure signs. The team then moved to the city of Pacific, where another levee breach along the White River prompted the rapid evacuation of hundreds of residents. While in Pacific, Guard members filled and emplaced sandbags to support crews repairing the damaged levee.

“We supported a number of critical missions in Skagit, Snohomish and King counties, while also monitoring multiple situations across the state, including flooding in eastern Washington and landslides in central Washington,” Welsh said.

As conditions improved across western Washington, Guard members began demobilizing from state active duty on Dec. 18, 2025. During the one-week mission, Guard members filled more than 20,000 sandbags, manned numerous traffic control points, supported five swift water rescues, assisted with 37 evacuations, and conducted one hoist rescue mission, saving a resident whose vehicle was swept away near the Skagit River.

“Our neighbors were in need, and our men and women grabbed their gear and answered the call,” Welsh said. “This mission demonstrated exactly what the National Guard is — a professional organization ready to respond when our communities need us most.”

- Photos by Nick Cloward, Adeline Witherspoon, Story by Joseph Siemandel





PREPARING FOR WORLD CUP 2026, WASHINGTON NATIONAL GUARD HOSTS COUNTER-UAS SUMMIT

As the 2026 FIFA World Cup nears and drone threats grow more complex, more than 100 public-sector leaders convened in Renton on Nov. 5, 2025, for a Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (CUAS) Summit hosted by Major General Gent Welsh, Washington's Adjutant General and Homeland Security Advisor. The summit united government, academic, legal, public safety, and industry experts to bolster national security readiness.

"If you think about where the world was on September 10th, we are at a very similar place," said Welsh during his opening remarks. "This isn't about the World Cup. This is about protecting America."

The summit served as a rare convergence of government and private-sector expertise.

"This is a true blending of industry and the government," Welsh noted, underscoring the importance of unified action as unmanned aerial threats continue to accelerate in complexity and frequency.

The summit also emphasized the sobering parallels between today's challenges and the vulnerabilities the nation faced prior to Sept 11, 2001. Citing the findings of the 9/11 Commission Report, which acknowledged a failure of imagination, a failure of laws, a failure of capabilities, and a failure of management, Welsh urged leaders and attendees to learn from the past.

"The commission report talked about red flags that popped up prior to 9/11, and now we have seen what is happening across the globe with drones and need to be ready," Welsh said.

Referencing recent drone incidents in New Jersey, Welsh explained how the real-world event highlighted regional vulnerabilities.

"That kicked me into high gear, because I immediately asked myself, if that happened in Washington state, how would I respond to the governor," Welsh asked the attendees. "We have a lot of people talking about the problem, from different angles, but we are talking past each other. I am glad we finally got everyone together and can walk through the problem."

The central component of the summit was a tabletop exercise simulating a coordinated drone attack on Lumen Field during a World Cup match. Participants examined the steps leading to the hypothetical attack, conducted pre-incident assessments, and explored possible drone launch points and methods of attack. The scenario also included two drone-based attacks on critical infrastructure, designed to expose vulnerabilities, test response capabilities, and evaluate interagency coordination.

Throughout the exercise, participants confronted persistent challenges: limited authorities across various

levels of government, gaps in resources, and barriers embedded in current policy and legal frameworks. These obstacles, many agreed, continue to hinder a unified response to unmanned system threats.

Defense industry partners later showcased a range of available technologies for detection, deterrence, disruption, and mitigation. Their presentations highlighted both the rapid innovation occurring in the counter UAS arena and the need for streamlined pathways to integrate these tools into public safety operations.

"I imagine we have solutions but you guys have the tools that will take us from concept to practical application," said Welsh.

The summit's overarching goal was clear: identify actionable solutions to counter the rising threat posed by unmanned systems and strengthen collaborative planning across jurisdictions. As World Cup 2026 approaches, and as drone-based incidents become more frequent worldwide, Welsh stressed that preparation must extend far beyond a single global event.

"Our mission isn't just about securing the games, it's about ensuring the safety of our communities and protecting America through joint planning, foresight, and cooperation." - Story and Photo by Joseph Siemandel

Washington's Western Regional Counterdrug Training Center prepares to launch counter UAS training course



As criminals turn to drones to move drugs and support illegal activity, the Washington National Guard's Western Regional Counterdrug Training Center will launch a new Counter Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) fundamentals training course in December 2025 to help law enforcement get ahead of the threat.

"This course will help bridge the gap between the lessons learned on the battlefield and what our law enforcement and security agencies in the U.S. will soon encounter," said Maj. Gen. Gent Welsh, Washington's adjutant general and homeland security advisor for the state.

The course "Counter Unmanned Aircraft Systems for Narcotics Officer Operations" aims to equip narcotics officers with the crucial knowledge and abilities needed to effectively address the escalating threat posed by Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) in drug trafficking and associated criminal activities.

The eight-hour course, created from a mix of military doctrine along with information from agencies that are already utilizing counter UAS operations to include the Federal Aviation Administration and Department of Homeland Security, provides participants a thorough

understanding of the various ways UAS are being utilized, including their specific capabilities and inherent limitations.

"We go into the history of UAS use, the technologies, types, laws and regulations, possible applications and understanding of counter measures," said SGM Birk, instructor at the Western Regional Counterdrug Training Center. "We go through a lot of material, but ultimately the goal is for law enforcement personnel to leave with some counter UAS tools they can start implementing immediately to help keep their communities safe."

Law enforcement officers that participate in the course will develop the critical skill of recognizing indicators of UAS activity within their operational environment, comprehend the complex legal and regulatory framework governing UAS operations and the implementation of counter-UAS measures. The course emphasizes the importance of identifying and potentially exploiting vulnerabilities in UAS operations for interdiction purposes. Ultimately, officers will understand how to seamlessly integrate CUAS strategies into their existing narcotics enforcement efforts, enhancing their overall operational effectiveness.

The fundamentals course is just the first of multiple counter UAS courses that will be offered to law enforcement by the Western Regional Counterdrug Training Center. The schoolhouse has also been developing a three-day counter UAS applied course, which will be less classroom instruction and more hands-on.

"The blueprint is taken from Ukraine and how they are using counter UAS measures from a defensive perspective," said. Maj. Karpenko, UAS / Counter-UAS officer with the Washington Counterdrug Program. "We are still working through the course and where it will be hosted at."

The two courses will have some level of the same instruction, but were developed to support the officers' time, knowing that many departments cannot give up an officer for three full days.

"I think these courses set the stage to discuss counter UAS and help law enforcement with a potential threat," said Birk. "It is important to note, the majority of UAS operators are just hobbyists and doing nothing malicious, but we need to be prepared for anything."

- Story by Joseph Siemandel

EMD HOSTS 3RD ANNUAL TRIBAL EMERGENCY MANAGERS FORUM

The Washington Military Department's Emergency Management Division (EMD) recently hosted the Tribal Emergency Managers Forum at The Evergreen State College's House of Welcome cultural arts public service center. The venue, created in collaboration with Northwest Tribes, provided a fitting setting for this important event.

"This is the third year we've held the Tribal Managers Forum," said Erik Riske, EMD Tribal Liaison. "It offers Tribes and state emergency management officials a valuable opportunity to engage in critical discussions and collaboration around preparedness, mitigation, response, recovery, and mutual aid, among other topics."

The Squaxin Tribe - whose ancestral lands include the location of the venue - provided meals and refreshments in support of the event. The Evergreen State College also eagerly partnered with EMD to make its venue available for this year's gathering.

This year's forum welcomed 35 participants representing 22 Tribes, including: Yakama, Tulalip, Suquamish, Nisqually, Chehalis, Kalispel, Lummi, Squaxin, Skokomish, Makah, Puyallup, Port Gamble, Spokane, Jamestown, Sauk-Suiattle, Colville, Hoh, Samish, Snoqualmie, Cowlitz, Nooksack, and Quinault.

Topics covered during the event included a collaborative workshop on cyberattacks affecting Tribes, in-depth discussions about the Washington Mutual Aid System (WAMAS), the Canoe Journey Tsunami Incident, Tribal fire incidents, and food security.

During annual on-site visits with Washington Tribes, a recurring request has been the opportunity for collective meetings between Tribal and state emergency management representatives. Since this forum began, relationships have been strengthened not only between the state and Tribes, but also among the Tribes themselves. Many have expressed that they previously felt like an afterthought, and this event has taken strong steps toward changing that.

"These important conversations help grow trust, and develop a shared commitment to being good neighbors," said Stacey McClain, EMD Assistant Director for Operations. "It's critical we work together to improve community safety and emergency plans."



State leaders learn the foundations of emergency management

When a disaster strikes, seconds count — and so does leadership. The day before the annual Great Washington ShakeOut, nearly 100 executives from 20 state agencies gathered at Camp Murray for an intensive new training to ensure they're ready to lead when the next big emergency occurs.

"In a crisis, Washingtonians expect their government to act as one team — and every state agency and leader has a vital role to play," said Kevin Wickersham, EMD response section manager. "That unity doesn't happen by accident. Training and preparing together builds the trust and coordination needed to serve our communities when it matters most."

During nearly every state emergency, agency staff from across the state enterprise support the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) and provide critical assistance to our state, local and tribal partners. Standing processes are followed to ensure a disaster response is coordinated, timely and effective.

To ensure state leaders are familiar with how a state emergency response is often coordinated, the state's Emergency Management Division developed a new, four-hour SEOC Foundations for Executive Officials course. The training equips state agency leaders with strategies to help lead effectively during disasters by providing a deeper understanding of the state's emergency management system and how state agencies work together to coordinate response to emergencies and disasters.

The course is held at Camp Murray and includes modules on the emergency management system, the SEOC, agency roles and responsibilities, emergency policy coordination, public information coordination and a tour of the SEOC. October's session was the second time the course was conducted. Dozens of state agency leaders attended a session earlier this year.

"We are happy that so many representatives from nearly two dozen agencies were able to attend," said Emergency Management Division Director Robert Ezelle. "It is critical that we can all work together and speak the same language when we need to help Washington residents after a disaster."

- Photos by Joseph Siemandel, Story by Sarah Foster



RENOVATION CONSTRUCTION BRINGS NEW LIFE TO 70-YEAR-OLD SNOHOMISH ARMORY

Seventy years after first opening its doors, the Snohomish Armory — home to the 176th Engineer Company — is undergoing a \$6 million modernization to ensure the facility continues to serve the community just east of Everett, Washington.

Built in 1953 and opened in 1955, the armory has served the Snohomish community for decades. Like many facilities constructed following World War II, however, it was not designed to accommodate larger vehicles, advanced technology, or current mission requirements.

“There are hundreds of these armories across the country with the same square footage, similar footprint and look,” said Adam Iwaszuk, director of the Construction, Facilities and Maintenance Office. “These became the go-to for Guard units following World War II.”

While the Snohomish Armory has aged well, the community around it has grown dramatically. When the 14,000-square-foot facility first opened, only about 3,000 people lived in Snohomish. Today, the city has more than tripled in size and continues to grow.

“This used to be nothing except the armory out here when it was first built, but now it is almost right in the heart of the city with stores, restaurants, and businesses,” Iwaszuk said. “We just want to bring it up to date and make sure that we are fitting in with the community.”

The Snohomish Armory is home to the 176th Engineer Company — a stand-alone vertical engineering and construction unit. They have consistently supported the community in times of need. In 2014, the company deployed to nearby Oso in response to the State Route 530 landslide. The unit has also supported numerous wildfire seasons, flood operations, and the state’s COVID-19 pandemic response.

In 2022, the Washington Army National Guard received approval to add roughly 6,000 square feet of office, classroom, and secure storage space to the existing armory.

“By adding on to the existing armory, we can get the project approved and construction started much faster,” said Iwaszuk.

Funded primarily by the federal government with state matching dollars, the project is part of a statewide effort to upgrade aging Guard facilities and bolster readiness for both federal deployments and local emergency response. The project includes construction of a 6,000-square-foot addition, significant alteration of 2,450 square feet of existing office space, and minor upgrades to an additional 8,000 square feet of the facility.





Renovation efforts will include expanded office space, a conference room, and a larger area for local recruiters. Smaller classrooms will be converted into increased storage off the drill floor, and the armory will receive a fully functional kitchen to support feeding troops on drill weekends. The new addition will feature two large, dividable classrooms, a distance-learning lab, a private lactation room, an expanded vault and storage room, an upgraded electrical room, a unisex bathroom with private floor-to-ceiling stalls, and an 800-square-foot workout room.

"This new addition will bring a whole new life to the armory so we can continue to support the city of Snohomish and the area north of Seattle more effectively and for years to come," Iwaszuk said. "Through this upgrade, we're taking a 70-year-old facility and modernizing it for the next 70 years."

If the past is any indication, the upgrades to the Snohomish Armory will only strengthen the impact of the unit that calls it home. Over the years, in addition to responding to local disasters, the 176th Engineer Company has participated in several community restoration and improvement projects around the state and beyond, including renovations at the Northport visitor center, a playground in Rogue River, Oregon, a church at North Fort Lewis, an upgrade project at Bowers Field in Ellensburg, and the construction of a community park in Orting. The unit has deployed to Iraq multiple times since Sept. 11, 2001, and has played a key role in the Washington State Partnership Program, building schools in the Kingdom of Thailand. - Story and Photos by Joseph Siemandel

ARMY GUARD COMMANDERS FOCUS ON READINESS, RETENTION, AND TRANSFORMATION AT ANNUAL CONFERENCE

In an effort to sharpen readiness and unify leadership across the force, Brig. Gen. Paul Sellars, commanding general of the Washington Army National Guard, brought together battalion command teams from across the state for the annual Commanding General-Battalion Commander Conference on Oct. 17, 2025, at Camp Murray, Washington.

During the conference, Sellars discussed the ongoing transformation of the 81st Stryker Brigade Combat Team into a Mobile Infantry Brigade, along with updates on the promotion board process, unit stationing, force strength, and readiness and retention.

“We are focused on retention. We want to keep every valuable member of our team as we go through this force structure transformation,” said Sellars. “We want our Soldiers to know how important they are to our organization.”

Members of Sellars’ staff also briefed commanders on current state-level initiatives and how the organization is supporting new Army priorities. Topics included the Army Virtual Desktop, the updated Army Combat Fitness Test, organizational transformation and innovation efforts, and the new personnel and career tracking platforms.

“We want to ensure that each unit and its leadership not only have access to, but are also utilizing all the resources available at the state level to keep their formations healthy and able to meet training requirements,” said Sellars.

Lt. Col. Brooke Muhich, commander of the 181st Brigade Support Battalion, said the conference provided valuable perspective she could share with her company commanders.

“Hearing directly from the directorates helps us as commanders see the big picture and adjust our priorities accordingly,” said Muhich.

Muhich also noted that the new state readiness platform has been a particularly useful tool.

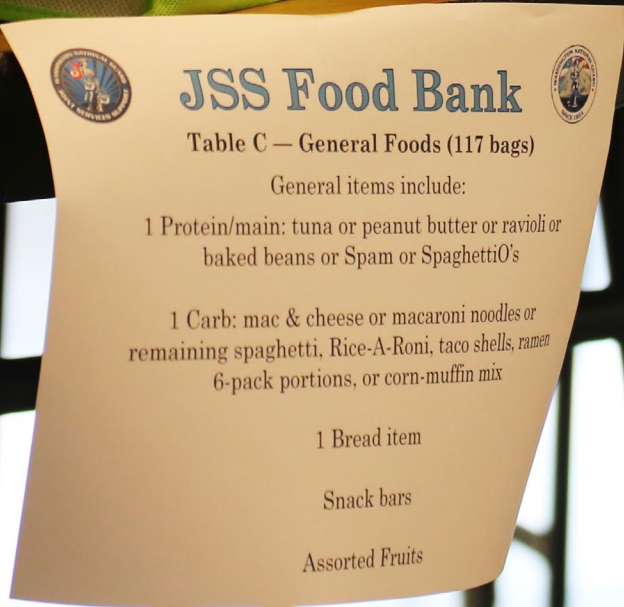
“The new readiness platform is very handy. I refer to it frequently,” Muhich said. “I appreciate that we’re all looking at a centrally managed data source for our key metrics.”

Overall, the conference offered leaders an opportunity to review critical state metrics, share best practices, and reconnect with peers from across Washington.

“We don’t always get the chance to come together, and I know you’re all busy with your units,” said Sellars. “I applaud you for your leadership and continued service in our Guard.”

- Photo by Peter Chang, Story by Joseph Siemandel





With more than 700 federal technicians at the Washington Military Department working without pay during the federal government shutdown, the agency worked in partnership with the National Guard Association of Washington to collect donations to help those facing food insecurity.

Due to the actions taken by the Washington Military Department:

- \$26,250 were issued in grocery and gas gift cards to soldiers and airmen statewide.**
- 478 families were served at Turkey Drop events**
- The Joint Service Support hosted four food drives, supported through donations from local food banks, bakeries and employee donations served nearly 1,000 service members and their families during the shutdown.**

Thank You to everyone that stepped up to support our team during this difficult time.

DISASTER TRAINING

WASHINGTON NATIONAL GUARD, STATE AGENCIES HOST
DISASTER RESPONSE TRAINING WITH MALAYSIAN PARTNERS

In late September 2025, the Washington National Guard hosted Malaysia's Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (SMART) for a week-long domestic response workshop in Spokane. This event marked the first "civilian-to-civilian" engagement under the State Partnership Program to be held in Washington state.

The week-long workshop, held in late September 2025, focused on domestic disaster response training. It was coordinated through the State Partnership Program, a federal initiative that links U.S. National Guard units with partner nations worldwide.

The event was the first civilian-to-civilian engagement conducted in Washington state under the SPP. This marked a notable step in the partnership, which was formed in 2017 between the Washington National Guard and the Malaysian Armed Forces.



The Washington National Guard, 10th Homeland Response Force, Spokane Valley Fire Department, Spokane County Sheriff's Office, Airmen with the 304th Rescue Squadron hosted members of the Malaysian NADMA SMART team. SMART is an elite, internationally certified Heavy Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) task force. Managed by NADMA, this team draws its personnel from the Malaysian Armed Forces, the Royal Malaysia Police, and the Fire and Rescue Department.

"The most important thing is the partnerships that we have with other countries [and] being able to work together," said U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Dereck Reese with the Washington National Guard's 10th Homeland Response Force. "That's a huge deal. If we ever got called to assist them—or if they ever got called to assist us—building that relationship is super important, and just learning different things and sharing that knowledge."

The Malaysian personnel received training on civilian SAR operations, including specific skills like swift water rescue techniques. A key component included breaking and breaching procedures, or drilling and cutting through materials to access areas during rescue missions.

The Malaysian SMART team members we've been working with are all civilians—police and firefighters—who respond to emergencies the same way we do: they receive a call, gather their gear and personnel, and deploy to handle the mission, said Reese.

As Malaysia's central disaster management agency, National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA) is responsible for coordinating the government's response to disasters. This includes managing assets like the SMART team.

Since 2017, Malaysia and the Washington National Guard have been partners through the U.S. Department of Defense's State Partnership Program. The program facilitates military-to-military and military-to-civilian cooperation. Previous SPP exercises, like the annual Bersama Warrior, have focused on enhancing military interoperability. The recent workshop expanded this partnership to include civilian SAR expertise.

Safriz Bin Swahini, Deputy Superintendent of Police and head of logistics for the Malaysian disaster assistance and rescue team

"The training was developed since last year, focusing on the strategic level," said Safriz Bin Swahini, Deputy Superintendent of Police and head of logistics for the Malaysian disaster assistance and rescue team. "So [by] bringing the teams to the United States, we were engaging with the U.S. Embassy [and] trying to find what's the best type of training that can be done."

- Story and Photos by Adeline Witherspoon

FROM THAILAND REFUGEE CAMP TO THE AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Tech. Sgt. Khampane Daoreuang's path to the 194th Wing, Washington Air National Guard, has been anything but ordinary.

His story begins long before he ever donned an Air Force uniform. Daoreuang's father was in the Laotian Army, an infantryman and paratrooper trained by U.S. personnel amidst what is now known as 'The Secret War,' a covert conflict in which the U.S. supported Laotian forces against communist expansion. As the war drew to a close, the communists persuaded the king of Laos and his soldiers to lay down their arms. Daoreuang's father refused.

"When that happened and people were laying down their arms, my dad was like, 'Look, anybody that wants to come with me, I'm taking my family, and I'm getting the heck up out of here,'" said Daoreuang.

That single act of defiance — choosing to fight for his family's future instead of surrendering — set Daoreuang's life on an extraordinary path. Daoreuang's family fled to Thailand, where Daoreuang was born in 1982. He spent his early childhood in a rudimentary refugee camp.

"There was no running water, so whatever water we had, we had to store it," said Daoreuang. "And there was no electricity where we stayed. I remember using lanterns and candles."

From Thailand, his family moved to the Philippines. And in 1989, they boarded a plane bound for the United States, eventually settling in Washington State. The adjustment to American life was not easy.

"It was extremely hard, because there was a culture difference," said Daoreuang. "I didn't grow up in the Southeast Asia culture. Growing up, I was pretty Americanized and my parents didn't know how to raise me."

Without strong guidance, Daoreuang struggled.

"I started hanging out with the wrong crowd, not going to school and stuff like that," said Daoreuang. "I was almost illiterate. I couldn't even read or write."

By the time he reached high school, Daoreuang landed in juvenile court for truancy. But the judge gave him an alternative to juvenile hall.

"It was either go Job Corps or get sent to juvenile hall," said Daoreuang. "And so I was like, 'Job Corps it is.'"

Job Corps provided Daoreuang the opportunity to earn his GED and learn a trade as a cement mason.

"Honestly, if it wasn't for Job Corps, I wouldn't even be here talking to you right now, or have some kind of formal education, or even know how to read or write," said Daoreuang.

After graduating Job Corps, Daoreuang found that steady work was scarce. And at 21, he decided to follow in his father's footsteps and join the U.S. Army.

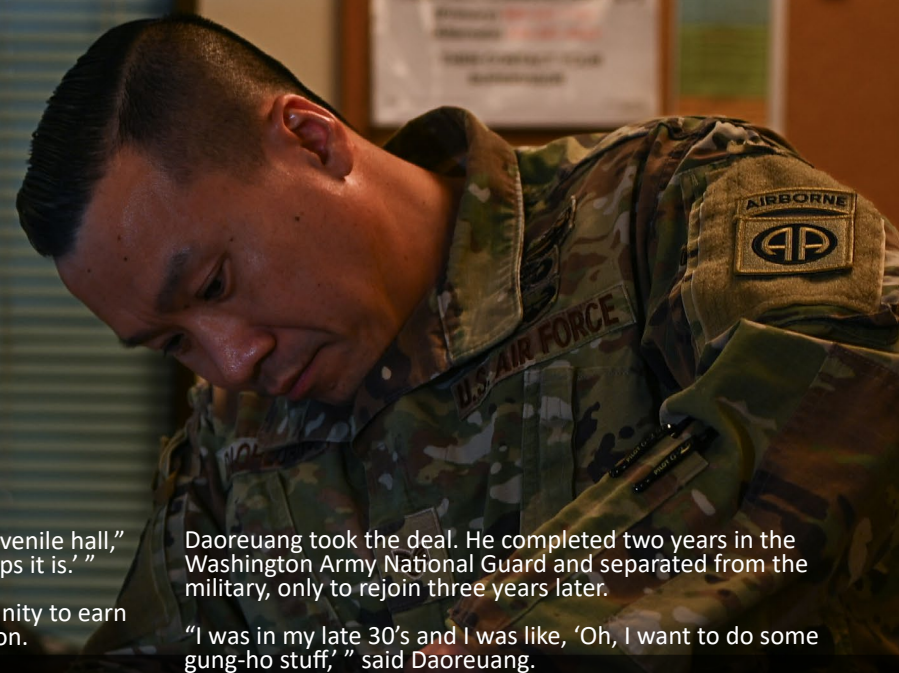
"The counselor asked me if I wanted to go airborne," said Daoreuang. "I was like, 'Yeah, absolutely!' And I ended up going infantry."

Daoreuang enlisted Feb. 4, 2004. After completing basic combat training, advanced individual training and airborne school, he was assigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He helped with relief efforts after Hurricane Katrina, and when he returned, his enlistment was nearly complete. But before his enlistment ended, the Army stop-lossed him for a deployment to Iraq.

"It was definitely a very hard deployment," said Daoreuang. "There were people you just have a normal conversation with and next thing you know, they died. It was unreal."

His intense deployment was more than he could endure. Upon returning stateside, Daoreuang planned to separate.

"I sat down with a retention [noncommissioned officer]," said Daoreuang. "And he goes, 'You still have 48 months left in the inactive reserve. There's a lot going on right now. If you get called back, you'll go to the needs of the Army. But I'll give you a good deal: you join the National Guard for two years, and we'll take the remaining two years away and you'll be non-deployable.'"



Daoreuang took the deal. He completed two years in the Washington Army National Guard and separated from the military, only to rejoin three years later.

"I was in my late 30's and I was like, 'Oh, I want to do some gung-ho stuff,'" said Daoreuang.

Within a short time period, Daoreuang undertook three courses: Master Fitness Training Course, Air Assault School and Ranger Training Assessment. But the physical toll became harder to ignore.

"I lasted for eight days [at Ranger Training Assessment]," said Daoreuang. "And then I was like, 'You know what? I'm going to give it another try.' But then I sat back and thought about it. I was like, 'Man, I'm 39 now, pushing 40, and everything is hurting.'"

Seeking a role that remained challenging but without the physical strain, Daoreuang transitioned to the Washington Air National Guard in 2022. He retrained into the 194th Communications Squadron, where he is currently the Base Equipment Custodian noncommissioned officer in charge.

In his short time in the Air National Guard thus far, Daoreuang has had some unique opportunities. In 2024, he deployed to the United Arab Emirates. And now he is preparing for a year-long change of station to Germany.

"I'm pretty fortunate," said Daoreuang. "I have a pretty good life, got a solid career outside of the military and a very solid career in the military. And I get to travel for work in the military and see all these cool places where people pay to go."

From a refugee camp in Thailand to the Washington Air National Guard, Daoreuang's journey is one of resilience, perseverance and pride.

"I have 18 years in total now, that's including active duty and [drill status]," said Daoreuang. "Every time I put on this uniform, there's always a sense of satisfaction. I'm proud, proud to be an American and proud to serve."

- Story and Photo by Jordaan Kvale



MINDGYM

FIRST ARMY NATIONAL GUARD MINDGYMS SET TO HELP SERVICE MEMBERS WITH MENTAL-FITNESS

With stress and burnout continuing to affect service members, the Washington National Guard (WANG) is testing a new strategy: training the brain like any other muscle. The WANG opened three MindGyms on Nov. 21, becoming the first Army National Guard in the nation to offer a virtual mental-fitness system that uses neurofeedback and sensory-reduction technology to help service members build resilience.

"We work out, lift weights, eat right, get enough sleep, and try to do all the things that ensure our bodies remain healthy to keep us in the fight. This system gives us the tools to bring that same readiness emphasis to the cognitive space, which is often neglected," said LTC Kevin Robillard, supervisor at the Army Aviation Support Facility (AASF) located at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. "The MindGym provides a huge advantage for the individuals in this organization to drive mental fitness and improve calmness, alertness, and focus, while combating the effects of our current operational environment. We are thrilled to add this tool to our arsenal."

As a fully immersive training environment, the MindGym combines neuroscience and cutting-edge technology, transforming any place into a space where you can train your mind. Focused on neurofeedback, the Mindgym combines focused attention meditation, sensory deprivation, and binaural beats, providing feedback to the individual user. The feedback is captured and presented in real-time, allowing the user to become more attuned to the inner workings of their mind. Understanding how the brain responds to various stimuli and stressors through neurofeedback unlocks the ability to self-regulate brain function, potentially improving attention, mood, and cognitive performance.

"MindGym was created to help train the mind and provide the user feedback to learn more skills so they can respond in stressful situations," said Brandon Murphy, chief revenue officer with Lumena Labs.

At the end of 2024, there were 16 MindGyms across the Department of War. That number has grown significantly in the last year, including a MindGym at the National Guard Bureau at Arlington Hall in Virginia.

One objective of the MindGym involves directing the user's attention to a specific point, object or thought and focusing on breathing patterns or a specific mantra to cultivate mindfulness and concentration. Lumena's website states that when practiced regularly, meditation is shown to improve symptoms of anxiety, depression, inattentiveness and other forms of cognitive dysfunction.

"So much of our day is spent staring at a screen, so our brains never get a chance to turn off and reset and focus on mental health," said Murphy. "We developed MindGym to reduce distractions and disconnect, even if for 10 minutes."

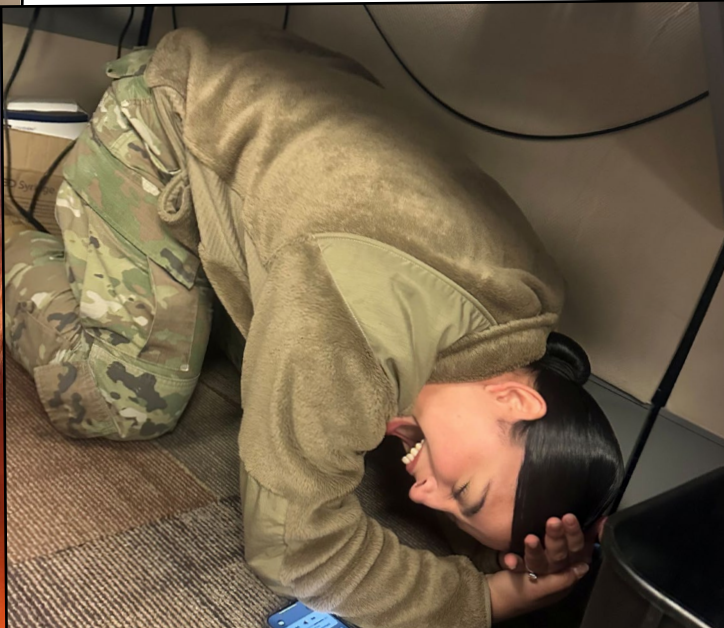
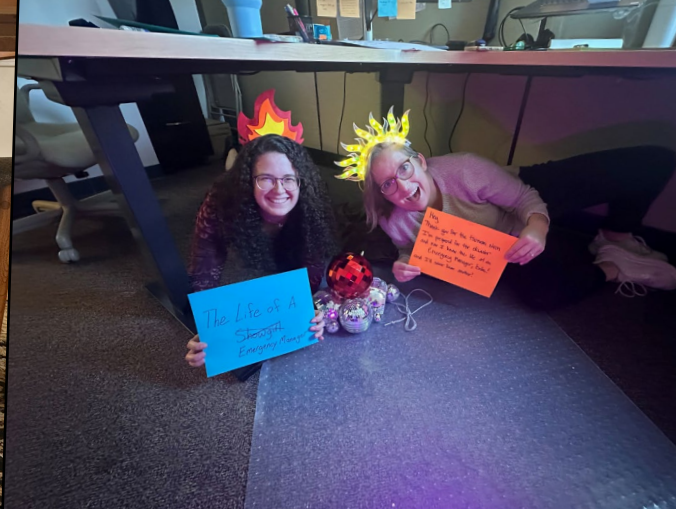
One of the ways the MindGym reduces distractions is through sensory deprivation, creating an environment with minimal or no sensory input. Sensory deprivation aims to provide a disconnect from the body so a user can focus on their mind.

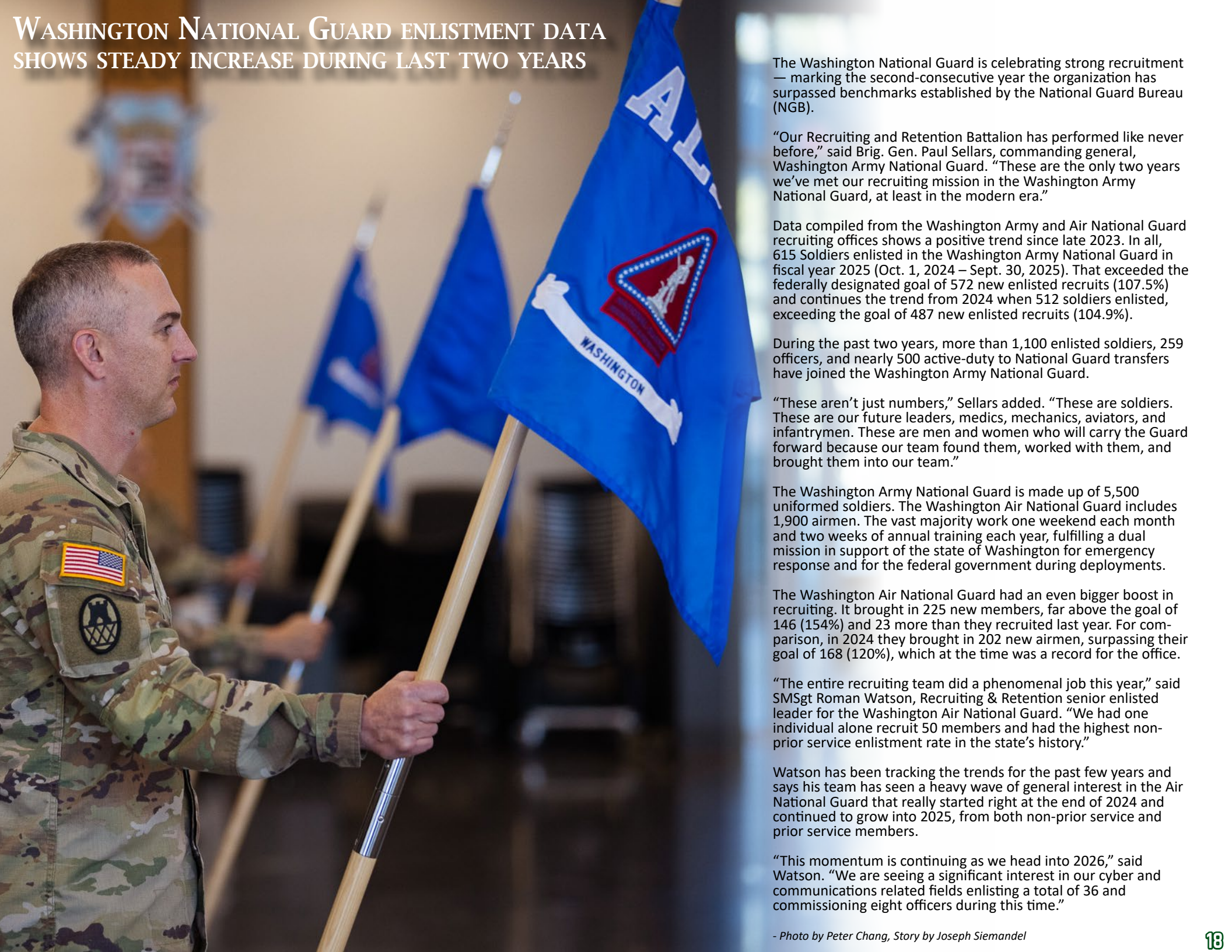
"This would have been done in a tank of water, but since we can't do that we use a cube with minimum distractions," said Murphy.

Since audio is a major part of reducing distractions, MindGym integrates binaural beats in training modules to engage the subconscious and promote healing. Binaural beats can improve cognition, memory, and mood depending on the frequency of the generated beat.

At the AASF, the Washington Army National Guard aviation community has already seen a benefit from using the MindGym.

"The daily stress related to the constant demands of Army National Guard aviation can take a serious toll on our soldiers," said Robillard. "The MindGym's ability to help individuals recover from that stress and harness neuroplasticity through isolation, light, reflection, and sound is an asset we can't wait to test the limits of." - Photo and Story by Joseph Siemandel





WASHINGTON NATIONAL GUARD ENLISTMENT DATA SHOWS STEADY INCREASE DURING LAST TWO YEARS

The Washington National Guard is celebrating strong recruitment — marking the second-consecutive year the organization has surpassed benchmarks established by the National Guard Bureau (NGB).

“Our Recruiting and Retention Battalion has performed like never before,” said Brig. Gen. Paul Sellars, commanding general, Washington Army National Guard. “These are the only two years we’ve met our recruiting mission in the Washington Army National Guard, at least in the modern era.”

Data compiled from the Washington Army and Air National Guard recruiting offices shows a positive trend since late 2023. In all, 615 Soldiers enlisted in the Washington Army National Guard in fiscal year 2025 (Oct. 1, 2024 – Sept. 30, 2025). That exceeded the federally designated goal of 572 new enlisted recruits (107.5%) and continues the trend from 2024 when 512 soldiers enlisted, exceeding the goal of 487 new enlisted recruits (104.9%).

During the past two years, more than 1,100 enlisted soldiers, 259 officers, and nearly 500 active-duty to National Guard transfers have joined the Washington Army National Guard.

“These aren’t just numbers,” Sellars added. “These are soldiers. These are our future leaders, medics, mechanics, aviators, and infantrymen. These are men and women who will carry the Guard forward because our team found them, worked with them, and brought them into our team.”

The Washington Army National Guard is made up of 5,500 uniformed soldiers. The Washington Air National Guard includes 1,900 airmen. The vast majority work one weekend each month and two weeks of annual training each year, fulfilling a dual mission in support of the state of Washington for emergency response and for the federal government during deployments.

The Washington Air National Guard had an even bigger boost in recruiting. It brought in 225 new members, far above the goal of 146 (154%) and 23 more than they recruited last year. For comparison, in 2024 they brought in 202 new airmen, surpassing their goal of 168 (120%), which at the time was a record for the office.

“The entire recruiting team did a phenomenal job this year,” said SMSgt Roman Watson, Recruiting & Retention senior enlisted leader for the Washington Air National Guard. “We had one individual alone recruit 50 members and had the highest non-prior service enlistment rate in the state’s history.”

Watson has been tracking the trends for the past few years and says his team has seen a heavy wave of general interest in the Air National Guard that really started right at the end of 2024 and continued to grow into 2025, from both non-prior service and prior service members.

“This momentum is continuing as we head into 2026,” said Watson. “We are seeing a significant interest in our cyber and communications related fields enlisting a total of 36 and commissioning eight officers during this time.”

262ND COS COMPLETES MOBILIZATION, FORTIFYING CRITICAL INDO-PACIFIC SYSTEMS

"852! Welcome home. Welcome back," said Brig. Gen. Kenneth Borchers, Washington Air National Guard commander.

The 262nd Cyber Operations Squadron concluded its mobilization as the 852nd Cyber Protection Team with a demobilization ceremony at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., Oct. 3, 2025.

The 44-person team, comprised of Air National Guardsmen from Washington, California, Kansas and Texas, devoted the mobilization to fortifying critical systems within the Indo-Pacific region. The team executed nine separate missions in six separate locations including Alaska, Virginia, Hawaii, Guam, the Azores and the United Kingdom.

"As any other CPT does, our primary objective and mission is to hunt, clear, harden and assess whatever specified terrain that we're on," said Maj. Benjamin Kolar, 852nd CPT operations officer. "We typically get tasked for systems that are very critical to a specific theater."

During this mobilization, the 852nd CPT fortified three systems: critical infrastructure in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, expeditionary communications and command and control in the INDOPACOM, and C2 for the U.S. Strategic Command.

"Some of our most critical assets have a cyber component to them so that they are operational," said Kolar. "The work that we do ensures the safety and security, confidentiality, integrity and availability of those assets."

The mobilization was divided into two phases: a predeployment site survey focused on identifying vulnerabilities and threats facing each system, and a subsequent deployment for implementation of security measures and monitoring for malicious cyber activity.

To maximize effectiveness, the 852nd CPT deployed teams in carefully constructed elements, each designed to include a specific mix of skills and experience. These elements typically included intelligence specialists, network technicians, network analysts, host analysts and an element lead. Team composition also prioritized a balance of junior and senior operators to facilitate mentorship and development.

"It led to some really great success," said Maj. Ammon Tenney, 852nd CPT team lead. "It enabled us to leverage the unique talents and capabilities that each individual brought, and I think it was a key factor in a lot of the successes that we experienced."

The impact of the 852nd CPT expanded beyond its immediate objectives. Teams fostered strong partnerships with military personnel, civilian contractors and various government entities throughout the Indo-Pacific.

"We integrated with so many other key partners within the INDOPACOM area that allowed us to share the good work that we did, but it also laid the framework and foundation for us and other teams in the INDOPACOM to continue this good work," said Kolar. "Inevitably, over the next couple of years, there's going to be a lot more teams that go out there, and the work that we did really laid the foundation."

Borchers emphasized the broader strategic importance of the team's work.

"One of the things we did learn in the course of this last [mobilization], is that cyber is undeniably in the very middle of everything we need to do as a department, everything!"

Borchers further noted that their efforts aligned with the National Defense Strategy's priorities of defending the homeland, deterring strategic attacks and deterring aggression.

"We're in a period of competition right now, global competition with a peer adversary, and some of the work [the 852nd CPT] did for ensuring we had command and control capability out there in the Pacific Theater was absolutely critical to that effort. If you look at what the interim National Defense Strategy says, the three things we need to be focused on, the [cyber defense measures the 852nd CPT] did were right in the middle of every one of those things, that's incredible!"

The successful mobilization of the 852nd CPT underscores the vital role the Air National Guard plays in defending the Nation's digital frontier and maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

"Taking all these folks from industry and the full-timers and incorporating them into an element where they can just let loose on some of this Nation's most strategic assets to do good work, they all knocked it out of the park!" said Kolar.

- Photos and Story by Jordaan Kvale



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