

Soldier Systems Center

SPOTLIGHT

Issue 23

January 2026



A Brief Word

Team,

It is with great pride and humility that I write to you as the Garrison Command Sergeant Major of the U.S. Army Garrison Natick. Since assuming this position on October 3, 2025, I have had the privilege of getting to know many of you and witnessing firsthand the dedication, professionalism, and resilience that define this incredible team.

Over the past few months, we have faced significant challenges, including persevering through the recent government shutdown. I am deeply impressed by how each of you rose to the occasion, ensuring that our mission continued and that the Soldiers, civilians, and families who depend on us received the support they needed. Your commitment to excellence and service is truly inspiring, and I am honored to serve alongside you.

U.S. Army Garrison Natick plays a vital role in supporting the readiness and well-being of our Joint force. From the groundbreaking research and development conducted here to the unwavering support provided to our community, this garrison is a cornerstone of our Joint force success. As your Command Sergeant Major, I am committed to ensuring that we continue to provide the highest level of support and service to those who depend on us.

As I continue to settle into this role, I want to emphasize the importance of teamwork and communication. My door remains open, and I encourage you to share your ideas, concerns, and feedback. Together, we will build on the strong foundation already in place and continue to make the Natick Soldier Systems Center a place where people thrive, innovate, and succeed.

To CSM (Ret.) Josh Kelley, you made my transition to this position the smoothest I've had in my career. Thank you for your leadership and for setting me off on the right foot to take over as the Command Sergeant Major. To the Garrison and Natick team, thank you for the warm welcome I have received and for the dedication you bring to your work every day. It is an honor to serve with you, and I look forward to continuing to work together to achieve great things for our Installation and the Army.

Be All You Can Be! This We'll Defend!

Respectfully,

CSM Jeremy W. Bunkley
Command Sergeant Major
U.S. Army Garrison Natick



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Editor's Note: The Soldier Systems Center Spotlight is transitioning to a quarterly publication. You may have seen some of content in this issue previously published on our other online platforms.

*To submit content to the Spotlight please email the Garrison Public Affairs Team at:
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MWR Resources

At Natick Family and MWR, we strive to continuously improve the quality and ease of access to MWR services and information. When planning your next event, please visit our website where you can easily request rental equipment, request dates for facility use, or send a message to one of our representatives.



Thirty Minutes to Win It!

TMtWI Class offers TWO CLASSES per day that run FIVE DAYS a week!

Starting Monday, 12 January 2026, any active duty Soldier wearing the approved Army Physical Fitness Uniform who wishes to participate in our already scheduled twice daily 30 minutes to Win it Classes at our gym will be able to do so for FREE!

Choose between 11:40 a.m. and 12:20 p.m. start times and, for the first time ever, you can choose between two payment options:

- **\$50**/month for TWO CLASSES per week (ONLY \$6.25 per class!) OR
- **\$75**/month for UNLIMITED CLASSES (you can pay with a CREDIT CARD in Building 38).

Please direct all inquiries to darin.p.stgeorge.naf@army.mil or (508) 206-4098

Equipment Rental

Visit www.natick.armymwr.com and click on the 'Equipment Checkout Center' banner.



Open to all authorized patrons. Prices subject to change.

B.O.S.S. Painting Night



Twenty-five Soldiers from three U.S. Army units took part in a private painting workshop at Muse Paintbar on Sept. 13, 2025.

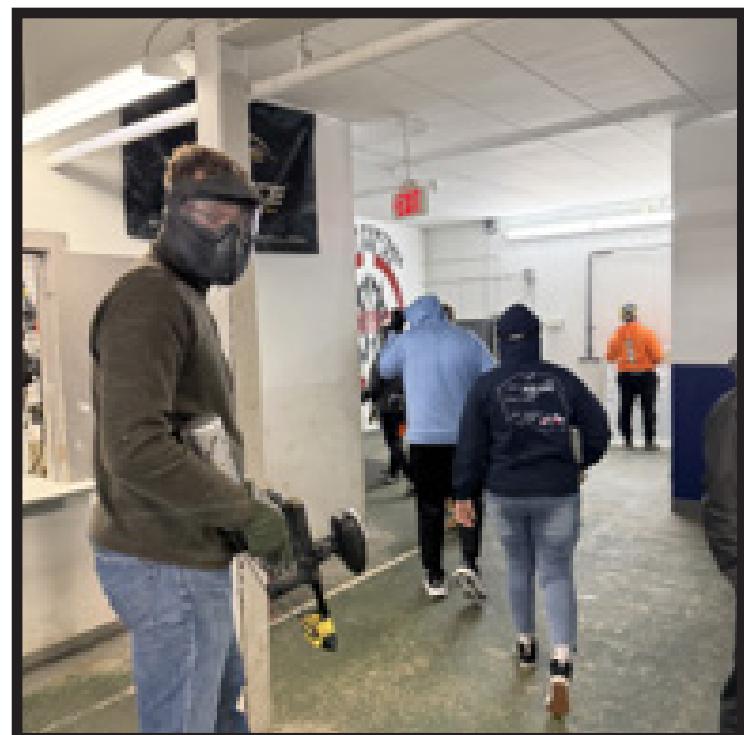
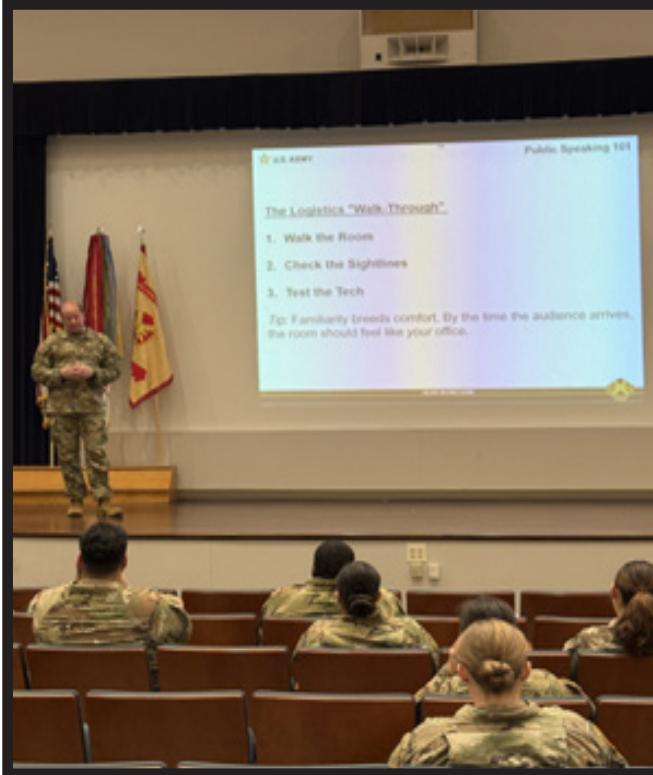
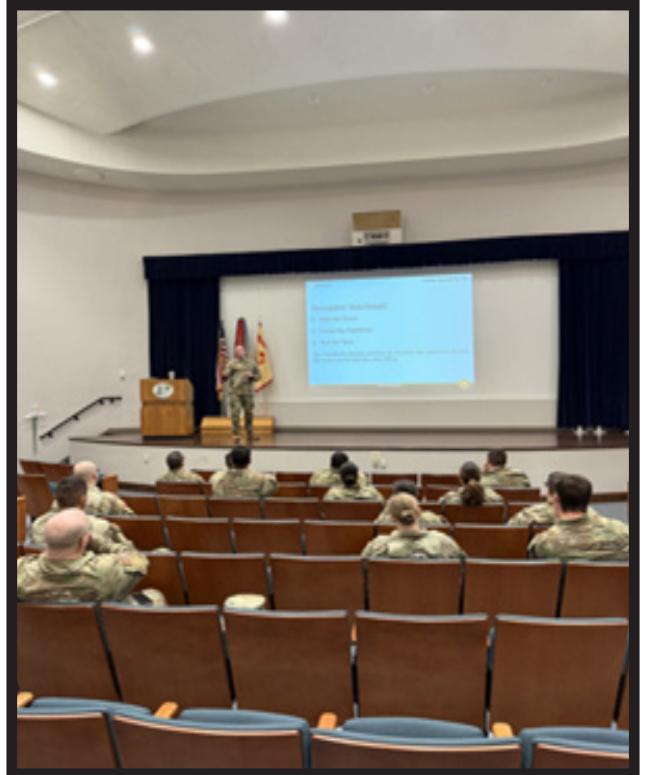
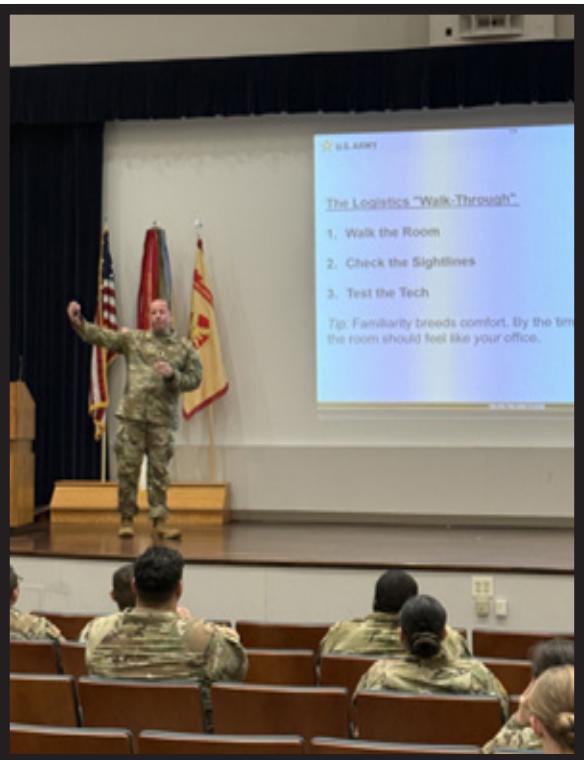
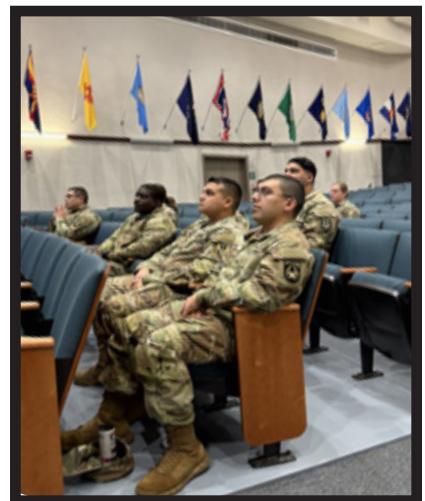
The event held by the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) program, had Soldiers from the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine (USARIEM) and the Human Research and Development Directorate (HRDD), DEVCOM Soldier Center..

Professional instructors provided step-by-step guidance as Soldiers created individual canvas paintings. According to organizers, the event was designed to teach stress management and resilience to heighten readiness and strengthen unit cohesion.



B.O.S.S. Public Speaking Workshop

Soldiers from Natick Soldier Systems Center participated in a Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Public Speaking Workshop, Dec. 10, 2025, at the Hunter Auditorium. The session, led by Command Sgt. Maj. Jeremy Bunkley, the U.S. Army Garrison - Natick command sergeant major, focused on improving confidence and effectiveness in communication by teaching techniques for organizing thoughts and managing nervousness.

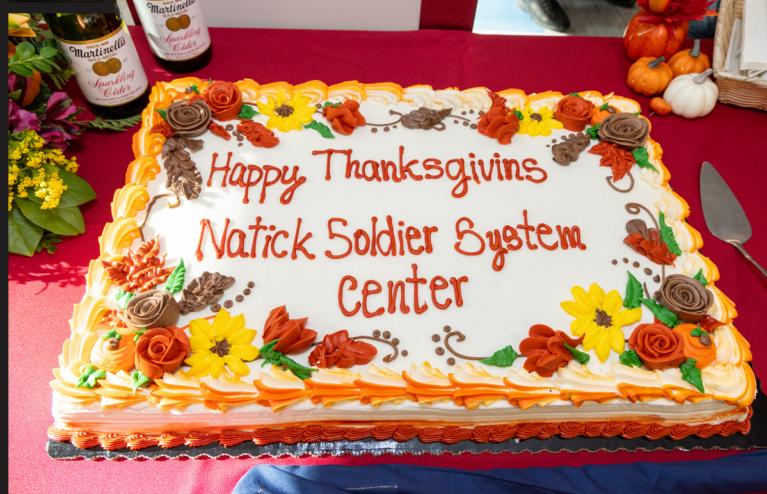
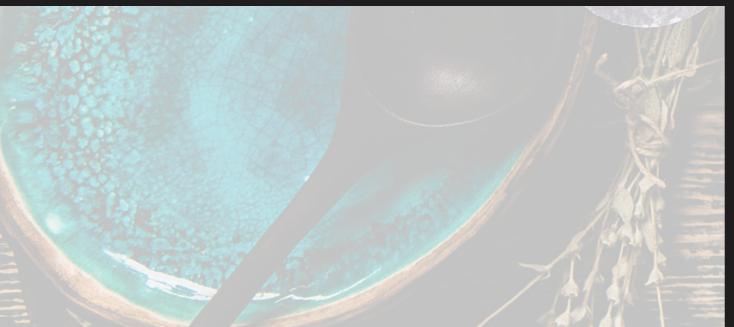


B.O.S.S. Paint Ball

Soldiers work together to accomplish objectives during a Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Battlefield Paintball event in Ashland, Massachusetts, Dec. 6, 2025. The activity reinforced leadership traits such as adaptability, trust, and decision-making while strengthening unit cohesion outside of the work environment.

The Holidays at NSSC

Turkey Trot 5K



The Holidays at NSSC



Holiday Tree Giveaway



Holiday Tree Lighting

The Holidays at NSSC



Holiday Meal



USO Lasagna Delivery

Community, by the Plateful

A huge thank you to the local nonprofit Lasagna Love for donating delicious meals to our service members and their families. This wonderful quality-of-life initiative was made possible through a fantastic collaboration with USAG-Natick Housing, the BOSS program, and the USO. It's a powerful and tasty example of our community in action

Col. Sharon Rosser Receives the 2024 Surgeon General Physician Associate Recognition Award. ‘It’s our duty to provide.’

Story by Maddi Langweil, USARIEM Public Affairs

Her days were filled with hours of studying, attending classes, fulfilling Army duties and caring for her family of four—an arduous life Col. Sharon Rosser had to become a physician associate for the Army, but today it's remembered as a steppingstone to earning her the 2024 Surgeon General Physician Associate Recognition Award.

The Surgeon General Physician Associate Recognition Award is a prestigious honor designed to recognize physician associates who have made notable efforts to military medicine that provides exceptional healthcare to soldiers and their families. This year at the U.S. Army Medical Center of Excellence at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, the 46 Surgeon General of the Army Lt. Gen. Mary K. Izquierre presented Rosser, Commander of the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine with this honor for her dedication to contributing extraordinary efforts to help the soldier and Army at large.

“Col. Rosser exemplifies a steadfast commitment to operational excellence and professional advocacy. As Commander of USARIEM, she leads a command that is critical to advancing human performance and environmental medicine, thereby ensuring our Soldiers remain ready to fight and win in any environment,” Izquierre said. “In her role as Deputy Physician Associate Consultant, she has been instrumental in driving policies that are transforming our Specialty Professional Corps for future conflicts.”

Before Rosser joined the Army, she knew she wanted to make a mark on the world and pave her own way. ‘But how?’ Was a question she had yet

to answer. As a foster child in South Dakota, she wanted to provide for herself and find her own way by learning and doing. She started with joining the National Guard during her Junior and Senior year of High School, and once graduated, she joined the Army with this “need to just go serve,” she said. Eager to start her life, Rosser joined the Army with the desire to be a combat medic but within six months, transitioned to active-duty Army as a Hospital Food Service Specialist at now joint base Lewis McChord in Washington. Soon after, she reenlisted for respiratory therapy.

“From the time I was little, I loved taking care of people and as a respiratory therapist I got to do that on a daily basis,” Rosser said. “I liked the balance that I had with respiratory therapy, but you’re doing the same thing over and over again. So, I wanted to marry taking care of people with lifelong learning.”

And so, she pivoted.

By the time Rosser received her commission as a Second Lieutenant through the Interservice Physician Associate Program, graduating with a Bachelor of Science Degree from University of Nebraska and a Master of Science in Physician Associate Studies from the University of Nebraska Medical Center and a Doctor of Science in Physician Associate Studies, she was already in the Army for 12 years.

Before serving as the commander of the USARIEM, Rosser served in notable positions in emergency medicine in hospitals to executive officer and director of hospital-based programs for the Medical Center of Excellence and director of comprehensive

pain management for the Office of The Surgeon General, and secretary of the general staff for the Office of the Surgeon General.

“That is what success looks like to me, moving the needle just a little bit forward in progress in a positive way. When the day comes that you can’t do that anymore, then I’m not contributing positively to change to leaving something better, then it’s time to look at a different career and phase of life.”

When deployed to Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan in support of operations, Rosser was the first key role model for combat medics. As an Army physician associate, it can be challenging to help as many people as possible, so in part of her job, she was training other soldiers to help.

“There were times where we had six causalities and there was one of me,” she added. To help more patients, she was responsible to train combat medics to be at the top of their training so that an injured team can be cared for. The growth of the medic, sustainment of the skills of the team and the ability to provide care on the battlefield was essential, Rosser shared.

The various roles, the schooling, the time away from family was challenging, but it was exceptionally rewarding for Rosser.

“To be able to take care of people is a selfless service and is one that has brought something new to my life each day,” she said. Earlier in her career, Rosser was part of the team that awarded the Surgeon General Physician Associate Recognition Award, so upon her nomination for the award, she was surprised.

“I’m humbled that the people that trusted me, who have mentored me and have marched alongside me believed in me and found me worthy,” she said. “I didn’t get here alone.”

With every experience—the easy and hard—has helped shaped her story into one that others will read about one day. It takes a “collective village” to become a leader and contribute to life.

Rosser’s Army Career began with a small leap of faith, and decades later, is one that she hasn’t forgotten about.

“There’s a pivotal moment when out in operations where you realize it’s not just about your craft but your ability to provide the best trauma or medical care in any situation with the resources we have,” she said. “It’s a selfless service that requires commitment on the good and hard days.”

“Col. Rosser embodies the innovation, leadership, and service that define Army Medicine. Her command of USARIEM and her mentorship as Deputy Consultant ensure our Physician Associates are ready for today’s missions and prepared for tomorrow’s challenges,” Izquierre said. “Our future is bright.”



Excellence in Action

Story by Keith Jackson, Deputy to the Garrison Commander USAG - Natick

At the heart of USAG Natick's operational success lies a powerhouse of precision, accountability, and strategic foresight, the Resource Management Office (RMO). Charged with the stewardship of financial and manpower resources, this team ensures every dollar and duty is aligned with statutory, regulatory, and policy requirements. Their work isn't just about numbers; it's about enabling mission readiness and organizational excellence. The USAG Natick RMO consists of a 6-person staff.

As FY25 ends, the Resource Management Team once again proves why they set the gold standard in fiscal and operational excellence. With precision and discipline, the team executed a seamless year-end closeout, validating obligations, reconciling accounts, and ensuring every dollar was accounted for in alignment with Army Audit Readiness standards. Their proactive approach to managing unliquidated obligations and unmatched disbursements minimized financial risk and maximized mission support. Now, with FY26 underway, the team has already laid a solid foundation for success: budgets are formulated, manpower requirements are aligned, and support agreements are in motion. Their commitment to strategic planning, compliance, and customer service ensures that USAG Natick enters the new fiscal year not just prepared but empowered.

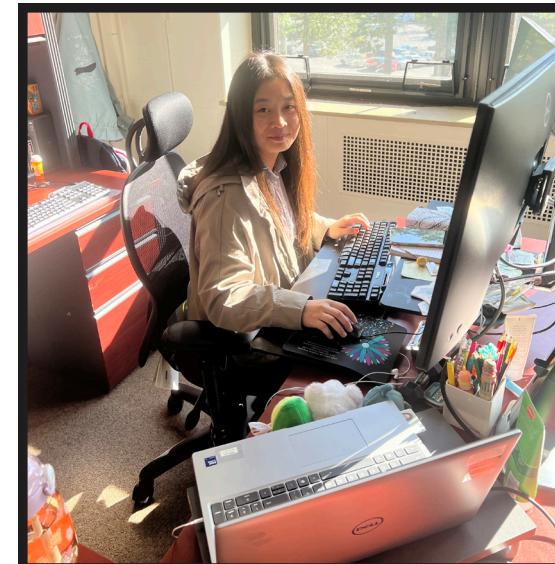
The Budget Branch exemplifies excellence in financial stewardship, serving as the strategic nerve center for all budgetary operations across the installation. With unmatched precision and dedication, the team formulates, analyzes, and executes budgets that directly support mission readiness and operational success. From contract management and cost analysis to travel systems and purchase card oversight, their work is both



comprehensive and mission focused. The Budget Branch doesn't just manage numbers, they empower decision-makers, safeguard resources, and drive performance with integrity and foresight. Their commitment to accuracy, transparency, and customer service sets the benchmark for resource management across the Army.

The Management Branch is the embodiment of manpower and agreements mastery, delivering strategic oversight with precision and purpose. This elite team orchestrates the planning, execution, and monitoring of personnel and equipment authorizations, ensuring every resource aligns with mission demands. Their expertise in crafting and negotiating Support Agreements, MOUs, and MOAs guarantees that inter-service partnerships are not only compliant but also financially sound. From future-year manpower programming to temporary IT and wireless device management, the branch operates with a forward-thinking mindset and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Their work doesn't just support the Garrison, it strengthens its foundation, enabling every unit to operate with clarity, accountability, and confidence.

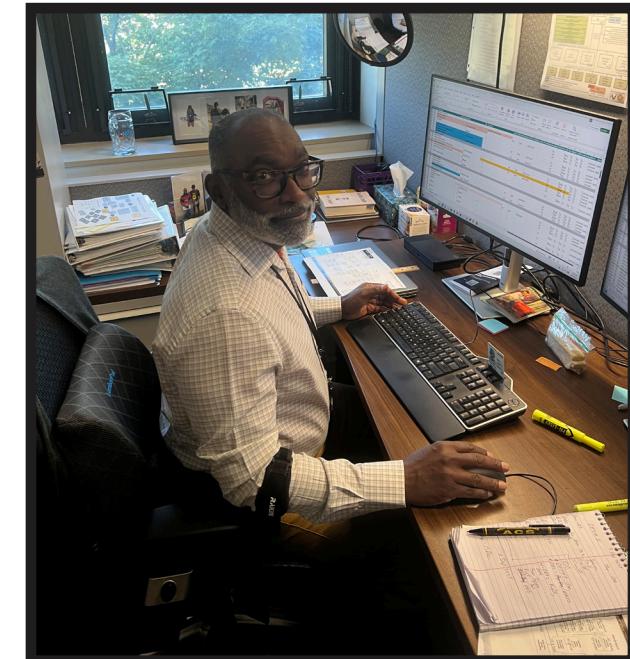
The Financial Operations Branch stands as a pillar



of integrity, precision, and accountability in military financial management. This team ensures every transaction, obligation, and reconciliation meets the highest standards of fiscal discipline. Their relentless focus on Army Audit Readiness drives the implementation and monitoring of the Statement of Budgetary Resources (SBR) controls, while their expertise in managing unliquidated obligations, unmatched disbursements, and aged receivables safeguards Garrison's financial health. Through daily fund status monitoring, contingent liability reporting, and seamless integration with GFEBS, the branch not only prevents over-obligations but also empowers leadership with accurate, actionable financial data. Their work is more than accounting. It's a commitment to excellence that reinforces trust, transparency, and mission success across USAG Natick.

The Resource Management Team exemplifies what it means to serve with precision, integrity, and excellence. Their tireless efforts ensure that every resource whether financial, human, or technological is optimized to support the mission. In a world where accountability and efficiency are paramount, this team stands as a model of what right looks like.

Thank you and we appreciate all you do for the service members, community partners, and civilians on the installation.



NSSC holds annual 9/11 Remembrance



The Backbone of Excellence: Spotlight on USAG Natick's PAO, EEO, Safety, and IMO Offices

Story by Keith Jackson, Deputy to the Garrison Commander USAG - Natick

At the heart of the U.S. Army Garrison Natick lies a network of dedicated professionals whose work often goes unnoticed but never unappreciated. The Public Affairs Office (PAO), Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Office, Safety Office, and Information Management Office (IMO) form the backbone of the installation's daily operations, ensuring that mission success is supported by integrity, safety, and seamless communication.

Storytellers of Service - The PAO team is the voice of USAG Natick, crafting narratives that honor the service, innovation, and community spirit of the installation. From press releases to social media updates, they ensure transparency and connection between the garrison and the public. Their behind-the-scenes coordination of events, media engagements, and internal communications keeps everyone informed and inspired.

Champions of Fairness - The EEO Office upholds the Army's commitment to a workplace free of discrimination. Their work is not just about compliance; it's about cultivating a culture of respect and opportunity. Through training, mediation, and policy guidance, they empower employees and foster an environment where everyone can thrive.

Guardians of Well-Being - Safety isn't just a checklist, it's a mindset. The Safety Office at Natick works tirelessly to ensure that every soldier, civilian, and contractor operates in a secure environment. From hazard assessments to emergency preparedness, their proactive approach prevents incidents and protects lives. Their efforts are especially vital in a research-heavy installation like Natick, where innovation must be matched with vigilance.

The Digital Lifeline - In today's tech-driven world, the IMO Office is the silent engine behind every email, database, and secure connection. They manage the infrastructure that keeps Natick running from cybersecurity to troubleshooting, they ensure that information flows safely and efficiently. Their responsiveness and expertise make them indispensable to every department.

Unsung Heroes, Unmatched Impact - Their impact may not always be visible in headlines or ceremonies, but it resonates in every mission accomplished, every challenge overcome, and every life made safer, fairer, and more informed. The PAO, EEO, Safety, and IMO teams are not just support functions, they are the backbone of excellence at USAG Natick. In their quiet dedication lies a profound truth: greatness is often found not in the spotlight, but in the unwavering commitment to serve with integrity, honor, and heart. These unsung heroes don't just support the mission they elevate it.

Let's give credit where it's due to the teams who make excellence look effortless.

The PAO, EEO, Safety, and IMO teams don't just support USAG Natick. They elevate it. They are the quiet force behind our precision. The steady hand behind our professionalism. The heartbeat of our values and in their unwavering commitment, we find something extraordinary. True greatness doesn't seek the spotlight. It simply shows up, every single day with integrity, honor, and heart.

Thank you, PAO, EEO, Safety, and IMO teams. We appreciate all you do for the service members and civilians on the installation.



Navy Lab Tests Kitchen Innovations to Help Sustain Ships Longer at Sea

By Katie Lange, Pentagon News

As the Navy looks toward extending endurance aboard vessels in contested logistics environments, sailors who've served on any ship or submarine know the options available on the mess deck can depend on the ingredients and equipment available.

If a ship is sailing in a remote part of the Pacific Ocean, for example, it might not have many options to stop for replenishment.

With those restrictions in mind, a lab in Natick, Massachusetts, tests recipes and evaluates commercial kitchen equipment specifically for naval vessel galleys to help make life easier for culinary specialists and to give more options to sailors on board.

The lab is part of the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center's Combat Feeding Division. It has two Navy project officers who spend their days researching and developing new recipes and equipment for the Navy Standard Core Menu.

"Those are developed specifically with the equipment that's actually on board a ship in mind, and the limited ingredients they have," explained project officer Rick Watts, who was a Navy cook for 26 years. "The Navy uses ... a very small list of actual ingredients that they can procure and bring on board the ship."

Because of these logistical restrictions, the Navy menu differs from the Armed Forces Recipe Service, which does most of the recipe development for War Department personnel and dining facilities.

The Navy is focused on finding options that can help ships remain at sea longer without needing replenishment. For example, project officers have been creating recipes using freeze-dried products



such as ground beef, chicken and sausage that have a 25-year shelf life. They can be stored anywhere on the ship, opening up freezer space for other items and, therefore, keeping ships at sea longer.

"It's not necessarily new technology, but it's new-to-the-Navy technology," said Watts, who added they've demonstrated how to use the freeze-dried items in dishes for several ships now.

Automated Innovations Freeing Up Time for Other Tasks

Finding acceptable equipment can be a challenge of its own due to power requirements, water requirements and sheer size — whether it will fit through a submarine hatch, for example. To adjust for those needs, Watts and his colleague often look toward commercial off-the-shelf appliances and tools that are going to overcome three obstacles: personnel shortages, obsolete equipment and lack of training.

"The first thing we look at is what's already existing and how we can make it better," Watts said. He explained that they're currently experimenting with a fully automated cleaning system to attach to ice cream machines already on aircraft carriers, cutting

the time and personnel required to manually clean each machine.

They're also testing a flavor-injection system attachment that can create combinations for seafaring ice cream lovers.

"It's a more fun one, less functional, but it's all about crew morale once you get on board the ship," Watts said.

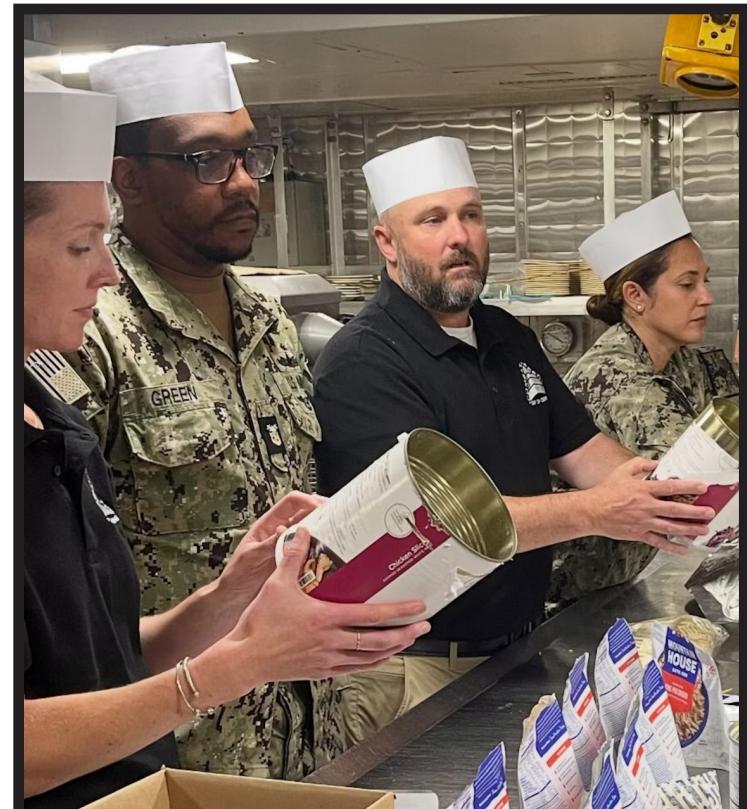
Another new innovation they're testing is the Breadbot, an automated, industrial-scale breadmaker to be used on large ships that have to feed thousands of sailors. Watts said the technology could cut down on the time and hands needed for large-scale production.

"This machine can make up to 10 loaves an hour. So, we figure in a 23-hour day, with an hour to clean, we could probably pump out 230 loaves," he said. "All you need is one sailor at a point to load in one of four flavored mixes, and then at some point, empty out the cabinet. Other than that, the machine is going to do everything."

A third item that's been tested and is going through the long process of getting approval for implementation is a space-saving, efficiency-promoting, preprogrammed tilt skillet that also serves as a pasta cooker, a deep fryer and a grill.

"If I wanted to boil pasta, I come into the preprogrammed pasta setting, and now it's automatically filling, automatically heating," Watts explained while demonstrating the machine. "Once the water is fully filled and boiling, it'll set an alarm to tell me to load product. [When] I hit the checkmark, this is going to automatically lower, completely cook the pasta, raise it up, and then it'll alarm again. I don't have to have a sailor standing over this and watching it."

Even the smallest innovation can cut time and effort, allowing sailors to focus on more important assignments. At the Natick Navy lab, their work is focused on streamlining daily culinary tasks and making better meals for crew members.



Culinary specialists aboard the USS Makin Island train on how to use freeze-dried foods with Rick Watts, center right, a project officer at the Navy lab of the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center's Combat Feeding Division, Sept. 30, 2025. Freeze-dried meats and other items are being used to keep ships at sea longer. (Photo by Rick Watts, U.S. Navy)



The Navy lab at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center's Combat Feeding Division in Natick, Mass., July 7, 2025, is experimenting with a fully automated cleaning system to attach to ice cream machines already on aircraft carriers, cutting the time and personnel required to manually clean each machine. (Photo by Katie Lange, DOW)

How Military Chefs Find New Recipes, Techniques to Expand Culinary Knowledge

By Katie Lange, Pentagon News

Military cooks and chefs often have the daunting task of cooking for hundreds, if not thousands, of their hungry counterparts. Making tasty, innovative and enjoyable meals on a massive scale isn't easy.

Luckily, military culinary specialists, as they're known, have the Armed Forces Recipe Service to use as a guide. The service's food technologists, chefs and dietitians develop recipes for dining facilities on land, at sea and on the go, and they've already mapped out how to scale-up recipes to feed large contingents.

Based at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center's Combat Feeding Division in Natick, Massachusetts, the recipe service uses input from the Joint Service Recipe Committee to develop recipes and guidelines that are added to a digital recipe book for military cooks and chefs to expand their culinary knowledge.

The recipe service currently has an index of more than 3,300 recipe cards, which include variations of recipes and the diverse ways to cook them. Separate guideline cards give detailed advice on food preparation, including conversion charts and how to use assorted pieces of equipment, as well as explanations of how various ingredients, such as anti-browning agents, work.

"Sometimes the guideline cards can be about knife skills," said Matthew Kominsky, a Combat Feeding Division food technologist. "We also have some culinary trainings. Some of them include cooking with whole grains or ... how to use other herbs, spices and flavorings to boost flavor without your fat, salt and sugar."

'Going for Green' With More Flexibility

While comfort foods like macaroni and cheese, fries and a burger will always be available, the Armed



A Korean pulled pork dish created by the Armed Forces Recipe Service at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., is one of many new recipes that food technologists are creating to bring diversity to menus at chow halls across the military. (Photo by Krys Peer, U.S. Army)

Forces Recipe Service is trying to provide more alternative, healthy options for a newer generation.

Over the past decade, the service has worked to transform its recipe collection through the Go for Green Program — a color-coded system that categorizes options much like a traffic light: green means healthy, yellow means intermediate and red leans toward the not-so-healthy options.

"We were finding that a lot of the recipes in the collection were weighted more towards that red and yellow, with a small sliver of green," Kominsky said. "So, over a five-year project, we were able to revise, update and expand the recipe collection. Now, it's ... about 50% green, another 35% yellow and then 15% red."

Some of the newer additions include lean proteins such as a lemon-chive salmon, an onion-and-lemon-baked cod dish and a lean-meat Philly cheesesteak

power bowl. When it comes to breakfast, service experts have also been thinking outside the box.

"Breakfast is traditionally a very heavy meal, especially in America," Kominsky said. "So, I did a quinoa and almond berry salad that's dressed with lemon and honey. It's a whole grain option, something different than, say, oatmeal."

By looking at what's trending and popular in restaurants, the service has also introduced more plant-based recipes and pushed to expand global flavors. For instance, congee, a popular Southeast Asian breakfast that's akin to rice porridge, has been added. The service also tweaked some grits recipes to mix in quinoa, adding some "stealth health," Kominsky said.

"A recipe I'm working on right now is birria-style tacos," Kominsky said. "[We're] giving soldiers a little taste of what they might find out at restaurants that they go to and bringing that into the dining facilities."

Expanding and Revising

The recipe service is also applying that outside-the-box thinking to food locations, expanding in recent years to offer service members more flexible options such as food trucks and grab-and-go kiosks.

"The Navy has a big food truck operation," Kominsky said, explaining that they're trying to make life easier for busy service members. "Where they're stationed on their Navy bases, it [can be] too labor-intensive to get to a dining facility and use some of their meal entitlements, so it's sort of like bringing the food to where the warfighter is."

Kominsky said recipes get revisited on a rolling basis every five to 10 years, especially if there's feedback.

"From 2017 to 2021, [there] was a lot of that 50s, 60s style of dining — of Jell-O treat salads and outdated combinations," Kominsky said. "We're phasing a lot of those out."

When creating a new recipe, the team will do a few small-scale tests to hone in the flavor before



A quinoa and almond berry salad dressed with lemon and honey is one of many new recipes that food technologists at the Armed Forces Recipe Service at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., created to bring healthier options to menus at chow halls across the military. (Photo by Krys Peer, U.S. Army)

scaling-up to ensure it is transferable to large-scale dining facilities.

"[There are] considerations for equipment, for ingredients, for preparation techniques to make it less labor intensive," Kominsky said.

The recipes, which are available online, include options for eight-10 people, as well as the scaled-up versions.

Once Combat Feeding Division food technologists are satisfied with each recipe, trained sensory panelists — both military personnel and civilians — will test the items and provide feedback.



What to Expect in the Next Iteration of MREs

Story by Katie Lange, Pentagon News

The old saying “variety is the spice of life” is especially true when it comes to food. While service members in combat will eat whatever they’re given, having good meals that match what they might eat at home is important for morale and readiness.

Every year, food scientists at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center’s Combat Feeding Division in Natick, Massachusetts, work to develop new components for meals ready-to-eat. They’re based on warfighter feedback received by each service to add variety or replace unpopular items. Researchers also look at trends in the commercial sector to see what might play well on newer menus.

What's Coming, What's Going

The next iteration of MREs is MRE 46, which is expected to come out in 2026. The menu's developers said that in MRE 46, they plan to replace the beef taco filling, pork sausage patty and jalapeno pepper jack beef patty — all of which were not rated high among surveyed service members — with a Cuban-style beef picadillo with vegetables, buffalo-style chicken, and a Thai-style red curry with chicken and rice.

“Buffalo chicken is something that [soldiers] have requested. It's a popular item ... so we're hoping



Dozens of U.S. service members assigned to the East Africa Response Force and Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa out of Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, consume meals, ready-to-eat, or MREs, for lunch at Cooperative Security Location Entebbe in Uganda, Feb. 24, 2025.

(Courtesy photo, U.S. Army)

big coffee drinkers, but the newer generation of soldiers are not.”

As replacements, researchers looked to develop new beverage options, as well as energy chews, energy gels, caffeinated gum and even caffeinated jelly beans.

Edwards said service members also requested a larger, more durable towelette.

“Any new item that we get that can help bring variety and increase acceptability is important,” Edwards said. “We know that eating an MRE isn't everyone's No. 1 thing, but we want to make it safe to eat — that's our No. 1 priority — and then to make it taste good as well.”

Like with the new close combat assault ration, developers also focused on reducing the weight

that this item will be longstanding,” explained Julie Edwards, a Combat Feeding Division senior technologist and registered dietitian.

More protein-filled snacks will round out the MREs, including new s'mores recovery bars and freeze-dried chocolate peanut butter bites. Another big focus of the newest iteration is more caffeinated products.

“What we've noticed is caffeine is one of the least consumed items in the MRE,” Edwards said. “Previous generations were

and volume of the new MREs without cutting calories or nutritional value.

Passing the Military Grade

All new items being considered for MREs must meet shelf-life requirements before they can be evaluated by warfighters, meaning they have to still be edible after spending six months in 100 degrees Fahrenheit and three years at 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

Edwards said a lot of commercial items that could be considered for MREs wouldn't pass muster. For example, she said it's been a challenge to find snacks — aside from nuts — that provide 10 grams or more of protein. Many of them have a chemical reaction over time that gives them an unappetizing appearance. She used beef jerky as an example.

“I know in the commercial sector, you see lots of beef jerky that's shelf stable. However, it has a very short commercial shelf life,” Edwards said. “What happens to jerky over time is it gets dark in color and becomes unappealing. So, we had a challenge of finding jerkies that meet our shelf-life requirements.”

MREs also have to meet specific nutritional requirements under the DOW-wide Army Regulation 40-25. Those requirements are different than nutritional needs for civilians and can often depend on environmental factors.

After shelf-life requirements are met, operational testing can begin. Teams of researchers go out and work with warfighters in the field to determine what they like, then behavioral psychologists hold focus groups to elaborate on the data. Edwards said it's important they get honest feedback from everyone at every rank.

“We want you to give us this feedback because it does help. It does make a difference,” she said. “Operational tests are very expensive and time-consuming. So, we want to make sure that we're being good stewards of investing money in the right areas.”



Food scientists at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center's Combat Feeding Division in Natick, Mass., work constantly to develop new meals, ready-to-eat components, such as those seen on this display shelf, July 7, 2025. (Photo by Katie Lange, DOW)

From there, the feedback is analyzed and presented to service leaders who are part of the Joint Services Operational Rations Forum. Those folks decide which new items to implement.

“From start to finish, it's about a four-year process until the soldier actually sees [the new meals],” Edwards said.

Meanwhile, items for MRE 47, which is expected to come out sometime in 2027, are already in development. One service request was to include more plant-based items, Edwards said. For snacking, the Combat Feeding Division has developed plant-based animal crackers, a new recovery bar, a protein bar and fruit-flavored cereal. Edwards said the four vegetarian meals currently available to troops will be replaced with plant-based entrees.

There are kosher and halal meals available for service members, too, but they're managed by Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support, not the Combat Feeding Division.

From MREs to Supplements: How Experts Feed Troops' Evolving Nutritional Needs

Story by Katie Lange, Pentagon News

Many comparisons are made between the diet and nutritional needs of service members and those of serious athletes. However, service members face unique constraints and challenges in their operational environments that render those needs very different.

For instance, athletes know the times and specific details of their events, for which they can prepare. Soldiers, sailors, airmen, guardians and Marines? Not so much.

Service members need to be ready at a moment's notice for anything that comes their way. They operate in extreme cold, extreme heat and at high altitudes, and they might be doing so with very little sleep for prolonged periods of time. All these factors can create unique stressors that call for varying nutritional requirements.



Air National Guard Security Forces specialists eat cold-weather meals ready to eat in a thermal shelter built using limited supplies and materials found in nature during the ANG's Cold Weather Operations Course at Camp Ripley Training Center, Minn., Feb. 5, 2025.

(Photo by Audra Flanagan, Air National Guard)

At the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Massachusetts, experts in the War Department Combat Feeding Division develop rations and packaging to support warfighters and stay ahead of their constantly shifting nutritional needs. From garrison-sized meals served at mess halls to single-serving rations eaten in the field, these experts research and engineer food for the entire department.

They also engineer new, energy-efficient ways to field food, from finding new kitchen equipment for submarines to creating portable gear for expeditionary units, or even packaging food into tubes for pilots flying at the edge of space. Other CFD experts are working on ways to protect food and water from contamination.



At the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., experts in the DOW Combat Feeding Division develop rations for extreme experiences, including food packaged in tubes for pilots flying at the edge of space.

(Photo by Katie Lange, Pentagon News)

The CFD works closely with the Military Nutrition Division at the nearby Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine. Together, both divisions

are focused on optimizing warfighter performance, improving their recovery and promoting overall health through nutrition.

Every year, each service reports its operational challenges related to field feeding to the DOW Combat Feeding Research and Engineering Program, which turns those challenges into research and engineering projects for the CFD to address. Those projects require expert knowledge in various fields, from dietitians and physiologists to biologists and engineers.

The process usually begins at the MND, which focuses more on the physiological side of the research. There, experts study various nutrients and food formulations to see what effects they have on the warfighter.



Two volunteers complete moderate-intensity exercise during a 36-hour residence period in the hypobaric chamber during a U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Research Military Nutrition Division nutrition intervention study in Natick, Mass. Prior to entering the chamber, the volunteers consumed a nutritional supplement or a placebo for 12 days.

(Photo by Carey Phillips, USARIEM Public Affairs)

Analyzing Ingredients for Warfighter Benefit
Currently, MND and CFD researchers are studying nutrients such as tart cherry and essential amino acids, which may improve muscle recovery and endurance. But before scientists can make a product from those nutrients, they need to know how the body uses them first.

At the MND's metabolic kitchen, nutrition experts plan diets for soldier volunteers by enhancing prototype ration products with nutrients that are being studied.

"We can feed [them] in a very controlled setting to ensure that no other variables impact our findings," explained Army Maj. Alan Dawson, the division's military deputy chief.

They also study warfighters in training or out in the field to evaluate their environmental stressors. "We're seeing how nutrition affects stress, their ability to exercise, their tolerance to a lack of sleep or extreme temperatures," explained Army Sgt. Noah Carrier, a medical lab technician with a molecular biology degree.

Carrier is one of about 60 soldiers stationed within the detachment. He's only been there for a few months, but so far, he said it's been a unique experience.

"The human race's relationship with food is the oldest thing that we have, but they're still discovering something new about how we can optimize performance and keep people sustained in stressful conditions," he said. "I've already learned stuff that blows my mind that these people are researching."

The studies help the MND define warfighter-specific nutrition requirements and recommendations. The CFD then takes that information to develop rations for the warfighter to enjoy in the field.



Marine Corps Maj. Philip Beckmann, right, helps serve food to Marines during cold-weather training in preparation for exercise Joint Viking 25 in Setermoen, Norway, Feb. 17, 2025.

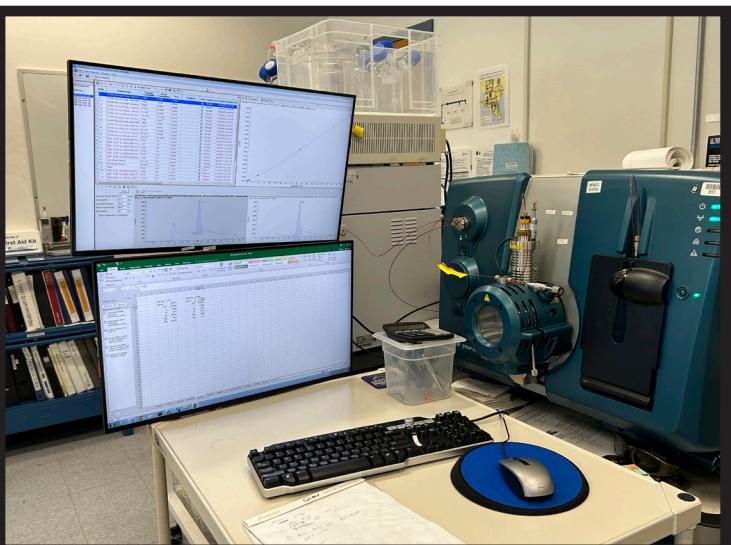
(Photo by Marine Corps Cpl. Alexander Peterson)

From MREs to Supplements: Cont.



Recent iterations of the Performance Readiness Bar are on display at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., July 7, 2025. The bars are packed with supplemental calcium and vitamin D to optimize bone health and prevent injuries among basic trainees.

(Photo by Katie Lange, Pentagon News)



Inside the Nutrition Analysis Lab at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., researchers analyze the components of ration prototypes to ensure their nutrient levels meet DOW-wide Army Regulation 40-25 requirements.

(Courtesy photo, U.S. Army)

From Studies to Sustenance

Natick's food scientists look for ways to make warfighter rations energy- and nutrient-dense to help avoid negative energy balance — when a person can't eat enough to maintain physical or cognitive performance, explained MND chief Dr. James McClung. It's an issue associated with poor performance and an increased risk of injury.

One ration created to fit this need was the Performance Readiness Bar, which is currently available to service members undergoing initial entry training. Researchers discovered that if they packed a ration bar with supplemental calcium and vitamin D, new recruits could eat one a day in the evening to optimize bone health and prevent injuries that had been reported among basic trainees.

"The body tends to rebuild during sleep ... so it's really important to provide nutrients prior to this time," McClung said. "The Performance Readiness Bar ... delivers protein, energy and other nutrients so they can be absorbed and utilized overnight."

Once a ration prototype is created, its various components — from proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals to moisture content and pH levels — are quickly analyzed at an in-house lab. That ensures their levels meet DOW-wide Army Regulation 40-25 requirements, which are different than nutritional needs for civilians and can often depend on environmental factors.

"In the heat, the demand for electrolytes may be greater. Cold oftentimes elicits shivering, and shivering requires energy and may cause one to require differing levels of macronutrients," explained McClung. He said altitude can also affect levels of nutrients such as carbohydrates and iron.

Analysts from the CFD also determine how nutrients can degrade over time in storage.

"We want to make sure ... the warfighter gets the full package of what they need to perform optimally," explained Lauren O'Connor, the branch chief for the division's Food Engineering and Analysis Team.



At the Combat Feeding Division in the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., a sensory lab is staffed by trained civilian panelists who evaluate replenishment rations from industry partners to make sure shelf-life requirements are met and to look at specifications such as flavor, odor, appearance and texture. (Photo by Katie Lange, Pentagon News)

It's All About the Taste

Nutrition is important. How food tastes, however, is an even bigger factor.

"It's not nutrition if they don't eat it. Rations need to taste good to encourage warfighters to consume them," explained Julie McNiff, branch chief of the CFD's Functional Food and Nutrition Intervention Branch.

With that in mind, the CFD houses a sensory lab staffed by trained civilian panelists who evaluate replenishment rations from industry partners every few months. They make sure shelf-life requirements are met and look at specifications such as flavor, odor, appearance and texture.

"They've got a very extensive lexicon of terms to describe the food, so while you or I might say sour, they have about 10 different words that mean sour," said Dr. Erin Gaffney-Stomberg, division chief of the CFD. "It's a very highly scientific process."

Once a round of testing is complete, reports are collected to determine if the items meet requirements. "If this is deemed acceptable, then it becomes our new product standard," said Jill Bates, a registered dietitian who runs the sensory evaluation lab.

Bates said they never know what items they might get from day to day, adding, "Sometimes it's eggs, or sometimes it's candy and hot sauce."

While about 10 to 12 trained panelists will do a round of testing, soldiers stationed at the Natick base will also get to do some evaluations, strictly to see if they like the product.

"After we've done all our technical testing ... we use the soldiers and the warfighters just for acceptance," Bates said. "Their opinion ... is really the ultimate goal of why we're here."

"Every single product that is considered for insertion into an operational ration platform needs to be warfighter tested and approved," Gaffney-Stomberg said.

The CFD also partners closely with the Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support to ensure rations meet DLA's standards before industry partners can begin to mass produce them.



A side-by-side comparison shows the size difference between meals ready to eat; the First Strike Ration and the new Close Combat Assault Ration in a display room at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., July 7, 2025. (Photo by Katie Lange, DOW)

The Importance of Shelf Stability

Aside from just packing rations with the right amounts of calories, protein and carbohydrates, those rations also have to withstand various

From MREs to Supplements: *Cont.*

environmental conditions.

For example, meals ready to eat, known as MREs, and other rations are stored in a variety of places throughout the world for a certain amount of time before they're rotated out. The CFD has to make sure any items they create can be shelf-stable for three years at 80 degrees Fahrenheit and for six months at 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Active ingredients in those rations have to be retained during that time.

"The typical consumer market doesn't have these requirements," Gaffney-Stomberg said.



A 2nd Cavalry Regiment soldier loads boxes of meals ready to eat onto a tactical vehicle during preventative maintenance checks and services in preparation for exercise Saber Guardian 25 on Rose Barracks in Vilseck, Germany, June 5, 2025.
(Photo by Spc. Sar Paw, U.S. Army)

"[We spend] quite a bit of time ... looking at how you can actually stabilize those active ingredients so that they're still active by the time they might get out into the field, which could be potentially years after it's been processed," McNiff said.

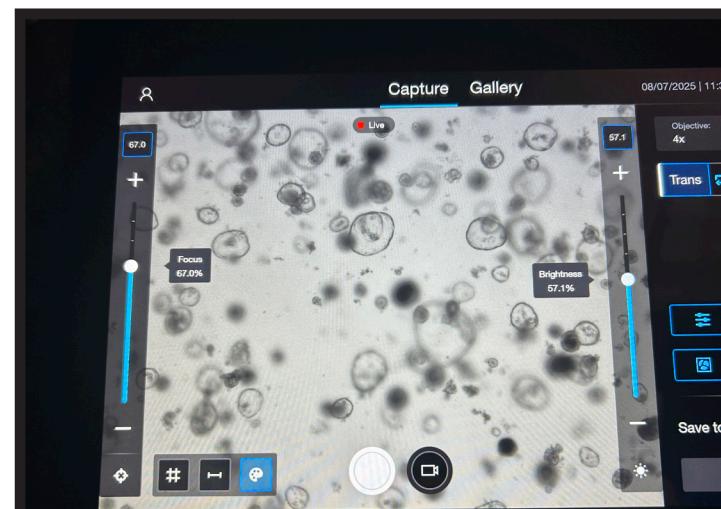
As an example, McNiff said the tart cherry research proved difficult for shelf stability because some

of the active ingredients are susceptible to degradation in high heat and storage.

"One of our food scientists worked for about two years to see if she could make it shelf-stable and get that ingredient retained," McNiff said. "The good news is, she has."

Popular probiotics have also been a challenge for shelf-life requirements, so researchers in the CFD's Integrative Physiology Lab are currently testing an inactivated form of them called postbiotics to see if they're more stable but still result in beneficial effects. To do so, biologists are using an intestinal organoid — "mini guts," as they call it — that responds like human intestines. So far, they've seen positive effects on how human-like cells respond to postbiotics.

"We are one of the few laboratories — if not the only laboratory in the [Department of War] — doing this type of work," explained research biologist Greg Weber, who leads the Integrative Physiology Lab.



The Integrative Physiology Lab at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., is one of the few DOW laboratories where biologists can use an intestinal organoid to see how it responds to various nutrients, much like a human intestine.
(Photo by Katie Lange, Pentagon News)

Once products are developed, project officers will focus on one particular ration platform — whether it be the MRE, the close combat assault ration, group rations or supplemental bars — and constantly look to update products according to consumer trends, new products on the market or what warfighters like to consume.



At the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., packaging is engineered to allow very little water and oxygen to permeate its barriers, helping to preserve food longer and keep it safe from potential contaminants.

(Photo by Katie Lange, Pentagon News)

Packaging: A Key Component

Gaffney-Stomberg said a common misconception is that military rations are full of preservatives and chemicals to maintain shelf stability. That's not true.

"A big part of the shelf stability is actually the packaging itself," she said, explaining that the packaging is engineered to allow very little water and oxygen to permeate its barriers, helping to preserve food longer and keep it safe from potential contaminants.

When it comes to the logistics of transporting food in combat, service members often carry all their sustenance with them. That weight adds up, as does leftover packaging waste after the meals have been eaten. CFD engineers aim to reduce those burdens by finding new materials to make packaging as small and light as possible.

"From a food chemistry standpoint, there's a lot of challenge to get all of that nutrition in the smallest footprint, be shelf-stable and taste good," Gaffney-Stomberg said.

It's a challenge both divisions have accepted to optimize warfighter performance and keep our troops healthy for any fight that comes their way.

How Smaller, Nutrient-Dense Rations Support Changing Warfighter Needs

Story by Katie Lange, Pentagon News

War Department experts constantly research and implement new technologies to improve the food that supports service members' ever-changing nutritional needs. A few new creations are helping to optimize warfighter performance during combat and recovery.

The future of expeditionary warfare is currently focused on small, self-sustained units who can operate for extended periods of time in combat areas where food supplies may not be established. One new product supporting that concept is the close combat assault ration, which was made available for the services to procure through the Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support in July.

The CCAR replaces the First Strike Ration that provided 72 hours of nutrition and was first fielded a decade ago. Since then, experts determined the FSR was too bulky for those longer missions.

"The close combat assault ration is 17% lighter and 39% smaller," explained Dr. Erin Gaffney-Stomberg, division chief of the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center's Combat Feeding Division in Natick, Massachusetts, that created the ration. "From a nutrition standpoint, they're pretty much equivalent."

Because the CCAR is more nutrient-dense, however, it includes five days of nutrition instead of three, meaning more sustenance for longer missions and more space in service members' rucksacks for other combat necessities.

The Science Behind Smaller, Nutrient-Richer Rations

To make a smaller, lighter ration, developers increased fat content, which raises energy density, according to food scientists at the Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine's Military Nutrition Division.



A side-by-side comparison depicts the size difference between the First Strike Ration and the new Close Combat Assault Ration in a display room at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., July 7, 2025. The new ration is now available for all military services to procure.
(Courtesy photo, U.S. Army)

During the CCAR's development, MND researchers studied special operators in training who were given a prototype CCAR to determine if its higher fat content would adversely affect their performance.

"High fat eating ... can bring on gastrointestinal distress, or sometimes it can just impact the amount you want to eat," explained Julie McNiff, chief of the Combat Feeding Division's Functional Food and Nutrition Intervention Branch.

Half of the participants received the CCAR, while the other half were given the older FSR. Researchers then measured their performance at the beginning and end of the study.

"We were able to validate that having the regular 30% fat [in the first strike] versus the 40% fat in the

CCAR had no impact on their performance," McNiff said, meaning the higher fat content in the CCAR did not negatively affect their work. It was one of many successful steps toward fielding the CCAR.



A soldier on a march puts part of a Close Combat Assault Ration into his pants pocket, demonstrating how the product can be carried on the go. The CCAR is the Department of War's newest ration that's smaller and lighter than its predecessor, the First Strike Ration.
(Photo by DEVCOM Soldier Center)

Updates Based on Input

By working with Marines and soldiers on the CCAR development, researchers determined combat troops really wanted an entree, something the First Strike Ration — made up of only on-the-go, snackable items — was lacking.

"We looked at the MRE — the meals ready-to-eat — entrees," Gaffney-Stomberg said of the research. "We reformulated a couple of those to be even more energy dense, then changed the packaging so it's in a spout pouch, meaning warfighters can tear off the top and eat it on the go."

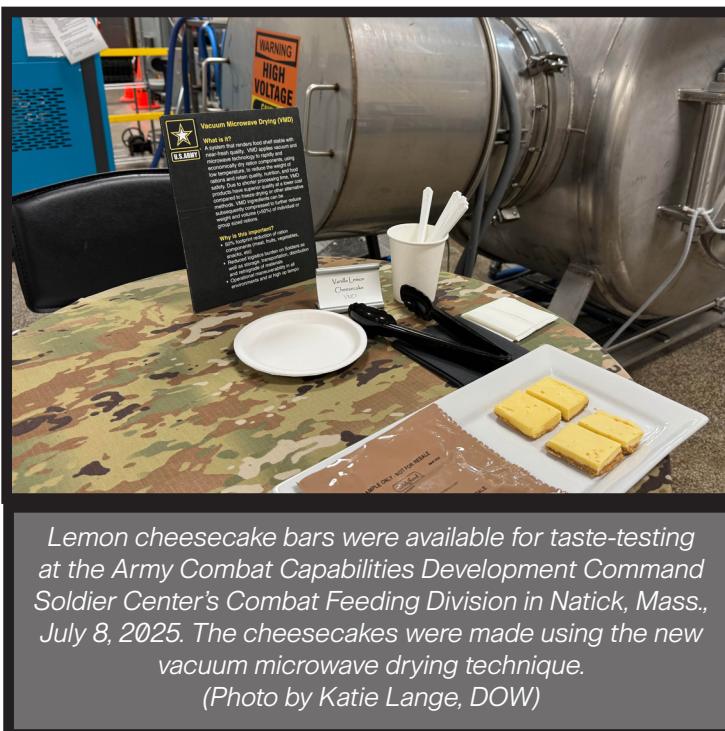
During a blind study comparing the CCAR to the FSR, researchers said the newer ration was well-received by service members.

"The soldiers actually preferred the close combat assault ration. They consumed more of [it]," Gaffney-Stomberg said. "Their energy intake was greater,

and they really were well-liked."

Surveyed service members also told researchers they wanted more than just dried and dehydrated goods in their ration packages, despite the added bulk. So, experts made all the entrees and side items in the CCAR ready to eat as-is.

"You don't need to rehydrate with water," Gaffney-Stomberg said. "Also, the entrees are acceptable without heating."



Lemon cheesecake bars were available for taste-testing at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center's Combat Feeding Division in Natick, Mass., July 8, 2025. The cheesecakes were made using the new vacuum microwave drying technique.
(Photo by Katie Lange, DOW)

Vacuum Microwave Drying

One new food processing technique that's helped create new, intermediate-moisture side components is called vacuum microwave drying.

While conventional dehydration methods, such as freeze-drying or air-drying, require a lot of time, the vacuum microwave drying process lowers the boiling point of water, leading to quicker evaporation, experts said. It also retains more nutrients, costs less than conventional methods and it doesn't require chemical additives for preservation like many air- and freeze-dried products do.

"The product is more durable and less likely to spoil, and it helps reduce the weight and volume of the

How Smaller, Nutrient-Dense Rations Support Changing Warfighter Needs - Cont.

ration," explained Gil Cohen, food technologist at the CFD's Food Engineering and Analysis Branch. And while vacuum microwaved dried foods are partially dehydrated, service members wouldn't need to take in more fluids to offset them.

Some vacuum microwave dried products will be fielded to service members in the near future, including a lemon cheesecake that will be available in some MRE menus.



*The Unitedized Group Ration Express, a ration for small, self-sustained military units that contains everything needed for a hot meal for 18 warfighters, sits on display at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center in Natick, Mass., July 7, 2025
(Photo by Katie Lange, DOW)*

New Group Rations and Lighter Packaging

Another new ration for small, self-sustained units is the Unitedized Group Ration Express. It's packaged in a cardboard box, complete with a flameless heater and cutlery, and contains everything needed for a hot meal for 18 warfighters.

"You don't need any refrigeration capability. You don't need a big field feeding kitchen. You have

an entree, a starch, a side and a dessert," Gaffney-Stomberg said.

"You pull a handle, and basically it peels back a water activated heater. We have a saline solution that drops in and will heat up one of those whole trays," explained Wes Long, CFD equipment specialist and the packaging lab manager. "Forty minutes later, has a box full of chow for all."

The Combat Feeding Division engineers who created the packaging for the new CCAR and other rations have also been working to make those components smaller.

"When you're thinking of just a single pouch, it's really not all that much. It's just maybe a gram or two of material. But when you look at the annual procurement of how many MREs the Army purchases, it actually ends up [being] tons of packaging waste that we're able to reduce," explained Danielle Froio-Blumsack, CFD materials engineer.

After all, smaller, lighter rations are also more efficient from a logistical standpoint.

"In future operating environments, we're expecting it to be harder to move things from point A to point B," explained Dr. Michael Wiederoder, Combat Feeding Division's strategic integrator. "So, when we think about supply chains, it's also less pallets — less boxes you have to ship."

Both divisions said they will continue to try to further reduce the CCAR's size in the future.

Transformation and Training Command activated

Story by David Accetta, DEVCOM Soldier Center Public Affairs

You may have seen a new patch on the sleeves of some of our Soldiers uniforms or noticed a change in some logos after we returned from the furlough. The new patch represents the Army's newest command—Transformation and Training Command, referred to as T2COM.

On October 1st, the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, or TRADOC, long responsible for all Army training, inactivated and on October 2nd, T2COM was officially activated in Austin, Tx.

The establishment of T2COM comes after Secretary of the Army Daniel Driscoll announced an effort aimed to accelerate transformation and improve force structure to ensure the Army remains the world's more lethal and ready land force.

This new command brings together key efforts into a unified headquarters responsible for force generation, force design, and force development. Gen. David M. Hodne assumed command as the T2COM commanding general and Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond Harris assumed responsibility as the command sergeant major.

This new command replaces TRADOC and Army Futures Command, or AFC, combining the two former four-star headquarters into one command. TRADOC, previously responsible for accessing the Army's Soldiers and their leaders into the service, individually training and educating both groups, formulating the doctrine by which they fight, and designing the units in which they serve, now hands that mission to T2COM.

AFC's missions of leading Army modernization, developing Army concepts, future force design, and requirements for future materiel are now transferred to T2COM.

T2COM's new subordinate commands are the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, Combined Arms Command, and Futures and Concepts Command,

which together will unify recruitment, training, and combat development, ensuring a cohesive and agile force ready for future challenges.

The U.S. Army Combat Capabilities Development Command, or DEVCOM, previously under AFC, now falls under the new Futures and Concepts Command. DEVCOM is the parent headquarters of DEVCOM Soldier Center.

The U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, or USARIEM, under the U.S. Army Medical Research & Development Command, or MRDC, is also now under Futures and Concepts Command and T2COM.

The creation of T2COM represents a significant investment in the Army's future and reflects the Army's ongoing effort to modernize and prepare for future challenges.



The inverted chevron rompu illustrates the merging of TRADOC and AFC through funneling knowledge and expertise across a transformational process to modernize the fighting force. Rompu, the heraldic term for broken, applied to the chevron characterizes "breaking the mold" and a shift in thinking. This creates a shape that resembles a stylized "V" in allusion to the motto "From Vision to Victory." Black, white, and gold, the contemporary colors of the Army, portray a modern approach to thinking and operating. A green scroll carries forward historical Army legacy into the future.



Winter Safety

Story by the Installation Safety Office

The winter season is a demanding time of year. With unpredictable weather and hectic schedules, many of us find ourselves embracing traditions and activities with family and loved ones. Whatever your plans may be, remember to prioritize safety. Keep these essential tips in mind to protect yourself and those you care about, ensuring the season remains a safe one.

1. Winter Travel Safety

If you need to travel this season, be sure your vehicle is in good running condition, get plenty of rest, and be prepared for any emergencies.

Avoid driving in poor weather conditions if possible.

Plan your transportation in advance—whether by designated driver, hotel stay, shuttle, rideshare (Lyft/Uber), or taxi—to ensure a safe and reliable trip.

Consider local sober rider programs and have their information handy for yourself and your friends.

If leaving your car is unavoidable, choose a busy, well-lit location. Roll up all windows, lock every door, and keep valuables either at home or completely hidden from view.

Carry only the essentials—identification, cash, and a single credit card. Leave store cards and unnecessary valuables behind to reduce risk and avoid drawing unwanted attention.

2. Winter Emergency Car Kit

Per OSHA.gov, the following is a recommended list of winter emergency items that you should keep in the trunk of your vehicle:

- Ice scraper / brush combination
- Small shovel
- Sand or kitty litter (for traction)
- Tow rope or chain
- Thick blankets
- Warm clothing (boots, gloves, and hat)
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Jumper cables or jump-start kit
- First-aid kit
- Road flares or reflectors
- Snacks (dried fruit or nuts)
- Road maps
- Cell phone with charging cord

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- Events
- Maintenance Requests
- MHS Genesis Login



Natick Soldier Systems Center Showcases Innovation and Soldier Support at Natick Days

Story and photos by Alfred Tripolone III, USAG-Natick Public Affairs

The Natick Soldier Systems Center (NSSC) brought science, technology and a people-first mission to the community during Natick Days, held Sept. 6 in downtown Natick. The annual event, designed to highlight local organizations and foster connections with residents, provided NSSC with an opportunity to show how Army research at Natick directly supports Soldiers in the field, and benefits the public as well.

The DEVCOM Soldier Center featured the largest footprint of the day, with displays ranging from advanced food technology to camouflage science, and even a tactical vehicle that drew attention from families as they walked through the town square. Scientists explained how these innovations tie into the Army's broader effort to ensure readiness.

"At Natick Days, we were able to showcase a wide range of ration platforms that are currently fielded including the Meal-Ready-to-Eat (MRE), Meal-Cold-Weather (MCW), First Strike Ration (FSR) which is transitioning to the Close Combat Assault Ration (CCAR), Modular Operational Ration Enhancement pack (MORE), and Tube Foods," said Gil Cohen, a food technologist with the Combat Feeding Division at Soldier Center. "Each ration platform is methodically designed to meet the unique needs of Soldiers in the field – whether it is high altitude, extreme weather, etc. we are committed to sustaining the warfighter."

Cohen said sharing the work with the local community "allows us to maintain a strong connection and build understanding. Many people are unaware of all the research that is done here at NSSC and how much it influences industry as a

whole. By engaging with the local community, we inform locals about some science and technology that supports Soldiers. For me personally, it is always exciting to see reactions when people hear I am on the team of scientists that actually develops food products for soldiers. So many people are unaware that this job exists!"



Gil Cohen, a food technologist with the Combat Feeding Division at Soldier Center, talks to a Natick resident about variations of MRE's and the technology involved with creating shelf-stable rations for servicemembers.

She added that community members are often surprised to learn about the complexity of military food research. "It is especially important to showcase this work to the public so that they can better understand the complexity of designing food that is nutritious, low weight/low volume, has extended shelf-life requirements, etc. Transporting food and equipment is a logistical challenge – we have to keep this in mind when developing products," Cohen said.

Col. Sharon L. Rosser, commander of the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine (USARIEM), said her team's presence at Natick Days allowed them to highlight the "skin-in" side of Soldier readiness. "Military readiness isn't only equipment and tactics, it includes the critical component of Soldier readiness, or 'skin-in' aspects – the health, performance, and physiology of our Soldiers," Rosser said.

She emphasized the value of explaining USARIEM's mission to the community. "Sharing our work allows the public to understand the comprehensive approach needed to ensure our Soldiers are at their best, both physically and mentally," Rosser said.

Rosser also said community engagement demonstrates responsible stewardship. "By sharing USARIEM's positive impact on Soldier health and performance, we demonstrate responsible stewardship of public resources. Transparency builds trust and fosters continued support for military research. It also gives us a chance to inspire others to optimize their health."

Both Soldier Center and USARIEM highlighted how their complementary missions come together. Rosser described it as the "skin-in" and "skin-out" approach. "The 'skin-in' and 'skin-out' analogy illustrates how DEVCOM Soldier Center (SC) and USARIEM, respectively, collaborate to holistically support our Soldiers," Rosser said. "DEVCOM SC focuses on the 'skin-out' – the equipment, uniforms, and technologies that Soldiers interact with in the field. They are concerned with the external factors that impact a Soldier's ability to perform their duties, like protection from the elements, improved load carriage, and enhanced communication systems. USARIEM, on the other hand, concentrates on the 'skin-in' – the human element itself: the physiology, health, nutrition, and cognitive performance of the Soldier. The Soldier, equipment and tactics aren't mutually exclusive; they are deeply intertwined and fundamentally complementary."

For Rosser, events like Natick Days strengthen the Army's connection to its neighbors. "USARIEM is a part of the broader community and engaging in community strengthens the bond between military and our local community we serve. We are also able to inspire the next generation of civilian and military scientists and leaders by sharing what we do and the Summer GEMS program we offer for the young people who want to pursue careers in STEM fields," she said.

She added: "I hope the combined presence of science, research, and garrison support allows the community members to see that the Army is a forward-thinking, people-centric organization deeply committed to its Soldiers, their families, and the communities it serves. That they see an Army that is modern, innovative, and compassionate and that is dedicated to protecting our Nation while also investing in the well-being of its most valuable asset: its people."

Cohen agreed that the community presence makes a lasting impact. "We have a shared purpose. We are a team that has a wide range of expertise. By participating in this event, we humanize our work and are able to showcase physical items to the community," she said.



Soldier Research Volunteers with DEVCOM Soldier Center show local Natick children the effectiveness of the camouflage patterns they created at one station of the Soldier Center display during Natick Days.

A Legacy of Leadership: CSM Joshua Kelley Retires After 22 Years of Service

Story and photos by Alfred Tripolone III, USAG-Natick Public Affairs

After 22 years of dedicated service, Command Sergeant Major Joshua Kelley is preparing to close his Army chapter, leaving behind a legacy defined by mentorship, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to Soldiers and the mission.

For Kelley, being an NCO has always been more than a rank; it has been a calling. "When people think of me, I want them to think of the NCO Creed," he said, reflecting on his career. That creed, beginning with the words, "No one is more professional than I," is more than just memorized doctrine for Kelley. It's how he's lived his career.

"He ensured we focused on what was important, taking care of our Soldiers, Civilians, and their Families," said Lt. Col. Andrew Ballow, the former U.S. Army Garrison Natick Commander. "He was the voice of reason and made sure we considered everyone's perspective before making a decision."

Those who worked alongside Kelley describe him as the embodiment of the Army's ideal NCO. Mr. Keith Jackson, Deputy to the Garrison Commander of U.S. Army Garrison Natick, began working with him in January 2024 and quickly saw his impact.

"One of his strong points is he's a mentor not just to me and the Colonel, but also to the entire civilian staff," Jackson said. "He's outstanding in everything he does. The Army's definitely going to miss him when he retires in October."

Kelley's mentorship wasn't confined to Soldiers in uniform. He took an active role in shaping the civilian workforce, teaching them tools like the POAM (Plan of Action and Milestones) and demonstrating how to apply after action reviews to improve performance

across the garrison. "Those after-action reviews came back and paid off big dividends," Jackson recalled.

Ballow echoed that sentiment, noting that Kelley's investment in staff development directly improved mission success. "Whether it was hip-pocket AAR training or how to use a POAM, CSM leveraged his 2-Star Staff experience to improve our ability to plan, prepare, and execute across the garrison," he said.

Whether in the conference room or out in the field, Kelley led by example. He didn't hesitate to join in spring and fall cleanups, or to roll up his sleeves alongside his teammates. "He's not afraid to get dirty," Jackson said. "That statue outside the gate? That was him out there with us, cleaning it all up, putting new flowers and mulch down. He just doesn't allow others to do his job, he does it and then helps with theirs too."

Kelley's approach to leadership always came back to two fundamentals: taking care of Soldiers and accomplishing the mission. Those around him say he gave officers the space to focus on their duties because they knew he could be trusted to handle his own.

"He does what he's expected," Jackson said. "If anything, he jumps in and helps others with their jobs so the garrison as a whole could be successful."

Ballow, who served alongside him daily, described their working relationship as seamless. "He was my shadow and sounding board, a constant voice of reason," Ballow said. "We were cut from the same cloth, he knew what I was thinking



without me saying anything, and he would often insert himself to resolve an issue before I had the opportunity to engage."

For Ballow, Kelley's legacy at Natick will be measured in people. "His impact on the staff and the BOSS program will last long after he's gone," he said. "He's a combat leader and the model NCO, the way he carries himself, his knowledge and experience, the way he communicates...everything about him is senior infantry NCO."

As Kelley prepares for life beyond the Army, his plans reflect the same spirit of adventure and discipline that guided his service. He hopes to sail around the world and spend quality time with his family.

"The good news is, with him going and sailing around the world, there's no doubt in my mind that the discipline he learned in the military, the mental and physical toughness, the spiritual guidance, all that will be with him," Jackson said. "For no matter what he does in the future, he's going to be totally successful."

Jackson, like many who served with Kelley, also expressed personal gratitude and friendship. "Hopefully a couple years from now we can sit down, maybe have a beer somewhere, and talk about how his sailing journey went, some of the good things and some of the bad things that happened, some things we can laugh about that weren't funny at the time."

"The Army is losing a proven combat leader. He doesn't need my advice, he has it figured out, but he should know he'll be missed. We're excited to watch him sail around the world," Ballow added.

As Kelley steps away from the uniform, his influence will remain etched in the Soldiers he led, the civilians he coached, and the community he served. He is, in every sense, the epitome of what it means to be an NCO, professional, selfless, and dedicated to the Army family.

Chaplain-Led Civilian Training Strengthens Communication and Teamwork

Story by Lynn Valcourt, Garrison Executive Officer

On Wednesday, September 10, 2025, the Natick community came together for a Build Strong & Ready Team (BSRT) Training led by Chaplain Southard at the Warren Conference Center and Inn in Ashland, MA. The day-long retreat provided civilians with professional development sessions on workplace dynamics, practical team-building activities, and the opportunity to connect in a relaxed setting.

One of the highlights of the training was a communication exercise that paired participants together for a lighthearted yet eye-opening activity. Each pair received the same drawing—an ice cream cone—but with only one person allowed to see it. The “instructor” gave verbal directions while their partner, unable to see the original, had to draw the picture based solely on the spoken instructions.

The results were both humorous and insightful. While some drawings closely matched the original, others looked entirely different; demonstrating just how challenging communication can be without clarity, feedback, and shared understanding.

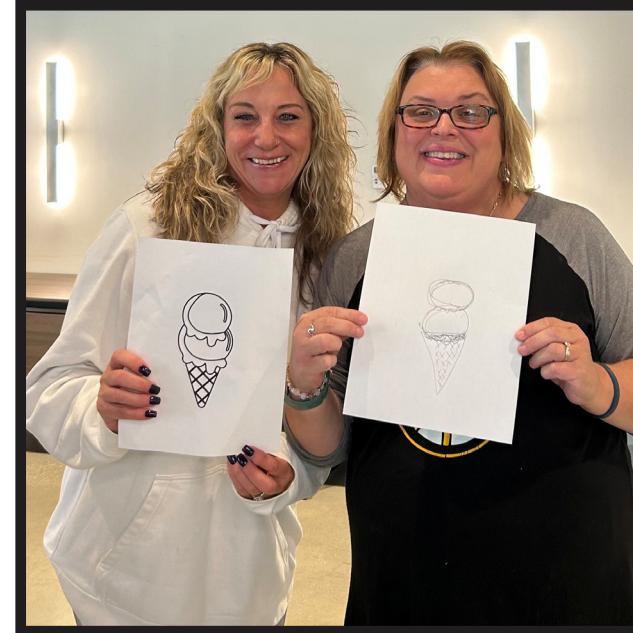
“It wasn’t about artistic skill—it was about listening, giving clear instructions, and asking for clarification,” explained Sgt. Thomas, the Training Facilitator. “The humor in the results really drove home the point: good communication is at the heart of effective teamwork.”

Participants agreed.

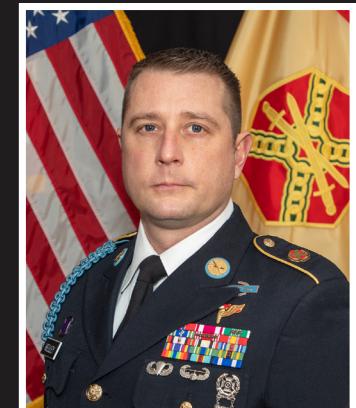
“We couldn’t stop laughing when we compared our drawings, but at the same time, it made me realize how easily miscommunication happens in the workplace,” shared one attendee.

Chaplain Southard praised the engagement and energy throughout the day, noting that the event achieved its purpose of strengthening workplace bonds while providing practical tools for everyday interactions.

With strong turnout and positive feedback, the BSRT Training is expected to continue as a cornerstone of professional and team development for the Natick community.



A Final Word



To the Soldiers, Civilians, Families, and Teammates of USAG Natick—

Serving as your Garrison Command Sergeant Major these past two years has been one of the greatest honors of my 22-year career as an Infantryman. And while I’ve spent plenty of time in the field, this assignment reminded me that the strength of the Army isn’t just in its tactics, it’s in its people.

Here at Natick, I’ve seen firsthand a high-performing, mission-focused, community-driven installation. From the early morning gate guards who greet us, to the DPW crews who fix things before we even know they’re broken, to the Housing Office that manages to juggle PCS season, family needs, and the occasional “creative” request, to all of our mission partners who support our Nations War Fighters, you are all the heartbeat of this post.

To the staff behind the scenes—and all the acronyms that make this place run—you’ve kept the ship on course, even when the winds shifted. Your professionalism, patience, and ability to translate Army-speak into action have been nothing short of impressive.

As I pass the torch to CSM Bunkley, I do so with full confidence. The Army got it right.

To the entire Natick community: thank you for your trust, your teamwork, and your tenacity. You’ve made this place feel like home, and I’ll carry that with me wherever I go. Please take a moment when you see CSM Bunkley out and about to welcome him to Team Natick!

CSM Kelley out.

NSSC Online

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