

# *The* **FOCUS**

**GUARD MEMBERS PARTICIPATE IN  
EXERCISES IN AFRICA P. 5**



APRIL 2026

NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS THEMES AND MESSAGES

## April Observances

Military Saves Month  
Month of the Military Child

5 Gold Star Spouses Day

6 Army Day U.S. Entered WWI (1917)

9 National Former POW Recognition Day  
(1942)

14 U.S. Air Force Reserve Birthday

19 Purple Up Day

23 U.S. Army Reserve Birthday

30 End of Vietnam War (1975)  
National Military Brats Day

# April - Family

## Alaska Army Guard Family Readiness team ranked best in nation

Story by U.S. Air Force Maj. David Bedard, Alaska Air National Guard



JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — As the demands on military families grow amid deployments, separations and fiscal constraints, the National Guard Bureau recognized the Alaska Army National Guard's Military and family readiness specialists as the top team in the nation for Fiscal Year 2025.

Despite a 50 percent reduction in staff due to budget cuts and attrition, the Alaska Army National Guard ranked first among all 54 states and territories for Family Readiness personnel following the bureau's evaluation.

Performance evaluations conducted by the NGB assess staff training, deployment outreach, quality assurance reporting, personnel management, systems access and execution of spending plans.

The recognition highlights the team's ability to sustain mission-critical support to service members and families under challenging conditions.

Military and family readiness specialists play a vital role in maintaining force readiness by ensuring troops can focus on their missions knowing their families are supported. They serve as the primary point of contact for service members and families seeking non-medical assistance and information on crisis intervention resources, general referrals, and deployment support tailored to the unique demands of military life.

Kera Spaulding, lead military and family readiness specialist, underscored the importance of the family's well-being to the mission.

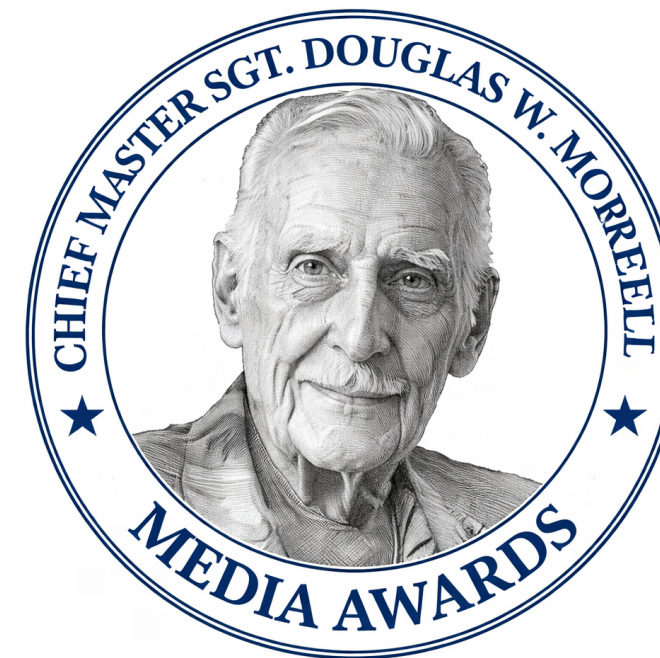
"Family readiness is a critical component of military effectiveness and mission success," Spaulding said. "The core idea is that a service member's ability to perform their duties is directly linked to the well-being of their family. When families are stable, resilient and well-supported, service members can focus on their military responsibilities with fewer distractions and less stress."

For the full story follow the link below (NIPR users copy and paste link into browser):

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/556500/alaska-national-guard-family-readiness-team-ranked-best-nation>

# Leadership News and Notes

## Guard participants win three Morrell Media Awards categories



The National Guard Bureau Office of Public Affairs congratulates the two National Guard winners in the 2024 Chief Master Sgt. Douglas W. Morrell Media Awards. They distinguished themselves by taking first place in these service-level categories:

### Military Graphic Designer of the Year

Staff Sgt. Kasie Faddis, 117th Air Refueling Wing, Alabama Air National Guard

### Long-form Production of the Year

158th Fighter Wing, Vermont Air National Guard

### Short-form Production Video

I.G. Brown Training and Education Center, NGB

To see their entry portfolios and the winners at the National Guard level follow the link below (NIPR users copy and paste link into browser):

<https://www.nationalguard.mil/Portals/31/Documents/2024-MMA-Winners.pdf>

## NGB-PA Plans and Policy

### SharePoint Site

The National Guard Bureau Office of Public Affairs hosts a SharePoint website that serves as a central hub for public affairs offices and units across the National Guard. This secure platform provides valuable instruction, standard operating procedures, and guidance to support effective communication, media engagement, and storytelling.

Please check out the platform and provide any feedback on what else should be made available on the site. The points of contact are Maj. Megan Wood, [megan.j.wood5.mil@army.mil](mailto:megan.j.wood5.mil@army.mil) and Master Sgt. Whitney Hughes, [whitney.r.hughes.mil@army.mil](mailto:whitney.r.hughes.mil@army.mil)

Sharepoint link (only available on NIPR):  
[NGB-PA PPR SharePoint](#)

## On the cover:

U.S. Army Spc. Martin Farrell, an infantryman with 1st Battalion, 181st Infantry Regiment, Massachusetts Army National Guard, points out targets to a Kenya Defence Forces ranger preparing to fire the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon during a live-fire event at the KDF School of Infantry, Isiolo, Kenya, as part of exercise Justified Accord, March 4. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Elijah Harris)

## May Observances

OPSEC Awareness Month  
Military Appreciation Month  
Month of the Military Caregiver

6-12 National Nurses Week

8 Victory in Europe Day (1945)  
Military Spouse Appreciation Day

10 Mother's Day

15 Peace Officers Memorial Day

17 Armed Forces Day

22 National Maritime Day

25 Memorial Day

# May - Readiness

## More than 450 Guard members participate in Arctic readiness exercise



NIPR users to play video copy and paste: <https://tinyurl.com/yme7ktcs>  
Video by: U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Garas, Michigan Army National Guard

Story by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Richard Mekkri, National Guard Bureau Public Affairs

GRAYLING, Mich. — More than 450 U.S. Soldiers and Airmen braved freezing temperatures and extreme winter conditions during the winter iteration of Northern Strike 26, Jan. 26-29. An Army-sponsored, National Guard Bureau exercise, Northern Strike provides service members from across the total force the opportunity to train to meet the objectives of the Department of War's Arctic strategy.

The winter iteration of the exercise focuses on one of the most unforgiving aspects of warfighting: surviving, moving, and fighting in extreme cold.

Held across more than 14,000 acres at the National All-Domain Warfighting Center in Northern Michigan, the event pushed service members to operate in sub-zero temperatures while training in a complex, contested environment — conditions leaders say are essential for meeting Department of War priorities and preparing for potential conflict against rival competitors.

“Northern Strike replicates the complexity of the modern environment and it's an outstanding learning opportunity,” said U.S. Army Col. Todd Fitzpatrick, officer in charge of the Northern Strike plans team, Michigan National Guard. “It's a very robust scenario that answers the call.”

The training includes conventional maneuver operations alongside modern threats such as unmanned aircraft systems, electronic warfare and complex opposing-force attacks. Northern Strike affords units the opportunity to perform these operations across each warfighting domain: land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace.

# June - Partnerships

## Mass., Nebraska Guard SPP programs shine at exercise in Kenya, Tanzania



U.S. Soldiers with 2nd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment (Airborne), Nebraska Army National Guard conduct infantry squad tactical training in Msata, Tanzania during exercise Justified Accord 26, March, 9. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Catessa Palone)

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Tucceri, Massachusetts National Guard

NAIROBI, Kenya – For the past 33 years, the Department of War National Guard State Partnership Program has fostered relationships around the globe by pairing Guard elements with partner nations worldwide to bolster security cooperation and build lasting ties across military, diplomatic, economic and social domains.

One event that benefits from the SPP is Justified Accord, U.S. Africa Command's largest annual multinational exercise in East Africa.

Throughout the exercise, SPP partnerships were at the forefront, showcasing multilateral training.

This year's exercise took place in Djibouti, Kenya, and Tanzania, highlighting partnerships between the Kentucky National Guard and Djibouti, the Massachusetts National Guard and Kenya, and the Nebraska National Guard and Tanzania -- one of the newest SPP relationships.

A closing ceremony in Nairobi, Kenya, marked the conclusion of this year's exercise, March 13. Members of the Massachusetts National Guard, alongside U.S. and Kenyan military leadership, representatives from the U.S. Department of State, and other officials attended the ceremony, which was held at the Humanitarian Peace Support School.

For the full story follow the link below (NIPR users copy and paste link into browser): <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/561266/massachusetts-national-guard-state-partnership-program-shines-kenya-during-justified-accord-2026>

## June Observances

PTSD Awareness Month

6 D-Day (1944)

14 Army Birthday  
Flag Day

21 Father's Day

22 GI Bill Anniversary

24 Navy Women Reserves Day

25 Korean War Began (1950)

27 PTSD Awareness Day