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DMA Military Newsletter

May 20, 2026



Military
NJ Department of
Military Affairs

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Commissioner's Corner



Brigadier General Mays led the New Jersey National Guard's delegation to Albania to mark the 25th anniversary of the State Partnership Program with the Republic of Albania.

Advancing Readiness Through Global Partnerships

This month, I had the honor of traveling to Albania to mark the 25th anniversary of the State Partnership Program between the New Jersey National Guard and the Republic of Albania. Over the past quarter century, this partnership has been strengthened through shared commitment, mutual respect, and years of standing shoulder to shoulder in training, exchanges, and operational cooperation.

During our visit, I met with Albanian President Bajram Begaj, Minister of Defense Ermal Nufi, Chief of Defense Lieutenant General Arben Kingji, and U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Nancy VanHorn. These engagements underscored the importance of investing in partnerships that advance readiness and interoperability. We look

forward to welcoming our Albanian partners to New Jersey later this year for events that will continue our 25th-anniversary commemoration.

What stands out most to me about the State Partnership Program is that its true strength lies in the relationships forged between service members. Whether training together in New Jersey, in Albania, or alongside other partner nations, our Soldiers and Airmen learn from our international partners and collectively strengthen readiness across both of our forces.

That spirit of excellence was on full display during this year's New Jersey National Guard Best Warrior Competition. Over four demanding days at the beginning of this month, competitors tested themselves physically and mentally in events designed to challenge tactical skills, endurance, resilience, and leadership under pressure. These warriors exemplify professionalism and embody the standards our force brings to every mission.

This year's Best Warrior Competition also demonstrated how our partnerships extend to the training environments that shape our Soldiers and Airmen. We were proud to host competitors from both of our partners, the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Cyprus. Events like Best Warrior help forge new ties and reinforce the shared values that unite our forces.

As we recognize 25 years of cooperation with Albania and continue to cultivate relationships with our partners, I remain incredibly proud of the Soldiers and Airmen who represent New Jersey with professionalism and excellence. Their dedication keeps our partnerships strong and ensures our force remains ready for whatever challenges lie ahead.

As always, thank you for staying connected to DMA.

We invite you to share ideas, events and feedback. Please email our team at outreach@dma.nj.gov.

Brigadier General Yvonne L. Mays
Adjutant General & Commissioner



Invitations



Brigadier General Yvonne L. Mays
The Adjutant General of New Jersey
and
Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Military
Affairs

cordially invites you to attend the

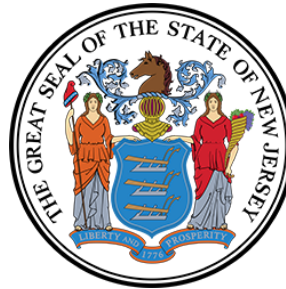
Memorial Day Ceremony

Thursday, May 21, 2026
11:00am

at the

New Jersey Department of Military Affairs
Lawrenceville Campus
101 Eggerts Crossing Road
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

Military: Uniform of the Day
Civilian: Business Casual



Governor Mikie Sherrill

requests the honor of your presence at the

**State of New Jersey Memorial Day
Observance**

on Saturday, the twenty-third of May at eleven o'clock

Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans
Memorial Cemetery
350 Province Line Road, Wrightstown, NJ



Brigadier General Yvonne L. Mays
The Adjutant General of New Jersey
and
Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Military
Affairs

cordially invites you to attend the

**25th Anniversary Ceremony of the
State Partnership**

between

**the State of New Jersey and the
Republic of Albania**

Wednesday, June 10, 2026
1100-1145 Ceremony

at the

New Jersey National Guard Armory
Building 151
151 Eggerts Crossing Road
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

Uniform/Attire: Class B's

[RSVP by May 29, 2026](#)

Events

SGT SAM NUTTER INC.
Working For Our Veterans

22ND ANNUAL 5K NUTTER RUN

RUN • WALK • HAVE FUN

NEW THIS YEAR - YOUTH RACE/WALK

SUPPORT SPC MITCHELL, GREGORY

JUNE 20TH, 2026 • 8:30-12:30PM
National Guard Training Center • 100 Camp Drive, Sea Girt, NJ
www.sgtnutterrun.org • ocssgtnutterrun@gmail.com

REGISTER **DONATE** **OUR HONOREE**

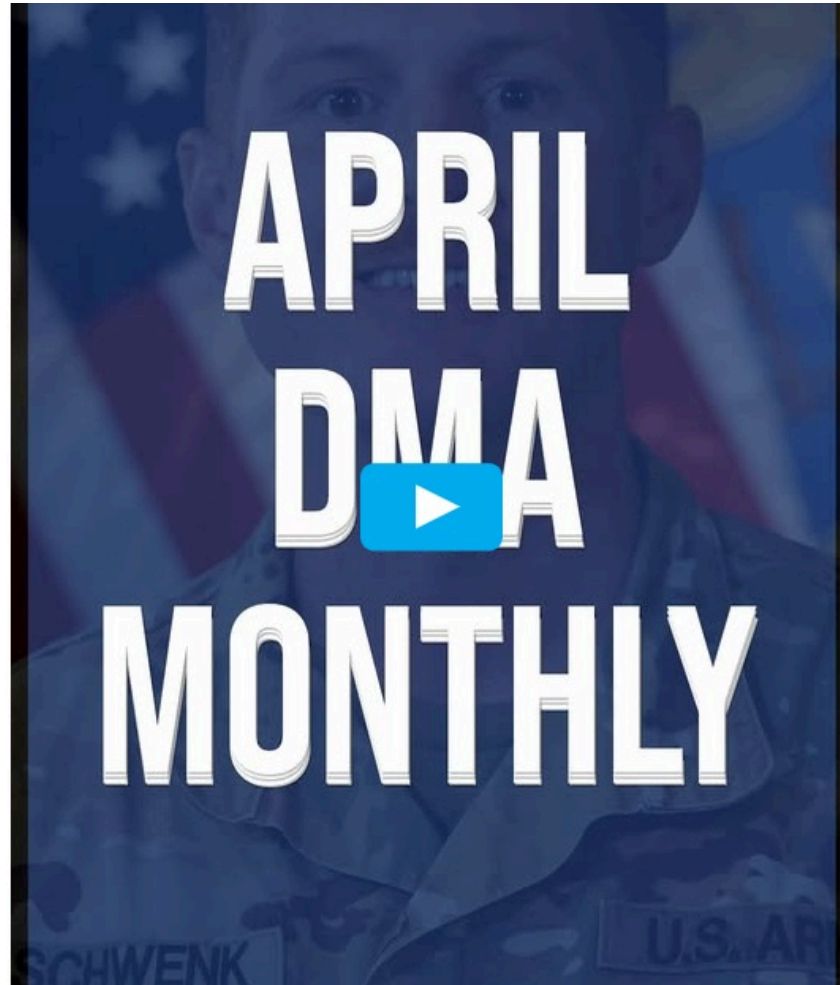
The poster features a central illustration of five runners in silhouette (blue, red, and white) running on a track. In the background, there is a guard tower with an American flag, a helicopter, and a military building. The text is arranged in a clear hierarchy, with the event name at the top, followed by the date and location, and then the registration and donation information at the bottom.

Community Calendar

New events are added to the calendar on a daily basis so please bookmark and check back often.

[View Full Calendar](#)

DMA Month in Review Video



NJ National Guard



NJ Best Warrior Competition 2026

Private First Class Roman A. Florio, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team and Staff Sergeant Taj D. Lumanog, 1st Battalion, 254th Regiment (Combat Arms), won as the best enlisted and best noncommissioned officer, respectively, in the New Jersey Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, NJ on May 8, 2026.

During the competition, the Soldiers demonstrated their adaptiveness, resilience, lethality, and the readiness of New Jersey's Citizen-Soldiers to respond to future threats.

SFC Florio and SSG Lumanog will now go on to challenge seven other states' winners at the Region I Best Warrior Competition in Rhode Island June 8-12, 2026.

[View Images](#)



Republic of Albania

Brigadier General Mays led the New Jersey National Guard's delegation to Albania in early May to mark the 25th anniversary of the [State Partnership Program](#) with the Republic of Albania.

During the visit, Brig. Gen. Mays met with U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Nancy VanHorn, President Bajram Begaj, Minister of Defense Ermal Nufi, and Chief of Defense Lieutenant General Arben Kingji.

Additional anniversary events will take place in New Jersey during the second week of June.



Republic of Cyprus

Instructors from the New Jersey National Guard's 254th Regional Training Institute conducted the Common Faculty Development – Instructor Course (CFD-IC) at Camp Stavros Stylianides in Kornos, Cyprus, marking the first time this course has been offered to the Cyprus National Guard.

Twenty-one students graduated from the 10-day course, strengthening instructor development and advancing NCO professional education.

This effort builds on the partnership between the New Jersey National Guard and the Republic of Cyprus through the National Guard's [State Partnership Program](#). Stronger together!

Join Our Team

Service to Community & Country
100% Free College Tuition
Bonuses | GI Bill
Student Loan Repayment



Servicemember Spotlight



CM Sgt Michael Rakauckas

A retirement ceremony was held for U.S. Air Force Command Chief Master Sergeant Michael J. Rakauckas in Eastampton, NJ on May 1, 2026.

From October 2019 to April 2024, Rakauckas served as the tenth New Jersey State Command Chief Master Sergeant, where he was responsible for the professional development, military readiness, health, morale, and welfare of more than 2,100 New Jersey Air National Guard enlisted members.

[View Images](#)



CSM Mark Leonard

A retirement ceremony was held for U.S. Army Command Sergeant Major Mark A. Leonard in Lawrenceville, NJ on May 8, 2026.

Prior to his retirement, Leonard served as the New Jersey National Guard State Command Sergeant Major.

[View Images](#)



MSG Marie Burns

The New Jersey Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion bids farewell to Master Sergeant Marie Burns.

With 24+ years of service, she joined in 2001 and was activated in response to 9/11 in support of Operation Noble Eagle.

A cornerstone of the [Recruiting & Retention Battalion](#) for over two decades, she retires as a Section Chief and was promoted to Master Sergeant in 2019.

We bid you farewell hoping nothing but the best for you in your endeavors!



MSgt Jason Harden

U.S. Air Force Master Sergeant Jason Harden, [177th Fighter Wing](#) Chaplain Corps superintendent, poses for a photo after receiving the Air National Guard Chaplain Corps Minuteman Award for 2025 from Colonel Jonathan Bell, director of the Air National Guard Chaplain Corps, at the Atlantic City Air National Guard Base on May 16, 2026.

MSgt Harden was awarded the Air National Guard Chaplain Corps Minutemen Award for 2025 for his actions during the "Make DC Safe and Beautiful" mission.

DMA Departments



NJ Service Medals

In accordance with New Jersey statute, the Adjutant General of New Jersey is the approving authority for the award of New Jersey state service medals.

The State of New Jersey awards medals to honorably discharged Veterans of the state who served during peacetime and in various conflicts and combat theaters.

State medals include the Distinguished Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Korean Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, POW/MIA Medal, Desert Storm Medal, and the Global War on Terrorism Medal.

[Learn More](#)



NJ Youth ChalleNGe Academy

Please join us in congratulating Cadet Thangaswamy of the [NJ Youth ChalleNGe Academy](#) on being accepted to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte!

Cadet Thangaswamy has shown true dedication to academics throughout the program and recently earned an impressive score of

97 on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB).

He is an outstanding Cadet who helps tutors his peers, shows leadership, and is always there for his platoon. We are proud of this outstanding achievement and excited to see all that lies ahead!

NEW JERSEY
YOUTH CHALLENGE ACADEMY
DREAM. BELIEVE. **ACHIEVE.**

YOUTH CHALLENGE ACADEMY

Now accepting applications
for Class 62 - July 2026!

APPLY NOW!

TUITION FREE

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
njyca.gov/admissions
rpm@dma.nj.gov
(732) 974-6500



**NJ MILITARY FAMILY
ASSISTANCE**

* /njarngfac



**NJNG Child & Youth
Program**

* /njngcyp



Employee Spotlight



Peter Espeut
Division Director, NGTC

Peter Espeut serves as the Division Director and Superintendent of the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, New Jersey. He joined the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA) on Juneteenth 2023, bringing with him a career that spans across military service, corporate leadership, and state government.

Espeut is the first in his family to serve in the U.S. military. He began his career in Army intelligence before transitioning to the corporate sector, holding human resources roles at AT&T and NJM. He later entered state government, serving as Deputy Director of Banking and Insurance before assuming his current leadership role at Sea Girt.

At the [National Guard Training Center](#), Mr. Espeut said that no two days look the same. His responsibilities range from overseeing building maintenance, to managing major events like the Officer Candidate School graduations and leading the facility's operations. One of his most important responsibilities includes directing the State of New Jersey's annual Military Review, a more than 130-year tradition in which the Governor, as commander in chief, reviews our state's troops.

Espeut's leadership philosophy focuses on what he calls "radical customer service." His approach is straightforward: exceed expectations and ensure every customer leaves with a positive experience. He credits this mindset to his military background, where mission and people come before bureaucracy. Beyond operations, he is committed to mentoring others, helping them build the skills and confidence needed to advance in their careers. Colleagues know him as someone who consistently advocates for the underdog and goes the extra mile to support others.

Outside of his professional life, Mr. Espeut is an avid amateur photographer and a music enthusiast. While he enjoys all genres, reggae tops his list, followed by jazz, Motown, and gospel. He emphasizes the importance of having an outstanding team at Sea Girt and believes in working hard, playing hard, and keeping a sense of fun in the workplace. A mindset he says that helps build a solid foundation for future success.

State Partners



NJ State Agencies

- [NJ Department of Veterans Affairs](#)
- [Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicides among Service Members, Veterans & Their Families](#)
- [The New Jersey's Governor "We Value Our Veterans" Awards](#)
- [Bringing Veterans Home](#)

- [Vote For Valor](#)
- [Career Services for Veterans](#)
- [Tax Resources for Military/Veterans](#)
- [Educator Certification for Military Spouses and Veterans](#)
- [Civil Service Preference for Veterans](#)
- [NJ National Guard Hunting / Fishing Licenses](#)
- [NJ Special Hawker and Peddlers License](#)
- [Veterans Designation for Drivers License](#)
- [Military CDL Skills Waiver Program](#)
- [Disabled Veteran / Purple Heart Recipient Placards](#)
- [Disabled Veteran Hunting and Fishing Licenses](#)
- [Veteran and Disabled Veteran-Owned Business](#)
- [Division of Consumer Affairs Military Outreach & Support](#)
- [Professional & Occupational Licenses for Veterans and Spouses](#)
- [Military and Overseas Voting](#)
- [Veterans & Spouses Entering the Educator Workforce](#)
- [Journey Through Jersey](#)

Federal Partners



Community Spotlight



USDA APHIS

In early May, wildlife biologists from [USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service](#), as part of a three-day FAA approved advanced airport training course, visited the 177th Fighter Wing and got to learn about one of the beneficiaries of their work of protecting aviation operations.

The group of 35 biologists, coordinators, supervisors, managers, and directors, who work with or on civil or military airfields across the U.S., met with 177th Fighter Wing leadership before viewing an F-16C static display and a General Electric F110 afterburning turbofan engine display.

It was our pleasure having you visit our Wing. We truly appreciate what you do to help keep aviation safe!



Somerset Patriots

Brig. Gen. Mays threw out the ceremonial first pitch and spoke to the crowd at the [Somerset Patriots](#) Military Appreciation game at

TD Bank Ballpark in Bridgewater, NJ on May 17, 2026.

[View Images](#)

Never Forget



New Jersey Fallen Heroes Memorial

In Honor of all those from New Jersey who gave their lives in the fight against terrorism during Operation Enduring Freedom & Iraqi Freedom. In humble gratitude, we remember their sacrifice.

Memorial Inscription

"But on the battlefield their feet stood fast, and in an instant at the height of their fortune, they passed away from the scene, not of their fear, but of their glory."

~ Pericles

NJ Fallen Heroes Memorial

History



Wars of America in Newark's Military Park

May 14, 1918

Trenton native Private Needham Roberts, an African-American soldier serving with the segregated 369th Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard, assigned to the French Army, was badly wounded when a post he manned with Sergeant Henry Johnson was attacked by a German patrol. Both men continued to fight with rifles, knives and hand grenades, killing 20 German soldiers, and were awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French army.

May 21, 1777

May 26, 1886

The Gettysburg battlefield monument to the Twelfth New Jersey Infantry was dedicated on Cemetery Ridge. Marked "buck and ball" to commemorate the combination of buckshot and round balls fired in the regiment's obsolete yet deadly at short range smoothbore muskets, it was the first New Jersey monument erected at Gettysburg and was privately funded by veterans of the regiment.

May 30, 1924

A sixty-five-foot obelisk was dedicated to commemorate Bergen County's Camp Merritt,

The force under George Washington's direct command encamped at Morristown reported 7,363 officers and men "fit for duty and on duty." Arms and ammunition were arriving in large quantities from France, including 19,000 muskets and 1,000 barrels of gunpowder during the month of March alone.

May 26, 1668

The first New Jersey Assembly met in Elizabethtown, with fourteen members from East New Jersey and two from West New Jersey. During a five day session, the body passed militia legislation requiring men between the ages of sixteen and sixty to train for "at least four days in the year."

DMA Military Newsletter


the troops who passed through there during World War I and, most importantly, the fifteen officers, four nurses, 558 enlisted men and one civilian who died, mostly from influenza, while serving their county there.

May 31, 1926

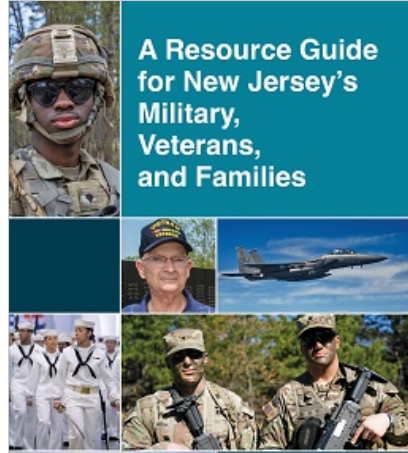
Famed sculptor Gutzon Borglum's massive bronze Wars of America statue, representing every conflict the United States participated in from the Revolution to World War I and composed of figures of forty-two humans and two horses, was unveiled in Newark's Military Park.

Resources

NEW JERSEY VETERANS BENEFITS GUIDE



A Resource Guide for New Jersey's Military, Veterans, and Families



NJ VETERANS TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

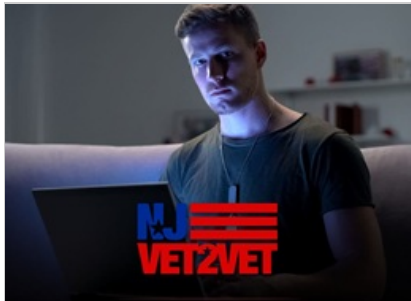


THIS PROGRAM OFFERS RIDES TO:

- VA MEDICAL CENTERS
- CLINICS
- OTHER HOSPITALS
- PRIVATE PHYSICIANS
- VA REGIONAL OFFICES
- VETERAN SERVICE OFFICES

GUARDLIFE

JANUARY - JUNE 2025

24 hour support to
NJ National Guard, Military,
Veterans Families, and caregivers
statewide.

Veterans Crisis Line



DIAL 988 then
PRESS 1

DMA Careers



We Are Hiring!

At the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs we take our work in support of Servicemembers and their families very seriously. The Department provides valuable services and can offer rewarding career opportunities to members of the public.

In addition, we have job openings for members of our military to serve in AGR and Federal Technician roles.

Subscribe to the [MilVets Jobs Bulletin](#) to stay updated on job openings.

Vacancies

Stay Connected



We hope you enjoy receiving our newsletter and find it both educational and engaging. If you have questions about our department, please visit our website at military.nj.gov to get contact information.

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