

GUARDLIFE

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THE FACES OF THE NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD

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Above: U.S. Army Pfc. Alcely Reyes with the 508th Military Police Company, New Jersey Army National Guard, provides traffic control at a COVID-19 Testing Site at Kean University in Union, N.J., March 25, 2020. The testing site, is the state's first county-run, drive-through testing center for COVID-19. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

Cover: Portraits of New Jersey Air National Guard Airmen during the buildup of a Field Medical Station at the Atlantic City Convention Center in Atlantic City, N.J., April 9, 2020. (U.S. Air National Guard photo illustration by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht)

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ANSWERING THE CALL

By Brig. Gen. Jemal J. Beale, The Adjutant General of New Jersey

The New Jersey National Guard is accustomed to the most complex challenges, the most high-tempo missions, and opportunities as diverse as the organization itself.

You, the thousands of Soldiers and Airmen of the New Jersey National Guard, have answered every call, whether it be to arms or to support our State's communities.

It is hard to think of a more challenging year than 2020. You have returned from or prepared for overseas deployments, you have supported operations as COVID-19 tore through our State's long term care facilities, and you have been ready as a vanguard of peace and stability during a time of civil unrest. All of these things occurred nearly simultaneously.

You responded anyway, and continue to serve with compassion, efficiency, and a strength of character unique to our New Jersey "can-do" attitude.

Readiness and resiliency, physical and mental toughness, and a great diversity of talent and population are the keys to our success as Soldiers and Airmen of the New Jersey National Guard. You represent every facet of our complex New Jersey family, and every New Jersey family knows it can rely on us to be "Always Ready, Always There."

It is impossible to know what the future will bring, but it is our responsibility to plan, train, and be prepared for every eventuality. There will be more deployments, more missions, and more opportunities to be a reliable force for good in our communities.

Who better than us, the Soldiers and Airmen of the New Jersey National Guard, to answer that call?



U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Jemal J. Beale, the Adjutant General of New Jersey, center, followed by U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Wayne McCaughey, Dual Status Commander for New Jersey and Director of the Joint Staff for the New Jersey National Guard inspect the Federal Medical Station inside the Atlantic City Convention Center, Atlantic City, N.J., April 21, 2020. The station was developed in conjunction with numerous organizations, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Health, the Office of Emergency Management, and the New Jersey National Guard. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht)

**Who better
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Download the NJNG recruiting app, available for Apple and Android devices.

More than one hundred-fifty Soldiers and Airmen with the New Jersey National Guard were called on to state active duty orders March 16 to assist with the COVID-19 outbreak response. Medics, transportation, and military police specialists volunteered to the request for support of multiple COVID-19 drive-thru testing facilities.

Soldiers from the 508th Military Police Company, 143rd Transportation Company, 250th Brigade Support Battalion, as well as Airmen with the 108th Wing and 177th Fighter Wing were activated and are operating under Joint Task Force 57, which is being run by the 57th Troop Command.

“The testing of residents is a mission the New Jersey National Guard is ready to assist with in the battle against COVID-19,” said Brig. Gen. Jemal J. Beale, the Adjutant General and Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. “Our Citizen Soldiers and Airmen stand



U.S. Army Sgt. Albert Chu, with the 508th Military Police Company, New Jersey Army National Guard, directs traffic at a COVID-19 Community-Based Testing Site at Bergen Community College in Paramus, N.J., March 20, 2020. The site, established in partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is staffed by the New Jersey Department of Health, the New Jersey State Police, and the New Jersey National Guard. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

ready to serve where ever the Governor needs us.”

The Soldiers and Airmen are spread out through

multiple sites, providing traffic control, as well as direct medical assistance to incoming patients. The

sites are partnerships with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, staffed by the New Jersey Department of Health, the New Jersey State Police, and the New Jersey National Guard.

“You know, it feels good, it’s what we sign up for,” said 1st Lt. David Robone, Commander, 508th Military Police Company. “I’ve got a great group of men and women who put on this uniform and have answered the call, and are always willing and able to. To be able to go out and help the community at a time like this is something that we’re all proud of.”

The sentiment was shared by Robone’s young Soldiers.

“We want to help to end this before it gets worse,” said Spc. Thomas Brennan, a Military Policeman. “It feels great to help out the state, and hopefully we can be a part of making sure more people get tested and treated.”



New Jersey Army National Guard medical personnel from the 250th Brigade Support Battalion assist New Jersey citizens at a COVID-19 Community-Based Testing Site at Bergen Community College in Paramus, N.J., March 20, 2020. The drive-thru testing center is open seven days per week. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

NJANG supports COVID test site

Story and photos by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

Forty Airmen from the New Jersey Air National Guard's 108th Wing and 177th Fighter Wing are providing site security and traffic control for the COVID-19 drive-thru testing site that was set up in Holmdel, N.J. at the PNC Bank Arts Center.

"This has never been done before by the National Guard," said 1st Lt. Chris Gable, officer in charge, Task Force Holmdel. "We worked with state agencies during Hurricane Sandy, but during this, we're working with FEMA, U.S. Public Health Service, New Jersey State Police, the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, the New Jersey Department of Health, and contract nurses. We're all coming together to do our part."

Gable, who is a Citizen-Airman with the 108th Security Forces Squadron, has also been a New Jersey State Trooper for thirteen years.

"We have Citizen-Airmen from several different jobs outside of the National Guard, and different Air Force specialty codes, but we're all coming together as a team to accomplish this one mission, which is to help New Jersey fight COVID-19," said Gable. "I couldn't be more humbled to lead this team of selfless Airmen."

Tech. Sgt. Jamal Roy, who normally works with aircrew egress systems at the 177th Fighter Wing, has taken on a new role as the noncommissioned officer in charge of Task Force Holmdel.



New Jersey Air National Guard Airmen with the 108th Wing provide traffic control at the COVID-19 testing site at the PNC Bank Arts Center in Holmdel, N.J., March 23, 2020.



New Jersey National Guard Soldiers and Airmen go over the wear of protective equipment at a COVID-19 testing site at the PNC Bank Arts Center.

Medical staff collect samples from a patient at the COVID-19 testing site at the PNC Bank Arts Center.



Medical staff bag a sample from a patient at the PNC Bank Arts Center testing site. This image has been altered to protect personal information.



"It makes me proud to have the ability to come out with a group of Airmen I've never met before, to integrate with a whole other unit, come together within a couple of days, and work cohesively," said Roy. "I believe taking on a mission like this is of vital importance. When it's a community-based, stateside mission, where you're from, we're making a direct impact."

While medical staff have been testing hundreds of patients a day, the Airmen have been making sure traffic runs smoothly and effectively.

"We've had cars break down, cars run out of gas," said Roy. "There was even a medical emergency. We're here to assist the citizens of New Jersey, and the more people we can get tested, hopefully the more lives we can help save."

"I'm grateful for the steadfast service of our Airmen," said New Jersey's State Command Chief Master Sgt. Michael Rakauckas. "Whether they've been tasked with serving their community by supporting a testing site, or providing medical support at a field hospital, I am appreciative for their role and the energy they bring to the fight against COVID-19."

New Jersey Air National Guard Airmen continue to assist state and local authorities with members currently staffing joint operations centers, as well as testing sites and temporary hospitals throughout the state.

"We're all coming together as a team to accomplish this one mission, which is to help New Jersey fight COVID-19."

1ST LT. CHRIS GABLE, OFFICER IN CHARGE, TASK FORCE HOLMDEL

Task force sets up Meadowlands FMS

**By Master Sgt. Matt Hecht
New Jersey National Guard
Public Affairs Office**

Twenty-five New Jersey National Guard Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen volunteered to assist with the setup of a field medical station at the Meadowlands Exposition Center in Secaucus, N.J. This site is one of three in the state that is opening to alleviate pressure on the hospitals responding to COVID-19.

The number of COVID-19 hospitalizations in the state has climbed steadily, underscoring the need for the state's medical centers to expand their critical care capacity in anticipation of the peak.

"We hit the ground and started to work with the Department of Health, who have just done an amazing job working with the State Police in getting this facility built and ready for patients," said Col. Stephen McKenzie, a physician assistant with the New Jersey Army National Guard and commander of Task Force Secaucus. "We're going to help establish the first pods of twenty-five beds of patients to actually start operating in this facility."

It took a joint effort with the New Jersey All Hazard Incident Management Team, technical support from the Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and support from the New Jersey National Guard to build the 250 beds and associated gear.

"We helped move cargo, set up beds, arranged medical equipment, and provided security at the entrances and loading docks," said Spc. Michael Cavanagh, a Citizen-Soldier with Charlie Battery, 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery.

"It makes me feel very proud to be helping the people who are suffering from this pandemic," said Cavanagh. "I wear this uniform so I can help my fellow citizens."

"The COVID pandemic is a war, and I'm proud as a National Guardsman to be a part of the defense of our nation," said McKenzie. "This is all about helping our citizens, helping out state, and getting us through this battle so we can come out at the end fit and well and ready to move forward with our lives."

"This is the first of what will be at least three such field medical stations in our state, with Edison and Atlantic City to follow, which will expand our bed capacity by at least 1,000 beds in total," said Gov. Phil Murphy. "We will need not only the capacity but the great flexibility these sites will afford our bricks and mortar hospitals in the coming weeks."

The next field medical stations being built will include 500 beds in Central Jersey at the New Jersey Convention Center in Edison, and 250 beds in South Jersey at the Atlantic City Convention Center.



Top photo: New Jersey Army National Guard (NJARNG) Soldiers with Joint Task-Force 57 (JTF 57) conduct inventory at the Meadowlands Exposition Center, Secaucus, N.J., March 28, 2020. Middle photo: JTF 57 Soldiers set-up the Field Medical Station at the Meadowlands Exposition Center, March 31, 2020. Bottom photo: NJARNG combat medic specialists with JTF 57, test an electrocardiogram at the Meadowlands Exposition Center, April 6, 2020. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

AIRMEN SEW FACE MASKS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. CRISTINA J. ALLEN
177TH FIGHTER WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

In addition to maintaining life support equipment for pilots, the 177th Fighter Wing Aircrew Flight Equipment (AFE) shop is sewing and distributing face masks at the Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J.

“These face masks are being made for all Wing members,” said Chief Master Sgt. Jason L. Gioconda, Superintendent, AFE. “They are mainly made for the full-time, mission-essential personnel who may work closely together and can’t always abide by social distancing guidelines.”

Airmen, especially those with the 177th Maintenance Group, are not always afforded the opportunity of working six-feet apart from each other and sometimes have to work in teams to complete tasks.

The 177th is committed to maintaining national defense while taking every precaution to ensure the health and well-being of the Wing’s



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Michael R. Ottaviano (left), and Staff Sgt. Brandon M. Staines, both Aircraft Ordnance Maintenance Technology Technicians with the 177th Fighter Wing, prepare fabric for face masks April 8, 2020, in the Aircrew Flight Equipment (AFE) shop at the New Jersey Air National Guard Base, N.J. The 177th AFE shop began sewing and distributing face masks for mission-essential personnel to take every precaution to ensure the health and well-being of our Airmen, families and community in response to COVID-19.

“There are many mission-essential jobs that require our Airmen to work side by side to accomplish the mission.”

CHIEF MASTER SGT. JASON L. GIOCONDA, SUPERINTENDENT, AIRCREW FLIGHT EQUIPMENT, 177TH FIGHTER WING



U.S. Air Force Airman Makayla P. Mehaffey, an Aviation Resource Manager with the 177th Fighter Wing, cuts fabric for face masks in the Aircrew Flight Equipment shop April 8, 2020.

Airmen, families, and community in response to COVID-19.

“Master Sgt. Kyle P. Brier came up with the idea for the face mask since the AFE shop works with oxygen masks that the pilots fly with,” said Gioconda. “They are made from a tightly woven cotton on the outside with a lint-free layer of woven poly-material on the inside.”

Airmen base wide are stepping up to help make face masks to better equip mission-essential members ability to do their jobs safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I think the making and distribution of these face masks will help prevent the spread of the coronavirus if someone may have the virus, but isn’t showing any signs or symptoms,” said Gioconda. “There are many mission-essential jobs that require our Airmen to work side by side to accomplish the mission.”

GUARD SETS UP ATLANTIC CITY FMS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MASTER SGT. MATT HECHT
NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

New Jersey National Guard Citizen-Airmen and Soldiers set up a third field medical station in the Garden State at the Atlantic City Convention Center in Atlantic City, N.J. The 250-bed facility will treat non-COVID-19 patients to make more space available in the state's hospitals for patients suffering from the virus.

This field medical station is a collaborative effort by many organizations, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, North Atlantic Division, the New Jersey State Police, The Office of Emergency Management, The Department of Health, local labor unions, and the New Jersey National Guard's Joint Task Force-57.

"We're tasked with deploying, inventorying, and setting up 250 patient care areas," said Capt. Nicholas Cincotti, a Logistics Officer with the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard.

"I was excited to get back and get on the ground running to help my community through this and be there for them."

CAPT. NICHOLAS CINCOTTI, LOGISTICS OFFICER, 177TH FIGHTER WING

Cincotti said that the facility will be fully ready by April 14. "We'll be able to support the mission that the medical facility will be doing. We've been working here for the past two days with our civilian counterparts, the New Jersey State Police, and other agencies. It's been a great relationship so far, being able to support their mission: to help our fellow New Jerseyans get through this crisis."

Joint Task Force service members set up ambulatory beds, wheelchairs, and other medical equipment for the patient areas that were shipped to the site by FEMA.

"These are very different times, so I'm happy to be helping out," said Senior Airman Tiffany Aiello, a medic with the 108th Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard. "It's a lot of work, but as long as we can help people, I'm happy to be doing it."

"It's fantastic to be activated to help New Jersey in a time of need," said Tech. Sgt. Ryan Nguyen with the 177th Fighter Wing. "I'm more than happy to do it, especially working with all these different [Air and Army Guard] shops. It just goes to show that no matter where we come from, we all have the same mission and same goal we have to get accomplished as a team."

Cincotti, who was active duty Air Force for the past four years, said that he came on duty with the New Jersey Air National Guard on March 31, and started working this mission on April 1. "Before I was active duty, I was enlisted in the New Jersey Air National Guard, and one big facet that I was missing personally in my life was having that direct community impact. I was excited to get back and get on the ground running to help my community through this and be there for them."



Top photo: New Jersey Air National Guard (NJANG) Airmen assemble wheelchairs at the Field Medical Station at the Atlantic City Convention Center in Atlantic City, N.J., April 9, 2020. **Middle photo:** U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ryan Bullock, center, a medic with the NJANG's 177th Fighter Wing, distributes bedding at the Field Medical Station at the Atlantic City Convention Center. **Bottom photo:** U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Tiffany Aiello, a medic with the NJANG's 108th Wing, inventories supplies at the Atlantic City Field Medical Station, April 15, 2020.

Guard supports Menlo Park Veterans

Story and photos by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew J. Moseley, 177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office

First thing you will see when you arrive at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park is the staff being temperature tested before entering the Home.

New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers are doing the testing.

More than 60 New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers from the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, as well as seven Airmen from the 108th Wing and 177th Fighter Wing, have been assigned to the Home in Edison, N.J., to assist the staff in caring for the residents during the COVID-19 crisis.

The Army Guard medics are providing palliative care while the Air Guard support staff are assisting the medics and civilian staff with administrative work.

“The great thing about having the Army and Air National Guard as a part of our Department is that we are one team,” said Sean P. VanLew Sr., Director, Veterans Healthcare Services for the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (NJDMAVA). “So when there is a need, we can fill the need.”

The Army Guard Soldiers assigned to Menlo Park are mostly combat medics, equivalent to an emergency medical technician, with approximately 17 serving each of the two day-shifts and eight during night shift.

“We’re helping the certified nursing assistants by taking vital signs, feeding the residents, moving them, keeping them ambulatory, taking them to the bathroom, changing their bedding and clothes,” said Sgt. Christopher Charles, noncommissioned



Top Photo: U.S. Army Spc. Laurel Yerg, a Combat Medic with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, checks on a resident at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park in Edison, N.J., April 17, 2020. **Center photo:** U.S. Army Spc. Jabari Ashanti, a 114th Infantry Regiment Combat Medic checks a resident's temperature. **Bottom photo:** U.S. Army Spc Ahddaisha Milburn, a 114th Infantry Regiment Combat Medic feeds a resident at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park.

officer in charge, 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry. “The big thing is really to help out the nurses, techs, doctors, nurse practitioners, and CNAs.”

In addition to medical support, New Jersey National Guardsmen are helping to connect family members to residents, electronically. As the novel coronavirus spread throughout the state, visits to Veterans homes, nursing homes, and hospitals have been restricted. The lack of visitation has created unavoidable apprehension and worry for family members. Having the Guard at the Home has helped increase communication flow between residents, loved ones, and staff.

“A few days after the start of our orders, they brought in additional support staff and put non-medical personnel at each nursing station in each wing to help answer the phones,” said Sgt. Kenneth Wise, a Combat Medic with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, and the second shift NCO “It has taken the burden off of the nursing staff as well as the medics.”

As the Guardsmen serve the Menlo Park residents, their efforts haven’t gone unnoticed.

“Were it not for their support and assistance, we could not do it,” said VanLew. “We’ll be eternally grateful for their support.”

JUST THE FACTS

EIGHTY-FIVE NEW JERSEY ARMY NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIERS FROM THE 44TH INFANTRY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, AS WELL AS SEVEN AIRMEN FROM THE 108TH WING AND 177TH FIGHTER WING, WERE ASSIGNED TO THE HOME TO ASSIST THE CIVILIAN STAFF IN CARING FOR THE RESIDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS.

JOC coordinates COVID response

Story and photo by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

The Joint Operations Center, known as the JOC, is the focal point for coordinating missions for nearly 700 members of the New Jersey National Guard operating across the state.

The JOC provides key leaders with a constant flow of information and updates they use to make decisions.

New Jersey Guard Soldiers and Airmen are teamed up with active duty Air Force and Coast Guard service members, as well as civilians from U.S. Northern Command, making the JOC a truly joint operation.

“We are essentially a liaison office between the Office of Emergency Management and the rest of the New Jersey National Guard,” said Spc. Benjamin Castria, a full-time JOC team member. “We also receive requests from the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C., asking for updates on what we’re doing to support the COVID-19 response efforts.”

According to Castria, the JOC also receives requests from the New Jersey State Police and the New Jersey Department of Health, through the New Jersey Regional Operations & Intelligence Center (ROIC). The ROIC, (which sounds like “rock”), is the steady-state nerve center that serves as New Jersey’s primary focal point for information sharing and intelligence production needed to support law enforcement, counter-terrorism, and homeland security missions.

While JOC team members normally operate out of the Homeland Security Center of Excellence in Lawrenceville, N.J., they had to get creative with the outbreak of COVID-19.

They were the first JOC in the country to go 100 percent telework.

“For the first week, we operated the JOC remotely,” said Master Sgt. Rene Sales, noncommissioned officer in charge of the JOC. “It offered a unique set of challenges, but we made the mission happen, and kept everyone healthy.”

Even though staff members have returned, JOC personnel are spread out around the building now, maintaining social distancing protocols.

Logistics experts, active duty liaison officers, medical officers, and intelligence



U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Timothy Jardinico works in the New Jersey National Guard's Joint Operations Center in the Homeland Security Center of Excellence, Lawrenceville, N.J., April 22, 2020. New Jersey Soldiers and Airmen, as well as active duty and civilians from U.S. Northern Command are working together in the center to support the state's response efforts to COVID-19.

analysts make up some of the force working in the JOC.

“The joint effort has definitely been a beneficial and instrumental part of this operation,” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Timothy Jardinico, officer in charge, Joint Directorate of Intelligence and Security. “We get to see it from different perspectives, from all levels of the organization.”

Master Sgt. Kimberly Kaminski, a Security Forces Airman with the New Jersey Air National Guard’s 108th Wing, has been acting as a liaison between the state’s two Wings and the JOC.

“It’s a whole different view,” said Kaminski. “To do missions like this means a lot to me. Humanitarian missions like this are a big part of why I enlisted. My family was affected by Hurricanes Floyd and Irene, and the National Guard came out and helped us, so it feels good to be able to give back.”

Air Force Col. Mike Smith, deputy Title 10 commander, who is assigned to U.S. Northern Command, said that it was his team’s role to support the Dual Status Commander, Brig. Gen. Wayne McCaughey, and the deployed

forces throughout the state, including U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers with Urban Augmentation Medical Task Force 352-2.

“The Urban Augmentation Medical Task Force Soldiers come from all over the country,” said Smith. “Wisconsin, Florida, California, and many others, coming together for the first time to work together supporting New Jersey.”

“The folks that make the most impact are the doctors and nurses, and our active duty and reserve staff that are augmenting hospitals,” said Coast Guard Cmdr. Shana Donaldson, a member of the U.S. Northern Command Team. “We’ve got Title 10 medical providers all over the state doing just amazing things.”

Even though they aren’t on the front lines of the COVID-19 response, JOC service members recognize the key role they play.

“What our team does is very important and a big responsibility,” said Castria, “What we’re doing here has direct impact on what they’re doing in the field. Being able to relay information correctly and accurately and quickly is critical to the mission.”

Getting the right fit

By Spc. Michael Schwenk, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

Tasked with one of the most important missions in the New Jersey National Guard, the 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction - Civil Support Team (WMD-CST) have been traveling to sites statewide training Guardsmen and civilians in the proper wear of personal protective equipment (PPE) in support of the COVID-19 outbreak.

“We’ve been sending unit members to long-term healthcare facilities and drive-thru testing-sites to ensure that Soldiers,



U.S. Army Sgts. Quran Williams, left, and Eric J. Boyer, both with the 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team, New Jersey National Guard, train a staff member on the proper way to wear personal protective equipment at the New Jersey Veterans Home at Paramus in Paramus, N.J., April 16, 2020. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Zachary Vucic)



U.S. Army Sgt. Quran Williams, 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team, New Jersey National Guard, instructs a medical staff member on the proper way to wear personal protective equipment at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park, Edison N.J., April 17, 2020. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)



U.S. Army Sgt. Nicky Lam, 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team, conducts a mask fitting test to an Airman at a long term care facility, Andover N.J., May 8, 2020. The 21st has been training Soldiers and Airmen on proper ways to wear personal protective equipment during the COVID-19 relief effort. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

Airmen, and civilians are properly wearing, donning and doffing as well as, sanitizing their PPE to protect themselves and the civilians that we are supporting,” said Sgt. 1st Class William Camp, noncommissioned officer in charge, 21st WMD-CST.

Located at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, the unit’s mission is to support civil authorities at man-made or natural disasters by identifying chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear substances; assess the consequences, and advise on response measures.

WMD-CST members receive more than 650 hours of hazardous materials and high-tech training from agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Energy, the Department of Justice, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The CST has also been training Soldiers, Airmen, and civilians conducting on how to properly wear the N95 mask.

“We introduce a sample into the air that can be tasted or smelled, then we have them don their mask and introduce a stronger sample to see if they can still taste it in the air. If they cannot, they have passed the fit test; if they can then they need to get a different size or change the mask,” said Camp.

To date, the 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team has conducted approximately 550 mask fitting tests, as well as trained 300 personnel in the proper use of PPE in seven different locations around the state.

“I enjoy doing my part to come out and help the state as we respond to this pandemic,” said Camp. “It makes me feel really good to see my Soldiers going out and fit testing all the Soldiers and Airmen that are on the frontlines working at these facilities and test-sites, to ensure their safety so when they go home to their families, they go home safely.”

Current and former service members provide for vets

Story and photos by Spc. Derek Vasquez, 444th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Any person that has served or is serving in the military will tell you the same thing: At its core, the military is a band of brothers and sisters-in-arms.

It's that shared sense of camaraderie that not only binds those that serve today, but connects them to those that served before them.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, that bond is obvious among the more than 100 New Jersey National Guard Soldiers and Airmen as they assist the staff and residents at the New Jersey Veterans Home at Paramus in Paramus, N.J.

That support can range from tasks such as taking residents vitals to cleaning and sanitizing high touch areas throughout the Home.

For Sgt. Vivian Cabanas, a Culinary Specialist with Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, that means ensuring that the residents get a meal three times a day.

"Our job here includes cleaning the kitchen and prepping meals to be sent out to all the kitchens in the Home," said Cabanas. "From there the other kitchens just need to serve it to the residents."

That camaraderie between Cabanas and her fellow service members also shows toward the residents they are preparing the meals for.

"Just being here gives you that gratitude of coming out and supporting them and helping them with whatever they need," said Cabanas. "Especially with these veterans that have given their time in service."

Jerard Burhan, a cook for the Home and an Army veteran, shares that same sense of appreciation for his fellow veterans, as well as the National Guardsmen that help every day.

"Working with them is a pleasure," said Burhan. "They always get it done."

That camaraderie goes both ways. The Soldiers and Airmen recognize the bond and call him "Sarge" because he used to be



U.S. Army Spc. David Siegel, an Infantryman with Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, prepares utensils for residents at the New Jersey Veterans Home at Paramus in Paramus, N.J. May 1, 2020.



U.S. Army Sgt. Vivian Cabanas, a Culinary Specialist with Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, sanitizes the kitchen at the New Jersey Veterans Home at Paramus in Paramus, N.J., May 1, 2020.

a sergeant during his time in the Army. Although he may roll his eyes at the nickname, he appreciates the work they are doing in his kitchen and the Home.

"I think it was a very positive move to bring in the National Guard," said Burhan. "It uplifted a lot of people here."

Connecting residents to families

Story and photo by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

Guardsmen across New Jersey are deployed to long-term care facilities hoping to make a difference. Senior Airman Bernabe Aguero is one of the New Jersey National Guard members activated to support the state's COVID-19 response.

Originally from La Plata, Argentina, Aguero grew up near Atlantic City, and recently graduated with a Master's Degree in International Relations from Norwich University. He is assigned to the 177th Fighter Wing's Public Affairs office, where he is waiting for a technical school date to become fully qualified.

Aguero is deployed to the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home in Paramus, N.J., where he is assisting the activities director.

"What an amazing feeling it is to be helping out," said Aguero. "These are unprecedented times we are in. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, Paramus Veterans Home is not able to allow family members to visit. Fortunately, we do have technology to bridge that gap with video calls."

Aguero said that the home received a donation that included tablets, and he was put in charge of coordinating video calls between residents and their families. He manages a joint team of Airmen and Soldiers, who have been suiting up and connecting some of the most critically ill patients with their loved ones.

"Seeing how happy the families are when they can actually see the resident really does fill you with a sense of pride," said Aguero.

While Aguero has roots in South Jersey, he has close ties to



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Bernabe Aguero, right, 177th Fighter Wing, briefs Brig. Gen. Patrick Kennedy, Deputy Adjutant General, at the New Jersey Veterans Home at Paramus, N.J., May 7, 2020.

Paramus, living in the next town over in Hackensack.

"This is my community. This is my state," said Aguero. "I want to see it come out the other side of this pandemic stronger than before."

New Jersey National Guard service members are deployed throughout the state at long term care facilities, COVID-19 test sites, Operations Centers, and Federal Medical Stations.

New beds

New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers with the 508th Military Police Company construct hospital beds at East Orange General Hospital, East Orange, N.J., April 29, 2020. The National Guard is assisting the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management in reopening a wing of the East Orange General Hospital in response to the COVID-19 relief effort. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)



Resiliency Task Force supports service members

Story and photos by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

The moment Gov. Phil Murphy announced that New Jersey National Guard members were being brought into the fight against COVID-19, hundreds of Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen volunteered to serve their communities. Across the state, military Doctors and medical staff were there on the opening days of the drive-thru test sites, assisting the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the New Jersey Department of Health, the Office of Emergency Management, the New Jersey State Police, and countless nurses and medical staff called into action.

In addition to medical missions, Guardsmen have been providing traffic control for testing sites, setup, security, and hospital administration for Federal Medical Stations; assisting the Medical Examiner's Office at mortuary sites, and providing medical and administrative support to long-term care facilities throughout the state.

While New Jersey's Soldiers and Airmen have put their all into the COVID-19 mission and supporting New Jersey's citizens, a Task Force was created to support Guardsmen and their families during these stressful times.

The Resiliency Task Force, a joint effort between the New Jersey National Guard Behavioral Health Office and the Chaplain's Corps, has been traveling to sites across the state, offering support to Soldiers and Airmen in need.

"Behavioral Health is an important part of medical readiness," said Shawna Hinkson, a civilian social worker with the Behavioral Health Office. "It has a lot to do with how we interact, it affects the social, it affects our ability to focus on tasks."

Working in teams of two or three, the Task Force has been going out to talk to service members directly.

"We're going around to all the different sites throughout New Jersey," said Behavioral Health Officer 1st Lt. Kevin Ball. "We're doing check-ins and reminding them that it's important



U.S. Army Capt. Melissa Parmenter, a Behavioral Health Officer with the New Jersey Army National Guard, speaks with Airmen in the Federal Medical Station at the Atlantic City Convention Center, Atlantic City, N.J., April 18, 2020.

to take care of other people during this time, but to also take care of themselves. You do have a mission, but it's important to know that you can take a knee, and reflect on a daily basis, and just make sure that you're well mentally, physically, and emotionally. You can't do your daily mission unless you're one hundred percent yourself."

The team noted that they've had a direct impact on the missions, and have already aided service members and their families undergoing stressors.

"It feels good to help others," said Capt. Melissa Parmenter, a Behavioral Health Officer.

"It's good to be that person to help remind others about self-care, because it's probably the easiest thing to forget about, although it might be the most important."

Chaplain Capt. Damon Missouri provides spiritual resiliency and services to Guardsmen.

"We have four

chaplains assigned to specific sites, but my role is tied directly to Behavioral Health," said Missouri. "We travel to each site in the state on a weekly basis, introducing ourselves to leaders, and offering support to Soldiers, Airmen, and their families. I offer prayer and confidential counseling for service members that have things on their heart and mind that may be difficult to talk about."

Missouri said that being around the Guardsmen and seeing what missions they're dealing with gives him an opportunity to provide comfort, encouraging words, and hope.

"It's a ministry of presence," said Missouri. "I get to remind Soldiers and Airmen that might be feeling stressed that what they're doing is meaningful work, and it's an opportunity to provide comfort for those in need."

"We're here to offer support, clinical expertise, referrals, and assessments to our service members and we extend that support to their family members," said Hinkson, "We're here for you."

The Behavioral Health Office offers support to all New Jersey Guardsmen and their families through 24/7 access to a crisis hotline at 609-235-5959.



U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Patrick Kennedy, Deputy Adjutant General, left, speaks with Chaplain Capt. Damon Missouri, right, at the Bergen Community College COVID-19 testing site in Paramus, N.J., May 7, 2020.

Airmen helping Vineland veterans

By Master Sgt. Matt Hecht, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

Thirty-one Citizen-Airmen with the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing are helping the state's most vulnerable population at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Vineland. Armed with cleaning supplies, and a desire to help others, the Airmen have integrated themselves with the staff at the facility.

"Having the National Guard here has been really helpful," said CEO Allyson Bailey. "They're supplementing our mission here, which is taking care of our residents. Some of the duties the Guard has assumed have been instrumental in helping us to reduce the spread of the virus in the Home."

According to Bailey, the housekeeping mission has been especially important.

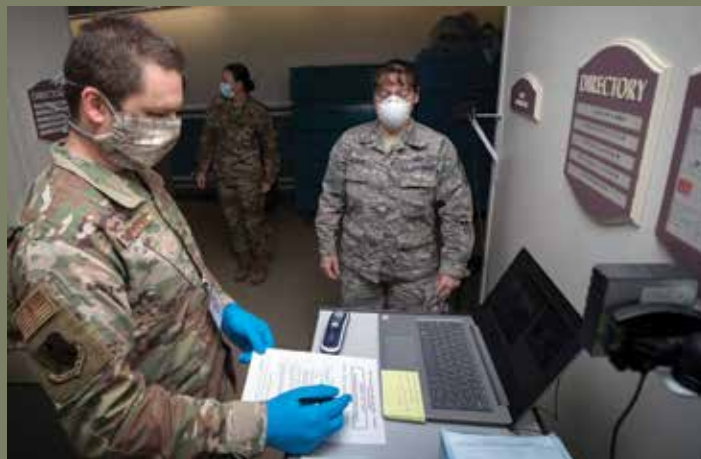
"For our housekeepers, who have been working seven days a week with no days off, having that extra support has been pivotal," said Bailey. "The Guard is also helping us out with life enrichment. Residents and families have not been able to directly interact for more than a month and a half now, so virtual visits, e-mails, and phone calls are very important to the resident's families. It has been a tremendously positive thing to have them here helping us."

"We're supplementing where the facility really needs help," said 1st Lt. Bernard Cortes, officer in charge of Team Vineland.

"Housekeeping, food service, health screening checkpoints, facility engineering, and life enrichment are some of the missions we're doing here.



Above: U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Rebecca Oxford, 177th Fighter Wing, prepares food at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Vineland, N.J., May 19, 2020. Below: U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Stephen Hillmann, 177th Fighter Wing, performs health scans for personnel entering the Veterans Home. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht)



New Jersey Air National Guard Airmen with the 108th Wing and the 177th Fighter Wing, conduct a retreat ceremony for the residents of the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Vineland, N.J., May 22, 2020. (U.S. Air National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Cristina J. Allen)

Airmen are getting food orders for residents, talking with them, and keeping them in touch with their families. We're giving them that interaction that is a basic human need."

Cortes said that the service members have developed a great relationship with Vineland's staff.

"It means a lot for me to be a part of this," said Cortes. "I'm from New Jersey, I grew up here. I look at the veterans and I want to give them the best care that I can. To see the residents smile and salute us, it makes it feel worthwhile."

"It's very rewarding," said Senior Airman Connor Jarvis, who is working on the housekeeping team, "It's nice to be able to help. I'm mopping floors, I'm sanitizing countertops, cleaning bathrooms, and common areas eight hours straight."

Senior Airman Casey Keevill said that working with residents in life enrichment has been a meaningful experience and has made an impact on the lives of the service members as well as the veterans.

"I work directly with the residents," said Keevill. "Our job is to keep residents involved and active. We start the morning by delivering newspapers and engage with them to see how they're doing and what they need. It's been great because you really get to know these people."

"It's been amazing seeing what the National Guard can do when our state needs us," said Keevill. "You get a whole new perspective. Seeing it and being a part of it gives it so much more meaning."

WINGS HONOR FRONT LINE FIGHTERS



Above: U. S. Army Soldiers with the New Jersey Army National Guard take pictures of a flyover at University Hospital in Newark, N.J., during the Air Force Salutes flyover campaign by the New Jersey Air National Guard's 108th Wing and 177th Fighter Wing to honor healthcare workers, first responders, and other essential personnel working on the front lines to combat COVID-19, May 12, 2020. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk) Below: New Jersey National Guard Soldiers and Airmen take pictures of two 177th F-16 Fighting Falcons as they fly over the New Jersey Veterans Home at Paramus in Paramus N.J., May 12, 2020. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Derek Vasquez)



GUARDSMEN MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT VETS HAVEN

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARK C. OLSEN, NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE



Top photo: U.S. Army Spc. Kyla Bowman, left, Culinary Specialist, Foxtrot Company, 250th Brigade Support Battalion, New Jersey Army National Guard, prepares a Stromboli while Head Cook Casie Smickle observes at Veterans Haven North, Glen Gardner, N.J., April 30, 2020. Middle photo: U.S. Army Spc. Joseph Valencia, a Culinary Specialist with the 250th, washes a steam kettle component. Bottom photo: U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Daphne Gojo Cruz, Services Specialist, 108th Services Flight, New Jersey Air National Guard, fills a serving pan with melon cubes for the residents at the residents at the Hunterdon Developmental Center.

This is a war that has no frontline.

In fact, from the hospitals to the home front, the Coronavirus has truly made this a global war.

“This mission made me open my eyes to the idea that we’re not always going to be fighting an enemy that’s in a uniform with a gun,” said Sgt. Michael Demayo, Culinary Noncommissioned Officer, Foxtrot Company, 250th Brigade Support Battalion (BSB), New Jersey Army National Guard.

Demayo is part of a team of five Soldiers from the 250th and three New Jersey Air National Guard Airmen – two from the 108th Wing and one from the 177th Fighter Wing assisting the Veterans Haven North kitchen staff.

Veterans Haven North, which is operated by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, is a transitional housing facility for homeless veterans that provides its residents long-term rehabilitation services and employment training.

“We’ve been doing a lot of cooking, a lot of prepping, cleaning, unloading and storing food,” said Spc. Joseph Valencia, a Culinary Specialist with the 250th BSB.

Valencia, who immigrated to the United States from the Philippines, has been with the 250th for seven years. “The reason I joined was to serve my country.”

Wherever there was a need in the kitchen, a Guardsman was there to make sure the job got done.

And the size of that job: 2,400 meals a day for the Haven’s 67 residents and the 430 residents at the Hunterdon Developmental Center.

The Center, which is located six miles from Veterans Haven North, provides behavioral, medical, and habilitation services to women and men with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Every day, the kitchen staff prepares breakfast, lunch, and dinner for the Center’s residents.

“I don’t think we would’ve been able to do what we’re doing without them,” said Al Hanby, Food Services Supervisor, Veterans Haven North. “We wouldn’t have been able to do 2,400 meals a day.”

For BSB Culinary Specialist Spc. Kyla Bowman, who returned from basic military training in December 2019, it’s about putting her skills to work.

“This makes me a better Soldier because I’m actually using what I learned in training here.”

The Guardsmen also had an additional impact, one that wasn’t foreseen when COVID-19 response began.

“Just the presence of the uniform and the confidence of the work being done, built up the morale of the kitchen staff,” said Edward Chrystal, Superintendent, Veterans Haven North.

“I joined the Guard to help out people,” said Airman 1st Class Daphne Gojo Cruz, Services Specialist, 108th Services Flight. “I’m honored to help out the veterans here.”

The Soldiers and Airmen are on orders through May 30, although, with the nature of the pandemic, that is subject to change.

“The staff here really appreciates us; they talk about wanting to keep us here permanently,” said Demayo.

Donated computers support frontline Guardsmen children

Story and photos by Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

It started with a question.

It was during a staff call-in meeting with Brig. Gen. Jemal J. Beale, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, at the beginning of the COVID-19 response in early March. New Jersey National Guard Soldiers and Airmen were being brought on to state active duty. It was also when all of New Jersey's schools were closed.

"The TAG said 'I wonder if our Guardsmen's children have any laptops to do their school-work,'" said Col. Timothy S. McLaughlin, Assistant Adjutant General – Army. "I realized maybe there is a need."

McLaughlin, a traditional drilling Guardsman, is the Senior Director for Pfizer Global Security. He knew that Pfizer Digital had a program that donated laptops to 501c3 organizations.

These are company laptops and computers that after they reach the end of their useful life, they are wiped of data and then are recycled, resold, or donated.

"Pfizer said you need to be a 501c3 to make a request, the request had to state the purpose, and that they wouldn't resell the laptops."

McLaughlin reached out to the National Guard State Family Readiness Council (NGS-FRC) who agreed to participate.

McLaughlin reported back to Beale "I said 'we can get them laptops.'"

The Council contacted Michele Daisey, Family Assistance Center Coordinator at the Joint Military and Family Assistance Center (JMFAC) in Bordentown, N.J., to see how many laptops were needed.

Daisey sent out an email to every New Jersey National Guard Soldier and Airmen explaining that because of the pandemic, children would



U.S. Army Master Sgt. Beth B. LaPoint, noncommissioned officer in charge, Joint Military and Family Assistance Center, New Jersey Army National Guard, unpacks donated laptops at the Center in Bordentown, N.J., April 14, 2020.

be required to perform their schoolwork from home. For the families that didn't have a computer, Pfizer had a limited number of used computers

they were willing to donate. Parents needed fill out an application letter and write a letter of circumstances which included the reason for the

need of a computer, child's name, age, and grade in school; name of school, and school district.

The applications rolled in.

"We vetted by ensuring all applicants were Guard-members and their child was a dependent listed in our family management program data base," said Daisey. "We made sure paperwork was complete and there was a legitimate need."

"I coordinated with the five Family Readiness Support Assistants and the two Airman and Family Readiness Program managers to ensure all the applications were complete, then racked and stacked all applications."

Sixty laptops were needed.

"I didn't know how many laptops Pfizer could provide, but they came back and said they could support the full request," said McLaughlin. "The whole process took less than three weeks. It moved pretty quickly."

Daisey emailed the Soldiers and Airmen telling them that their request had been approved.

"The computers started arriving April 8," said Master Sgt. Beth B. LaPoint, non-commissioned officer in charge, JMFAC.

The response by the Soldiers is overwhelmingly positive.

"I know that when Michele (Daisey) emailed the individuals to let them know that they have been selected, they were so grateful that they were getting them, very appreciative," said LaPoint.

"Pfizer was very appreciative to support our Guardsmen," said McLaughlin. "It was a good thing to help Soldiers and Airmen in need as they were supporting New Jersey's citizens."



U.S. Army Sgt. Christopher M. Schwear, Alpha Company, 1-150th Assault Helicopter Battalion, picks up a laptop at the Joint Military and Family Assistance Center in Bordentown, N.J., April 14, 2020.

STAND DOWN

New Jersey National Guard Soldiers with the 253rd Transportation Company and the 328th Military Police Company cooked meals while 177th Fighter Wing Airmen provided medical assistance to 187 homeless veterans at the Stand Down at the National Guard Armory in Cherry Hill, N.J., Sept. 27, 2019. The veterans were provided healthcare, mental health screening, substance abuse counseling, social services, legal services, religious counseling, a hot meal, a haircut, and winter clothing.



Top left: U.S. Army Pvt. Jennifer Michele, 328th Military Police Company, hangs up donated winter coats. Top right: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jessica Reichner, left, and Sgt. Stephanie C. Immendorf, both with the 328th, cook sausages for lunch. Middle left: U.S. Army Spc. Janerah W. Glaze, 253rd Transportation Company, grills hamburgers for lunch. Middle right: U.S. Air Force Airman Mario A. Pasquarelli, Aerospace

Medical Technician, 177th Fighter Wing, gives a homeless veteran a health assessment. Bottom left: U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Angela C. Gallagher, 177th Aerospace Medical Technician, gives a veteran a flu shot. Bottom right: U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Melissa A. Seel, 177th Aerospace Medical Technician, puts a bandage on a veteran after giving him a flu shot. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)



WELCOME HOME

By Sgt. 1st Class Wayne Woolley, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs Office

The families began filling into the Westfield Armory while the December sun was still high in the sky. They carried signs that said things like: “I’m walking to my daddy for the first time” or “I can’t wait to meet you, uncle!”

By the time the Soldiers of the New Jersey Army National Guard’s 1st Squadron of the 102nd Cavalry Regiment stepped off charter buses into the icy air to end a year-long deployment, the sun had been gone for hours - and the welcome home contingent inside the armory had grown to the hundreds.

The roar of the crowd was deafening as the Soldiers, many wearing black cavalry Stetson hats, marched onto the drill floor.

Carrying a huge array of balloons, Luz Lopez leapt into the air when she saw her son, Spc. Aaron Lopez make his way into the armory.

“He’s home, thank God, he’s home,” she said.

For the Soldiers, the deployment had been a



Top photo: U.S. Army Soldiers with the 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry, New Jersey Army National Guard, salute during the national anthem at the welcome home ceremony at the National Guard Armory in Westfield, N.J., Dec. 12, 2019. Middle photo: An attendee displays her poster during the 102nd’s welcome home ceremony. Bottom photo: U.S. Army Soldiers are reunited with their families and friends after the ceremony. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)

challenge because of some of the missions the unit drew and the places they went. One company was assigned to work with Special Operations troops in Africa. Several of those Soldiers earned the Combat Infantry Badge.

Lt. Col. Omar Minott, the Battalion Commander, told the families that the deployment would not have been possible without their support.

“We became more tactically proficient and were reminded that we have the ability to succeed regardless of circumstances,” he said.

As the crowd began to thin, Staff Sgt. Karen Adrada, a Personnel Specialist, said the deployment had been at once exhilarating and exhausting. And as happy as she was to see her real family again, the end of the deployment’s end was bittersweet.

“I’m extremely proud of this unit. Every one of us who made this deployment - we’re family,” she said. “I can’t think of a better family to deploy with.”

Centurions receive hero's welcome

Story and photos by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office



Centurions from the New Jersey Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment (Air Assault) received a hero's welcome at their home armory in Blackwood, N.J., after more than nine months overseas.

support for the New Jersey Citizen-Soldiers.

A large group of people waiting to see Sgt. Kyle McQueen could barely contain their excitement.

"We're very excited to see Kyle, she smiles

first responders, who used two ladder trucks to hoist a giant American Flag over the main entrance.

"I cannot express how much this means to your Soldiers," said Centurions Commander Capt. Andrew Pope, addressing the crowd. "You did the hard work here, while we stood at gates, stood in towers and made sure that we did everything that we were supposed to be doing. They searched thousands of vehicles, and hundreds of

thousands of people, and they came back better fathers, mothers, and Soldiers than you gave me at the beginning of this year."

Soldiers were then released to reunite with their families.

Spc. Patrick O'Hanlon reflected on the deployment.

"The best part? I mean, just serving your country, it's something I've always wanted to do," said O'Hanlon. "I'm just glad to be back with my family."



Family and friends wait for New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment to arrive at the National Guard Armory in Blackwood, N.J., Dec. 8, 2019.

The Soldiers were tasked with a security force mission manning entry control points, searching vehicles, processing gate entries, and working in guard towers in Qatar.

Family members, friends, and locals came out to show

every time she sees him on FaceTime," said Schoeber, holding their two-month-old daughter Kolbi.

More than one hundred and thirty Soldiers arrived in Blackwood, greeted by local fire departments and



U.S. Army Soldiers with Charlie Company, 1-114th Infantry Regiment, are welcomed home by family members and friends.

WELCOME HOME



Top left: U.S. Army Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, wait to be announced for their welcome home ceremony at the National Guard Armory in Teaneck, N.J., Nov. 30, 2019. Top right: A U.S. Army Soldier has his picture taken with his mother after the 113th welcome home ceremony. Middle left: A U.S. Army Soldier with the 113th Infantry Regiment, is kissed by his daughter. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen) Middle right: Family and friends welcome home the Citizen-Soldiers of Bravo

Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, at the National Guard Armory in Freehold, N.J., Dec. 5, 2019. (New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photo by Kryn P. Westhoven) Bottom left: U.S. Army Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, pose for a photo before their welcome home ceremony at the National Guard Armory in Teaneck, N.J., Dec. 6, 2019. Bottom right: U.S. Army Spc. Oscar S. Tenesaca with the 113th Infantry Regiment hugs his family. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)

HOME WRAP UP



Top left: U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Erick G. Recinos, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, poses for a photo after the welcome home ceremony at the National Guard Armory in Teaneck, N.J., Dec. 7, 2019. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Armando Vasquez) Top right: Soldiers of Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, are welcomed home at the National Guard Armory in Mount Holly, N.J., Dec. 8, 2019. (New Jersey Department of military and Veterans Affairs photo by Krynn P. Westhoven) Middle left: U.S. Army Sgt. Aidan J. Curran leads the Soldiers of Headquarters

and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, into the National Guard Armory in Woodbury, N.J., Dec. 8, 2019. Middle right: A U.S. Army Soldier is hugged after the 114th welcome home ceremony. Bottom left: A daughter of a U.S. Army Soldier watches as Citizen-Soldiers with Alpha Company, 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion, march into the National Guard Armory at West Orange, N.J., Dec. 13, 2019. Bottom right: U.S. Army Sgt. Gaby Dessin spends time with his daughter after the 104th welcome home ceremony. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)

She said "Yes!"

By Sgt. Bruce Daddis, 444th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen

As the more than 120 Citizen-Soldiers of Task Force Warrior returned home from a ten-month deployment to Djibouti, Africa, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom Horn of Africa, there were bound to be changes in their lives.

When the 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, rushed to the arms of their loved ones at the Teaneck Armory Dec. 6, one Soldier in particular experienced the surprise of her lifetime.

Spc. Elizabeth Drumm met her boyfriend Michael Seewald on the armory floor and he wasted little time as he dropped to a knee and proposed to his girlfriend of three years, and her answer was yes.

Drumm is a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Specialist with the New Jersey National Guard and a full-time student who is pursuing a degree in Fine Arts Education was hopeful this engagement would happen soon but was overcome with the surprise of it.

"It's no secret, I talk about my feelings all the time. He knows that I love him very much and this is where my heart is at. It was on my mind the whole time, which sometimes made it harder but it made a world of difference to me. I feel waves of it, I'm coming back to Earth right now and it's beautiful," said Drumm.

The couple described how much they missed each other

although they stayed in contact daily Drumm said "He called me every day. It was my favorite part of the day."

"I had it planned for a couple months, trying to figure out how and when. So I figured it was the best time with family here to take advantage of the gathering," said Seewald.

"It's no secret, I talk about my feelings all the time. He knows that I love him very much and this is where my heart is at."

Spc. Elizabeth Drumm
2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment

Drumm expressed her pleasure with the timing as her grandfather was in attendance to witness it.

During deployments one of the sacrifices Soldiers have to face is that life at home goes on without them and change is inevitable. Some came home to newborn children, others to new homes. For Drumm, it is the start of an exciting new phase in her life.

"Coming back is bittersweet because I grew so close and got to spend so much time with the people in my platoon, but I'll see them at drill. It's time to go home with my fiancé now."

A DIFFERENT WORLD

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARK C. OLSEN, NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

When the New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers assembled on the drill floor April 4, 2020, unlike past welcome home ceremonies, there was no one there to meet them.

Instead their families were waiting inside their cars in the parking lot behind the Joint Military and Family Assistance Center in Bordentown, New Jersey.

This is the age of Coronavirus and welcome home ceremonies are no exception to the social distancing rules New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy has implemented throughout the state.

"It's a lot different than we imagined it would be; this is nowhere near what we thought it would be," said Col. Robert W. Hughes Jr., Commander, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT). "The world is a different place than when we left."

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 44th IBCT, had just returned from a nearly year-long deployment in the Republic of Kosovo as part of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) peacekeeping mission.

KFOR is NATO's longest-running peacekeeping mission, with more than 28 allied and partner nations ensuring safety, peace, and security in the Kosovo region. The KFOR mission began June 10, 1999, and derives its mandate from the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and international agreements. Currently approximately 3,600 troops help ensure that KFOR's objectives are met.

"We worked with our international partners, we built bridges, we built relationships," said Command Sgt. Maj. Scott Mechkowski, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. "You knocked it out of the park."

Prior to their return to New Jersey, the more than 120 Soldiers spent 14 days in quarantine at Fort Bliss, Texas.

On the Bordentown drill floor, Mechkowski offered this advice to the Soldiers.

"We just came out of quarantine; remember this: We know you're good right now, you don't know where everybody else has been, so use caution."

Hughes reinforced that message.

"Ease back into it, you can't make up for the lost year and all that lost fun in



A family member displays her sign for the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team welcome home ceremony at the Joint Military and Family Assistance Center, Bordentown, N.J., April 4, 2020.

a day or two. As the sergeant major said, you've earned the right to relax. In due time, you will get your opportunity to celebrate as a group."

And with that, the Soldiers were dismissed.

When the armory's loading dock door was opened to the parking lot, the Soldiers were met with a crescendo of honking car horns.

This was their welcome home.



U.S. Army Spc. Luselys Lugardo, Military Intelligence Company, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, is hugged by a family member in the Joint Military and Family Assistance Center parking lot. Due to the Coronavirus, the traditional welcome home ceremony was changed to enable proper social distancing.



STORY AND PHOTOS BY SGT. 1ST CLASS WAYNE WOOLLEY, JOINT FORCE HEADQUARTERS PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

The Soldiers of the New Jersey Army National Guard's Soldier Wellness Education Training (SWEAT) program have helped dozens of Soldiers pursue their military goals by improving their fitness and overall health.

Several SWEAT members are also certified as instructors and graders for the new Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT).

From July 22-25, 2019, SWEAT members had a new focus: Working with top New Jersey National Guard uniformed military leaders and several New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans affairs civilian senior leaders.

For four days, these leaders, who ranged in age from 30 to 57, underwent a condensed version of the SWEAT program, which emphasizes classes on nutrition and brutal workouts. The group, which included sergeant majors and colonels, as well as a retired officer, finished the week by taking the ACFT. The leaders participated to help chart a course for the New Jersey Army National Guard as it continues to prepare its Soldiers for the rigorous test, which becomes the Army standard in 2020.

The new test is designed to more closely replicate the rigors of combat than the test it replaced, which was limited to push-ups, sit-ups, and a two-mile run. The only events remaining on the new test is the two-mile run and a more challenging

version of the push-up. But there also four new events that mimic movements used for climbing obstacles, carrying ammunition, fighting off an adversary, and dragging a wounded comrade to safety while under fire. In beta tests of the ACFT across the Army, no Soldier



has yet to achieve the maximum score of 600, although several have come very close. The highest recorded score so far, 597, was notched in June by a Kentucky Army National Guardsman. But even to achieve the minimum score, Soldiers will have to train for a test that requires a minimum three-repetition deadlift of 140 pounds for those in occupational skills requiring "moderate" physical demands and a minimum of 180 pounds for those considered "heavy." A three-repetition deadlift of 340 pounds is required for the maximum score.

An event many Soldiers consider the most taxing is the sprint-drag-carry. The test begins with a 50-meter sprint, followed by pulling a 90-pound sled over the same distance, then a 50-meter shuttle run, followed by carrying two 40-pound kettlebells for 50-meters, and finishing with a 50-meter sprint. To pass, those in "heavy" demand occupations, such as the infantry, need to finish in just over two minutes. Those in specialties considered "moderate," such as a supply specialist must complete the course in less than three-and-a-half minutes to pass. To achieve the maximum score, a soldier needs to complete the course in just over a minute and a half.

There are other significant changes in addition to the doubling of the number of tested events and their greater rigor. The new test is both age and gender neutral. Previous tests had different standards for men and women for push-ups and the run and requirements for each event were set by age group. No longer.

"The ACFT is the new standard and it is going to require that every one of our Soldiers prepare for it," said State Command Sergeant Maj. Earnest Williams, who was among the leaders who took the test that week. "The test is no joke. But our people are going to be ready."



U.S. Air Force F-15 Eagles form up next to Danish Air Force F-16 Falcons behind a 108th Wing KC-135 Stratotanker after being refueled over Sweden during Arctic Challenge Exercise 19, May 24, 2019. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kenneth Shaner Brown)

108TH PARTICIPATES IN ACE 19

BY SENIOR AIRMAN MARIA RELLA, 108TH WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

Airmen and aircraft from the 108th Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, participated in Arctic Challenge Exercise 2019 (ACE 19), a Nordic aviation training exercise, May 22 through June 4, 2019.

ACE is a biennial Nordic aviation exercise which builds strong and strategic relationships and increases global response and interoperability between multinational forces.

During the exercise, Ørland Air Base, Brekstad, Norway, hosted KC-135R Stratotankers from the 108th and two other Air National Guard wings.

ACE trains multinational forces in air operations over Sweden, Finland, and Norway. During the exercise, the U.S. Air Force and Marine Corps trained with units from Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway,

Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

As one of the largest air operations in Europe, ACE coordinated 140 aircraft and more than 4,000 troops from the nine nations and NATO (although it is not a NATO Exercise). The aircraft types include multi-role fighters, transport and liaison aircraft, aerial refueling tankers, airborne warning and control system aircraft, transport, and search and rescue helicopters.

Swedish Air Force Lt. Col. Tobias Wikstrom, wing commander at Kallax Air Base, stated approximately 1,600 sorties were flown for ACE 19. During some missions, as many as 100 aircraft were in the exercise airspace simultaneously.

The Arctic Challenge Exercise provided participating countries a unique opportunity to plan and execute a large

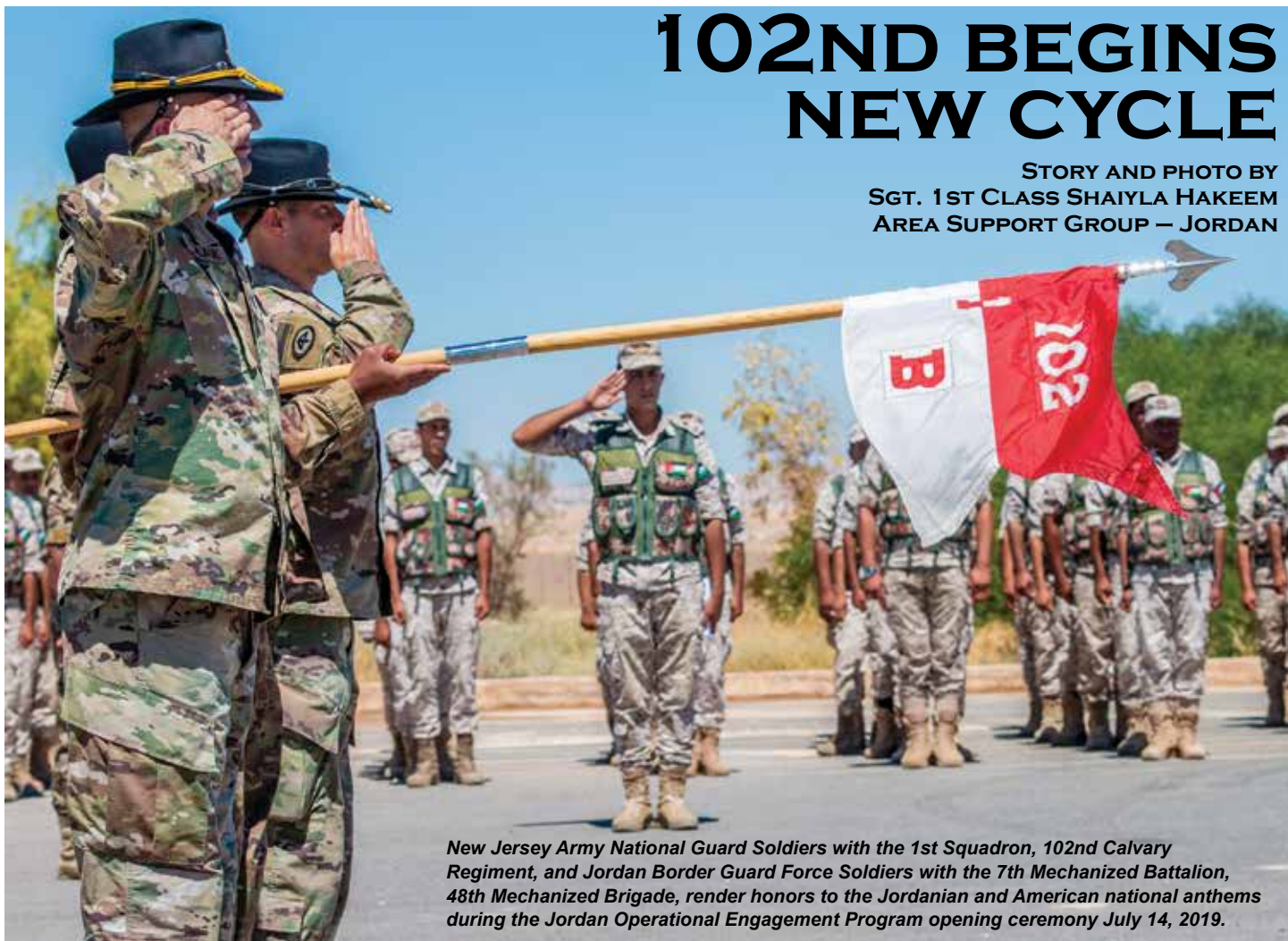
multinational air operation. The exercise concept was based on a United Nations mandate to operate a large international stabilization force against a highly-skilled, near-peer competitor. All facets of air operations were tested, including offensive and defensive scenarios consisting of both air-to-air and air-to-ground missions.

Swedish, Finnish, and Norwegian forces conduct Cross Border Training on a weekly basis, which prepares the nations' air forces for both friendly and combative airborne interactions. Because of their experience, the host nations are uniquely qualified to instruct the invited nations during the exercise.

Mark C. Olsen contributed to this story.

102ND BEGINS NEW CYCLE

STORY AND PHOTO BY
SGT. 1ST CLASS SHAIYLA HAKEEM
AREA SUPPORT GROUP – JORDAN



New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers with the 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Regiment, and Jordan Border Guard Force Soldiers with the 7th Mechanized Battalion, 48th Mechanized Brigade, render honors to the Jordanian and American national anthems during the Jordan Operational Engagement Program opening ceremony July 14, 2019.

Jordanian and American Soldiers stood side-by-side during an opening ceremony honoring the commencement of the Jordan Operational Engagement Program (JOEP) training cycle.

New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers, with 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Regiment, and Jordan Border Guard Force Soldiers, with the 7th Mechanized Battalion, 48th Mechanized Brigade, started the cycle July 14, 2019.

“Border Guards protect Jordanian borders and I am honored and proud to train with the U.S. Army in all areas of weapons, [us] all together here shows a strong partnership,” said Brig. Gen. Khalid Al-Masaeid, Northern Region Commander, Jordan Armed Forces (JAF), during the ceremony.

JOEP is a 14-week individual and collective training period, as well as a military partnership between Jordan and America. Areas of training include marksmanship, tactical first aid, map reading, land navigation, battle drills,

“Border Guards protect Jordanian borders and I am honored and proud to train with the U.S. Army in all areas of weapons, [us] all together here shows a strong partnership.”

Brig. Gen. Khalid Al-Masaeid
Northern Region Commander
Jordan Armed Forces

reacting to improvised explosive devices, sniper training, and other Soldier skills.

Speaking on behalf of Task Force Spartan-Jordan, U.S. Army Col. Kirk White, Senior Army leader of Jordan, emphasized Soldiers serving shoulder-to-shoulder in an effort to become a stronger force.

“Let us continue to build on this successful program by enhancing the mission readiness for both units.”

JOEP’s purpose is to partner and train with the Jordan Army battalions mobilizing for border missions. The program’s intent is to conduct meaningful partnership training with the JAF leading to the promotion of stability and security in the region.



Twins deploy together

Story and photo by Sgt. Zachery Mott, Area Support Group – Qatar

“It feels like I got a cheat code for a deployment,” said Pvt. Matthew Maurino, an Infantryman with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment. “You don’t feel as far away from home when your brother’s here. Especially your twin.”

Private Maurino and his identical twin brother, Spc. Joseph Maurino, an infantryman with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, deployed together to

Qatar and served as part of the security forces element for Area Support Group-Qatar. Joseph joined the Army after graduating high school in 2017 while Matthew joined in 2018 after completing his first semester of college.

“I’ve always wanted to join since I was a little kid,” said Matthew. “I didn’t plan on joining so soon, I planned on going to college first. But my brother came back and I saw him in his nice uniform and I said, ‘You know what, I might as well join up now.’”

For Joseph, his journey to the Army began with a properly placed pen.

“I basically was at lunch one day and a recruiter was there and I needed a pen for class and I took it,” said Joseph.

From there, the recruiter contacted him and, after some discussion about military occupational specialty options, Joseph signed up as an infantryman by October of his senior year in high school.

“A part of me always wanted to learn how to fight,” said Joseph. “I figured if I’m going to go military, I’ll go guard. I wanted to make sure I’d go to college, too.”

The opportunity to deploy together came about while Matthew was attending one station unit training (OSUT) at Fort Benning, Georgia.



U.S. Army Spc. Joseph Maurino, left, of Bravo Company, and his twin brother, Pvt. Matthew Maurino, of Alpha Company, both with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, at Camp As Sayliyah, Qatar.

“I knew he wanted to go, there [were] like two slots left, and [my first sergeant] put my brother in one of those slots,” said Joseph. “So before he even was finished with OSUT, I knew he was going on the deployment.”

“It’s interesting with twins, especially identical twins, we actually just naturally tend to do the same things even if we’re in different environments. If he’s up at a random time, odds are I’m up.”

PVT. MATTHEW MAURINO
ALPHA COMPANY, 1ST BATTALION
114TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

Now that they’re deployed, the brothers, who are separated by less than three minutes at birth, enjoy spending time together when their schedules allow.

“Usually we’ll just knock on each other’s door at obscene hours of the day like one o’clock in the morning,” said Joseph. “I’ll get over there and he’ll blast

some music as he’s telling me all these crazy stories. That’s usually how it goes every time. Either me doing it or he’s doing it.”

The random door knocks are not the only way Matthew and Joseph find themselves spending time together.

“Sometimes we wake each other up, but generally we’re both up at the same time,” said Matthew. “It’s interesting with twins, especially identical twins,

we actually just naturally tend to do the same things even if we’re in different environments. If he’s up at a random time, odds are I’m up. If one random night I just want to chill at the (Post Exchange) – and I never do that – he’ll usually be there, too. The odds shouldn’t be that we meet up so much in random places but we tend to always go to the same places by ourselves and meet up. I think that has to do with being a twin because all throughout our life we’ve done stuff coincidentally in the same area.”

Having family close by while deployed is an advantage both brothers enjoy. But, they also enjoy keeping connected to their family in New Jersey.

“My mom will send us snacks and we’ll meet up and we’ll bring a big thing of snacks and we’ll trade what we want because sometimes she sends us a different one,” said Matthew.

Matthew has his sights set on earning his degree and becoming an officer. Joseph is also pursuing his college degree and plans to join the New Jersey State Police in the future.

“You miss out on a lot, as a twin especially, when they’re so far away and you don’t have time to talk,” said Joseph. “Now that he’s here, I don’t really lose that. I haven’t felt homesick at all yet.”

Training to save lives

Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Shaiyla Hakeem
Area Support Group – Jordan



Above: A Jordanian Soldier with the 7th Mechanized Battalion, 48th Mechanized Brigade, supports a Soldier with the 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, with simulated arm and abdominal injuries during medical evacuation training, part of the Jordan Operational Engagement Program at Joint Training Center-Jordan Aug. 27, 2019. **Below:** Soldiers with the 7th Mechanized Battalion protect a simulated injured 102nd Cavalry Regiment Soldier as a UH-60 Black Hawk lands.



In a combat environment, proper medical care and evacuation can be the difference between life and death.

Jordanian Soldiers with the 7th Mechanized Battalion, 48th Mechanized Brigade, trained alongside Soldiers with the 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, for casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) training, and received air support from U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers with the 244th Combat Aviation Brigade for medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) training, part of the Jordan Operational Engagement Program (JOEP) at the Joint Training Center-Jordan Aug. 27, 2019.

Field medical training is an important aspect of the 14-week program because it enables each Soldier to become more skilled on tactical medical techniques and, according to Col. Omar Minott, Commander, 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Regiment, “Save the life of his fellow Soldier or civilian in distress with a level of skill and confidence that would be very hard to replicate without our JOEP medical training program.”

The Soldiers practiced reacting to enemy fire, room clearing techniques, and performing CASEVACs for simulated injured troops. Once the injured were relocated to a secure location, they provided tactical field care and performed MEDEVACs into a UH-60 Black Hawk. The 102nd Troops were hoisted into a UH-60 Black Hawk Helicopter on a rescue seat, simulating the removal of casualties from areas where a helicopter would not be able to safely land due to terrain or enemy forces.

The JOEP is the largest training program funded by Title 10 USC Section 333. The U.S. is committed to training and equipping Jordan in its battle to defend their country against ISIS and any other violent extremist organization that may threaten the safety of its people. Minott described the JOEP as a “win-win” for both the U.S. and Jordan.

“For the U.S., we get a closely aligned regional partner that is better able to defend its borders from external threats, namely ISIS,” he explained, “The more capable the Border Guard Force is, the better protected and more stable Jordan is; the more stable Jordan is, moreover, the further U.S. strategic interests advance in the Middle East.”

Best Warrior 2019

Photos by Mark C. Olsen
New Jersey National Guard
Public Affairs Office

The 2019 New Jersey Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition ran from April 8-11, 2019 at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., April 10, 2019. The competitors, front row, left to right: U.S. Army Spc. Emma E. Archut, 328th Military Police Company; Spc. Daniel P. McAuley, Delta Company, 1st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 150th Aviation Regiment; Sgt. Samantha L. Merryfield, 328th Military Police Company, and Pfc. Michael C. Rinehart, 50th Chemical Company. Back row, left to right: U.S. Air Force Senior Airman John M. Cucci, 227th Air Support Operations Squadron; U.S. Army Sgt. Christopher M. Schwear, Delta Company, 1st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 150th Aviation Regiment; Pfc. Matthew D. Maher, Medical Detachment; Sgt. Karlee S. Severns, Medical Detachment, and Spc. Joaquin D. Reed Jr., Delta Company, 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion. Merryfield and Cucci won the 2019 Competition.



Top Left: U.S. Army Pfc. Michael C. Rinehart, 50th Chemical Company, completes the two-mile run portion of the Army Physical Fitness Test April 9, 2019. Top right: U.S. Army Spc. Emma E. Archut, 328th Military Police Company, performs a sled drag during the stress shoot April 10, 2019. Bottom left: U.S. Army Sgt. Samantha L.

Merryfield, 328th Military Police Company, performs a M249 machine gun breakdown during the stress shoot. Bottom right: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Johnny Soriano, left, evaluates Spc. Daniel P. McAuley, Delta Company, 1st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 150th Aviation Regiment, during the stress shoot.

MAINTAINERS WIN EFFECTIVENESS AWARD

BY AIRMAN HUNTER HIRES, 177TH FIGHTER WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE



The 177th Fighter Wing Aircraft Maintenance Squadron (AMXS) was recognized as the Air National Guard's top maintenance unit in the small aircraft maintenance category in 2019.

National Guard Bureau informed the Wing on Jan. 8.

"This unit has some of the best and most dedicated aircraft maintainers in the world, and I am truly excited that they get to see that their blood, sweat and tears didn't go unnoticed," said Lt. Col. Brian T. Cooper, Commander, 177th AMXS. "This year was one of our most challenging years ever, but also one of the most rewarding."

The Category 1 Maintenance Effectiveness Award is presented annually to the maintenance squadron that has best met the objective of providing safe, serviceable, and available equipment for sustained use in peacetime and wartime, and has best managed resources.

The Maintenance Effectiveness Award is separated into two levels. There is the Headquarters Air Force (HAQ) level and the Air Force Reserve Component (AFRC) level. Within each level, there are four categories,

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**LT. COL. BRIAN T. COOPER
COMMANDER
177TH AIRCRAFT
MAINTENANCE
SQUADRON**

which are, respectively, small aircraft maintenance, medium aircraft maintenance, missile and munitions maintenance, and depot. The 177th AMXS competed on the AFRC level, winning the small aircraft maintenance category.

During the 2019 fiscal year, the 177th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron generated the most sorties and flying hours that it has in several years. The squadron exceeded their maintenance action goals, accruing positive improvements on every key performance indicator for the year.

In 2019, the unit also mobilized on a continental United States Air Expeditionary Force tasking in support of North American Aerospace Defense Command's Operation Noble Eagle, enforcing multiple flight restrictions established by the FAA. According to Cooper, the wing also accumulated an amazing aircraft utilization rate during this mobilization.

The 177th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron is currently competing for the Maintenance Effectiveness Award at the HAQ level.

"I couldn't be more proud of this team," said Cooper.

The 177th Maintenance Group poses for a group photo Jan. 11, 2020, at Naval Air Station Key West's Boca Chica Field, Florida. 177th maintenance, operations, logistics, and security personnel traveled to the facility for training. (U.S. Air National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Kenneth Brown)



Ace lends a paw to Soldiers in need

Story and photos by
Master Sgt. Matt Hecht
New Jersey National Guard
Public Affairs Office

The New Jersey National Guard's Psychological Health Program recently received its fifth team member, though instead of wearing combat boots, he has four paws!

Ace is a rescue dog, and at eight months old, he's been making waves throughout the state as a therapy animal in training.

Ace can be seen sporting military gear, with a large "PET ME" patch emblazoned on the side.

"He's going to be a tool that we're able to use in order connect to Soldiers and provide emotional and therapeutic support throughout the state," said Capt. Melissa Parmenter, a Behavioral Health Officer with the New Jersey Army National Guard. "Sometimes when we're struggling with mental illness or just life stressors it's hard to get that courage to come forward and ask for some help, so Ace's role will be to help open that door."

When Parmenter was trying to name the dog, her husband said that Batman had a dog named "Ace". She immediately took to the idea, when she realized it fit the Army acronym for Ask, Care, Escort.

"A.C.E. teaches Soldiers at the lowest level, if you have a battle buddy in need, this is how to get them to the right



U.S. Army Capt. Melissa Parmenter and therapy dog Ace sit for a portrait in front of the New Jersey National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., Aug. 12, 2019. Parmenter and Ace are both part of the New Jersey Army National Guard's a Behavioral Health Office.

place, and not to leave them alone until they're in the right hands," said Parmenter.

Ace has already been helping out Soldiers, providing comfort to those in need.

"Literally everybody's body posture and everything changes automatically when they see him," said Parmenter. "He's licking everybody, and everybody is trying to touch him and hug him and get kisses from him. Like the whole demeanor of wherever he walks in changes."

Parmenter hopes that Ace is going to break down barriers when it comes to mental health.

"I think Ace will help with a change of thinking that therapy has to be sitting at a desk and talking to someone," said Parmenter.

"I think it will help us

get the message across that there are different modalities available and there's different ways to receive therapy that can be helpful and really beneficial."



WING PASSES EVALUATION



Members of the 177th Fighter Wing's Aerospace Control Alert team at the New Jersey Air National Guard's Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew J. Moseley)

Story and photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Moseley, 177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office

The 177th Fighter Wing passed a Fighter Alert Force Evaluation (FAFE), conducted by the North American Aerospace Defense Command Inspector General and Air Combat Command inspectors Jan. 23 -24, 2019, at the Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J.

All aspects of the Wing's North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) mission were evaluated, from flying operations, to maintenance, security forces, and command post functions.

"I'm extremely impressed with the Wing's performance at the no-fail homeland defense mission," said Col. Bradford Everman, Commander, 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard. "Our Aerospace Control Alert team members have continuously demonstrated their dedicated service to the NORAD mission of defending the air sovereignty of North America."

The FAFE no-notice inspection was preceded by an Air

Force operational assessment conducted by 1st Air Force, located at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida.

"Our Aerospace Control Alert team members have continuously demonstrated their dedicated service to the NORAD mission of defending the air sovereignty of North America."

**COL. BRADFORD EVERMAN
COMMANDER, 177TH FIGHTER WING**

"We welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate our capability to respond rapidly to any number of possible scenarios without any pre-planning," said Lt. Col Philip Stein, Commander, 177th Aerospace Control Alert team. "We executed our tasking and were pleased with our performance and results."

The command post, part of the 24-hour function of the mission, received positive feedback for an innovative practice for training unit members on reporting procedures.

"I'm proud of our team members and their execution of the mission," said Master Sgt. Justin Kelley, Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, Command and Control Operations. "I didn't expect anything less. We performed to the same high standards that we are held to on any other day of the year."

SHAVE-TAILS EARN SPURS

Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Shaiyla Hakeem, Area Support Group - Jordan

The echoes of, “Yes spur holder!” reverberated in the mountainous desert terrain as shave-tails fought mental fatigue, dehydration, and physical exhaustion in a relentless effort to obtain one item – a set of spurs.

New Jersey Army National Guard spur holders with 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Regiment, conducted a Spur Ride from Aug. 10 to 13, 2019, at the Joint Training Center-Jordan (JTC-J). Sixty-two spur candidates began, but only 44 successfully completed and were awarded the silver spurs, formally inducting them into the Order of the Spur.

The Spur Ride is a cavalry tradition that has its beginnings during America's western frontier days. New Troopers needed extensive swordsmanship training from atop a horse, so their horse's tail would be shaved, identifying them as a potential hazard due to their inexperience. Naturally they were called, “shave-tails.” Once they proved themselves, they were awarded a set of spurs and were no longer referred to as shave-tails.

Modern-day Spur Rides are the only means to join the Order of the Spur, aside from a wartime induction. Serving with a cavalry unit in a war zone authorizes Troopers to wear a set of gold Prince of Wales type spurs.

The 72-hour Spur Ride at the JTC-J tested spur candidates on a variety of combat specific tasks, including weapons familiarization, land navigation, radio communications/maintenance, vehicle recovery, live-fire maneuvers, first aid, and tactical team maneuvers.

Senior spur holder Sgt. Maj. Ronald Ambrose has more than 34 years of military service with the 102nd Cavalry Regiment. The JTC-J Spur Ride marked the sixth ride he has been involved with.

“I won't be around anymore to do it [Spur Rides], the next one will be conducted on their own. They have to move forward, but continue with the same cavalry traditions and the same esprit de corps as they did with this one.”

Despite the difficult terrain, Ambrose was pleased to see the candidates



enthusiasm in dealing with the desert environment.

In addition to spurs, Troopers are authorized to wear the cavalry Stetson hat. An old cavalry saying states: “When a Trooper dons his Stetson, lesser men step aside, children stop to stare in awe, and the ladies whisper his name.”

Today they whisper his or her name.

1st Lt. Jennifer Wain, 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Regiment, said the Spur Ride provided her with a better understanding for assessing the battlefield, Soldier placement and how to use Soldier assets. She explained that as an officer, you should be able to do whatever task you ask your Soldiers to do.

“I know more now of what my Soldiers go through,” explained Wain, “So when I ask them to do things, I know what it means, and I know how long it takes.”

Receiving her spurs was a personal milestone for Wain. She said her goal is to motivate females and be the example of what they can do.

“We are all one team,” said Wain. “We all worked very hard and everybody is proud of each other.”

Photos top to bottom: U.S. Army 1st Lt. Jennifer Wain, 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Regiment, drinks water during a Spur Ride inventory inspection at Joint Training Center-Jordan Aug. 10, 2019. 102nd Cavalry Regiment Sgt. Richard Isidoro drags a simulated casualty to safety at a timed live-fire, maneuver and rescue training station Aug. 11, 2019. A Spur Holder evaluates spur candidates with the 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Regiment on their teamwork, radio communication capabilities, and the elements of a call for fire Aug. 11, 2019. Spur candidates assemble a Mark 19 40 mm grenade machine gun on a Humvee Aug. 12, 2019.

CE building dedicated to Capt. Mendez

Story and photo by Senior Airman Julia Santiago, 108th Wing Public Affairs Office

On Oct. 19, 2019, the 108th Civil Engineer Squadron's (CES) building on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., was dedicated to Capt. Robert M. Mendez.

"We, as the military, don't put people's names on buildings that often," said Lt. Col. Eric Balint, Deputy Commander, 108th Mission Support Group. "Having a building memorialized to someone is a permanent and lasting honor that is reserved for the most deserving individuals."

Mendez was the Deputy Base Civil Engineer for the 108th CES where he oversaw the day-to-day operations of a Prime Base Engineer Emergency Force squadron, as well as managed the Wing's military construction, sustainment, restoration, and modernization programs.

To his family and the men and women of the 108th Wing, Mendez was much more.

"Rob loved the Air Force," said Matty Malava, Mendez's stepson. "He was a tremendous father, devoted and dedicated husband, a great son and brother, and overall the most honorable person that I have ever met."

"He had an ability to deeply and personally connect with people that few of us do," said Balint. "He just wanted to do right by our people."

Mendez joined the Squadron as an Engineering Assistant in 2001. He deployed twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and once in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He also supported the Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy recovery efforts.

In the beginning of 2016, Mendez started receiving



Family and friends cut a ribbon dedicating the 108th Civil Engineer Squadron building after Capt. Robert M. Mendez at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., Oct. 19, 2019.

treatment for severe back pain.

"He was in so much pain, but he still went to work every day," said Ruth Mendez, Robert Mendez's wife.

severe back pain for over a year at this point. Despite this, he did not want the training to fail, so he came to me and said, 'Boss, I got this.'"

involved and engaged in the morale of his team."

As a result of his leadership, the IRT was a success.

A few weeks after Mendez returned, he was diagnosed with kidney cancer that had spread to throughout his body including his spine. The cancer had compromised the structural integrity of two of his vertebrae.

"Few people can fathom the agony that this must have caused him," said Balint.

On Jan. 16, 2017, Mendez contracted pneumonia and passed away.

"I have a lot of mixed emotions today," said Ruth Mendez. "I miss him so much, but I am very happy for him. I know that he would be so humbled by all of this."

"Today we can ensure that Rob's legacy will endure and it has an opportunity to be a lasting one," said Balint.

"He had an ability to deeply and personally connect with people that few of us do. He just wanted to do right by our people."

**LT. COL. ERIC BALINT
DEPUTY COMMANDER
108TH MISSION SUPPORT GROUP**

In August 2016, the 108th CES was scheduled for a two-week innovative readiness training (IRT) at Camp Hinds, Maine. This training was later the justification used in the building dedication package.

"Due to several competing priorities within the Wing, there was a lack of experience in the Wing to lead this team," said Balint. "Rob had been receiving treatment for his

During the training, members slept in cots, which exacerbated Mendez's pain.

"He tried to hide it from everyone, but it quickly became evident that he was suffering," said Balint. "However, that did not stop him from visiting the job site daily to ensure all construction and activities were progressing as scheduled, nor did it stop him from being actively

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOUR HAIR, IT'S ABOUT YOUR HEART

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MASTER SGT. MATT HECHT
NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

At only 22-years-old, Spc. Imani Gayle balances college, serving in the National Guard, a fashion career, and charitable work assisting young girls with Alopecia, a condition that causes hair loss.

Gayle also has Alopecia, and has marketed her signature look for work with various clothing and jewelry designers in the New York City area.

Her passion for helping people with Alopecia goes beyond charitable work, she's also getting a degree in biology pre-med, with the hope of one day becoming a dermatologist.

"My reason for joining the Army National Guard was to help me pay for school," said Gayle, a Motor Transport Operator with 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment.

Gayle has currently put school on hold, as she prepares to deploy with the New Jersey Army National Guard

supporting Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa.

Ever since she was a child, she had worn some type of hat to cover up her Alopecia.

"Growing up with Alopecia was very hard. I went to a Catholic school, and

I used to wear a uniform, and my grandma made special hats to match my uniform," said Gayle. "My eyebrows would fall out, so I would wear my hats low, and kids would question it. It was difficult. I had to ignore them. It really affected me, kids used to pull my hats off."

When Gayle went to basic training, she wore a hairpiece. The heat and time limitations made wearing it difficult and time consuming. Finally, she decided not to wear it.

"I was a little shy, but



it was so hot, I took my hair off," said Gayle. "I had this crazy tan line, a lot of people stared, and a lot of drill sergeants were curious.

Gayle attracted the negative attention of one female drill sergeant.

"I had a drill sergeant yelling in my face 'You think you're cute, you got a weave on, you think you're cute, I think she wants to be cute,' and I didn't break down at that moment, but as soon as the shark attack was done, I just broke down crying, and my male drill sergeant pulled me aside, and said, 'She didn't know'. I think she felt really bad, and later she apologized to me."

Gayle's drill sergeant wasn't the only one who came to her defense, her fellow Soldiers also embraced who she was.

"Initially, I always wore my wigs. So when I got back, it was just, hmm, if these strangers who don't know me never met me, if they could come to my defense and do everything that I felt people at home could do, then why couldn't people at home do it?," said Gayle. "So once I came home I stopped wearing my wigs, and I got

a lot of attention, I got a lot of offers from people locally that do fashion shows, that make clothes, that make jewelry, different makeup artists, different hair stylists, like I've done hair photo shoots and everything. It kind of helped me build a platform for young girls in New Jersey with Alopecia."

The money she gets from her modeling shoots goes to her Alopecia Awareness Foundation, and so far she has given out three college scholarships to young girls in Nevada, Texas, and New Jersey.

"They're so overwhelmed with joy, when you're young it's hard to find someone you can relate to," said Gayle. "I think I give them a lot of comfort, and I still talk to them. It makes me feel so good."

Thinking back to her school days, Gayle realized the hats were cute, but she always preferred to "have her head out there."

"It's not about your hair, it's about your heart. Embrace your Alopecia, and be accepting of yourself. It's important that you accept yourself for who you are, and not what people see you as."



U.S. Army Spc. Imani Gayle, a Motor Transport Operator with the New Jersey National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, plays with her dog, Ghost, Jan. 17, 2019.

Father, son deploy together

Story and photo by Sgt. Zachery Mott, Area Support Group – Qatar

Most fathers are happy to receive a tie or some other present from their children on Father's Day – especially once their children are grown.

For Sgt. 1st Class Robert Scott, he had something far more valuable to see while deployed to Qatar during Father's Day. He served alongside his oldest son, Staff Sgt. John Scott, and both are members of Centurion Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, at Camp As Sayliyah, Qatar.

"It's a satisfying feeling with your children being in the military and seeing their accomplishments," said Robert, Base Defense Operations Center noncommissioned officer in charge for Area Support Group-Qatar.

The Scott's family history of military service extends back to World War II when Robert's father served with the same 114th Infantry Regiment. Robert enlisted in the Army in 1985 as a military police officer. After serving for six years in Panama, Korea, California, and Missouri, he returned to civilian life and became a police officer.

John, who is now the headquarters platoon sergeant and operations noncommissioned officer for Centurion Company, enlisted at 17 in 2006 while still a senior in high school. This led to a fateful question John asked his father.

"He was active duty long before I even joined, then he decided to get out," said John. "When I joined, I can only remember me looking at him and saying, 'don't you miss it?'"

With that simple question, the ball began rolling and shortly thereafter Robert again found himself at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, this time training to become a Chemical, Biological,



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Robert Scott, left, and his son, Staff Sgt. John Scott, both with Centurion Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, at Camp As Sayliyah, Qatar, May 22, 2019.

Radiological, and Nuclear Specialist.

This is the second time the Scott's have been deployed at the same time. The first time, in 2008 to 2009, Robert was at Camp Bucca, Iraq, and John was

"This is kind of like we're both at home."

SGT. 1ST CLASS ROBERT SCOTT (FATHER)

"How many other people get to go overseas with their father?"

STAFF SGT. JOHN SCOTT (SON)

at Camp Cropper, Iraq. While the two were separated by more than 300 miles then, they now have only about 300 feet between them.

"This is kind of like we're both at home," said Robert.

John, who is also a police officer, likes to spend his off time visiting his dad, sharing a meal together at the dining facility, or doing typical father and son type games.

"The other day we were just talking and we just started tossing a roll of duct tape around, just catching back and forth," said Robert. "We were both standing there throwing it back and forth to each other, he looks at me and he goes, 'This turned out to be more fun than I thought.'"

This is John's fourth tour with Central Command. Once to Iraq

in 2008 to 2009, once to Afghanistan in 2009 to 2011, Qatar in 2014 to 2015 and again to Qatar now.

What the future holds for both remains open. Robert wants to finish out his current contracted time of two years and see what options are available. John, who has 13 years of service, is looking for a broadening assignment as a New Jersey Army National Guard instructor.

"He's hoping I either die or retire because my brother was a retired sergeant first class," said Robert. "I'm going to stay in. I'm going to drive him into the dirt. He'll have to shoot for E-9 first."

"He'll retire, I'll outrank him. Then I'll rub it in his face," said John.

The jokes continue and the smiles grow as father and son talk about the unique opportunity to serve together while deployed.

"How many other people get to go overseas with their father? I don't hear much about it," said John. "I get to have family support while deployed."

FROM EXILE TO FREEDOM

STORY AND PHOTO BY AIRMAN 1ST CLASS ANDREA A. S. WILLIAMSON, 108TH WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

When asked about Hispanic Heritage Month and what it meant to him, Cuban-American Tech. Sgt. Eric Suarez with the 108th Maintenance Squadron said: “The food, the pictures—all brings about memories, that’s huge for me.”

This is because Suarez’s life in America, began with the exile of his grandfathers from Cuba not so long ago.

As a former Cuban United Nations representative, during the early reign of communist Fidel Castro, Suarez said, his maternal grandfather, Mario Fernandez, stood on his beliefs despite the consequences.

At the assembly held in New York, his grandfather openly criticized the Cuban government. The communist regime found out.

With only letters at that time to communicate, Suarez’s grandmother in Cuba sent her husband a letter to warn him about the trouble he would face upon his return, said Suarez. But the letter did not reach him in time.

When Suarez’s grandfather returned to Cuba, he was taken into custody for interrogation. He was given one option: Take your family and leave the country.

With only 24 hours to pack up the only life he ever knew, Suarez’s family left for New York.

Despite leading a different life as a farmer, Suarez’s paternal grandfather, would suffer a similar fate.

“My grandfather, Jose, wanted a better life for his family,” said Suarez. “So he was willing to do whatever it took.”

Suarez’s grandfather sought work in the U.S. Though the Cuban government allowed this, the conditions were that he could work in the fields and do whatever was needed for three-to-five years with no support from the Cuba and limited visits home.

“While away, communist government officials would make random visits to my

grandmother’s home,” said Suarez. “They would steal and break things just to assert their authority.”

The actions of Suarez’s paternal grandfather were eventually seen as betrayal to Cuba, once again, forcing his family to leave their home.

“On my grandfather’s 40th birthday they said, ‘you have to get your family and leave the country or we are going to come after you,’” said Suarez. “He left behind his mother, father, and six siblings in a moment’s notice.”

While their circumstances were grim, Suarez’s outlook on those family memories is a positive one.

“I’m here and I’m grateful for it,” said Suarez. “That’s why I say, ‘wearing my family’s name on this uniform and serving in the Air National Guard is an honor.”

Now a family man himself, Suarez continues to uphold the values, passion, and work ethic that his late grandfathers instilled in him.

As the Non-Destructive Inspection noncommissioned officer in charge, Suarez ensures the structural integrity

of the KC-135R Stratotanker aircraft by examining, testing, and recording each part’s functionality.

“I went to my first air show at McGuire and on my father’s shoulders as a little kid, a Thunderbird flew from behind us and I was sold,” said Suarez, “I knew what I wanted to be.”

“I love what I do,” said Suarez. “Aside from flying, I was interested in anything that allowed me to interact with aircraft.”

No matter the level of sacrifice or responsibility, Suarez said his grandfathers’ resiliency is what motivates him to this day.

“My [maternal] grandfather would always say, ‘Palante, palante,’ which means move forward,” said Suarez, who uses this mantra whenever things get tough.

Moving forward, Suarez plans to share his family history, culture, and best memories with his son.

“I don’t know if my son will take to the military like I did,” said Suarez. “But I’m going to take him to air shows. It might spark something in him. It’s kind of a family tradition.”



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Eric Suarez, nondestructive inspection noncommissioned officer in charge, 108th Maintenance Squadron, analyzes a KC-135R Stratotanker part, Sept. 22, 2019. The process involves magnetizing the part, which is then bathed in a suspended particle bath that seeps into the defects and when exposed to ultraviolet light – black light, causes the defects to become florescent and visible.

DIAMOND SABER SHARPENS FINANCE SOLDIERS

STORY AND PHOTOS MASTER SGT. MATT HECHT, NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

U.S. Army Soldiers from New Jersey's 350th Finance Detachment participated in Exercise Diamond Saber 2019, the U.S. Army's largest finance exercise, basing operations out of the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, N.J. June 18-30, 2019. For the first time, Soldiers remotely took part in Diamond Saber, which is held annually at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin.

Diamond Saber is designed to provide realistic technical training to regular Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard finance units.

"Diamond Saber is an exercise that was provided to all financial units in the United States that allows us to stay current on all of our mission essential needs," said 1st Lt. Andrew Vallejo, Commander, 350th Finance Detachment. "It's kind of a capstone exercise that's offered every year, it allows us to put into practice all of the things that we drill on, and the things we learn about over the course of the year and put it into a deployment simulation exercise."

The finance troops took part in a financial management support team mission, transporting a case of money from Sea Girt to the Somerset Armory aboard a UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter, simulating the type



Above: U.S. Army Spc. Savanna Sanchez, left, and Spc. Joyce Marrero, both with the New Jersey Army National Guard's 350th Finance Detachment, review contracting information during Exercise Diamond Saber at the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, N.J., June 26, 2019. Soldiers with the 350th are remotely participating in the Army's largest finance exercise, which is held annually at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. The exercise is designed to provide realistic technical training to regular Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard finance units. Below: U.S. Army Soldiers provide security during a financial management support team mission on a UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter during Exercise Diamond Saber at the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, N.J., June 26, 2019.



of transport they might do between forwarding operating bases at a deployed location.

"As finance Soldiers, we get overlooked a lot, being that its paper and pen, but as you can see, a lot of tactical stuff goes on," said Sgt. Maj. Dharam Manka. "This is the first ever remote training, in that we are working out of New Jersey and we are attached to a company for the exercise in Wisconsin."

As one group of Soldiers supported the finance helicopter mission, others worked simulations at the military pay, vendor services, and information technology work centers based at Sea Girt.

"Being here has helped in a variety of ways," said Vallejo. "It's a great and unique opportunity for us to be kind of on the forefront of an exercise that hasn't been done before and being here at Sea Girt allows us to be in our home state where we have all of our resources and our Soldiers have familiarity with the area."

The exercise had a huge impact on Pvt. Kaitlyn Lemoine, who is brand new to the unit.

"I definitely feel like I've come out of this knowing a bit more about my job," said Lemoine. "I feel like we've all come together and we've really helped each other out, and the instructors were a great help as well."

"Diamond Saber is an exercise that was provided to all financial units in the United States that allows us to stay current on all of our mission essential needs."

1ST LT. ANDREW VALLEJO, COMMANDER, 350TH FINANCE DETACHMENT

Walking a blazed trail

By Airman 1st Class Andrea A. S. Williamson, 108th Wing Public Affairs Office

As America honors African Americans who became the first to eliminate barriers in diversity, New Jersey Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Rose Anna Beljour-Sommer's story is a reminder to also celebrate those who currently strive to make their own path.

"I am the first Beljour to have ever stepped foot on to Lackland Air Force Base," said Beljour-Sommer. "It is part of the reason I kept my last name after marriage. It is a huge homage that my sister—who was the only one to join the Marine Corps—and I pay to our parents and to our culture."

Though initially, she was motivated to join the military after witnessing her brother join the Army, once enlisted, Beljour-Sommer began to find her own reasons to serve.

"I knew I wanted to learn something completely different than what I was doing on the civilian side, but I also wanted to make myself a versatile individual," said Beljour-Sommer.

"I was always taught to have a back-up for my back-up. Joining the military was my chance to be a part of that unique one percent."

Now at five years and two months of service, Beljour-Sommer, an Engineering Assistant (EA) with the 108th Civil Engineer Squadron recalls her proudest moment to date.

"At Airman Leadership School I received two out of the four awards that were given to the selectees of the graduating class," said Beljour-Sommer. "I was shocked, surprised, and honored because I went in just hoping to pass. I

know, I not only represented CE [Civil Engineer Squadron] well, but I made them and the 108th proud."

Despite being part of a structured field, Beljour-Sommer says her career field welcomes creativity.

"From roads to buildings, built or renovated, we put together the design for it using computer aided design," said Beljour-Sommer. "We are responsible for planning and managing construction projects on base as well.

We also use surveying technology to include global positioning systems and maintain geographic information system modules."

More specifically, Beljour-Sommer adds that the skill set and training required as an EA has further fueled her passion and pride for serving.

"I absolutely love using AutoCAD (Auto Computer Aided Design)," said Beljour-Sommer. "It's a great skill to have whether in the military or on the

civilian side. I love it because it is literally like watching a piece of art come to life. To see it go from a computer screen or a printout to an actual physical establishment is very satisfying. You're almost like a world-renowned interior designer when it comes to the computer aided design aspect of being an EA."

With skill

sets being honed and academic milestones being met, Beljour-Sommer remains receptive to what measures she will conquer next.

"I do not know where the wind will blow me long-term, but if God or fate sees fit, maybe I will become an officer."

Regardless, like past African American trailblazers, she wants to leave a legacy of integrity, service, and excellence - marking another Airman to exemplify moral and leadership within the New Jersey Air National Guard.

"Great leaders don't set out to be a leader...they set out to make a difference," said Beljour-Sommer. "It's never about the role, it's always about the goal."



"Great leaders don't set out to be a leader...they set out to make a difference. It's never about the role, it's always about the goal."

**STAFF SGT. ROSE ANNA BELJOUR-SOMMER
ENGINEERING ASSISTANT
108TH CIVIL ENGINEER SQUADRON**



SPP SNAPSHOT



Olta Xhaka, Albanian Minister of Defense, left, and U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Jemal J. Beale, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, right, attend a meeting between Albanian visitors and the New Jersey National Guard at the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs campus, Lawrenceville, N.J., April 17, 2019. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht)



U.S. Army Lt. Col. Ryan Smith, left, Commander, Army Aviation Support Facility, New Jersey Army National Guard, briefs Olta Xhaka, center, Albanian Minister of Defense; Brig. Gen. Ndriçim Sallaku, second from left, commander, Albanian Support Command; Florian Kali, second from right, Albanian General Director of Defense Policy, and Col. Ardian Bali, right, Albanian Defense Attaché to the U.S., during a tour of the Facility at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., April 17, 2019. (New Jersey Army National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)



Above: U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Steve B. Kovacs, right, First Sergeant, 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team, New Jersey National Guard, demonstrates a handheld analyzer to Haki Çako, second from right, Director General, General Directorate of Civil Emergencies, Ministry of Defence, Republic of Albania; Lt. Col. Robert Hysenllari, second from left, Staff Officer, Search and Rescue and Civil Emergencies, General Staff, Albanian Armed Forces, and Sabina Mitrovassili, Office of Defence Cooperation, during a visit at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., July 31, 2019. Top right: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Brad T. Graham, left, instructor, 1st Battalion, 254th Regional Training Institute (Combat Arms), New Jersey Army National Guard, observes through a spotting scope as an Albanian Army Special Forces soldier fires an M4 carbine during squad designated marksmanship training at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., June 4, 2019. Bottom right: Albanian Air Force Maj. Ervin Buzi, left, Military Unit No. 3006, and U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 3 James Green, a UH-72A Lakota helicopter pilot with Charlie Company, 1-224th Security and Support Battalion, New Jersey Army National Guard, hold the Albanian flag in front of a Lakota at the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Lawrenceville, N.J., Aug. 1, 2019. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)



Airman, athlete, coach, trainer, mentor

Story and photo by Senior Airman Cristina J. Allen, 177th Fighter Wing

For Tech Sgt. Danielle R. Todman, a Services Journeyman with the 177th Fighter Wing, being an athlete and an Airman go hand-in-hand.

So do trainer, coach, and mentor.

Not only was she named an Air National Guard Athlete of the Year, but Todman is also a championship powerlifter, a high school track and field coach and a mentor to special needs children.

It all began in high school, where she competed in track and field, and continued at Bucknell University, again in track and field.

Though she excelled at athletics, during high school she was often teased for it.

"I was bullied and heavily mocked for my physique and how strong I was," she said.

But she moved past the taunts and teasing.

"It took me a long time, but I finally saw the strength and beauty behind being strong," said Todman.

In 2006 Todman enlisted in the Air Force and eventually competed as a member of both the U.S. Air Force Track Team and the United States National Track and Field Team.

The Olympics was a possibility, but life events got in the way.

"I had just missed out on competing in the Olympics in Italy, so I had taken myself out of the game for a while," said Todman. "At that time I was going through a tough marriage, so the battle took me out of the opportunities and the blessings."

She joined the New Jersey Air National Guard in 2013. Two years later, she was selected as part of the team to represent the U.S. in the Military World

Games, where she competed in the 400-meter hurdles. In 2017, Todman was named the Air National Guard Female Athlete of the Year.

For Todman, the recognition is nice, but more importantly, it can carry on to those just starting out on their journey through life.

"Your story opens doors for others," she said. "That's what you want to do as a coach or supervisor - inspire those you teach to see the bigger picture."

Her drive to motivate isn't limited to the Airmen she supervises. In her civilian career, the students she coaches at the Newark Technical High School track team in Newark, N.J., have found success on and off the athletic field.

"All 11 of my high school seniors that I coached in track and field [this year] received academic scholarships."

She also teaches and mentors special needs children.

"I do one-on-one special education for children in preschool and kindergarten," said Todman, adding the work is both challenging and rewarding. One student who had trouble speaking stands out.

"He had a hard time speaking, so I asked him to show me [what he was trying to say]," she said. "It was amazing to be with him



through his progress, and every day off the bus, he would run and give me the biggest hug."

Todman still challenges herself athletically and has taken up powerlifting, which she took up while deployed.

"I didn't choose powerlifting, I fell in love with powerlifting, though it was very new to me. It mirrors so much of what we face in life, every single day. The weights are heavy, the stress, the pressure, the judgment, but through all of that, you still have to push and pull through the journey."

While deployed, she met her powerlifting coach. With a coach, that led to competing in powerlifting competitions, including this year's North American Regional Powerlifting Championships in Costa Rica, where she took second place for overall qualifying total points.

"After I lifted my last lift and they called my name, I had tears in my eyes," she said. "I thought, 'This is real, I'm on an international stage.' It's like something you read about in someone else's story, but it's my story."



Airmen with the 108th and 177th Civil Engineering Squadrons pose for a group photo at Camp Kamassa, Crystal Springs, Miss., Aug. 1, 2019. The Squadrons partnered with the Mississippi's Toughest Kids Foundation to help build Camp Kamassa, a year-round camping facility for children and adults with serious illnesses, disabilities, or other challenges. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Capt. Nathan Gorey)

Making a positive impact

By Staff Sgt. Zachary Yucic, 108th Wing Public Affairs Office

The 108th and the 177th Civil Engineer Squadrons (CES) traveled to Crystal Springs, Mississippi, to assist with the construction of a camping facility July 31 through August 15, 2019.

The Squadron partnered with Mississippi's Toughest Kids (MTK) Foundation to help build Camp Kamassa, a year-round camping facility for children and adults with serious illnesses, disabilities, or other challenges. Guard and reserve units from multiple branches have been rotating in and out for months prior to the 108th's arrival.

"This was a great opportunity to do something really positive," said Lt.

Col. Eric Balint, Commander, 108th CES.

As units rotate through the construction site, their tasks have included road construction and creating a lake; clearing and digging out campsites; installation of water, sewage, and electrical utilities; and building cabins, a cafeteria, an infirmary, a multi-purpose building, an open-air recreation building, and an office building.

"We're really fortunate with this one where we were able to get some very applicable training that our folks absolutely need for their overall readiness, and also contribute to just an amazing cause," Balint said. "It becomes mutually beneficial for both organizations."

At the end of their two week innovative readiness training, the 32 Airmen from the 108th CES, 177th CES, and 108th Medical Group completed electrical circuit installation for four cabin porches; installed air duct systems for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning



U.S. Air Force Airman Destiny Carl, 177th Civil Engineering Squadron, installs insulation wrap on a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning duct at Camp Kamassa in Crystal Springs, Miss., Aug. 1, 2019. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Capt. Nathan Gorey)



Airmen with the 108th and 177th Civil Engineering Squadrons install electrical circuits on a cabin porch at Camp Kamassa, Aug. 1, 2019. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Capt. Nathan Gorey)

for four cabins; improved surface water drainage across the project site; enhanced two culvert drainage systems; constructed two earthen berms at the construction site main entrance and completed project site road remediation.

In addition, structures shop Airmen constructed porches for four cabins, as well as gable end walls for four cabins, prepared six cabin interiors for follow-on insulation installation, and installed metal roof ridge caps on four cabins.

"The 108th CES makes a positive impact wherever we go," said Balint. "My folks have been knocking it out of the park, and I couldn't be prouder of them."

Top recruiter finds inspiration in art

Story and photos by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

New Jersey Army National Guard Sgt. Stephanie Hoang grew up as the tomboy of her family, she says, surrounded by male family members who talked about joining the Army. In 2011, as a college freshman, she saw the free education benefits the New Jersey Guard offers, and decided to join.

After becoming a recruiter in 2017, she not only recruited her brother into the National Guard, but also two male cousins. By 2019, Hoang was named New Jersey's Top Recruiter.

"Winning Top Recruiter in 2019 really meant a lot to me, I'm the only female in my family that joined and I felt like I had to prove myself being a woman in the Army," said Hoang. "I don't sell the National Guard, I sell my story. The National Guard helped me build those relationships, helped me experience things I never thought I would be able to experience."

Hoang is especially excited about combat specialties being opened to women.

"We've recruited females into Field Artillery, and we're selling that. It's becoming a norm now. Females are being more looked at as peers than previous generations."

She believes that these new jobs offer unique opportunities to women who want to serve.

"Every day, you want to be the better you than you were yesterday," said Hoang. "You know, this is a challenge for you, manage to push yourself."

When Hoang isn't recruiting, she's painting and drawing characters and murals, including artwork on the walls inside the Rutgers ROTC building.

"I love art," said Hoang. "Art has been pretty prominent in my life. I started drawing and painting when I was young, and I've kept it with me. I deployed in 2014 and I did a lot of paintings. It's a peaceful state of mind for me."

Hoang reflected on her service, and reasons for joining the Guard.

"I joined for the free tuition, I joined for the educational benefits, but I stay for the experience and the relationships that I've built here," said Hoang.

"Now, I've done things that I didn't think I'd be able to do, I've pushed myself a lot more than I thought I would be able to, and it's really helped me become a better person, especially being in the Guard."



"I don't sell the National Guard, I sell my story. The National Guard helped me build those relationships, helped me experience things I never thought I would be able to experience."

**SGT. STEPHANIE HOANG
RECRUITING AND RETENTION COMMAND**



Sgt. Stephanie Hoang, a recruiter based out of the Rutgers University Army Reserve Officer Training Corps facility, paints the Scarlet Knight Battalion crest in the ROTC building basement in New Brunswick, N.J., March 3, 2020.





Airman adopts dog while deployed

Story and photos by Master Sgt. Matt Hecht
New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

The month leading up to Staff Sgt. Dannielle Garcia's deployment was a somber one, first having her dog Pepper diagnosed with a brain tumor, then making the tough decision to put her beloved pet down before leaving for Kuwait in 2018.

Garcia, who is a registered nurse, is also an Emergency Management Specialist with the New Jersey Air National Guard's 108th Civil Engineer Squadron. She was deploying to instruct Airmen and Soldiers on chemical, radiological, and biological threats.

She reflected on those painful weeks before leaving.

"It was like losing a part of me, and at the same time putting her down before I was deployed was a bittersweet moment because I got the chance to be with her, and comfort her, and be in her last moments before going away," said Garcia.

Garcia went overseas for a six month rotation, assigned to a base in an arid region of Kuwait.

"You would see stray animals everywhere, mostly dogs," said Garcia.

"One day we were driving back to my shop, and we saw this little skinny tan dog run across the street. Two days later, a friend of mine texted me, saying pest management caught a dog, and the pest management building is right next to mine. So I just ran outside, and I saw her, and I was like, 'that's the dog I saw!'"



Because of the remote location of the base, veterinary services were not readily available, so the decision was made to care for the animals until they could be shipped elsewhere.

Garcia began volunteering in her time off to care for the

skinny tan dog, who she started calling Mina, as well as a male dog that was also caught on the installation. As she spent more time with Mina, she realized she was developing a bond with the animal.

"I guess jokingly I was saying, 'oh I just want to take her home', and Tech. Sgt. Dorsey, who was part of pest

back to the United States.

The process was not easy, since shots and shipping can be in the thousands of dollars, and in the meantime Mina had to be fostered off-base by an expatriate American couple.

"Around November [2018] I had the application for Puppy Rescue Mission, I filled out everything, her whole story, how I met her, got all the paperwork done, and I was finally able to ship her. My family received her around January 16th, so she was here before I was," said Garcia.

Garcia was elated to have Mina home, but felt bad bringing a dog that was from the desert back to New Jersey in the winter. Mina has a small selection of dog jackets to fend off the cold weather.

"She's so gentle, and so sweet, and when we found her, she was by herself," said Garcia.

Mina isn't alone anymore, now living with Garcia and her family in New Jersey.

"I feel privileged to have her," said Garcia. "She's the best thing that happened on my deployment."

SKY DEVILS PROVIDE CRITICAL LINK TO SOLDIERS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SPC. MICHAEL SCHWENK
NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers with the Detachment 1, Delta Company, 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion "Sky Devils" train daily to hone their skills operating the RQ-7B Shadow unmanned aerial vehicle.

"We provide a critical link to troops on the ground," said Sgt. Benjamin Yuen, an Unmanned Aircraft Systems Operator. "The communications capabilities can keep squads in touch when there's difficult terrain."

The Shadow is used for surveillance and targeting as well as communications relay. Soldiers monitor it by a ground control station mounted on a High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle.

Yuen joined the New Jersey Army National Guard after serving as an infantryman in the Marine Corps. It's that infantry experience he feels that gives him a better perspective as a drone operator knowing what Soldiers on the ground are doing.

The Shadow is launched by a hydraulic powered launcher, which can accelerate the aircraft to 70 knots in 40 feet right into the air. While airborne, the Shadow can fly for about nine hours at a time and up to 16,000 feet.

"It's very similar to playing a video game," said Yuen. "I feel like the skills are very interchangeable."

Even when the Shadows are on the ground, the 104th Soldiers maintain daily upkeep of all the equipment that goes along with the aircraft.

"Preventive Maintenance Inspection and operations checks on the equipment, engine runs or applying updates, maintaining the software," said Staff Sgt. Matthew Hedges, a maintenance chief with the 104th, are some of the things the Soldiers do on a day-to-day basis.

"It feels great to be a part of this team," said Hedges. "We train all the time for a mission that saves lives downrange."



Top photo: U.S. Army Sgt. Ben Yuen, Detachment 1, Delta Company, 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion (BEB), New Jersey Army National Guard, performs a final check on a RQ-7B Shadow unmanned aerial system at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., Feb. 10, 2020. Bottom photo: 104th BEB Soldiers perform operations checks on an RQ-7B Shadow and launcher. Background photo: 104th BEB Soldiers Yuen, left, and Pfc. Antonio Arriola operate a RQ-7B Shadow inside a ground control station.

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A U.S. Air Force F-16C Fighting Falcon with the 177th Fighter Wing approaches a KC-135R Stratotanker from the 108th Wing, both with the New Jersey Air National Guard, during the Air Force Salutes flyover campaign to honor healthcare workers, first responders, and other essential personnel working on the front lines to combat COVID-19, May 12, 2020. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Kenneth Brown)

