

GUARDLIFE

2023



CONTENTS

- 2 Operation Winged Devil: Prepping for JRTC
- 6 Airman's ramp moves terminal
- 7 NJ Guard assists Albanian Armed Forces in NCO development
- 9 Combat Archer
- 10 Championship Flyover
- 11 Ghillie Wash
- 14 177th hosts ICT training
- 15 Honoring Albanian World War II heroes
- 17 177th trains at Red Flag 23-2
- 18 The road to Best Warrior
- 23 177th leads Wings in joint training
- 25 Instruct, mentor, and collaborate
- 27 Train as we fight
- 30 44th IBCT leads JRTC rotation
- 33 112th hits "grand slam"
- 34 A Box within "The Box"
- 35 A tale of two battle buddies
- 36 21st WMD-CST trains in Camden
- 39 Protecting history
- 40 177th completes first POL Multi-Capable Airmen class
- 41 Cyprus National Guard visits 177th
- 43 New Jersey and Republic of Cyprus sign letter of intent
- 45 9/11 memorial dedication held at 177th
- 46 Same call sign, first flight
- 47 MK-22 familiarization range
- 50 NJNG Soldiers and Airmen help homeless veterans at Stand Down
- 51 Albanian Armed Forces tour JT2DC
- 53 177th deploys
- 54 MEDEVAC training
- 57 2023 Military Review
- 59 NJNG's next chapter
- 61 Mortar live-fire exercise
- 63 Albanian Armed Forces welcomes NJNG
- 65 M136 AT4 training
- Back Cover: Last shot

Above: Two U.S. Army UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters with the 1st Battalion, 150th Assault Helicopter Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, prepare to land during an air assault exercise at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Feb. 10, 2023. More than 350 Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, participated in an air assault and a field training exercise in preparation for the unit's rotation to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, later this year. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

Cover: A U.S. Army Soldier with the New Jersey National Guard's Reconnaissance and Sniper Platoon, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, peers out from under his ghillie suit at the Fort Dix Ranges on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, March 25, 2023. The Soldiers participated in a ghillie wash using sand, water and mud, all in an effort to perfect their suits camouflage. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

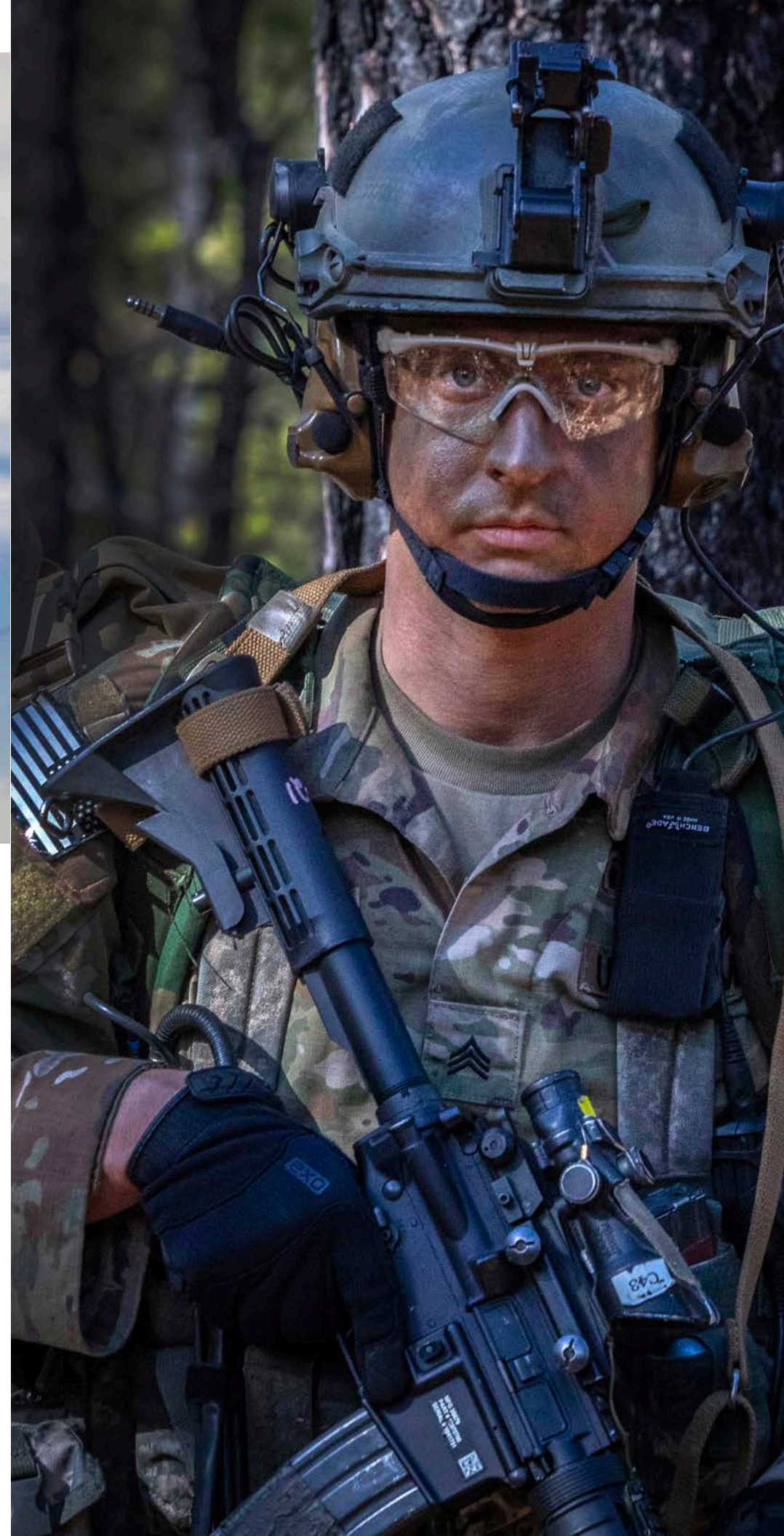
GUARDLIFE STAFF

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICERS
Lt. Col. Agneta E. Murnan
Maj. Amelia Thatcher

EDITOR-PRODUCTION
Mark C. Olsen

STAFF WRITERS/PHOTOGRAPHERS
Spc. Mike Schwenk

GUARDLIFE is published by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office for all members of the New Jersey Army and Air National Guard, their families, retirees, and civilian employees. The views and opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Department of Defense, the Army, the Air Force, or the National Guard Bureau. Letters may be sent to: *Guardlife*, Public Affairs Office, P.O. Box 340, NJDMAVA, Trenton, NJ, 08625-0340. E-mail at: pao@dmava.nj.gov



OPERATION WINGED DEVIL: PREPPING FOR JRTC

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

It never gets old.

The Black Hawks suddenly rising above the tree line and touching down in the landing zone; distant bars of Fortunate Son or Ride of the Valkyries; infantrymen jumping out and taking defensive positions on either side of the helicopters before the Black Hawks take off to get the next squad of Soldiers.

This is air assault, and it is just one part of the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard's field training exercise at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Feb. 9-12, 2023.

It is the largest combined arms FTX the New Jersey Army National Guard has performed at JB-MDL in more than a decade. It will evaluate the battalion's proficiency in conducting these types of combat operations continuously and also serves as a proving ground for the battalion's training that addresses threats seen in recent wars.

"It gives us the opportunity to perform a combined arms exercise with our engineers, artillery, and New Jersey Air National Guard tactical air control party specialists," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Timothy Sorrentino, commander, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment. "It also allows us to get one more rep in before our rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana."

It took six months of planning to get to this stage.



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, exit a UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter with the 1st Battalion, 150th Assault Helicopter Regiment, at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst,

New Jersey, Feb. 10, 2023. More than 350 Soldiers with the 114th Infantry Regiment participated in an air assault and a field training exercise in preparation for the unit's rotation to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

“We’ve been working to ensure that we had all the resources within the brigade and the partner organizations lined up and coordinate,” said 1st Lt. Keith M. Burkhart, training officer, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment. “This exercise is unique because of the size and scope of what is being done on a drill weekend – three company-level combined arms operations nested under the battalion’s command and control and supported by higher level assets. This is typically done only at larger events, such as at the JRTC, not on a drill weekend.”

The exercise has three goals: train and operate as a joint force combined arms battalion task force for the first time; integrate units required for the battalion's success; and finally, identify any issues before the battalion arrives at the JRTC.

“This is a big exercise for us; we haven’t done this in years,” Sorrentino said.

By 10 a.m. on Feb. 10, UH-60M Black Hawks from the 1st Battalion, 150th Assault Helicopter Regiment had ferried more than 350 Soldiers with the 114th Infantry Regiment and the 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment; forward observers from the 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment; and engineers from 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion. Tactical air control party specialists with the 227th Air Support Operations Squadron, 177th Fighter Wing, NJANG, ensured that the aircraft could land safely.

The Soldiers headed toward the tree line and split up into three companies: Alpha 114th, Bravo 114th, and Alpha 113th.

“Each of our three companies will be conducting an attack to seize a village, followed by defensive operations,” said Burkhart.

Countering that will be opposing forces from the Observer Coach/Trainer Operations Group.

“We have a team of 20 Soldiers that will be rotating between the three objectives,” said U.S. Army Maj. Rob Roma, infantry team chief, Observer Coach/Trainer Operations Group.

Keeping an eye out for the opposing forces will be New Jersey Army National Guard RQ-7 Shadows with the Tactical Unmanned Aircraft Systems Platoon, 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion, and the 114th’s RQ-11 Ravens.

“We’re incorporating small unmanned aircraft systems with our Ravens,” said Burkhart. “They will provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance down to the company level. This gives them the ability to observe where the enemy is located, so we can adjust our plan of attack”

The opposing forces will be doing the same.

“We have a UAS that has thermal imaging that will pick up on body heat signatures and we have one that has the ability to drop simulated munitions on positions,” said Roma. “Ukrainian forces are using UASs for offensive operations against the Russians. We’re going to give our guys a taste of that over the next 48 hours.”

“The time between now and JRTC is short,” said Burkhart. “This exercise enables us to adjust and make improvements that will allow us to increase our effectiveness and lethality.”



Above: U.S. Army Soldiers with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th IBCT, move out during a field training exercise.

Below: An Alpha Company Soldier provides covering fire with an M240B machine gun.





Above: U.S. Army Soldiers with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, provide cover fire as they take a building during a field training exercise Feb. 10, 2023.

Below: Soldiers with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, clear a room at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.

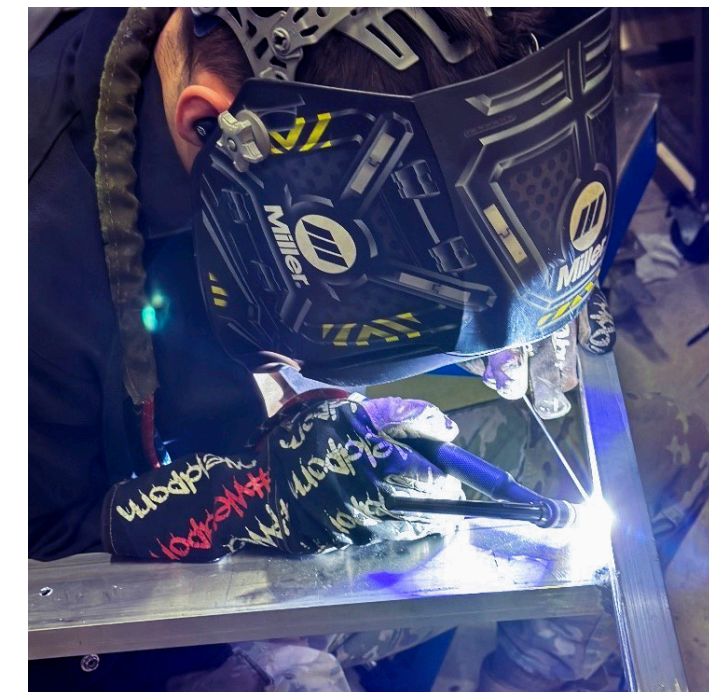


Airman's ramp moves terminal

BY MASTER SGT. LEON JACKSON, 108TH WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

You need to move a key communications component. The only problem is you don't have a ramp and that ramp isn't the kind you find in your local hardware store.

It all started when the 108th Wing Command Post staff were in the process of remodeling their work area when they ran into a dilemma. They needed to move the Global Aircrew Strategic Network Terminal, which weighs more than a thousand pounds, several yards into a controlled area. The terminal is a nuclear command, control and communications system that provides wing command posts, munitions support squadrons, and mobile support teams with the ability to receive and disseminate emergency action messages.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Keith Lee, an aircraft metals technology craftsman with the 108th Maintenance Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard, welds together a ramp, specially made to install a Global Aircrew Strategic Network Terminal at the 108th Wing Command Post, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Jan. 2, 2023. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Leon Jackson)

Enter Staff Sgt. Keith Lee.

Lee, an aircraft metals technology craftsman assigned to the 108th Maintenance Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard, at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, took on this task with years of experience behind him.

While his aircraft fabrication skills were honed in the Guard, Lee's construction talents were developed during his teenage years. In high school, Lee designed his own three-axis computerized numerical control milling machine which sparked his interest in fabrication, and ultimately led him to join the New Jersey Air National Guard and to the 108th machine shop.

Upon joining the 108th Machine Shop, he quickly learned the art of tungsten inert gas welding and gained certification in four different alloys. Early into his career, he had established himself as a master craftsman according to his shop leadership.

Creating a ramp to move the terminal would put Lee's talents to the test.

Initially, the 108th Civil Engineer Squadron was assigned to the task, but it was determined that the ramp was too costly to purchase. The civil engineers recommended reaching out to the 108th Fabrication Section to see if they could solve the problem.

Shop supervisor Senior Master Sgt. Dave Fortin assigned Lee and Master Sgt. Leon Jackson – the aircraft structural repair shop supervisor – to the project.

Typically, fabrication Airmen deal with making precise measurements, inspecting different components, drilling, and reaming holes, and performing aircraft repairs – the necessary skills for this job.

Lee and Jackson surveyed the area where the ramp needed to go, making meticulous measurements. Using that information, Lee developed the base of the ramp with computer-aided design software. He and other members of the 108th Fabrication Section then made the pieces that would make up the ramp using bandsaws, miter saws, and grinders.

Last, Lee assembled all the parts and welded them together.

On Jan. 17, 2023, the terminal rolled across the ramp Lee built in to the 108th Wing's command post, Jan. 17, 2023.

The task took a week-and-a-half to finish. Lee's innovation and determination saved the wing thousands of dollars and helped the command post to install its messaging system, keeping the 108th's mission moving forward.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Lee, left, and Master Sgt. Leon Jackson, both with the 108th Maintenance Squadron, stand behind the ramp built to install a Global Aircrew Strategic Network Terminal. (U.S. Air Force photo)



NJ Guard assists Albanian Armed Forces in NCO development

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

The New Jersey National Guard and Albanian Armed Forces resumed military-to-military training Feb. 5-9, 2023, as a contingent of more than 30 NJNG service members traveled to Land Forces Headquarters, Zall-Herr, Tirana, Albania. The counterpart teams worked in cooperation to exchange best practices of their respective fields of expertise, such as indirect fire, forward observation, vehicle maintenance, and signal communications.

Additionally, Albanian Armed Forces service members and Soldiers of the 254th Regiment (Combat Arms), New Jersey Army National Guard conducted non-commissioned officer professional development. The combined team covered topics



U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Andy Marte, of the 254th Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, instructs noncommissioned officers of the Albanian Armed Forces through Army Combat Fitness Test exercises during NCO development training at Zall-Herr NCO Academy, Tirana, Albania, Feb. 8, 2023, as part of the State Partnership Program between the New Jersey National Guard and the AAF. The State Partnership Program began in 1993 with 13 partners. Thirty years later, the program has grown to 95 partner-nations and is a key U.S. security cooperation tool that facilitates collaboration across all aspects of civil-military affairs. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis)

ranging from NCO leadership and roles in training to physical fitness and readiness. Service members of both forces also took a diagnostic Army Combat Fitness Test.

Compared to the U.S. military model, the role of the non-commissioned officer has been developing since a new law passed by the Albanian Parliament in 2004, according to Brig. Gen. Bilbil Bitri, commander, AAF Training and Doctrine Command.

“The NCO role and responsibilities have been altered in different periods. However, before 1995, the NCOs were trusted only in administrative positions or as specialists who were required to provide a very narrow expertise,” Bitri said. “This is a milestone, since although different roles, it enhanced the

NCOs on the same importance as officers. This legitimized the importance of the NCOs as leaders, instructors, and subject matter experts in different domains. They maintain the discipline and provide direction, but also to care, motivate, and inspire the troops they lead.”

The 254th Soldiers have provided courses, workshops, and familiarization visits, as well as contributed to the drafting of a new NCO Doctrine, which has been approved and implemented in the AAF.

“Our focus has been to get the Albanian Armed forces to NATO standards, as far as NCO professional development is concerned,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Kevin Kirkpatrick, senior enlisted leader of the 254th Regiment. In September 2022,



U.S. Army Spc. Alvin Kumon, Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, instructs an Albanian Armed Forces soldier on adjusting a 120mm mortar, at Land Forces Headquarters, Zall-Herr, Tirana, Albania, Feb. 5, 2023. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Pfc. Seth Cohen)

the AAF Light Infantry Battle Group demonstrated its combat readiness in a NATO validation exercise, earning the praise of the U.S. Army’s 4th Security Force Assistant Brigade.

“In my time working with [the AFF], they have improved leaps and bounds in this regard,” Kirkpatrick added.

NJNG and AAF leaders plan to identify different approaches to improve education and training of the AAF. The next AAF Command Sergeants Major Course is scheduled to include familiarization visits, train-the-trainer instruction and presentations from New Jersey guest speakers.

“We owe much of what we have done to our friends from New Jersey,” said Bitri. “Our partnership is a true success story.”

Combat Archer

Photo and story by
1st Lt. Tyshawn Jenkins
177th Fighter Wing
Public Affairs Office



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Maria-Jose Ibarra, a load crew chief with the 177th Fighter Wing, marshals an F-16C Fighting Falcon at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, Jan. 25, 2023.

Airmen from the 177th Fighter Wing traveled to Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, to participate in Combat Archer – the Air Force’s air-to-air Weapons System Evaluation Program – Jan. 12-27, 2023.

“Participating in WESP is essential and unique in that it provides an environment where our operations and maintenance squadrons work closely together and experience scenarios they can anticipate in combat,” said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Long, commander, 119th Fighter Squadron. “It’s critical; it takes a village. Everyone sees the pilot as the most visible part in the kill chain process, but in fact, it takes hundreds of people to affect the mission. The hundreds of hours leading up to that one moment are often not seen by most people; they just see the pilot.”

F-16 Fighting Falcon pilots, maintainers, and support staff launched and recovered 150 sorties during the combat training, which tests and evaluates multiple areas of operations, from weapons loading to missile employment and aerial gunnery. This training ensures operational readiness and success in current and future missions.

According to Long, one of the training goals is to acclimate the pilot to weapons deployment in combat, something that very few pilots experience more than once in their career. One of the

aspects that makes this mission unique is that pilots can employ live weapons, preparing them for that feeling of the missile or bomb coming off the jet.

“We train and simulate all the time, but the human factor is completely different,” said Long. “It’s making sure that maintenance can load the weapons correctly, the aircraft are operating correctly, the missile station communicates with the station, and the jets can fire the weapon correctly.”

During the training, the 177th FW had the opportunity to operate in a joint environment with other units within the Department of Defense, collaborating in a simulated combat environment.

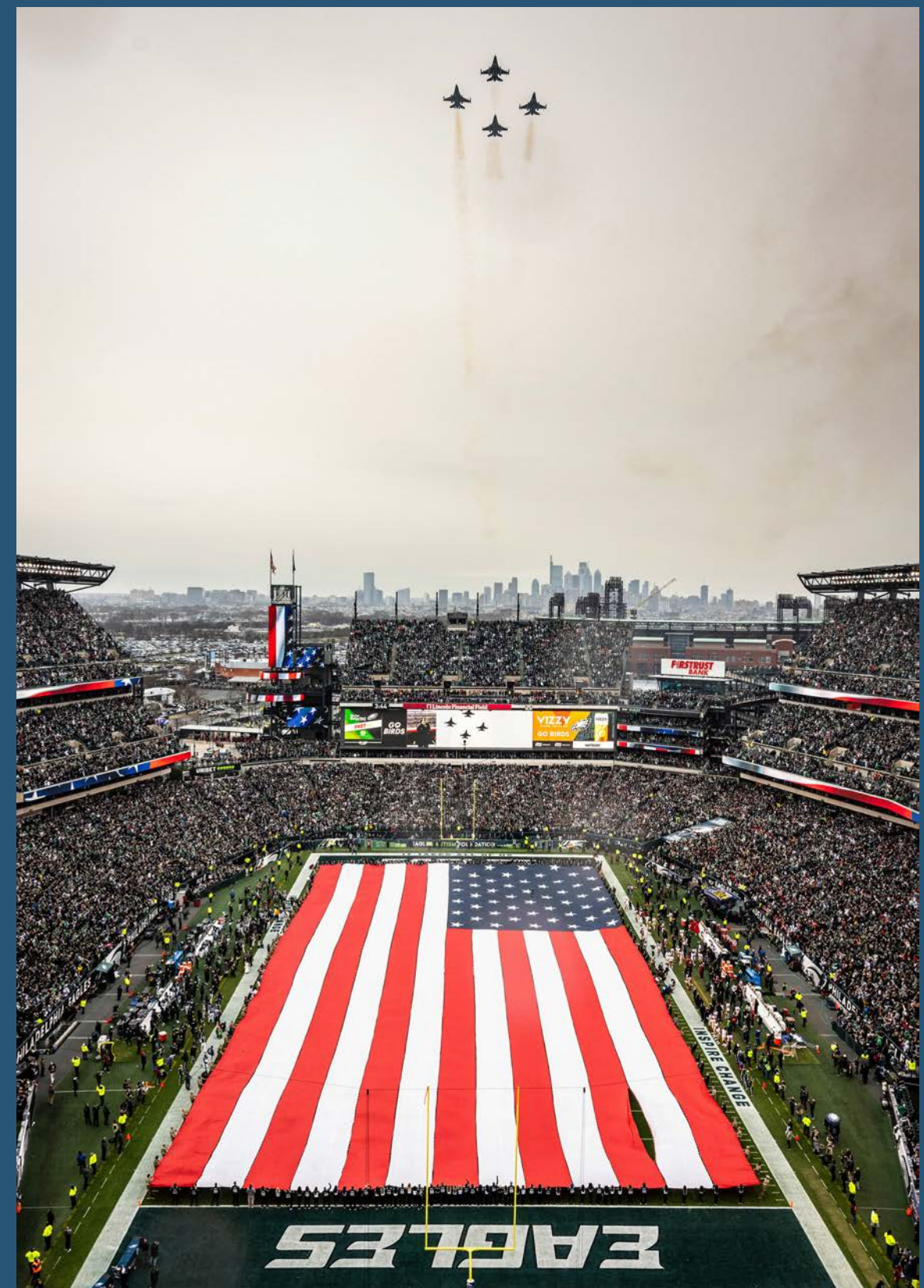
“It is wonderful to work in a joint environment, and it’s good to see how others do

things,” said Lt. Col. Christopher J. Kelly, commanding officer, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 214. “When we go to combat for real, we are going to be working in a joint environment together, so we are going to know each other’s intricacies so that we can be more lethal in our tactics.”

“Everyone sees the pilot as the most visible part in the kill chain process, but in fact, it takes hundreds of people to affect the mission.”

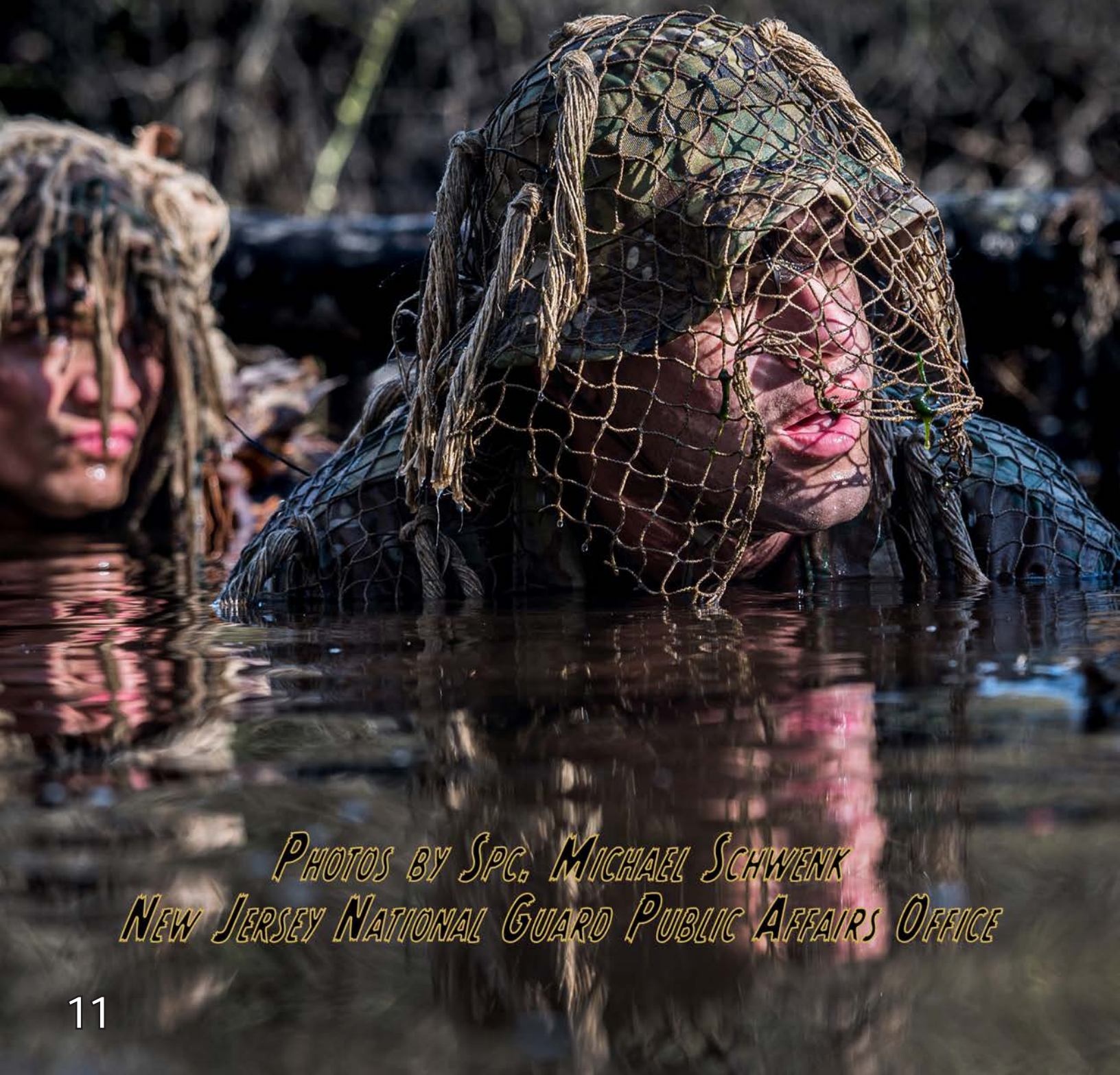
**LT. COL. MICHAEL LONG
COMMANDER, 119TH FIGHTER SQUADRON**

Championship Flyover



U.S. Air Force F-16C Fighting Falcons with New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing, fly a four-ship delta formation during the national anthem before the NFC Championship game at Lincoln Financial Field, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Jan. 29, 2023. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

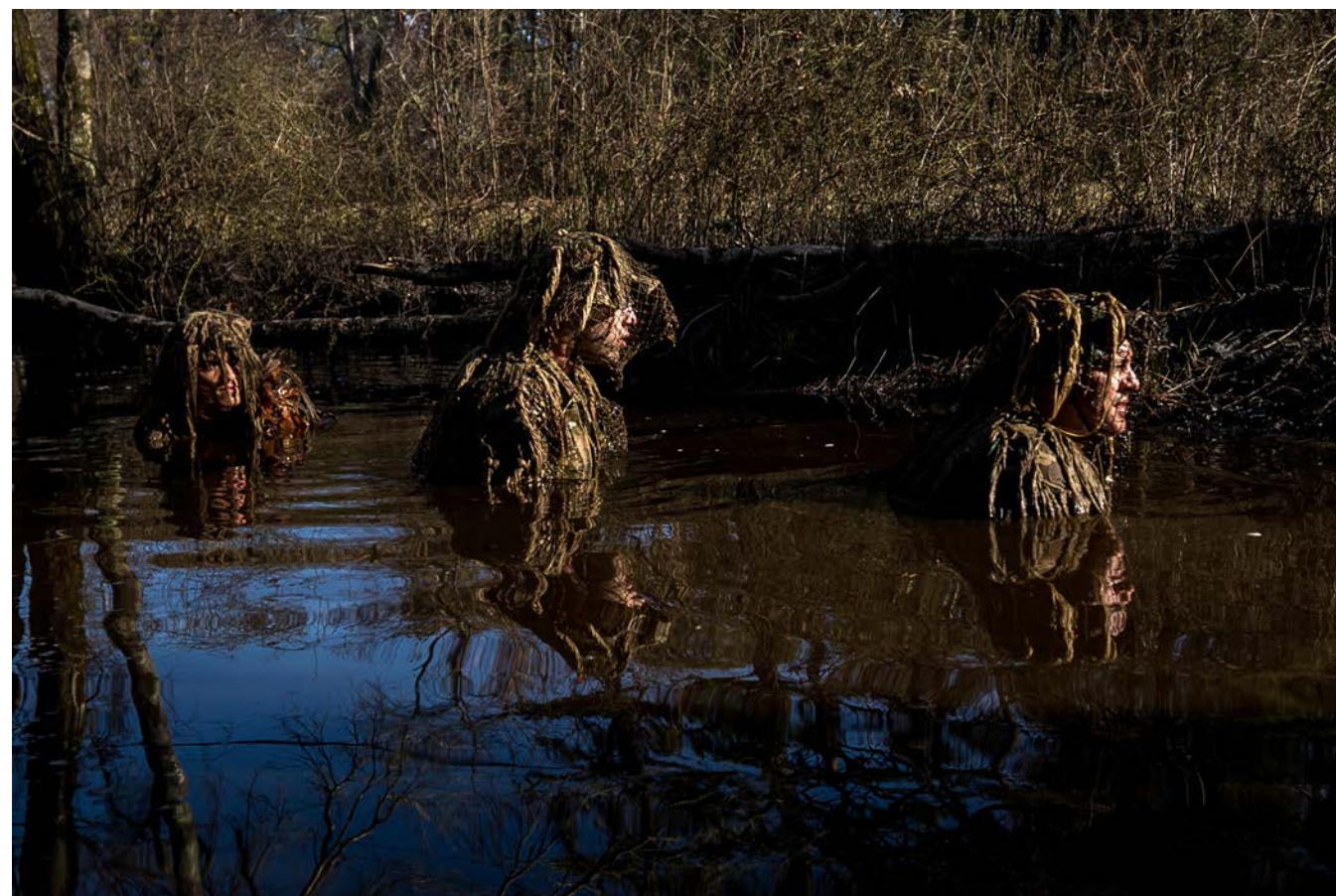
GHILLIE WASH



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



U.S. Army Soldiers with the New Jersey Army National Guard's Reconnaissance and Sniper Platoon, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, participate in a ghillie wash, which tests the suit's strength and durability well as weather them at the Fort Dix Ranges on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, March 25, 2023.





The process is designed to test the strength and durability of a sniper student's ghillie suit and to weather them for future environments they may encounter. The Soldiers use sand, water and mud, all in an effort to perfect their suits camouflage. The ghillie suit was first introduced to the battlefield by Scottish snipers during World War I.



177th hosts ICT training

Photo and story by
Senior Airman Hunter Hires
177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Dominic Francesco, Sr., 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron fuels operations section chief, right, instructs Staff Sgt. Carmelo M. Paduani, with the 157th Civil Engineer Squadron, Pease Air National Guard Base, New Hampshire, on how to perform a hot-pit refuel of an F-16C Fighting Falcon during an Integrated Combat Turnaround training Feb. 17, 2023, at the 177th Fighter Wing, Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, New Jersey.

The 177th Fighter Wing hosted Integrated Combat Turnaround training for Air Mobility Command members Feb. 9-17, 2023.

ICT is a process where an aircraft is recovered and relaunched in a minimum amount of time, through the simultaneous fueling, loading of munitions, aircraft reconfiguration, and aircraft inspections.

"Hot pitting is a technique used to refuel aircraft without the need to shut down engines, resulting in a very rapid turnaround time," said Tech. Sgt. Charles A. Zingrone, Jr., fuels information service center section chief, Fuels Management Flight, 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron.

The 177th's Aircraft Maintenance Squadron and Logistics Readiness Squadron collaborate on hot pit refueling, the loading of munitions, aircraft reconfiguration, and aircraft inspections. Once the ICT training was scheduled, Zingrone reached out to his

counterparts at other bases and offered them the opportunity to attend. Airmen from three AMC bases – Scott Air Force Base, Illinois; Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, and Pease Air National Guard Base, New Hampshire, attended the training.

"They're [177th members] providing all of their lesson plans and checklists so that I can bring them back and develop our own at Scott Air Force Base," said Staff Sgt. Johnathan King, 375th Logistics Readiness Squadron fuels management flight training non-commissioned officer in charge at Scott AFB.

Scott AFB has hot pit capabilities for Navy F/A-18 Hornets, E-2 Hawkeyes, C-2 Greyhounds, CH53 Sea Stallions, USAF F-22 Raptors, and Army UH-60 Black Hawks, said Craig Reis, a Scott AFB transient alert contractor. Scott AFB is currently looking to expand its repertoire of aircraft for hot pit capabilities to include the F-16 Fighting Falcon.

The 177th ICT training provided total force training scenarios that will strengthen relationships between Mobility Air Forces and Combat Air Forces. To be ICT trained and current is a mark of an Airman who is actively engaged in the Agile Combat Employment of the U.S. Air Force.

"We jumped on the opportunity, because the U.S. Air Force is striving to be multi-capable, and this extends our multi-capable assets," said Chief Master Sgt. Lonnie J. Major, chief enlisted manager, Fuels Management Flight, 157th LRS at Pease ANG Base.

"The importance of this training is the experience and knowledge of the operation," said Airman 1st Class Nolan Taylor, 87th Logistics Readiness Squadron fuels service center controller at JB MDL. "Learning different operations gives you the knowledge of what to do when these situations come to you."



Honoring Albanian World War II heroes

U.S. Air Force Col. Eric N. Erickson Jr., Joint Surgeon and Commander, 177th Medical Group, 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, presents a certificate of appreciation and coin to Hurma Zena, in Belsh, Elbasan, Albania, March 7, 2023. A contingent from the New Jersey Air and Army National Guard, U.S. Embassy-Tirana, and the U.S. Air Force Office of the Command Surgeon, Ramstein Air Base, Germany, traveled to Belsh to meet and honor the members of the Zena family, whose relatives helped rescue and house Soldiers of the 807th Medical Air Evacuation Transport Squadron in November, 1943, after their C-47 Skytrain transport plane was shot down in Nazi-occupied Albania during World War II. All 26 members of the squadron, made up of flight nurses, medics, technicians, and pilots, survived the crash and endured harsh winter conditions as they trekked through the mountains of Albania for over two years, hiding from enemy forces, until they could safely reach the Adriatic Coast and were rescued by OSS Agent Lloyd Smith and British operatives on January 9, 1945. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis)

177th trains at Red Flag 23-2

Photos and story by Senior Airman Darion Boyd, 177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office

The 177th Fighter Wing participated in Red Flag Nellis 23-2 hosted by the 414th Combat Training Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base on the Nevada Test and Training Range. Red Flag is a two-week advanced aerial combat exercise designed to provide a realistic experience for military pilots, flight crew members and maintainers from various disciplines.



U.S. Air Force Airmen with the 177th Maintenance Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard, load a training-grade projectile onto an F-16C Fighting Falcon in preparation for a Red Flag 23-2 flight March 16, 2023 at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada. Red Flag is a rigorous two-week exercise hosted by the 414th Combat Training Squadron to provide fighter pilots with realistic aerial training.

Red Flag Nellis 23-2 hosted more than 20 units, including the 119th Fighter Squadron of the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, and approximately 1,800 service members from around the world. Participation in the Red Flag exercise is a significant milestone for Airmen.

The 414th CTS simulates authentic air combat sorties in deployed settings by utilizing "enemy" hardware and live ammunition in a safe learning environment.

"Red Flag is a chance for 119th pilots to receive training we wouldn't normally receive at home," said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Long, commander of the 119th Fighter Squadron.

Red Flag seeks to increase the skill-sets of multi-capable Airmen of all ranks, providing them with the experience necessary to engage in potential conflicts.

"Training prioritizes first-timers combat missions, mission commander upgrades, and flag-unique experiences that contribute most to readiness," said Col. Jared Hutchinson, 414th Combat Training Squadron commander. "Additionally, participants led and learned in the world's best combat debrief, while writing into the next chapter of the Red Flag's resilient heritage."

The Nevada Test and Training Range is the U.S. Air Force's premier military training area with more than

12,000 square miles of airspace and 2.9 million acres of land. The exercise is vitally important for service members to maintain combat readiness, providing services not readily available to the 177th Fighter Wing.

All of this gives pilots the training they need to engage future adversaries including defensive counterair, offensive counterair suppression of enemy air defenses, and offensive counterair air-interdiction.

"For our younger pilots, all they've known is AC (Atlantic City)," said Long. "When they fly at Nellis, they understand we're just one component of the larger force and there's a lot more going on. For the older pilots, it's a great chance to refine their tactical leadership – I've really enjoyed letting them lead missions and do the mission planning."

Red Flag 23-2 is unique due to the inclusion of allied forces, training to increase the interoperability and integration of U.S. armed forces in air operations around the world.

"The Israeli F-35 participation in Red Flag is another step forward for the U.S. and its allies in the transition to the next level of air warfare," said Hutchinson. "It is a rare opportunity for warfighters from both countries to integrate our most advanced capabilities."

The 177th Fighter Wing's visit to Nellis Air Force Base was largely a success. Because of Red Flag, Air Force fighter pilots and maintainers across the country are more ready to maintain air superiority.

"Red Flag is a great opportunity for the entire 177th Fighter Wing to train and prepare for future taskings," said Long. "I am immensely proud of all the Jersey Devils were able to accomplish at Nellis."



U.S. Air Force Airmen with the 177th Maintenance Squadron prepare an F-16C for flight during Red Flag 23-2 March 16, 2023.

THE ROAD TO BEST WARRIOR



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Barnabas A. Adombire, left, Charlie Company, 1st Security and Support Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, and Pfc. Jeffrey Staudt, with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, perform the 12-mile road march portion of the New Jersey Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, April 26, 2023. Competitors are tested on physical fitness, marksmanship, land navigation, and other soldiering tasks. Seven Soldiers and five noncommissioned officers are competing April 25-27, 2023, with the top Soldier and NCO going on to compete against seven other states of Region I at Bangor, Maine, May 15-19, 2023. The Best Warrior Competition recognizes Soldiers who demonstrate commitment to the Army Values, embody the Warrior Ethos, and represent the Force of the Future. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)



Above: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Barnabas A. Adombire, Charlie Company, 1st Security and Support Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 57th Troop Command, checks his shot group on the M4 carbine zero range April 25, 2023. (New Jersey National

Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen) Below: U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Antonella Cataliotti, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, fires an M17 pistol April 25, 2023. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)



Above: U.S. Army Spc. Laura Grieco, Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat team, calls in a medical evacuation request on a PRC-152 radio April 26, 2023. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by

Spc. Michael Schwenk) Below: U.S. Army Sgt. Bryan Garcia, Golf Company, 250th Brigade Support Battalion, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, fires an M4 carbine April 25, 2023. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)





Above: U.S. Army Spc. Gale S. Clayton, Charlie Company, 1st Security and Support Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, 57th Troop Command, carries ammunition containers April 26, 2023.

Below: U.S. Army Spc. Bryan J. Merritt, 253rd Transportation Company, 42nd Regional Support Group, drags a simulated casualty during the stress shoot/warrior tasks portion of the Competition April 26, 2023. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)



Above: A U.S. Army New Jersey National Guard Soldier hikes during the 12-mile road march April 26, 2023.

Below: U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., The Adjutant General of New Jersey, stand for a photo with Sgt. 1st Class Antonella Cataliotti, second from left, and Spc. Laura Grieco, winners of the NJARNG's Best Warrior Competition April 27, 2023. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Spc. Michael Schwenk)





177th leads Wings in joint training

**Story by
Senior Airman Darion Boyd
Photo by
Staff Sgt. Hunter Hires
177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office**

For 96-hours, Air National Guard civil engineers participated in a contingency training exercise at Camp Mad Bull on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska.

From May 21-24, 2023, the 177th Civil Engineer Squadron led a Prime Base Engineer Emergency Force training week, including civil engineers from the 108th Wing, 111th Attack Wing, and 176th Wing from the New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Alaska Air National Guard, respectively.

Prime BEEF week sharpens an Airman's understanding of field condition scenarios such as bare base bed-down, base sustainment and emergency service support. The Scruffy Devil exercise earned its name through its nature as expeditionary training with engineers dealing with extreme weather conditions, field conditions and limited communications. The conditions for the training were selected to simulate a real-world deployment in an austere environment.

The exercise began with engineers of numerous career

“Engineers are born as multi-capable Airmen. We are carpenters, plumbers, heavy equipment operators, electricians, and so much more. Air Force Instruction 10-210, which outlines contingency training outside an Airman’s specialty, sets us apart from the active-duty Air Force.”

**U.S. AIR FORCE MASTER SGT. MICHAEL GARCIA
PRIME BEEF MANAGER
177TH CIVIL ENGINEER SQUADRON**

specialties constructing a bare base from a Disaster Relief Bed-down System, followed by multiple contingency combat skill courses across two days, and finally, a three-mile-long obstacle course.

“Engineers are born as multi-capable Airmen,” said U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Michael Garcia, 177th Civil Engineer Squadron Prime BEEF manager. “We are carpenters, plumbers, heavy equipment operators, electricians, and so much more. Air Force Instruction 10-210, which outlines contingency training outside an Airman’s specialty, sets us apart from the active-duty Air Force.”

Part of a civil engineer's duty is to provide shelter for all service members in deployed environments. This ensures that other Airmen from any career field can complete their missions.

“Our job is to make sure we can bed down people and make sure the mission happens in any austere location to get the aircraft off the ground,” said Garcia.

Relocating the 177th, 108th, and 111th civil engineers offers them hands-on experience.

“We can even build tents at home, but that wouldn’t be training in an unfamiliar environment,” said Garcia. “When you deploy, you’re not familiar with the area. It wouldn’t have been beneficial to stay in New Jersey. Alaska sets us up to be prepared for the unknown.”

Camp Mad Bull provided previously unfamiliar equipment to some engineers.

“We were unsure of the specific equipment we would be working with,” said Senior Master Sgt. William Ericksen, Heavy Repair Superintendent of 177th Civil Engineer Operations Flight. “Having us away from the equipment and environment that we know is much more realistic to a deployed environment.”

Shorter Deployments for Training like Prime BEEF are also crucial for junior enlisted Airmen, exposing them to the Air Force Force Generation model.

INSTRUCT, MENTOR, AND COLLABORATE



**STORY AND PHOTOS BY
SGT. 1ST CLASS ARMANDO VASQUEZ
42ND REGIONAL SUPPORT GROUP
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE**

U.S. Army Capt. Matt Armstrong, center, commander of the 50th Chemical Company, 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, briefs U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, third from left, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, and Albania Armed Forces Brig. Gen. Bilbil Bitri, fourth from right, Director of the General Staff of Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania, during a field exercise May 22, 2023, with chemical soldiers from Albania Armed Forces and Kosovo Security Forces, at Forca Tokesore in Zall-Herr, Albania. The New Jersey Guardsmen are conducting annual training in Albania to instruct, mentor, and collaborate with the Albanian Armed Forces as they prepare to participate in the Dynamic Employment of Forces to Europe for NATO Deterrence and Enhanced Readiness 2023 exercise.



U.S. Army Soldiers from the 50th Chemical Company, 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, and Albania Armed Forces stand in formation alongside each other at Mother Teresa Square in Tirana during the DEFENDER 23 distinguished visitors'

day, May 22, 2023. DEFENDER 23 is a U.S. European Command directed multi-national, joint exercise designed to build readiness and interoperability between U.S. and NATO allies and partners and takes place from April 22 through June 23.

Approximately 45 Soldiers from the 50th Chemical Company, 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard spent two weeks at Zall-Herr, Albania, to conduct annual training alongside soldiers from the Albanian Armed Forces and Kosovo Security Forces, May 16-26, 2023.

The “Dragons” provided chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear training, as well as mentorship and knowledge-sharing with AAF counterparts, with whom the NJNG has shared more than two decades of friendship through the Department of Defense State Partnership Program.

“We fulfilled the 50th Chemical Company’s mission essential tasks lists, while also integrating, training and collaborating with Albanian and Kosovo chemical units to help their ability to perform military CBRN tasks,” said U.S. Army Capt. Matt Armstrong, commander of the 50th Chemical Company. “These tasks include troop and equipment decontamination, CBRN reconnaissance and surveillance and biological detection.”

According to Army Sgt. Hope Satour, CBRN specialist with the 50th, her unit provided instructional classes on the biological integrated detection systems and the process to decontaminate equipment and personnel after a chemical attack. Additionally, Albanian and Kosovar soldiers trained hands-on with an M1152A1 BIDS vehicle and an M26 Joint Service Transportable Decontamination System Small Scale.

“Soldiers from our RECON, DECON, and BIDS platoon taught classes on the specifics of our jobs,” she said. “Then we conducted an exercise showing our NATO counterparts how we would apply these skills in a real-world scenario.”

The training preceded the AAF and KSF’s participation in the Dynamic Employment of Forces to Europe for NATO Deterrence and Enhanced Readiness 2023 exercise. DEFENDER 23 is a multinational joint exercise running from April 22 to June 23 and is designed to build readiness and interoperability between U.S. and NATO Allies and partners.

“This experience was an amazing way for us as a National Guard unit to put our training and expertise to use,” said Satour. “The ultimate goal of our job is to hopefully never have to use it but getting the chance to show others, especially in another country, is something a lot of us will never forget.”

The Department of Defense’s State Partnership Program is managed and administered by the National Guard Bureau, and is a U.S.-sponsored security cooperation program that supports the security cooperation objectives of the United States and the geographic combatant commands by developing enduring relationships with partner countries and carrying out activities to build partner capacity, improve interoperability, and enhance U.S. access and influence, while increasing the readiness of U.S. and partner forces to meet emerging challenges.

TRAIN AS WE FIGHT

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



A U.S. Army Soldier with the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, directs a vehicle at the Morrisville Yard in Morrisville, Pennsylvania, May 15, 2023. More than 800 vehicles and pieces of equipment were sent by train to Fort Polk, Louisiana, to participate in an exercise at the Joint Readiness Training Center prior to the unit's deployment.



Above: U.S. Army Soldiers with the 44th IBCT secure a vehicle onto a rail car at the Morrisville Yard.

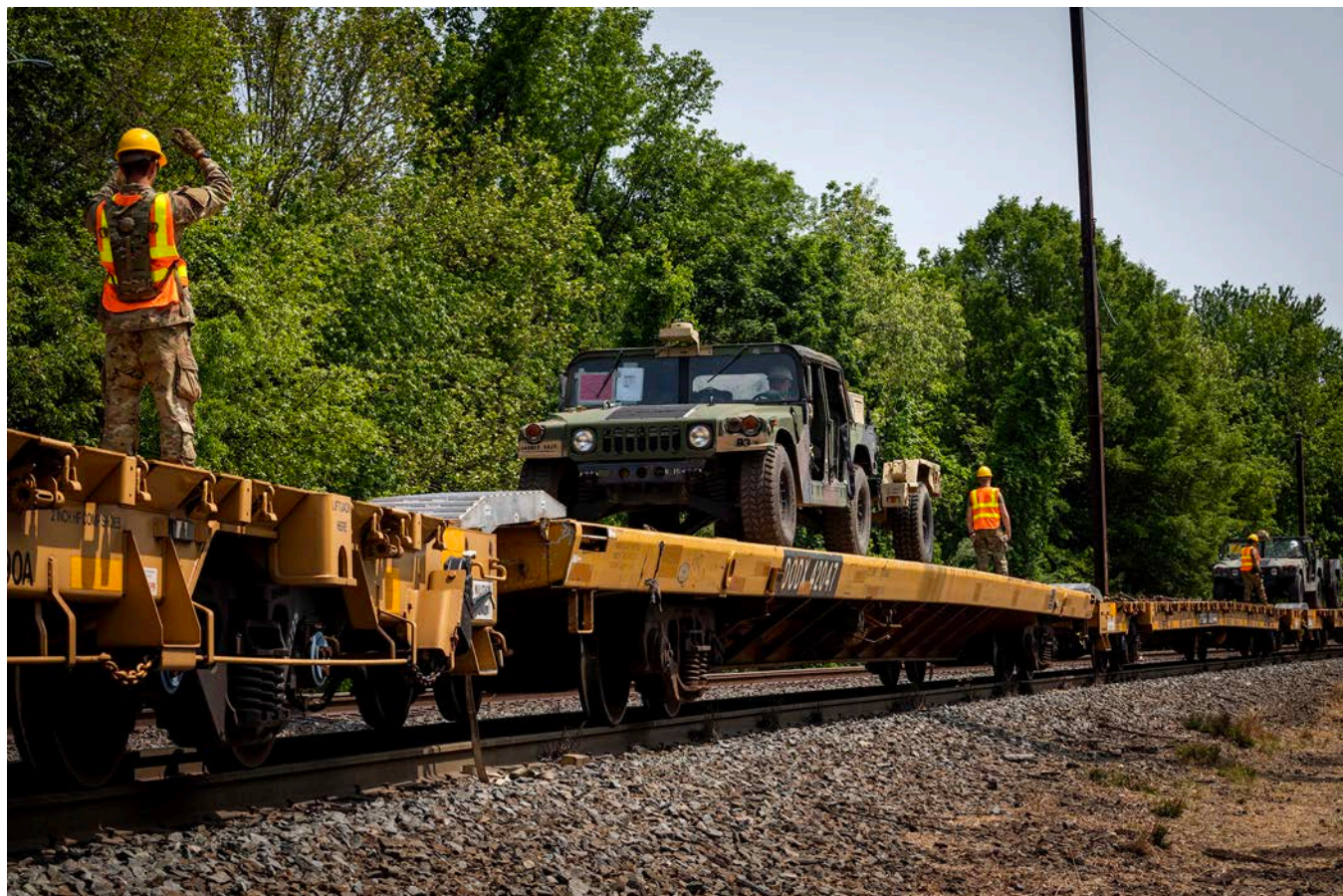
Below: A 44th IBCT Soldier tightens a chain securing a vehicle on a flatcar.





Above: A U.S. Army Soldier with the 44th IBCT, secures one of more than 800 vehicles and pieces of equipment for shipment.

Below: A 44th IBCT Soldier directs a vehicle as it moves across flatcars.



44th IBCT leads JRTC rotation

Photos and story by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis
44th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



“The Box” at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Johnson, Louisiana, is the preeminent environment where Soldiers can be battle-tested in a high-stress, multi-domain setting against a near-peer opposing force, to become a deployment-ready element.

Showing their resilience and modernized war-fighting capabilities, the New Jersey Army National Guard’s 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team was up to the task, and made history as the first New Jersey Guard unit to lead a rotation at JRTC.

“The ability to successfully operate as a brigade while maneuvering battalions in a large-scale combat operation training environment is a rare achievement for a National Guard BCT,” said Col. Brian J. Stramaglia, commander of the 44th IBCT. “This is a historic experience for the 44th and for every Soldier and leader involved, as they were able to perform to the highest of standards in their given military occupational specialty.”

Nearly 3,000 NJARNG Soldiers were assessed on their ability to conduct large-scale combat operations – maneuvering as a close-combat force. It was the 44th’s largest training exercise in more than a decade, with approximately 2,500 additional Soldiers from a dozen states and Puerto Rico participating in rotation 23-08.

Brigade combat teams are designed to maneuver against, close with, and destroy enemy forces. They also acquire and occupy key terrain and keep the enemy under constant pressure breaking their will to fight.

As the Army has transitioned from counterinsurgency warfare into large-scale combat operations, JRTC has implemented a

refined training model and the 44th IBCT units were able to demonstrate modernized capabilities during the exercise.

“The Box” consists of a two-week training period beginning with live-fire exercises before units move into a force-on-force phase. Units and their Soldiers were evaluated on the performance of their duties within their military occupational specialties by observer coach trainers. During the 10-day force-on-force exercise, Soldiers constantly battled various attacks and surveillance tactics by opposing forces in a simulated combat environment.

The training environment enables Army forces to gain and capitalize from information advantages by utilizing the human dimensions of an operational environment. Leaders combine these advantages to better understand the situation and execute tasks in order to defeat enemy forces. Feedback from the JRTC observer coach trainers allows units to reflect on their actions and assess performance.

Soldiers also gain insight on how their given occupational specialties are vital in combat and are able to coordinate with other sections to gain wins on the battlefield, building unit cohesion.

“As the days went, I felt more confident and proficient in my duties in the Brigade Aviation Element, where I assisted in air assault missions as well as UAS (unmanned aerial systems),” said Sgt. Christopher J. Moses, an air traffic controller assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 44th IBCT. “It was a constant battle of improvising and improving to become more efficient and valuable to the unit’s mission. Like General Patton said: ‘He who sweats more in training, bleeds less in battle.’”



Above: Soldiers with the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, move in at the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Johnson, Louisiana, May 28-June 11, 2023.

Below: 44th IBCT Soldiers fire a M136 AT4 84mm unguided anti-armor weapon at Fort Johnson, Louisiana, June 1, 2023.



Above: A New Jersey Army National Guard Soldier prepares for an air assault exercise at the JRTC, May 31, 2023.

Below: A U.S. Army Soldier with the 44th IBCT fires a M249 light machine gun.





112th hits "grand slam"

Photo and story by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis
444th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

The New Jersey Army National Guard's 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, made history at the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana by becoming the first New Jersey unit to successfully fire the GPS-guided M982A1 Excalibur precision projectile May 27, 2023.

The Precision Guided Munition and Precision Guidance Kit live-fire utilized a towed 155 mm M777A2 Howitzer from Charlie Battery, 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment. The M982A1 Excalibur round can double the range of a conventional high-explosive round fired by a 155mm Howitzer. The Excalibur is a GPS-guided round which can impact within approximately four meters of a target.

"This newly acquired ability to fire PGM munitions has made us a more lethal and precise option for our Brigade Commander and a force multiplier for the brigade when we deploy at the beginning of next year," said Lt. Col. David Eckenrode, Commander, 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment.

Eckenrode went on to state that the battalion fielded the

M777A2s back in 2015, and the opportunity to fire Excalibur had not presented itself until they were scheduled for a rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center. During the initial

planning conference for JRTC, it was clear that one of their main training goals was to conduct a PGM live-fire with Excalibur and PGK.

"I knew right then and there that this was our moment to add to our battalion's long and storied history," stated Eckenrode. "Command Sgt. Maj. (Angel) Rosario and I are proud of all of our Soldiers involved in planning and executing this. It was a combined effort across the different Fires Military

Occupational Specialties in order to achieve this milestone for 3-112th. This effort is a reflection of the Army as a whole and how it works. No one Army element can accomplish the mission alone. It takes a team in order to accomplish any mission. This was a grand slam and a big win for us."

"I knew right then and there that this was our moment to add to our battalion's long and storied history."

**LT. COL. DAVID ECKENRODE
COMMANDER, 3RD BATTALION
112TH FIELD ARTILLERY REGIMENT**

A Box within "The Box"

Photo and story by
Sgt. 1st Class Armando Vasquez
42nd Regional Support Group Public Affairs Office

"The Box" at the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Johnson, Louisiana is a training range on the installation where brigade-sized elements – between 4,000 to 6,000 Soldiers – and multinational units come to train through a 14-day realistic battle with simulated combat scenarios.

The New Jersey Army National Guard's 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team entered "The Box" on May 29, 2023, to begin their 14-day training as part of JRTC 23-08 rotation. Staying behind in North Fort Johnson were more than 100 Soldiers from the 42nd Regional Support Group, Medical Command, Joint Force Headquarters, and 57th Troop Command. They stayed in a different box, as part of the Army exercise support group, also known as the White Cell.

"Their mission is to provide a stable foundation and valued resource that commanders and Soldiers in "The Box" can utilize in times of need," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Anthony Salvani, Rotational Support Cell officer in charge, 42nd RSG. "The ESG is tasked with performing the division's day-to-day administrative and personnel tasks, freeing the brigade staff to train during their JRTC rotation."

Having arrived at JRTC between May 18-19, the Soldiers quickly set up command and control functions for the arriving troops from the 44th IBTC and other National Guard units from various states that were supporting the training exercise

"The S-1 section scanned thousands of common access cards to ensure accountability of arriving personnel," said Sgt. Maj. Saso Zafirovski, Rotational Support Cell non-commissioned officer in charge. "And they will do it again on the way out."

Soldiers with expertise in human resources, transportation, network systems, medical, and culinary skills were the backbone of the White Cell, ensuring that the Soldiers in "The Box" can focus mainly on their training mission.

"This is why we sent the RSG: because we know that this is what you do so well," said Brig. Gen. Robert W. Hughes, Jr., Assistant Adjutant General-Army, New Jersey National Guard. "Moving the bulk of things and people – it's really an amazing thing."

The White Cell provided support by transporting injured Soldiers from inside and back to The Box via 24-hour operations that required the transportation section to be on call for possible transportation requirements in the middle of the night. Working together with the transportation section, medics



U.S. Army Sgt. David Exantus, right, a human resources specialist, 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, discusses the daily administrative workflow at the White Cell compound at the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, Louisiana, June 10, 2023, with Sgt. Rey Rodrigues, also a human resource specialist, Joint Force Headquarter, NJARNG. Soldiers from the 42nd RSG provided rear operations support to the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, NJARNG.

from NJARNG MEDCOM provided sick-call operations, as well as administered emergency medical care for Soldiers in The Box and those staying back.

"It's a state effort," Hughes added, referring to the MEDCOM and JFHQ augmentees and the Command Chaplain's inbound visit to the White Cell. "And we have the best team in the Guard."

According to Zafirovski, more than 1,000 Soldiers were attended to by the medics at the JRTC Aid Station – Rear. Additional functions within the White Cell included administrative and food service operations. These functions included processing Red Cross messages, emergency leave requirements, personnel accountability, and the feeding of Soldiers: a task made more complicated because of the constant fluctuation of Soldiers coming in and out of The Box.

"In order to be successful in "The Box" you must have a highly motivated and capable support system," said Salvani. "Soldiers in the White Cell provided that capability and skillset so that Soldiers are positioned for success on the battlefield."

"All roads lead to the White Cell," said Zafirovski.

A tale of two battle buddies

By Maj. Amelia Thatcher
42nd Regional Support Group
Public Affairs Office



Two heroes: Pvt. Henry Johnson, left, and Pvt. Needham Roberts from the "The Negro pictorial review. A Visual Narrative of the Negro's Glorious part in the world's greatest war. Of The Great War," by Miles V. Lynk, 1919. (Image courtesy of The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, the New York Public Library)

More than a century ago, as many as 150,000 New Jerseyans raised their right hands and served in the Great War. Just one stood watch with Sgt. William Henry Johnson, namesake of Fort Johnson, Louisiana, which was redesignated in a ceremony June 13, 2023.

In the early hours of May 15, 1918, Johnson of Albany, New York and Pvt. Needham Roberts of Trenton, New Jersey, manned their post in the trenches of the Western Front. A two-dozen-strong German raiding party cut through the barbed wire and nearly overran Johnson and Roberts' position – but the two Harlem Hellfighters fought back against overwhelming odds.

Johnson suffered more than 20 shrapnel, gunshot, and stab wounds as the enemy attempted to capture Roberts. Johnson, empty on grenades and ammunition, drew his bolo knife and slashed his way through the remaining attackers, rescuing Roberts and singlehandedly eliminating the German squad.

Gen. Daniel R. Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, relayed Johnson's story of heroism at the ceremony. The renaming coincides with the Joint Readiness Training Center Rotation 23-08, led by the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard. Nearly 5,000 Soldiers from 18 states completed their tasks and departed "The Box," as the expansive training area in western Louisiana is known, as the Fort Johnson colors were uncased for the first time.

"I am always struck by the transformative power of the training fields," Hokanson said. "This is the fire in which warriors are forged. Johnson's is a story of fearless heroism and the National Guard's groundbreaking contributions to World War I."

Brig. Gen. David W. Gardner, commanding general of the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Johnson explained that the modern 44th IBCT's higher headquarters, the 42nd Infantry Division, was originally activated for World War I service as the "Rainbow Division" because it encompassed Soldiers from 26 states. Those Soldiers included Johnson's unit, the segregated 369th Infantry Regiment, New York National Guard.

But Johnson and Roberts served at

a time when black Soldiers rarely went into combat, and almost never received recognition for heroism. The 369th's fortunes changed when Gen. John J. Pershing directed their reassignment to the French Army, which welcomed the influx of fighting men to their ranks regardless of the color of their skin. Also known as the "men of bronze," the Harlem Hellfighters earned their moniker with distinction. For their actions in battle, Johnson and Roberts were among the first Americans to earn the French Army's highest award for valor, the Croix de Guerre avec Palme.

"If Sergeant Johnson doesn't exemplify the Warrior Spirit, then I don't know who does," said Gardner, referencing the installation motto, "Forging the Warrior Spirit."

"The Soldiers who pass through these gates go forth with the spirit of Henry Johnson," Hokanson said. "These are the values of the U.S. Army, and these are the values we are proud to fight for today. That's why I am proud that this place bears the name of a Guardsman."

The Naming Commission, established by Congress in the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, identified and recommended redesignating, renaming, or relocating more than 1,100 Confederate-named assets, to include bases, ships, and prominent artworks. Fort Liberty, North Carolina is the second most recent base to implement the commission's work, with the Fort Bragg colors cased on June 2, 2023.

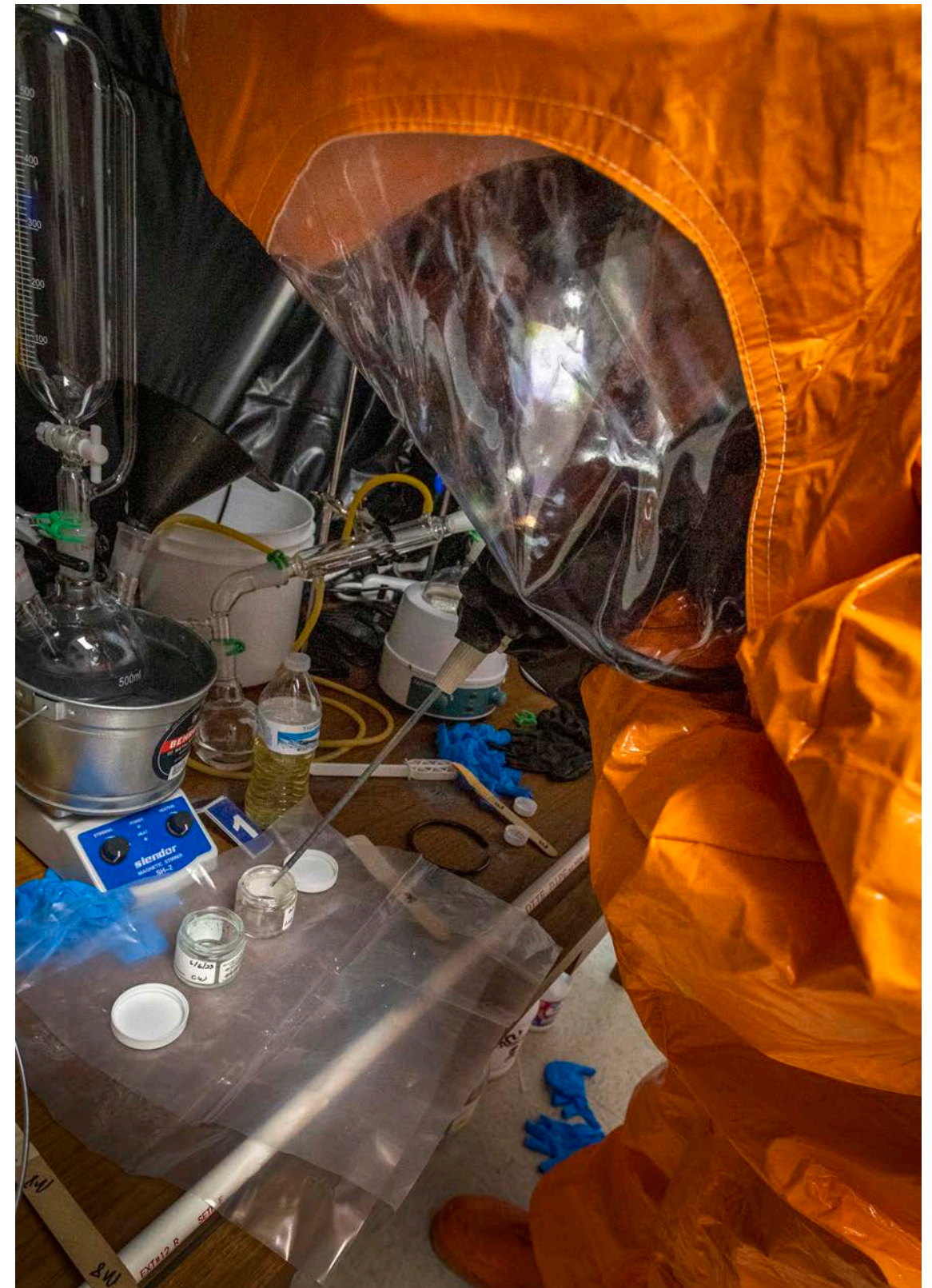
"Our military bases are important symbols of might and right of the United States," said retired Adm. Michelle Howard, chair of the Naming Commission and attendee at the ceremony, in an April 2023 television interview. "And the names that are on the base signs, the names that are on our ships should reflect the values of our country and the values of the American people."

Fort Johnson is among nine U.S. Army installations which will or have already shed their previous Confederate namesakes, most of which had initially been assigned during the U.S. Army's massive reorganization following World War II.

"The 'Home of Heroes' is now named after a Soldier who embodies the Warrior Spirit," Gardner said.

21st WMD-CST trains in Camden

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

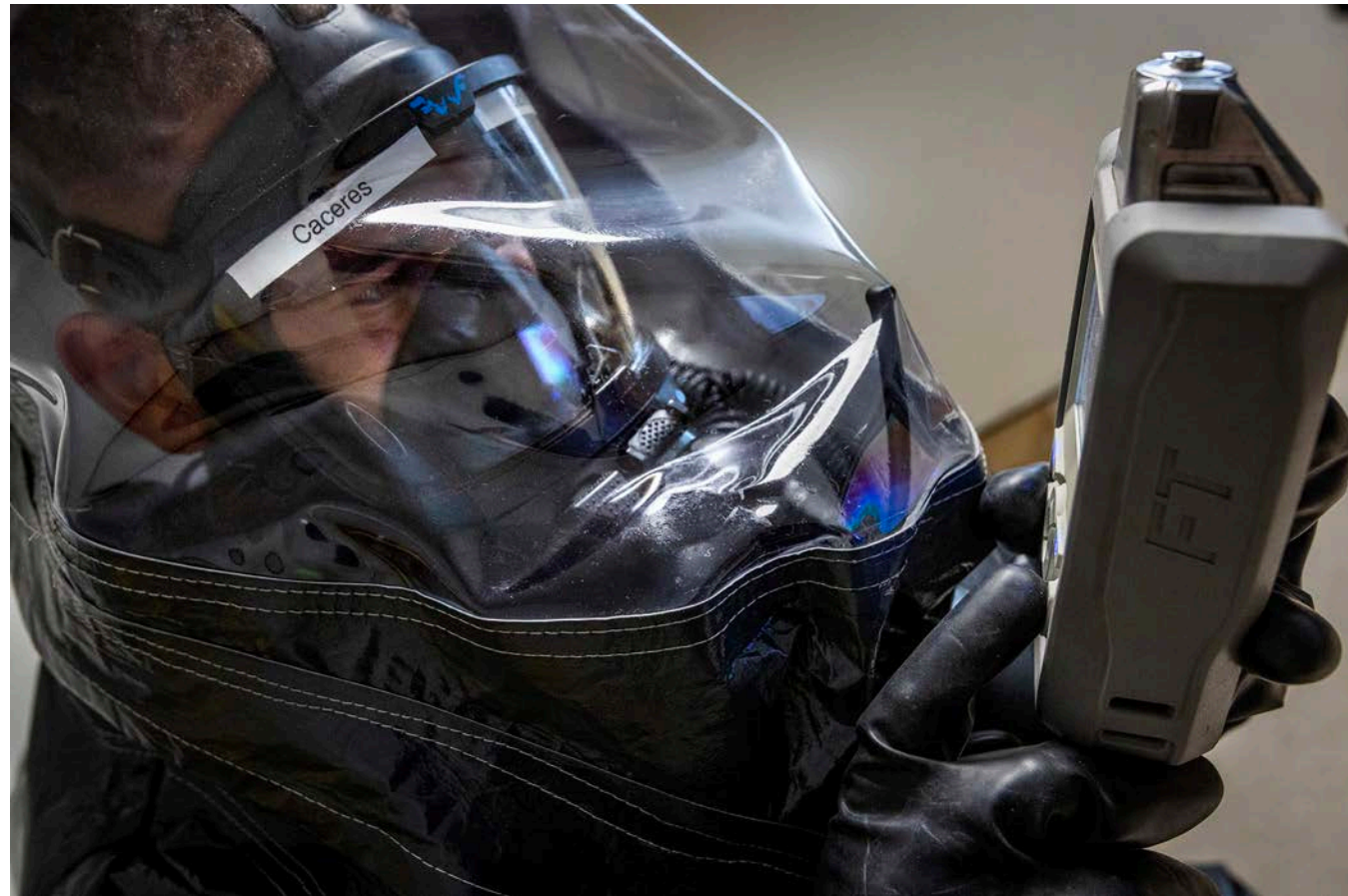


U.S. Army Sgt. Christopher Wall, a survey team member with the New Jersey National Guard's 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team, collects a sample at a simulated crime scene during a training exercise in Camden, New Jersey, June 6, 2023. The 21st identifies chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear substances; assesses and advises civil authorities on response measures to man-made or natural disasters.



Above: Aerial view of the New Jersey National Guard's 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team's setup during a training exercise in Camden, New Jersey.

Below: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mauricio Caceres, a survey team member, uses a handheld Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy chemical identification analyzer at a simulated crime scene.



Above: U.S. Army Sgt. Christopher Wall, right, places a sample jar into a container held by Sgt. Eric Boyer, both survey team members with the 21st WMD-CST, at a simulated crime scene.

Below: U.S. Army Soldiers with the 21st, pull simulated casualty Sgt. Christopher Mejia on to a gurney during a training exercise.



Protecting history

Photo and story by
Spc. Michael Schwenk
New Jersey National Guard
Public Affairs Office



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Andrew Walker, Curator of the National Guard Militia Museum, displays a unit photo at the museum in Sea Girt, New Jersey, June 14, 2023.

The Curator of the National Guard Militia Museum of New Jersey, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Andrew Walker, attended and presented at the New Jersey History and Historic Preservation Conference June 13, 2023, in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

The annual two-day conference brings together participants who have a collective commitment to preserve New Jersey's current historic landmarks.

Back in October 2012, the National Guard Training Center, located along the coast in Sea Girt, was struck by Hurricane Sandy. The hurricane caused an estimated \$36.8 billion of damage in New Jersey alone. The hurricane hit the museum especially hard, damaging 80 percent of the artifacts in the museum's collection.

Walker spoke during the "We Have a Lot at Risk" panel, hosted by Monmouth University professor and former Fort Monmouth Command Historian, Melissa Ziobro, where he presented the story of the National Guard Militia Museum of New Jersey's recovery from Hurricane Sandy and the lessons learned to better prepare for the unknown road ahead.

"It is important to attend this conference to share with others the impact and more beneficially, our recovery from

Hurricane Sandy," said Walker.

Since taking over the position as the museum's curator in 2019, Walker oversaw the relocation of the Sea Girt museum's artifacts to a more publicly accessible location just outside the main gate to the training center in Sea Girt. Of particular note, this building is located a half mile from Stockton Lake and on more elevated terrain.

This was the first time Walker presented at the conference, though he plans to continue these collaborations with other historic sites across the state on an annual basis.

"We have seen how unpredictable weather can devastate our collection and we have to hear from the different experiences of other historic sites," said Walker. "Learning from each other's past experiences is the best way to better prepare for whatever unknown future weather events might come at us and preserve the long history of the New Jersey National Guard."

Jersey National Guard."

For more information on the National Guard Militia Museum of New Jersey, including the Center for U.S. War Veterans' Oral Histories, visit njmilitiamuseum.org.

"We have seen how unpredictable weather can devastate our collection and we have to hear from the different experiences of other historic sites"

STAFF SGT. ANDREW WALKER
CURATOR
NATIONAL GUARD MILITIA MUSEUM
OF NEW JERSEY



177th completes first POL Multi-Capable Airmen class

By Master Sgt. Drew Darrow, Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants Flight, 177th Fighter Wing

The 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants Flight hosted its first Multi-Capable Airmen Familiarization training course for Airmen from a variety of other career fields June 20 – 30, 2023.

The training provided Airmen an opportunity to gain valuable knowledge and experience in several core competencies of the POL specialty career field and was developed locally to support the Air Force's Agile Combat Employment Doctrine.

"A few months ago, we decided to implement this program, in line with Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr.'s signing of the Agile Combat Employment Doctrine," said Lt. Col. Justin C. Krowicki, commander, 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron. "During past deployments, I have seen first-hand the need for Airmen to have the abilities to step into unique roles in order to accomplish the mission."

Agile Combat Employment requires Airmen to learn an array of skills from other Air Force Specialty Codes to become a more flexible and adept force.

"Training like this is extremely beneficial to support the new Agile Combat Employment model we are embracing," said Senior Master Sgt. Misty Capanas, 177th POL flight chief.

The training takes Airmen from diverse career fields and trains them in the basics of POL operations. Five 177th Airmen participated in the training and learned core POL competencies. During the first week, one group of Airmen concentrated on refueling vehicles and liquid oxygen, while the second group focused on fuels laboratory and bulk storage. The following week, the Airmen switched concentrations.

"The ability of these Airmen to expand their knowledge outside their own Air Force Specialty Code and then apply that in austere conditions, or contested environments, is invaluable to the ACE construct," said Chief Master Sgt. Andrew DeVito,

177th FW LRS senior enlisted leader. "Proficiency in all the core competencies of POL will provide them the flexibility to augment the POL career field."

Airmen learned the components of an R-11 Refueler unit; daily inspection; how to drive and operate an R-11; how to service aircraft in both standard sortie generation, as well as hot pit operations.

In the LOX portion of the training, Airmen drew samples from LOX storage tanks, and learned how to correctly service LOX carts used to service the 177th's F-16 Fighting Falcons.

During the lab portion of the training, Airmen studied and performed the stringent test required to ensure clean, dry fuel, necessary for compliance with aircraft consumption. They also learned about the proper receipt of jet fuel, as well as bulk storage maintenance.

"We already have a second class scheduled and are looking forward to making this an annual legacy," said Staff Sgt. Anthony J. Stricchiola, 177th POL trainer.

The Airmen were then able to apply what they learned through hands-on training. The goal is to ultimately equip the Airmen with knowledge and experience they can apply in deployed environments.

"This program will continue to evolve and mature over time," said Krowicki. "We need to be more agile, smaller, and leaner - that's the program's intent. Instead of deploying an entire POL Flight somewhere, we may have a seven-level or a senior NCO who oversees a small team of Multi-Capable-Airmen that can execute the mission with a fraction of the footprint that we would have previously deployed. The long-term vision for this program will be to push for a Special Experience Identifier for members to have, so MCA Airmen are easily identified. It's something we plan to work with the National Guard Bureau on."



CYPRUS NATIONAL GUARD VISITS 177TH

U.S. Air Force Col. Derek Routt, 177th Fighter Wing commander, left, gives a tour to the Minister of Defence Michalis Giorgallas, second from left, Republic of Cyprus, and other Republic of Cyprus National Guardsmen at the Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, New Jersey, July 19, 2023. The Republic of Cyprus is the latest partner of the New Jersey National Guard in the U.S. Department of Defense State Partnership Program. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)



New Jersey and Republic of Cyprus sign letter of intent

U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., The Adjutant General of the New Jersey National Guard, left, and Lt. Gen. Dimokritos Zervakis, Chief of Defence, Republic of Cyprus, shake hands after signing respective copies of a letter of intent during the State Partnership Program Signing Ceremony between the State of New Jersey and the Republic of Cyprus at the National Guard Training Center, Sea Girt, New Jersey, July 21, 2023. The NJNG and the Republic of Cyprus National Guard formalized their state partnership and will commence sharing expertise to strengthen capabilities, uniting in mutual efforts for a safe, secure, and prosperous Eastern Mediterranean region. The State Partnership Program is a Department of State and Department of Defense joint security cooperation program administered by the National Guard Bureau that links a state's National Guard with the armed forces of a partner country in order to build long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with U.S. partners around the world. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)



9/11 memorial dedication held at 177th

Story by Senior Airman Darion Boyd; photo by Staff Sgt. Hunter Hires, 177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office

The 177th Fighter Wing held a ceremony Sept. 11, 2023, to dedicate a memorial erected in remembrance of the 9/11 tragedy and to recognize Airmen preparing to deploy to Southwest Asia.

The ceremony consisted of the official unveiling of the memorial; speakers providing first-hand accounts; a formation of Airmen representing the deployers, and the laying of five commemorative wreaths.

"The 9/11 attacks were horrific, but they brought our country together," said U.S. Air Force Col. Derek B. Rouff, 177th Fighter Wing commander. "If our younger troops can see what it meant to us, maybe they'll gain a new perspective on their mission and how important their mission is."

Frank LoBiondo, former Congressman for New Jersey's 2nd Congressional District, was the keynote speaker. LoBiondo, who served as a Congressman during the 9/11 attacks, spoke about the lessons and perspectives Americans should take after the 9/11 attacks.

"We learned a lot in the days afterward of the heroism of the New York Fire Department, the New York Police Department, and the Port Authority," said LoBiondo. "We have to make sure we understand the sacrifices that were made, not only 22 years

ago, but the sacrifices that continue to be made today. It's going to take everyone to keep us from another attack."

LoBiondo was joined by New Jersey's 1st Congressional District Congressman Donald Norcross, who echoed his sentiment.

"That's the spirit of America, that we all do this together," said Norcross. "I can't thank the men and women in uniform enough for everything they've done in the past and what will be asked of them in the future."

The memorial is constructed from two steel beams recovered from ground zero, the shape and size of which represent the twin towers, mounted atop a cement base formed in the shape of the Pentagon. The ceremony concluded with the laying of five floral wreaths symbolizing the north tower, the south tower, the Pentagon, Flight 93, and the lives lost in the aftermath of the attacks.

"It was an honor to bring us all together for this ceremony, from our congressmen to the community members, to the members of the 177th Fighter Wing that helped construct the memorial," said Rouff. "I hope our younger Airmen take away some perspective from this experience and remember the pain that our country felt that day."



Same call sign, first flight

Photo and story by Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

Seventeen Airmen walked into New Jersey Air National Guard history Oct. 3, 2023.

The 108th Wing's 141st Air Refueling Squadron officially flew its first KC-46 Pegasus local sortie.

Sixteen of the 17 Airmen – pilots, boom operators, and crew chiefs are with the 141st Air Refueling Squadron. A 514th Air Mobility Wing boom operator also participated in the mission.

The sortie marks the continuing evolution of the New Jersey Air National Guard and specifically, keeping the 108th on the leading edge in aerial refueling.

"The 108th Wing and the 305th Air Mobility Wing are great partners and the right choice for a KC-46 association," said Col. Joseph W. Leonard, Deputy Commander, 108th Wing.

"This association provides the right capabilities, at the right time, anywhere in the world the Air Force needs," he said.

The KC-46A is the first phase in recapitalizing the U.S. Air Force's aging tanker fleet. With greater refueling, cargo, and aeromedical evacuation capabilities compared to the KC-135, the KC-46A will provide aerial refueling support to Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and partner-nation receivers. Air refueling increases the speed, range, lethality, flexibility, and versatility of combat aircraft.

During the mission, the two aircraft refueled F-16 Fighting Falcons and then took turns refueling each other.

"It's a two-ship formation with the call signs Hobey 41 and 42," said Capt. Brandon M. Johnson, a 141st pilot.

This was the first time the Hobey call sign had been used for a KC-46 sortie.

The call sign Hobey is a nod to Hobart Amory Hare "Hobey" Baker. Baker, a world-renowned Princeton University athlete, served as the commander with the 141st Aero Squadron during World War I. The 141st, one of the Air Force's oldest units, is part of the 141st Air Refueling Squadron's lineage. After Baker's death, the Princeton Tiger was incorporated into the 141st's squadron insignia. Today, the tiger insignia remains in use by squadron members.

"The Air National Guard, and more specifically the 108th Wing, is a force multiplier because we provide years of experience and confidence to our partners...whether training next to the Active Duty at home station or side-by-side in battle against an adversary," said Leonard. "Together the 108th and 305th will continue to excel through our richness and diversification of culture, experience differences, and determination to provide our piece to National Security."

MK-22 familiarization range

Photos by Spc. Michael Schwenk
New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office



The MK-22 Precision Sniper Rifle sights view a target on the range at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Oct. 22, 2023. The MK-22 replaced the Army's existing M2010 and M107 sniper rifles.



Above: A U.S. Army Soldier with the New Jersey Army National Guard's 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, fires the MK-22 Precision Sniper Rifle as part of a weapon familiarization range on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Oct. 22, 2023. Below: A 44th IBCT Soldier takes notes after firing the MK-22 Precision Sniper Rifle.





Above: A 44th IBCT Soldier makes adjustments to the MK-22 Precision Sniper Rifle during weapons familiarization.

Below: 44th IBCT Soldiers fire the MK-22 Precision Sniper Rifle on the weapon familiarization range.



NJNG Soldiers and Airmen help homeless veterans

Photos and story by
Sgt. 1st Class Armando Vasquez, 42nd Regional Support Group Public Affairs Office



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Ariel Rivera, a medical technician with the 108th Medical Group, 108th Wing, New Jersey National Guard, prepares to take the vital signs from a participant at the North Jersey Stand Down conducted at the John F. Kennedy Recreational Center in Newark, New Jersey, Oct. 14, 2023.

New Jersey National Guard Soldiers from the 42nd Regional Support Group and 108th Wing Airmen joined forces with state and federal agencies, GI Go Fund and other non-government organizations to provide assistance to more than 100 homeless Veterans at the North Jersey Stand Down conducted at John F. Kennedy Recreational Center in Newark, New Jersey, October 14, 2023.

At the event, Soldiers from the 117th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 42nd RSG, assisted the participants by guiding them through the many social service kiosks available to them. Additionally, culinary specialist Soldiers from 902nd Quartermaster Company, also with the 42nd RSG, prepared hot meals of hamburgers, hot dogs, baked beans, vegetables, and nutritious salads, while medical technician Airmen from the 108th Medical Group provided medical screenings.

“This is my first time doing this type of mission,” said Spc. Anthony Pilay, culinary specialist, 902nd QM. “I am happy to be providing a hand to those who need it. Stand Down is such a great program and it’s good to know that people are there for you when in need.” Many Veterans return home after their service to unexpected situations and financial emergencies that can result in homelessness.

“On any given night, one in every five people living on the streets is a Veteran and that is a tragedy,” said Joseph Bongon, Director of Veteran Services at GI Go Fund.

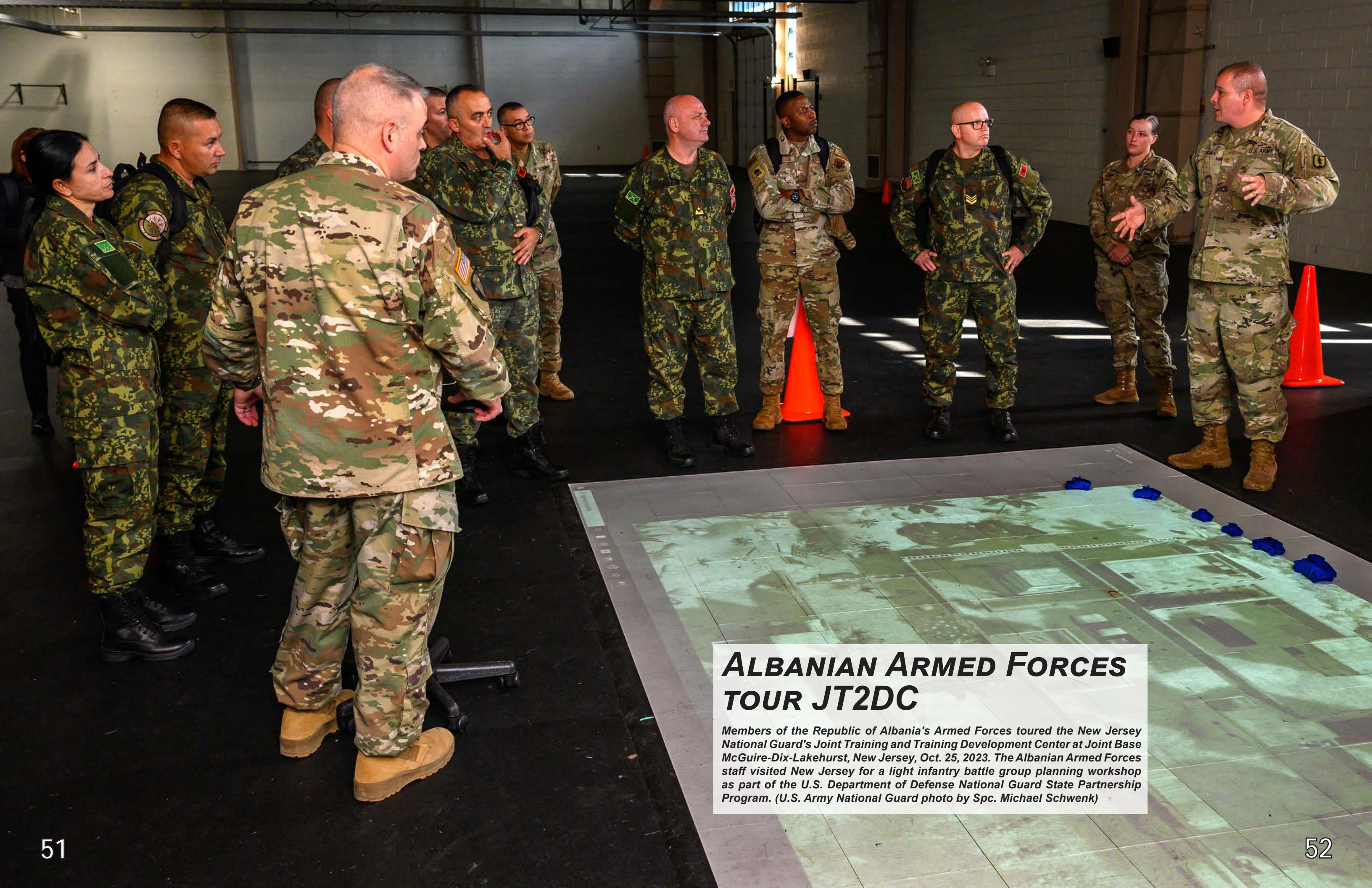
Stand Downs are typically one to

three-day events during which Veteran organizations’ staff and volunteers provide food, clothing, and health screenings to homeless and at-risk Veterans. In addition, Veterans also receive referrals for health care, housing solutions, employment, substance use treatment, mental health counseling and other essential services. They are grass roots, community-based intervention programs to help Veterans battle life on the streets.

With the motto of “Always Ready, Always There!” the New Jersey National Guard has been supporting New Jersey’s Stand Down events for more than a decade.



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Orlando Tronco, a culinary specialist with the 902nd Quartermaster Company, New Jersey Army National Guard, grills hamburgers and hot dogs for attendees at the North Jersey Stand Down.



ALBANIAN ARMED FORCES TOUR JT2DC

Members of the Republic of Albania's Armed Forces toured the New Jersey National Guard's Joint Training and Training Development Center at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Oct. 25, 2023. The Albanian Armed Forces staff visited New Jersey for a light infantry battle group planning workshop as part of the U.S. Department of Defense National Guard State Partnership Program. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

177TH DEPLOYS



A U.S. Air Force F-16C Fighting Falcon with the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, arrives at an undisclosed location within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, Oct. 24, 2023. At the direction of the U.S. Department of Defense, 9th Air Force, Air Forces Central, expedited the movement of these aircraft, along with multiple fighter, aerial refueling, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Megan Floyd)

MEDEVAC training

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



U.S. Army UH-60L Black Hawk helicopter crew chiefs with Charlie Company, Detachment 2, 1st-171st General Support Aviation Battalion, 57th Troop Command, New Jersey Army National Guard, conduct medical evacuation training with combat medics with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Nov. 7, 2023. The 44th IBCT combat medics conducted MEDEVAC training in preparation for the unit's upcoming deployment.



Above: A U.S. Army Soldier with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, calls in evacuation instructions during medical evacuation training.

Below: A 114th Infantry Regiment Soldier signals a 1st-171st General Support Aviation Battalion UH-60L Black Hawk at the landing zone.



Above: A 114th Infantry Regiment Soldier signals his team to wait before moving a simulated casualty to a UH-60L Black Hawk.

Below: 114th Infantry Regiment Soldiers move a casualty out to the waiting Black Hawk.



2023 MILITARY REVIEW



New Jersey Youth ChalleNGE Academy cadets face New Jersey Gov. Philip D. Murphy and Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., the Adjutant General of New Jersey, as they enter the parade ground at the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, New Jersey, for the New Jersey National Guard Military Review Oct. 29, 2023. The Military Review is a more than 130-year-old tradition that allows the governor as commander-in-chief to review the Soldiers and Airmen of the New Jersey National Guard. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

NJNG's next chapter

BY BRIG. GEN. LISA J. HOU, D.O., THE ADJUTANT GENERAL OF NEW JERSEY

Today we gather for the annual Military Review – an event rich in history and significance. For more than 130 years, Governors have traveled to Sea Girt to honor the service of those who protect and serve New Jersey and the United States of America. Thank you, Governor Murphy, for continuing this important tradition.

Today, with your presence on this parade field, we acknowledge that through training, deployments, and overall hard work, we ask a great deal from those of you who choose to wear our nation's uniform. And while each of us has heard the phrase, "thank you for your service," I wish to specifically acknowledge those who make that service possible: families, loved ones, as well as civilian employers and colleagues.

Whether you are the spouse, parent, child, friend, supervisor or coworker of a Soldier or Airman, you know, better than most, the sacrifices made not only by our service members but by you, yourselves. You have shouldered additional workloads and truly shared in the burdens of service.

Families juggle household chores, endure missed birthdays and special occasions, and even go without something as simple as a hug and a kiss on the cheek. To everyone here today who supports our Soldiers and Airmen in ways both seen and unseen, please allow me to say, "Thank you for your service."

We live in an uncertain time that only affirms the need for a ready, trained, and resilient force capable of deploying to protect our communities here at home and overseas. Collectively, we respond to these uncertainties by ensuring a continued focus on people, readiness, modernization, and organizational



New Jersey Gov. Philip D. Murphy, Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., the Adjutant General of New Jersey, and Brig. Gen. Bradford R. Everman, Commander of Troops, review the Soldiers and Airmen of the New Jersey National Guard during the 2023 New Jersey National Guard Military Review at the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, New Jersey, Oct. 29, 2023. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

development and reform. Those standing before me today have put words into action through your achievements this last year and your preparations for overseas service.

Just a few minutes ago, we were among the first to see a New

Jersey Air National Guard flyover in the new KC-46 Pegasus aerial refueler. This marks a milestone for our state's 108th Wing, which recently concluded decades of service in the beloved KC-135. It is starting a new chapter focused on modernization and the training and readiness of multi-capable Airmen in the KC-46. Across both the 108th and 177th wings, New Jersey's Airmen are developing

new skills across multiple fields to ensure Agile Combat Employment in all manners of contingencies.

In addition to a change in fixed-wing aircraft, there is another difference in today's ceremony: the absence of the Army howitzer salute battery from New Jersey's Third of the 112th Field Artillery.

"You continue to impress me by your willingness to step forward and serve our communities, state, and country."

While the silent cannons may be a relief to our neighbors in Sea Girt and Manasquan, the absence of the 112th is a poignant reminder that the Soldiers of the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team are preparing for the largest deployment of the New Jersey National Guard since 2008-2009. I am pleased to report to our Commander-in-Chief, Governor Murphy, that through collective and individual training, our brigade is ready to meet the challenges ahead.

Earlier this year, members of the 44th hit the ground running through their successful completion of a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation at Fort Johnson, Louisiana. New Jersey led Army and Air National Guard units from two dozen states in an exercise that tested our ability to confront a near-peer threat. I am confident that this experience shaped a generation of leaders, many of whom are now completing final combat readiness tasks to prepare for deployment in support of U.S. Central Command early next year.

In that same theater of operations, today, as I speak to you, more than 200 brave Airmen from our 177th Fighter Wing are conducting missions to bolster the U.S. defense posture in the Middle East. Additionally, soldiers from the 508th Military Police Company and Charlie Company from the first of the 224th Aviation are currently deployed to enhance the security of the nation's Southwest border. To everyone gathered here today, I ask that you keep all of these heroes in your thoughts and prayers until they safely return home.

With these deployments in mind, I would like to acknowledge our Veteran Service Organizations who not only provide tremendous support to our Garden State Veterans but are also strong supporters of our soldiers and airmen in uniform.

In the New Jersey National Guard, we continue our persistent engagement with international partners to advance collective security. In May, United States European Command's largest annual exercise kicked off in Tirana, the capital of New Jersey's state partner, Albania. Indeed, today we are joined by some of our Albanian brothers and sisters in arms who – for over two decades – have served beside New Jersey Citizen Soldiers and Airmen as partners in the State Partnership Program. Brig. Gen. Xhehexhia and Sgt. Maj. Cera I welcome you and your team to New Jersey, to what hopefully feels like a home away from home.

We marked another advancement in our international partnerships and support of broader U.S. efforts this year as we officially gained our second state partner, the Republic of Cyprus. We discussed our lines of effort and work has already begun in mutual training and development opportunities. Lieutenant Colonel Andreou, we look forward to this new partnership as well, a home away from home.

From Albania, to Cyprus, to our deployed locations, thank you, Governor Murphy, for your support of our engagements abroad. Through those engagements, our Garden State Warriors have had the opportunity to contribute to our nation and international community in very special and unique ways.

This month marks three years since I assumed the duties of Adjutant General. It is the privilege of my lifetime to serve beside each of you. You continue to impress me by your willingness to step forward and serve our communities, state, and country.

Soldiers, Airmen, thank you for serving with integrity, dignity, and honor. I will always be your advocate and I look forward to your achievements as you write the next chapter in the New Jersey National Guard story.



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 57th Troop Command, New Jersey Army National Guard, parade past the reviewing stand during the 2023 New Jersey National Guard Military Review as four UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters with the 1st Battalion, 150th Aviation Regiment perform a flyover during the Military Review. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

Mortar live-fire exercise

Photos by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis
444th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



Above: Soldiers with the 114th Infantry Regiment prepare to fire a M121 120 mm mortar. The cannon, bipod, and base plate weigh 319 pounds.

Below: A mortar round is caught in-flight. The mortar provides high-angle fire for ground troop support and has a sustained rate of fire of four rounds per minute.



U.S. Army National Guard Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, perform a mortar live-fire exercise at the Fort Dix Ranges on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Nov. 14, 2023. The 44th IBCT conducted annual training in preparation for the unit's upcoming deployment.



Albanian Armed Forces welcomes NJNG

Photos and story by 1st Lt. Tyshawn Jenkins
177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office

More than 15 Airmen and Soldiers of the New Jersey National Guard linked up with the 2nd Battalion, Light Infantry Battle Group, Albanian Armed Forces at Land Forces Headquarters, Zall-Herr, Tirana, Albania, Dec. 2-8, 2023, as part of the Department of Defense State Partnership Program.

Service members from both forces shared training, best practices, and mentorship opportunities, building on more than two decades of friendship as state partners.

“This is important to national security: it provides our partners’ interoperability with U.S. forces and other allies,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Kevin Murphy, director, NJNG SPP.

Service members with the U.S. Air and Army National Guard and Albanian Armed Forces pose for a photo in front of Land Forces Headquarters, Zall-Herr, Tirana, Albania, Dec. 4, 2023.

Murphy explained that the week’s exercise focused in part on uncrewed aircraft systems and future aviation operations, noting the AAF’s acquisition of two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. The UAS group conducted familiarization and maintenance of the Puma AE3 DDL UAS, and training activities included drone handoff, low and high-altitude testing, as well as setup and breakdown under time constraints. According to Sgt. 1st Class Justin Harris-Bennett, Course Director/Master Trainer, 254th Regiment [Combat Arms], NJARNG, small UASs provide defense assistance for civil authorities, which can be critical in supporting law enforcement, fire departments, battle damage assessments, surveillance capabilities and search and rescue operations.

“We work with [the Albanian Forces] Puma team to continue to build their Puma UAS,” said Sgt. 1st Class Justin Harris-Bennett. “We’ve been working with the Albanian Army for over 20 years, and we continue to support NATO and its mission. The Albanian military has been very welcoming and enjoys the training just as much as we do. These exercises make the UAS community stronger.”

Members of both forces exchanged best practices critical

“In June of 2024, the goal is to conduct water training, launch and recovery, and other required exercises,” said Lt. Col. Emerjol Harka, commander, 2nd Battalion, LIBG, AAF.

During the collaborative exercises, the NJNG and AAF empowered their enlisted forces, as noncommissioned officers and senior noncommissioned officers are the leaders of their UAS programs.

“It’s been great, and most importantly, the concepts that the U.S. shares with us have been beneficial,” said Capt. Mirsit



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Justin T. Harris-Bennett, center, a senior instructor with 2nd Battalion, 254th Regiment (Combat Arms), New Jersey Army National Guard, and Albanian Armed Forces service members work on the setup of a Puma AE3 uncrewed aircraft system at Land Forces Headquarters, Zall-Herr, Tirana, Albania, Dec. 3, 2023.

Bimaj, deputy company commander, 2nd Battalion, LIBG, AAF. “As an officer, we are constantly applying strategy; however, the enlisted soldiers can grow together, and this helps them do their jobs with excellence.”

In addition to the week’s training and mentorship activities, the two forces planned future lines of effort to strengthen state partner capabilities, including professional development, aviation, and cyber missions.

“The relationship between the N.J. National Guard and Albania has been more than positive. The planning committee is an opportunity to work together and clarify the proposed activities for 2024 and 2025,” said Lt. Col. Gentian Alilaj, deputy J5, MOD. For New Jersey leaders new to SPP operations, the journey to the Western Balkans was especially rewarding.

“These meetings have been extremely beneficial,” said Lt. Col. Monica Delacruz, deputy commander, 254th Regiment [Combat Arms], NJARNG. “Being my first time in Albania, it was great interacting with the Albanians culturally, seeing the parallel between our military and theirs, and how they have adopted some of our standard operating procedures and doctrine.”

The relationship between the New Jersey National Guard and Albanian Armed Forces has

existed for over 20 years. Building upon the military-to-military events is a primary focus as members of both militaries aim to improve NATO standards and cultivate the relationship through exercises and professional development of NCOs and senior NCOs.

“The United States has supported the Albania Armed Forces for years now, not only in the organization process but also in the education and training,” said Lt. Col. Dritor Papa, NATO advisor to the chief of defense, AAF. We have had your presence in LIBG with the Security Forces Assistance Brigade [SFAB] teams; they are instrumental; these bilateral meetings are opportunities to see if we are doing the right things or how we can adjust as we progress. I think we are doing great; the chief of defense is also very grateful he had a chance to meet with the various representatives of the N.J. Guard teams.”

The Department of Defense’s State Partnership Program is managed and administered by the National Guard Bureau. It is a U.S.-sponsored security cooperation program that supports the security cooperation objectives of the United States and the geographic combatant commands by developing enduring relationships with partner countries and carrying out activities to build partner capacity, improve interoperability, and enhance U.S. access and influence while increasing the readiness of U.S. and partner forces to meet emerging challenges. The State Partnership Program began in 1993 with 13 partners. Thirty years later, the program has grown to more than 100 partner nations and is a key U.S. security cooperation tool that facilitates collaboration across all aspects of civil-military affairs.



Albanian Armed Forces members assemble a Puma AE3 DDL drone at Land Forces Headquarters, Zall-Herr, Dec. 3, 2023.



U. S. Army Soldiers with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, were instructed on firing the M136

AT4 at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Nov. 17, 2023. The AT4 is a recoilless rifle used primarily by infantry forces to engage and defeat armor threats.

M136 AT4 TRAINING

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





"Back blast area clear!"

Last shot

U. S. Army Staff Sgt. Joseph Garback with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, carries an M136 AT4 at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Nov. 17, 2023. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk)

