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DMA Military Newsletter

January 21, 2026



Military

NJ Department of
Military Affairs

Ready to serve ★ military.nj.gov

Commissioner's Corner



On January 9, 2026, New Jersey Gov.-Elect Mikie Sherrill addressed the audience during the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Town Hall at the National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville, NJ.

Welcome to the NJ Department of Military Affairs

This newsletter marks our first as the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs, and what an incredible way to begin this new chapter together.

On January 9th, alongside our dedicated teammates, leaders, and service members, Governor Mikie Sherrill joined our Transformation Town Hall to formally recognize the launch of the Department of Military Affairs. We had the honor of casing the colors of DMAVA and unveiling the new colors of DMA. For me, it was a defining moment that acknowledged the progress we have made and set the tone for what is ahead: sharper focus, stronger readiness, and an unwavering commitment to service.

That commitment was on full display yesterday as the New Jersey National Guard proudly supported the gubernatorial inauguration. Our Soldiers and Airmen executed a cannon salute, a rotary-wing flyover, presented the colors, and served as guides to senior officials in attendance. These missions showcased the unparalleled professionalism and dedication of our team and set the standard for our work moving forward.

Our mission is clear: we will continue to build and sustain highly trained, professional forces capable of rapid deployment and mission success in support of state and federal operations. Whether responding to emergencies, supporting civil authorities, or answering the call overseas, DMA exists to serve and deliver for the people of New Jersey.

To our Soldiers, Airmen, civilians, and partners: thank you. Your dedication, adaptability, and quiet competence made the transformation of our organization possible. You are the strength behind this team and the reason New Jersey can rely on us, no matter the mission and no matter the moment.

Ready for today. Prepared for tomorrow.

As always, thank you for staying connected to DMA.

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

Brigadier General Yvonne L. Mays
Adjutant General & Commissioner



Events

Community Calendar

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

[View Full Calendar](#)

Spotlight



Transformation Town Hall

New Jersey National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, along with New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA) employees attended a Town Hall at the National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville, NJ on January 9, 2026.

On January 9th, DMAVA transformed into two separate, cabinet-level agencies: the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs and the New Jersey Department of Veterans Affairs.

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NJ National Guard



21st WMD-CST

Soldiers and Airmen with the New Jersey National Guard's 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team performed joint agency training with the FBI at the Union County Fire/EMS Academy in Linden, NJ on January 15, 2026.

The training is in preparation for security operations at the 2026 FIFA World Cup games at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, NJ.

The 21st WMD-CST identifies chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear high-yield explosives; assess and advises civil authorities on response measures to man-made or natural disasters.

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Join Our Team

100% Free College Tuition Bonuses | GI Bill Student Loan Repayment



Servicemember Spotlight



SFC Karen Adrata

Brig. Gen. Yvonne Mays, Sergeant First Class Karen Adrata and Master Sergeant Thomas A. Calvo have their photo taken during the NJ Department of Military & Veterans Affairs Town Hall on January 9, 2026.

SFC Adrada was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for donating a portion of her liver to MSG Calvo.



SGT Seth Cohen

Congratulations to Sergeant Seth Cohn, a Public Affairs Mass Communication Specialist with the New Jersey Army National Guard.

Recently, SGT Cohen was recognized as a winner of the [Army Public Affairs Association](#) Monthly Photo Competition, a reflection of his continued dedication to excellence and creative storytelling.

Thank you, SGT Cohen, for your professionalism, leadership, and contributions to the public affairs community and the New Jersey National Guard.



SGT Bethanie Keir

Congratulations to Sergeant Bethanie Keir from the New Jersey Army National Guard for graduating Cum Laude with a Bachelor's in Political Science from Rutgers University.

SGT Kier shows incredible dedication and resilience, managing to juggle full-time work, military duties, and motherhood while utilizing the Post-9/11 GI Bill and State Tuition Assistance for her education.

SGT Keir's commitment is truly inspiring.

In The News



New Jersey Guard Soldier Saves Her Own Life Using Lessons From U.S. Army Training

Sgt. Seth Cohen | NJ National Guard | January 2, 2026

PHILADELPHIA, Pa. – New Jersey Army National Guard Specialist Sanaa Drinks survived a drive-by shooting and credits her survival to the skills she learned while in U.S. Army Basic Combat Training.

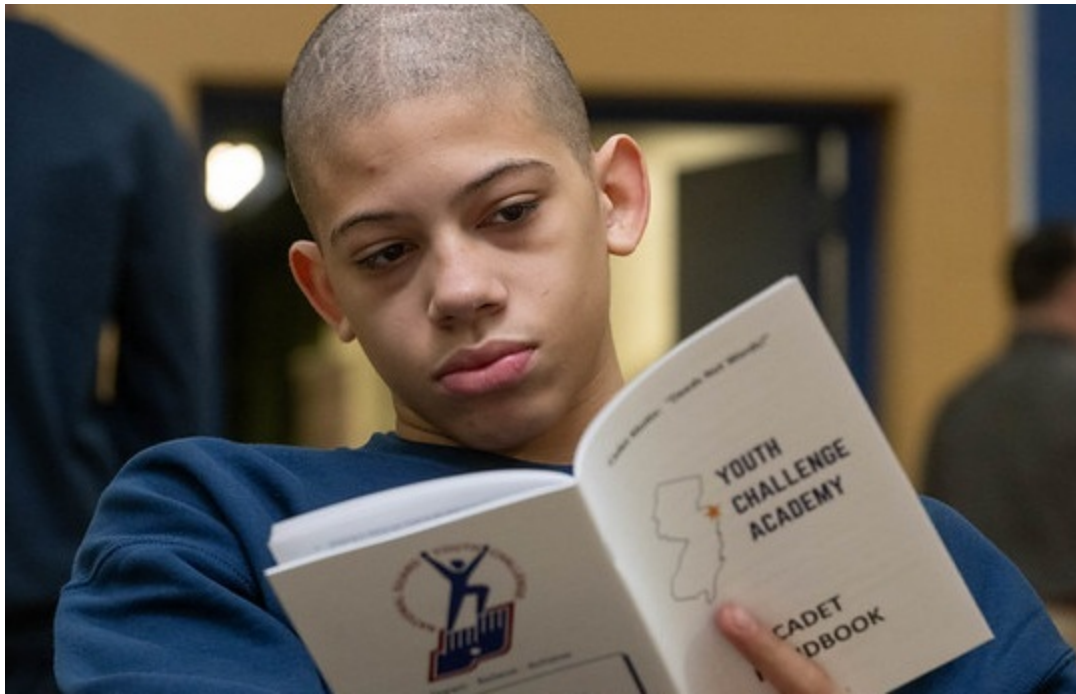
Three years later, Drinks looks back on the night of the shooting as a defining moment. She remembers the interminable seconds as bullets whizzed past her just as clearly as the long road to recovery.

“Everything that happened to me is the reason why I joined,” Drinks said. “I joined to escape gun violence in the city, but I also joined to become a role model so that my community has someone to look up to, especially now.”

To her, the shooting would serve as proof of the U.S. Army’s ability to forge the tenacity needed to survive in armed conflict. She relied on that tenacity on the summer evening of her shooting.

[Read Full Story](#)

DMA Departments



New Jersey Youth ChalleNGe Academy

New Jersey Youth ChalleNGe Academy Class 61 candidates in-processed at the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, NJ on January 13, 2026.

The NJYCA is an alternative education program established by the United States Congress in 1993, administered by the individual states' National Guard, and provided at zero cost to parents and guardians.

The program is designed to produce graduates with the values, skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as adults. Over 4,500 at-risk 16- to 18-year-old New Jerseyans have

successfully completed the NJYCA since its first class began in September 1994.

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NEW JERSEY
YOUTH CHALLENGE ACADEMY
DREAM. BELIEVE. ACHIEVE.

YOUTH CHALLENGE ACADEMY

TUITION FREE

Now accepting applications
for Class 62 - July 2026!

APPLY NOW!

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

-  njyca.gov/admissions
-  rpm@dma.nj.gov
-  (732) 974-6500

REGISTRATION OPEN JANUARY 11 - MARCH 22

NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD

YOUTH CAMP 2026



Camp Dates: July 5th - July 11th

A one week sleep away camp for NJ military youth. Daily activities include: Morning PT, Beach, Archery, Arts & Crafts, Sports & Night Activities.

- Open to ALL National Guard Youth ages 9+
- Counselors 16+ and Staff 18+
- Open until Mar 22nd or until full, acceptances sent by Mar 31st
- \$275/camper until Jan. 31st, or \$300 after that



Use the QR code to find ALL registrations and the FAQ page

COORDINATORS

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NJ MILITARY FAMILY ASSISTANCE
* /njarngfac



NJNG Child & Youth Program
* /njngcyp

Community Spotlight



Generous Donation

Demonstrating the power of community support, the [Toms River American Legion Post 129](#) has made a generous donation to the [108th Wing](#) Chiefs Group to help combat food insecurity among military members.

Post Commander, Stan Bilicki and 108th Maintenance Group Honorary Commander, Ralph Wolff presented the check on January 6, 2026.

The contribution will go a long way in restocking the food pantry located in Bldg. 1835, Room 216, which is free and open 24/7 to any service member in need.



Habitat for Humanity

Brig. Gen. Mays joined local partners and [Senator Troy Singleton](#) in a community day of service for MLK Day at [Habitat for Humanity of South Central New Jersey](#)'s ReStore in Maple Shade.

Volunteers came together to support Habitat's mission of expanding affordable homeownership through hands-on work and local partnership.

State Partners



NJ State Agencies

- [NJ Department of Veterans Affairs](#)
- [Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicides among Service Members, Veterans & Their Families](#)
- [The New Jersey's Governor "We Value Our Veterans" Awards](#)
- [Bringing Veterans Home](#)
- [Vote For Valor](#)
- [Career Services for Veterans](#)
- [Tax Resources for Military/Veterans](#)
- [Educator Certification for Military Spouses and Veterans](#)
- [Civil Service Preference for Veterans](#)
- [NJ National Guard Hunting / Fishing Licenses](#)
- [NJ Special Hawker and Peddlers License](#)
- [Veterans Designation for Drivers License](#)
- [Military CDL Skills Waiver Program](#)
- [Disabled Veteran / Purple Heart Recipient Placards](#)
- [Disabled Veteran Hunting and Fishing Licenses](#)
- [Veteran and Disabled Veteran-Owned Business](#)

- [Division of Consumer Affairs Military Outreach & Support](#)
- [Professional & Occupational Licenses for Veterans and Spouses](#)
- [Military and Overseas Voting](#)
- [Veterans & Spouses Entering the Educator Workforce](#)
- [Journey Through Jersey](#)

Federal Partners



Did You Know?



Military Funeral Honors Team

The New Jersey Army National Guard Military Funeral Honors Team performed 2,634 missions across the state in 2025.

History



Grave marker for Civil War Veteran George Ashby.

January 25, 1844

George Ashby was born in Burlington. Ashby, an African-American, served in the Forty-fifth United States Colored Infantry regiment during the Civil War from 1864 to 1865, rising from private to first sergeant. When he died in Allentown, on April 26, 1946, Ashby was the last surviving New Jersey Civil War veteran.

January 25, 1942

Varanger, a Norwegian tanker sailing from Curacao to New York City with 12,750 tons of fuel oil, was torpedoed by a German submarine at 3:00 AM twenty-eight miles off Atlantic City. Hit by three torpedoes, Varanger split into three pieces, but all hands escaped in life boats. The crew

February 1, 1977

A British force skirmished with New Jersey militiamen at Drake's Farm, near Springfield, as the "forage war" between the British seeking supplies in the countryside and the local militia heated up.

February 1, 1865

New Jersey governor Joel Parker presented New Brunswick native Captain Charles Stewart Boggs with a presentation sword in recognition of Boggs' heroic actions commanding the gunboat Varuna in the naval battles leading to the capture of New Orleans in April, 1862. Boggs sank six Confederate gunboats before his own ship began to sink, then ran Varuna into shore, tied her up to some trees and kept firing on the enemy.

was rescued by two fishing boats and brought to the US Coast Guard station at Sea Island Inlet, arriving there at 12:45 PM.

January 29, 1833

Alexander Arsace Vandoni was born in Italy. Vandoni emigrated to America in 1841, eventually settling in Chatham as a self-employed broom maker. In 1862 he enlisted as a musician in the Twenty-seventh New Jersey Infantry. After campaigns in Virginia and Kentucky, Vandoni was discharged with his regiment in 1863, and returned to Chatham as one of a relatively small number of Italian-American Civil War veterans. He died on February 29, 1908 and is buried in Florham Park.

January 29, 1957

The New Jersey National Guard ceased to be an all-male organization when the first women soldiers in its history, two nurses, Captain Frances R. Comstock and 1st Lieutenant Lucille Valentino of Paterson, were sworn in as members of the 114th Mobile Surgical Hospital.

February 3, 1943

The troop ship SSAT Dorchester, with 904 men aboard, was torpedoed off Greenland. Four chaplains - one Jewish, two Protestant and one Catholic - gave their lifejackets to soldiers, joined arms, said prayers and went down with the ship. There were 230 survivors. The Catholic chaplain, Father John Washington, born in Newark in 1908, was a graduate of Seton Hall University and Darlington Seminary and assigned to St. Stephen's parish in Kearny when he enlisted in the Army. The chaplains were posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart. There is a monument to Father Washington at Saint Rose of Lima Church, his home parish, on Orange Street in Newark and another to all four chaplains at St. Stephen's.



Operation Desert Storm

On August 2, 1990, more than 200,000 Iraqi soldiers flooded into neighboring Kuwait. President George H.W. Bush described the invasion as "naked aggression" and set out to form a global coalition opposing the unprovoked attack.

Under Operation Desert Shield, American forces deployed to southwest Asia. From the New Jersey National Guard, Soldiers of the 328th Transportation Detachment, 253d Transportation Company, 144th Supply Company and Airmen from the 170th Air Refueling Group deployed to the region in support of operations against the Iraqi military, while many other guardsmen were activated for support roles stateside.

Operation Desert Storm began early January 17, 1991 with the aerial bombardment of Iraqi military targets, followed by a ground invasion of Kuwait on February 24th. Iraqi forces were driven out within 100 hours of commencing ground combat operations and Kuwait regained its sovereignty.

Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm Veterans can apply for your award at [New Jersey Desert Storm Medal](#).



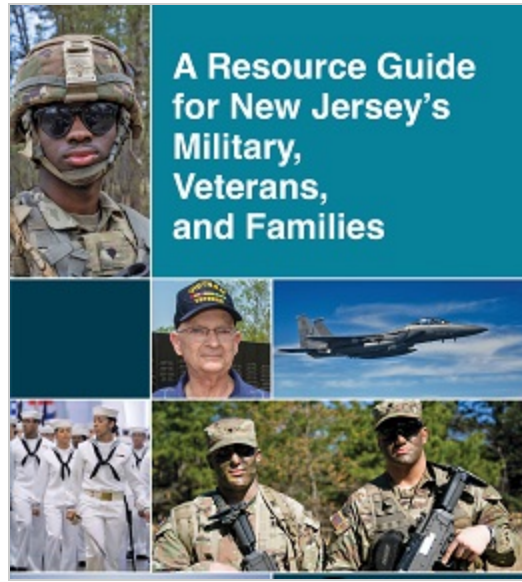
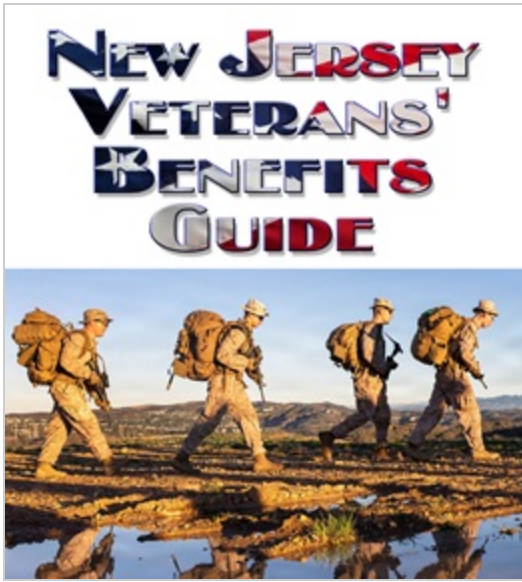
Battle of Princeton

On January 4, 2026, the capstone event of the Ten Crucial Days took place at the annual Battle of Princeton reenactment.

The event brought together legacy units, dozens of dedicated reenactors, and hundreds of brave, cold-weather spectators.

[View Images](#)

Resources



DMA Careers



We Are Hiring!

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

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

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

Vacancies

Stay Connected



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

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