GUARDLIFE

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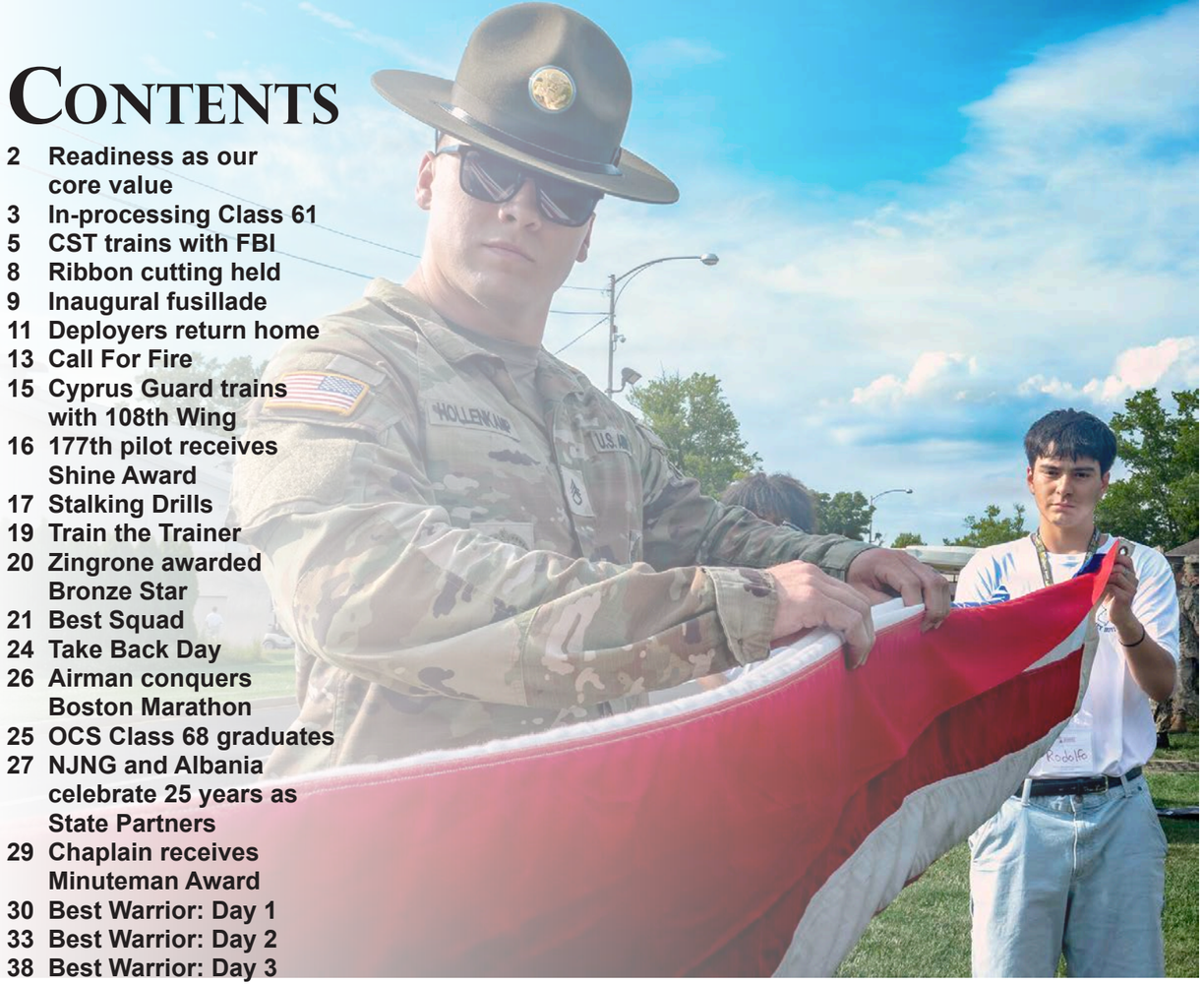

Above: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Shaun A. Hollenkamp, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, New Jersey Army National Guard, teaches students how to fold the American flag during the American Legion Jersey Boys State program at Rider University, Lawrenceville, New Jersey, June 25, 2026. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth Cohen)

Cover: U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, conduct a squad fire team live fire training exercise at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, June 23, 2026. Low visibility training exercises are crucial to the development of squad team tactics in modern warfare. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth Cohen)

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Readiness as our core value

By Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey

U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, back row, center, and Soldiers with the 328th Military Police Company, 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, have their photo taken at Camp Bondsteel, Republic of Kosovo, Feb. 2, 2026. The 328th are currently deployed to the NATO-led Kosovo Forces Regional Command-East. KFOR continues to implement its mandate, based on UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 1999, to contribute to a safe and secure environment for all people living in Kosovo and freedom of movement, at all times and impartially. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Alyssa Lisenbe)

The first half of 2026 demonstrated the strength and reach of the New Jersey National Guard. Across the state, around the country, and overseas, our Soldiers and Airmen continue to train, deploy, lead, and serve. The stories in this issue of Guardlife reflect the work taking place every day across our formations and the commitment of the people who make that work possible.

Readiness remains at the center of everything we do. This year, the 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team opened a new Ready Building at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst and trained alongside the FBI in preparation for security operations surrounding the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The new facility strengthens the team's ability to support its 24-hour response mission and assist civil authorities during complex emergencies.

That focus on readiness is reflected throughout the organization. Soldiers continue to sharpen individual and collective skills through demanding field training, while Airmen are building the expertise needed to support missions at home and abroad. From combat lifesaver instruction to Best Warrior events and small-unit training, these efforts strengthen the fundamentals that allow the New Jersey National Guard to respond when called.

The New Jersey National Guard also continues to support missions well beyond the state. Nearly 300 Airmen from the 177th Fighter Wing returned home following a deployment to Kadena Air Base in Japan, where they supported operations in the Pacific. Their service is one example of the role New Jersey Soldiers and Airmen continue to play in supporting national defense requirements around the world.

Our international partnerships remain an important part of that mission. This year marked 25 years of partnership between the New Jersey National Guard and the Republic of Albania. Since the partnership was formally established in 2001, our forces have participated in more than 500 training events and engagements. Those years of cooperation have built trust, familiarity and interoperability while creating lasting professional relationships between service members.

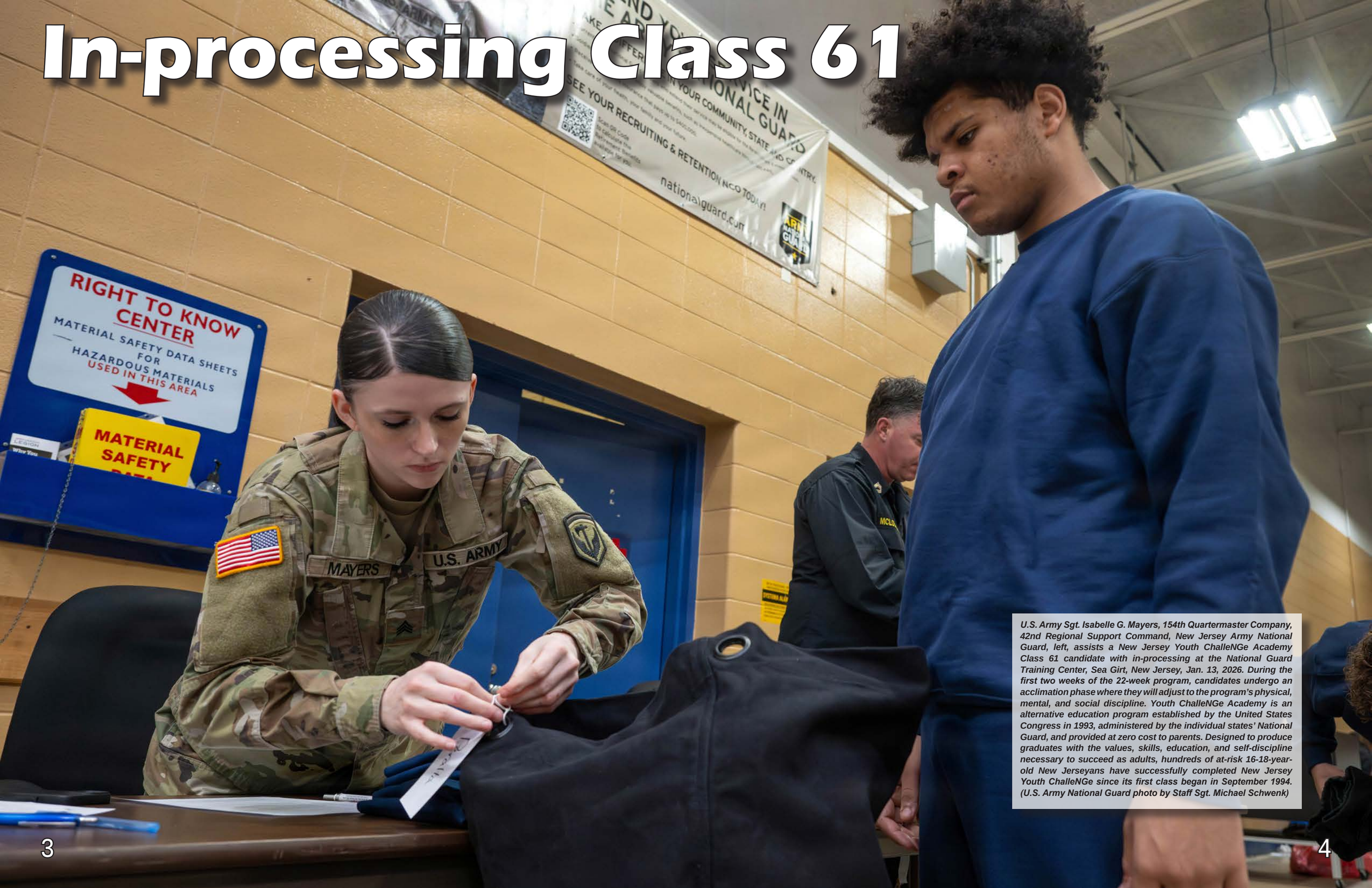
Our partnership with the Republic of Cyprus continues to develop as well. Cypriot National Guard officers trained with cyber professionals with the 108th Wing and the New Jersey Army National Guard, exchanging knowledge and observing operational procedures in cyber defense and cybersecurity. These engagements strengthen our ability to learn from one another and continue building a partnership that will serve both organizations in the years ahead.

This issue also highlights the quality of the people who serve across the New Jersey National Guard. Throughout these pages, Soldiers and Airmen are recognized for leadership, professional excellence, courage, compassion, and service to others. Those accomplishments reflect the standards we expect across the organization and the support of the teammates, families, and communities behind every service member.

As we move through the remainder of 2026, our priorities remain clear. We will continue developing our people, strengthening readiness, investing in our formations and expanding the partnerships that support our missions at home and abroad. Every training event, deployment, exercise, and professional achievement contributes to a stronger and more capable New Jersey National Guard.

I am proud of what our Soldiers, Airmen and civilian professionals have accomplished during the first half of this year, and I look forward to what this team will continue to accomplish together.

In-processing Class 61



U.S. Army Sgt. Isabelle G. Mayers, 154th Quartermaster Company, 42nd Regional Support Command, New Jersey Army National Guard, left, assists a New Jersey Youth ChalleNGe Academy Class 61 candidate with in-processing at the National Guard Training Center, Sea Girt, New Jersey, Jan. 13, 2026. During the first two weeks of the 22-week program, candidates undergo an acclimation phase where they will adjust to the program's physical, mental, and social discipline. Youth ChalleNGe Academy 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. Designed to produce graduates with the values, skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as adults, hundreds of at-risk 16-18-year-old New Jerseyans have successfully completed New Jersey Youth ChalleNGe since its first class began in September 1994. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Schwenk)

CST TRAINS WITH FBI

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

U.S. Air Force Capt John Ewasko, survey team leader, 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team, New Jersey National Guard, center, is briefed by a FBI Hazardous Evidence Response Team member during a training exercise at the Union County Fire/EMS Academy in Linden, New Jersey, Jan. 15, 2026. The training is in preparation for security operations at the 2026 FIFA World Cup games at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey. 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.

Above: U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Russell Bongiovanni, left, assists Spc. Miguel Diaz, both survey team members with the 21st WMD-CST, with his breathing apparatus at the Union County Fire/EMS Academy.

Below: U.S. Army Spc. Andrew Dejesus, survey team member, 21st WMD-CST, leads a combined NJNG and FBI team during a training exercise in Linden.

Above: U.S. Army Spc. Andrew Dejesus, survey team member, 21st WMD-CST, seals an evidence container during a training exercise in preparation for security operations at the 2026 FIFA World Cup games. Below: U.S. Army Sgt. Esteban Cifuentes, survey team member, 21st WMD-CST, right, employs radiation and chemical detection equipment at a simulated crime scene.

Ribbon cutting held

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

U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, center, and Lt. Col. Ismael Soler Jr., commander, 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team, New Jersey National Guard, right, cut the ribbon for the 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team Ready Building at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Jan. 21, 2026.

As soon as the ribbon was cut, the New Jersey National Guard's 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team began moving in to their new facility at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Jan. 21, 2026.

"To you Lt. Col. Soler, 1st Sgt. Betancur, and the Soldiers and Airmen of the 21st WMD-CST: this building belongs to you," said U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey. "It reflects the professionalism you bring to your mission every day and the confidence the State of New Jersey places in your ability to respond during the most challenging circumstances. You represent exactly what we expect from our force: disciplined, highly trained personnel always ready to serve."

The 21st WMD-CST Ready Building is a state-of-the-art facility, constructed in accordance with local and federal codes, requirements, standards, and National Guard Bureau design guides. The project consisted of constructing a 12,488 square foot Ready Building at a cost of approximately $6,500,000. Construction took 742 days from contract award to the ribbon cutting ceremony.

"This facility is the result of years of collaboration among our state leadership, the National Guard Bureau, our installation partners at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, engineers, planners, and project managers," said Mays. "Construction spanned more than two years, and throughout that period, the shared commitment to quality, stewardship of resources, and long-term value remained consistent."

The facility consists of four ready bays along with a briefing room, an administration area, exam room, physician's office, decontamination area, and a locker room.

The facility includes a temperature-controlled environment and continuous electrical power source for vehicles that contain hypersensitive instruments, as well as storage requirements for temperature sensitive personal protective and decontamination equipment and supplies sufficient to sustain a 72-hour response to a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incident.

This Ready Building will support the unit's 24/7/365 mission and improve the New Jersey National Guard's response to any emergency that results, or could result, in catastrophic loss of life or property.

"The 21st WMD-CST holds a vital and unique responsibility," said Mays. "The team operates at the point where military capability supports civil authorities, prepared at any moment to respond to highly complex and high-risk incidents."

Inaugural fusillade

U.S. Army Soldiers, with A Battery, 3-112th Field Artillery, New Jersey Army National Guard, fire M119A3 howitzers for the 19-gun salute during the inauguration ceremony for New Jersey Gov. Mikie Sherrill at Military Park in Newark, New Jersey, Jan. 20, 2026. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Schwenk)

Deployers return home

A U.S. Air Force Airman with the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, embraces her daughter after returning home to Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, New Jersey, Jan. 21, 2026. The 177th's three-month deployment to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan, projected combat-ready airpower to deter aggression and ensure stability, affirming the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Connor Taggart)

Above: New Jersey National Guard leadership welcome home nearly 300 177th Fighter Wing Airmen. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Andrew J. Moseley)

Below: U.S. Air Force Airmen with the 177th Fighter Wing have their photo taken after deploying to Japan. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Connor Taggart)

Call For Fire

U.S. Army Soldiers with 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, train Albanian Armed Forces' soldiers on the Call For Fire Tactical Combat Trainer at the Joint Training and Training Development Center at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Jan. 29, 2026. The State Partnership Program is 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. The New Jersey National Guard's partnership with the Republic of Albania, began informally in 1995 and officially became part of the National Guard State Partnership Program, Sept. 21, 2001. It is one of the oldest SPP relationships in the nation. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

State Partnership Program
Republic of Albania and New Jersey

Above: U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Christopher J. Petrizzo, mortar platoon sergeant, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, right, plot coordinates with an Albanian Armed Forces' soldier during a training session at the Call For Fire Tactical Combat Trainer.

Below: U.S. Army Sgt. Dwight C. Asberry, squad leader, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, right, observes as an Albanian Armed Forces' soldier tracks the impact of simulated mortar fire. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Michael Schwenk)

Cyprus Guard trains with 108th Wing

Cyber personnel with the 108th Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard; 50th Communication Information Squadron, Republic of Cyprus National Guard and New Jersey Army National Guard have their photo taken at the 108th Wing headquarters at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Jan. 29, 2026. Two Cypriot National Guard officers visited the 140th and 227th Cyberspace Operations Squadrons from Jan. 26-31, 2026. The training included exchanging know-how and monitoring operational procedures and operations in the field of cyber defense and cybersecurity. The New Jersey National Guard's partnership with the Republic of Cyprus was established March 30, 2023. The State Partnership Program is administered by the National Guard Bureau, which 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. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Donna Jeffries)

State Partnership Program
Republic of Cyprus and New Jersey

177th pilot receives Shine Award

Story and photo by Master Sgt. Erich Smith, Air National Guard

U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Eric "Rebel" Emerson, a fighter squadron commander with the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing, received the 2024 Lt. Col. Anthony C. Shine Award during a ceremony at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, Feb. 10. becoming the first Air National Guard pilot to earn the honor in nearly 45 years.

The Shine Award, established in 1980, honors the legacy of Air Force Lt. Col. Anthony C. Shine, a Vietnam War fighter pilot who went missing in action in 1972. The award recognizes one outstanding Air Force fighter pilot in the rank of major or below for "superior leadership qualities, exceptional flying proficiency and community involvement."

"It always feels special to be a 'first,' but more importantly it highlights the hard-working men and women of the Air National Guard and their contributions to the fight," said Emerson. "Without these amazing Airmen, nothing we do in the air would be possible. I dedicate this award to the men and women of the 177th Fighter Wing."

Air Combat Command oversees the Shine award, selecting the top representative each year among the best of active duty, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve fighter pilots. Shine's daughter, Colleen, was in high school when her father went missing. She would eventually be instrumental in helping to find her father's remains – leading to his burial in Arlington National Cemetery – and she would become an advocate for the remaining 1,566 Americans who are still unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

"Rebel, your outstanding service in flying, teaching and leading is a reminder of all that is right about today's Air Force." Colleen said. "You are a sterling example for the caliber of character and excellence in flying my father stood for."

During the presentation ceremony, Colleen remarked she stood in awe at Rebel's extraordinary responsibility and community impact – spotlighting the vital role played by the Air National Guard's 25 fighter units defending the Nation.

"This is the first time an Airman from the Air National Guard has won the Shine Award, and we are grateful to spotlight the Guard's role in our formidable Air Force," Collen said. "Lt. Col. Emerson embodied the National Guard motto of 'Always Ready, Always There,' leading extraordinary missions while serving his community with the same commitment."

According to the award citation, Emerson earned the honor for an "exceptional year" as an F-16 instructor pilot and squadron commander. The citation highlights his leadership during a "no-notice" mission that rapidly mobilized more than 50 personnel and six aircraft, generating over 200 combat hours in support of coalition forces in the Red Sea. Additionally, he directed aircraft and personnel movements across multiple countries while maintaining continuous alert operations, guided pilot upgrade training, and supported homeland defense missions – ensuring combat-ready Airmen and aircraft remained prepared to respond at a moment's notice.

Beyond operational excellence, Emerson volunteered hundreds of hours as a youth basketball coach and mentor and played a key role in organizing community outreach initiatives, including food distribution efforts supporting more than 1,000 families.

U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Duke Pirak, acting director, Air National Guard, left; and Colleen Shine, right, presents Lt. Col. Eric "Rebel" Emerson, commander, 119th Fighter Squadron, 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey National Guard, the 2024 Lt. Col. Anthony C. Shine Fighter Pilot Award at a ceremony at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, Feb. 10, 2026. Named after the Vietnam War fighter pilot who went missing in action in 1972, the award, recognizes fighter pilots for "superior leadership qualities, exceptional flying proficiency and community involvement." Shine is the daughter of the award's namesake.

U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Duke Pirak, acting director of the Air National Guard, said that while maintaining a war fighter ethos as part of the world's foremost air power is paramount, it's what leaders "do on Earth that matters."

"These are the reasons we fight, and there are reasons we serve. But there are great individuals whose lives are not only defined by their ability to 'slip the surly bonds of Earth,'" said Pirak, who served as host for the award ceremony. "They're devoted; compassionate, selfless members of the community who seek to leave every place on every occasion better than they found it. Lt. Col. Shine was that individual. Lt. Col. Emerson is that individual."

Pirak, as the ANG's senior leader and a fighter pilot himself, extended Emerson high praise.

"Rebel, in winning the Shine Award, you represent the best of the Air National Guard: rooted in the community, with lethal capabilities and an unwavering dedication to any and every mission," Pirak said. "You are truly an example of the best of our profession, and I am proud to serve with you."

For Emerson, the honor represents both recognition and responsibility.

"The spirit of Lt. Col. Shine reminds us to strive for excellence on and off the field, to learn from failure, and then to teach others," said Emerson. "This is who we are – Airmen bound by trust, loyal to our cause, dedicated to excellence in our craft, and accountable for our actions."

STALKING DRILLS

A U.S. Army Soldier with the 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, conducts stalking drills at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, March 23, 2026. Stalking requires Soldiers camouflaging themselves and making their way to a final firing position without being identified. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth Cohen)

Train the Trainer

U.S. Air Force Airmen with the 108th Medical Group, New Jersey Air National Guard, work on a trauma simulator mannequin during combat lifesaver train the trainer course at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, March 8, 2026. This course was designed to certify representatives from each squadron as instructors across the 108th Wing. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Bela Vaszlavik)

Zingrone awarded Bronze Star

Photo and story by Senior Airman Connor Taggart
177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office

U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Charles Zingrone, fuels management flight chief, Petroleum, Oils and Lubricants, Logistics Readiness Squadron, 177th Fighter Wing, received the Bronze Star during a ceremony at the Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, New Jersey, April 17, 2026.

The Bronze Star Medal is awarded to United States service members who distinguish themselves by heroic and meritorious achievement or service in a combat zone.

"When you hear the events that transpired during Master Sergeant Zingrone's deployment, it drives home the gravity of the decoration, and you realize it isn't just for a job well done," said Lt. Col. Justin Krowicki, commander, 177th Fighter Wing Logistics Readiness Squadron. "This is a deco-ration for decisive action under pressure, where the outcome mattered and this Airman stepped up to the challenge."

U.S. Air Force Col. Matthew Vanderschuere, commander, 177th Fighter Wing Mission Support Group, New Jersey Air National Guard, left, presents the Bronze Star medal to Master Sgt. Charles Zingrone, fuels management flight chief, Petroleum, Oils and Lubricants, 177th Fighter Wing Logistics Readiness Squadron, at the Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, New Jersey, April 17, 2026.

Zingrone was deployed as a section chief, Fuels Information Service Center, 379th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron, Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, while engaged in military operations in-volving conflict with an opposing foreign force from April 14 to Oct. 16, 2025.

During this period, Zingrone directed one of Central Command's busiest Fuels Flights, managing operations for delivery of approximately 84 million gallons of fuel, servicing more than 1,700 air-craft in support of five U.S. Central Command operations and aiding in the elimination of approx-imately 600 targets during Operation "ROUGH RIDER."

"We were all focused on the mission," said Zingrone. "We depended on each other. Everyone knew each other's role, and we operated seamlessly as a cohesive team. To me, it meant a lot that everything paid off at the end, from the months of preparation."

Zingrone identified critical fuel shortages threatening installation air defense artillery system readi-ness. His actions under risk were critical as he traversed through 12 target zones to deliver approx-imately 2,800 gallons of fuel, fueling depleted surface-to-air defenses, enabling successful Patriot battery intercepts of 13 missiles and safeguarding 94 Army operators.

"They depended on me, so I was just mission oriented," said Zingrone. "I understood the risks, but I was solely focused on getting that lifeblood to those Patriot operators so they could successfully engage."

> ***"We were all focused on the mission. We depended on each other. Everyone knew each other's role, and we operated seamlessly as a cohesive team."***
>
> **Master Sgt. Charles Zingrone**
> **Fuels Management Flight Chief**
> **177th Fighter Wing**

As he entered staging areas, incoming missiles detonated directly overhead with debris landing within 100 meters. While operating under Alarm Black conditions, he led a team of 19-members at Al Udeid, preparing them to execute fueling operations for continuous combat fighter aircraft for offensive strikes within hours of the largest Patriot theater ballistic missile response in United States forces in history.

While in theater, as a by-name request, Zingrone briefed Army Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla, com-mander, United States Central Command, and Air Force Chief Master Sgt. David A. Flosi, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, on fuels missions, culminating in him being coined by both sen-ior leaders.

"From a leadership perspective, that kind of action sets the tone for the entire unit," said Krowicki. "Junior Airmen hear about Master Sgt. Zingrone's actions and understand what right looks like un-der pressure. His peers respect it because they understand what it takes to rise to that level of ac-tion. Frankly it reflects well on the entire wing, that the 177th Fighter Wing developed someone like him, that when the moment arose, he stepped up to put others and the mission first before his own safety."

Best Squad

Photos by Sgt. Derek Vasquez 444th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

U.S. Army Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, practice movement techniques during the regiment's best squad competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, April 18, 2026. The 1-114th held a best squad competition over drill weekend to provide an immersive and collaborative training environment to hone both individual soldiers and collective competencies.

A U.S. Army Soldier with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, keeps watch as Soldiers prepare to evacuate a simulated casualty during the regiment's best squad competition.

The most influential level of leadership is at the Squad level — where the majority of our Soldiers reside.

"Squad" extends beyond a traditional infantry squad to any small-unit group of Soldiers, connected by a squad leader, who have the most direct impact on their lives. Soldiers never fight alone; the unbreakable bonds forged through shared hardship and unending support for one another are the hallmark of our most successful small units.

Above: A U.S. Army Soldier with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, treats a simulated casualty.

Below: A U.S. Army Soldier with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, low crawls during the unit's best squad competition.

Take Back Day

Photos by Staff Sgt. Eddie Lorenzo, New Jersey Air National Guard

A U.S. Army Soldier with the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, transfers a box of prescription medications during Operation Take Back New Jersey, April 28, 2026. Operation Take Back is a biannual event where Drug Enforcement Administration agents in partnership with the New Jersey National Guard Counterdrug Task Force collect and dispose of unused, unwanted, and expired medications. With 240 collection sites across the state and 199 participating Law Enforcement Agencies, a total of 12,640 pounds of unwanted prescription medications were collected and disposed of at the Covanta Energy Recovery Center in Camden, New Jersey.

U.S. Army Soldiers with the New Jersey Army National Guard dispose of boxes of unwanted prescription medications at the Covanta Energy Recovery Center in Camden, New Jersey during Operation Take Back New Jersey, April 28, 2026.

Airman conquers Boston Marathon

By Donna Jeffries, 108th Wing Public Affairs Office

Amid deafening cheers from spectators, Tech. Sgt. Deana Ditri, an Air National Guardsman completed her first 26.2-mile race April 20, 2026, in the 130th Boston Marathon.

Ditri joined the Air Force Reserve in 2015 and transferred to the Air National Guard with the 108th Wing in 2023 as part of the KC-46 Pegasus mission. As an aircrew communications technician with the 108th Operations Support Squadron at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Ditri ensures aircrew can effectively communicate in flight to complete each mission successfully and safely. Her military duties include troubleshooting, fixing and loading high-tech communication devices aboard the KC-46.

As a first-time marathon runner, Ditri chose Boston, one of the oldest and most distinguished annual marathons in the world. After what seemed like a long six hours and 19 minutes, Ditri said the marathon was one of the hardest things she has done, but it was well worth the effort.

A penchant for being part of a greater cause led her to participate in the annual event. As a 10-year service member, she is used to "Service Before Self." She said this run was personal, completed in an effort to support a close family member who has been battling drug addiction for years.

She applied through the Herren Project, where she has been an active volunteer since 2015. According to its website, the Herren Project is a national nonprofit organization providing free resources and support for the treatment, recovery, and prevention of substance use disorder. After watching a documentary on the nonprofit's founder, Chris Herren, a former NBA player and recovering drug user, she wanted to help not only her family member but others who share that struggle.

She applied in 2025 and was not selected, then applied again in 2026 and was accepted.

"You don't need a qualifying time if you do it through a charity organization," Ditri said.

In the Boston Marathon's Official Charity Program, the Boston Athletic Association allocates a set number of bibs to each participating nonprofit organization. These "charity bibs" are given to runners who commit to raising funds for the cause represented by that organization, allowing them to enter the race without meeting the standard qualifying time.

Not new to running, Ditri has participated in 5Ks for several years, including those in Boston. For the marathon, she adopted a 20-week training program to prepare for the race.

The race begins in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, and finishes on Boylston Street near Copley Square and the Boston Public Library.

Ditri admitted she walked a little more than she wanted. When her ankle started hurting, she was motivated to continue by remembering Chris Herren's words: "The pain you go through in a marathon is nothing like the pain an addict experiences."

Spectators were another motivator. The Boston Marathon reportedly attracts crowds reaching 500,000. Having been on the sidelines of many marathons cheering others on, she was part of the race this year and the crowds carried her.

"The crowd's energy is like nothing else. People are handing out water and energy snacks and cheering," Ditri said.

With less than a mile left and two turns in front of her, Ditri focused on the end and successfully crossed the finish line.

"I felt accomplished crossing that finish line, and I would do it again," she said.

NJNG and Albania celebrate 25 years as State Partners

President of Albania Bajram Begaj, left, Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, center, and Nancy VanHorn, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires in Albania during the 25th anniversary celebration in Tiranë, Albania, May 6, 2026. (Photo by Eridon Kotrri Ministry of Defence, Republic of Albania)

The State of New Jersey and the Republic of Albania are celebrating their 25th anniversary within the State Partnership Program. Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey and Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs, joined U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Nancy VanHorn in Albania from May 4 to 6 for meetings with President of Albania Bajram Begaj, Minister of Defence Ermal Nufi, and Chief of Defense Lt. Gen. Arben Kingji.

New Jersey National Guard Soldiers and Airmen conducted multiple trainings with the Albanian Armed Forces throughout the week. Meanwhile, two Albanian servicemen participated in the 2026 Best Warrior Competition in New Jersey. A ceremony and other events will also take place the second week of June in New Jersey.

"This year provides an opportunity to not only reflect on 25 years of enduring partnership with the Republic of Albania," said Mays, "We have the opportunity to renew our collective commitment and set the conditions for an even stronger partnership in the years ahead."

"In 2001, this partnership began with a simple promise: to train together, to learn from one another, and to stand side by side. That promise has been kept," said VanHorn. "When Americans and Albanians stand together, we are a force multiplier for freedom."

"This year provides an opportunity to not only reflect on 25 years of enduring partnership with the Republic of Albania. We have the opportunity to renew our collective commitment and set the conditions for an even stronger partnership in the years ahead."

Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays
The Adjutant General of New Jersey

The State Partnership Program pairs U.S. states with partner nations to strengthen military, civil, and societal relationships. Members of the New Jersey National Guard, Albanian Armed Forces, law enforcement units, and civil organizations have participated in more than 500 training events and engagements since the New Jersey-Albania State Partnership Program was established in 2001. New Jersey and Albania were paired because they share similar climates and terrain features and because of the large Albanian American population in New Jersey and neighboring states.

Above: Ermal Nufi, Minister of Defence, Republic of Albania, left, and Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, have their photo taken in Tiranë, Albania, May 4, 2026.Below: Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, second from right, and Lt. Gen. Arben Kingji, Chief of Defense, Republic of Albania, greet Albanian Armed Forces officers in Tiranë, Albania, May 4, 2026. (Photos by Eridon Kotrri Ministry of Defence, Republic of Albania)

Chaplain receives Minuteman Award

Photo and story by Airman Alex Cadavid, 177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office

U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Jason Harden, superintendent, 177th Chaplain Corps, 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, left, receives the Air National Guard Chaplain Corps Minuteman Award for 2025 from Col. Jonathan Bell, director, Air National Guard Chaplain Corps, at the Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, New Jersey, May 16, 2026.

U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Jason Harden, Chaplain Corps superintendent assigned to the 177th Fighter Wing, Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, New Jersey, was awarded the Air National Guard Chaplain Corps Minuteman Award for 2025 on May 16, 2026.

The Director of the Air National Guard Chaplain Corps, Col. Jonathan Bell, presented Harden with the award during May's Unit Training Assembly, highlighting Harden's extraordinary service in providing immediate care to the families and teammates of two National Guardsmen who were shot in Washington, D.C., just before Thanksgiving this past November.

In November 2025 during the Make D.C. Safe and Beautiful mission, Army National Guard Spc. Sarah Beckstrom and Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe were shot while on duty. Upon hearing the news, Harden and U.S. Air Force Maj. Vladimir Steliac, a 177th Fighter Wing chaplain, both serving at the National Guard Bureau Joint Staff Chaplain's Office, immediately volunteered to the hospital in the nation's capital.

"Chaplain Steliac and I both raised our hands and said that we're going to the hospital to care for them at their bedside," said Harden. "We did pray over both Spc. Beckstrom as well as Staff Sgt. Wolfe, but we also provided care for their families."

Operating under intense conditions, the team provided non-stop spiritual care for the victims' families and teammates waiting in the hospital corridors. Beckstrom later succumbed to her injuries, while Wolfe survived and began recovery.

"A lot of their teammates were in the corridor, and we were providing chaplain support for them as well," said Steliac. "We feel very much encouraged as a Chaplain Corps to have the opportunity to support and make a difference."

Beyond his military role, Harden's civilian career directly prepared him to handle the emotional weight of the tragedy. Harden, who has served in the police force since 2005, has been a detective and part of a major task force.

While Harden worked quietly behind the scenes to support the family and maintain order during the crisis, his leadership actions did not go unnoticed.

"His name will remain in the history of the Air Force's Chaplain Corps as the Minuteman recipient for the year of 2025," said Bell. "He rose above all the others in the field. Master Sergeant Harden stood beside the families and those service members from the instant that shooting took place, the whole way through for days of care, not doing this for his own recognition, but doing it to take care of people."

Best Warrior: Day 1

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Francis C. Garganian, Alpha Battery, 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, descends a ladder on the 500-meter NATO Standard Obstacle Course – the first event of the NJARNG's Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, May 5, 2026. During the competition, the Soldiers demonstrate their adaptiveness, resilience, lethality, and the readiness to respond to future threats. Ten Soldiers and 10 noncommissioned officers, along with four soldiers from the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Cyprus – New Jersey's State Partnership Program partners, will compete May 5-8, 2026, with the top Soldier and NCO going on to challenge seven other states' winners at the Region I Best Warrior Competition in Rhode Island June 8-12, 2026. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

Above: U.S. Army Spc. Peter W. Kalvelage, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 57th Troop Command, NJARNG, scales the high wall obstacle on the NATO Obstacle Course.

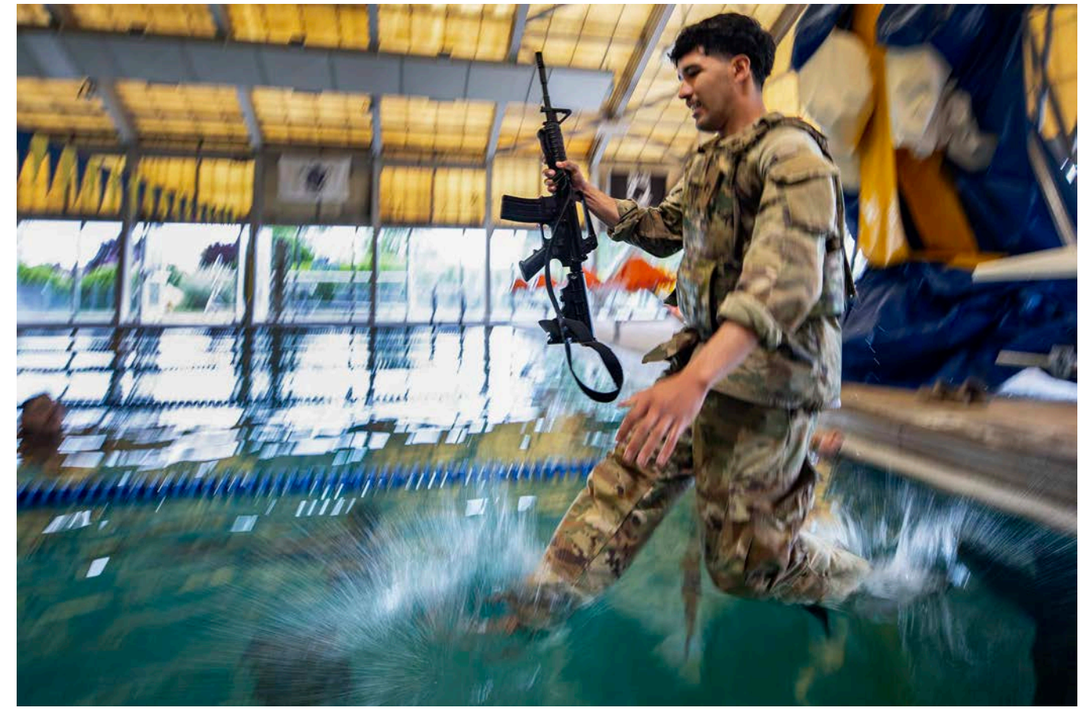
Below: Albanian Army Sgt. Marjus Cauli, Republic of Albania, vaults over an obstacle on the 500-meter NATO Standard Obstacle Course. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)

Above: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Taj D. Lumanog, 1st Battalion, 254th Regiment (Combat Arms), NJARNG, climbs over a high wall obstacle.

Below: U.S. Army Sgt. Grant Tamutus, Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, NJARNG, high crawls under a wire obstacle. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Michael Schwenk)

Best Warrior: Day 2

U.S. Army Pfc. Roman A. Florio, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, completes the 15-meter swim for the Combat Water Survival Training event during the NJARNG's Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, May 6, 2026. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

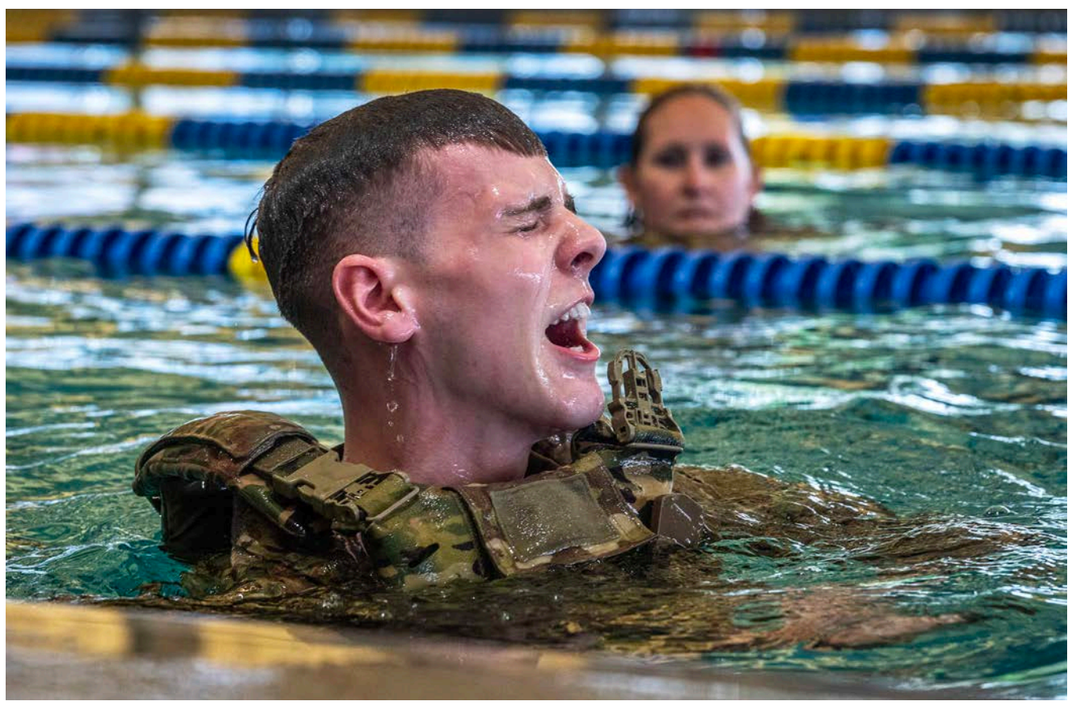


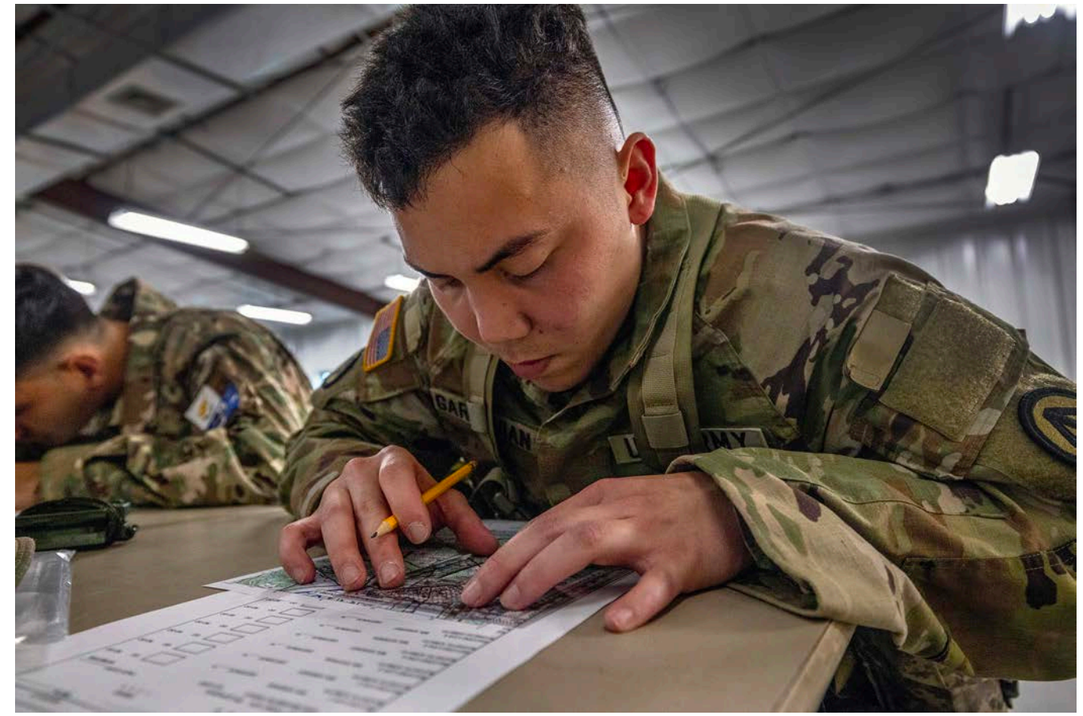
Above: U.S. Army Spc. Rey Velez, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th IBCT, NJARNG, jumps into the pool for the gear ditch during the Army Combat Water Survival Test. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Schwenk)

Below: U.S. Army Spc. Colby D. Carr, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th IBCT, NJARNG, performs the 15-meter swim with his weapon and equipment during the Army Combat Water Survival Test. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

Above: Command Sgt. Maj. Mustafa Kuçuku, Albanian Land Forces, Republic of Albania, right, films Albanian Army Sgt. Marjus Cauli as he performs the 15-meter swim during the Army Combat Water Survival Test. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

Below: U.S. Army Spc. Peter W. Kalvelage, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 57th Troop Command, NJARNG, completes the 15-meter swim. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Schwenk)





Above: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Francis C. Garganian, Alpha Battery, 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, 44th IBCT, NJARNG, plots his land navigation route.

Below: U.S. Army Spc. Peter W. Kalvelage, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 57th Troop Command, NJARNG, begins his land navigation route. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Faheed Adenuga, 154th Quartermaster Company, NJARNG, checks his compass during the night land navigation portion New Jersey Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Derek Vasquez)

Best Warrior: Day 3

U.S. Army Sgt. Grant Tamutus, Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, New Jersey Army National Guard, advances through a simulated chemical attack during the stress shoot/warrior tasks portion of the NJARNG's Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, May 7, 2026. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Schwenk)

Above: U.S. Army Spc. Peter W. Kalvelage, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 57th Troop Command, NJARNG, fires a M240 machine gun during the stress shoot/warrior tasks portion of the competition.

Below: U.S. Army Spc. Emmanuel Manchego, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, NJARNG, fires a M4 carbine during the stress shoot. (New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen)

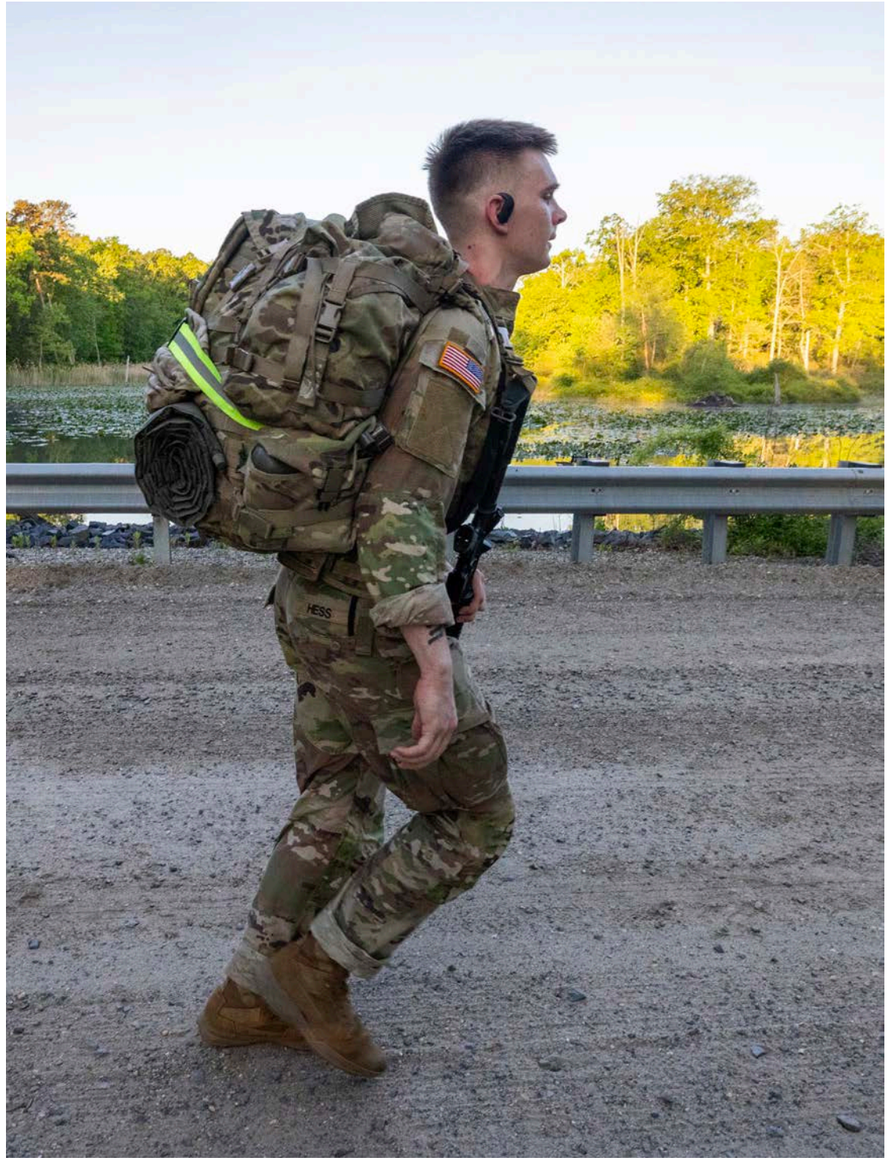
Above: U.S. Army Spc. Cory J. Hess, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th IBCT, NJARNG, fires a M320 grenade launcher during the stress shoot.

Below: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Leo Hochhauser, 508th Military Police Company, 117th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, NJARNG, treats a simulated casualty during the stress shoot. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Michael Schwenk)

Above: U.S. Army Sgt. Grant Tamutus, Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, NJARNG, calls in a medical evacuation request during the stress shoot.

Below: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Michael R. Spencer, Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th IBCT, NJARNG, carries the New Jersey flag and the Delta Company pennant during the stress shoot. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Michael Schwenk)

Best Warrior: Day 4



U.S. Army Soldiers with the New Jersey Army National Guard and soldiers from the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Cyprus – New Jersey's State Partnership partners – compete in the 12-mile ruck march – the final event of the NJARNG's Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, May 8, 2026. During the competition, the Soldiers demonstrate their adaptiveness, resilience, lethality, and the readiness to respond to future threats. Ten Soldiers and 10 noncommissioned officers, along with four soldiers from the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Cyprus – New Jersey's State Partnership Program partners, will compete May 5-8, 2026, with the top Soldier and NCO going on to challenge seven other states' winners at the Region I Best Warrior Competition in Rhode Island June 8-12, 2026. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

U.S. Army Soldiers with the New Jersey Army National Guard run down a hill during the 12-mile ruck march – the final event of the NJARNG's Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, May 8, 2026. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

Best Warrior Winners

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Taj D. Lumanog, 1st Battalion, 254th Regiment (Combat Arms), left, and Pfc. Roman A. Florio, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, both with the New Jersey Army National Guard, have their photo taken after winning the 12-mile ruck march – the final event of the NJARNG's Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, May 8, 2026. Overall, Lumanog placed first in the noncommissioned officer category, while Florio took first in the junior enlisted. Both will compete at the Region I Best Warrior Competition in Rhode Island June 8-12, 2026. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

NJ Soldiers participate in Spring Storm 2026

By Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

Four U.S. Army Soldiers with the New Jersey Army National Guard participated in Spring Storm 2026 alongside more than 12,000 soldiers from 15 countries May 9-24, 2026.

U.S. Army Maj. Jesse E. Nagle, Capt. Jennifer L. Wain, Capt. Jonathan D. O'Connor, and Sgt. Sebastian E. Fara, all with the 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, travelled to the Republic of Estonia as part of Military Reserve Exchange Program 2026 Estonia.

MREP enables Guard and Reserve Soldiers, both officers and noncommissioned officers, to temporarily attach to and train with their selected NATO partner nation. It provides immersive training opportunities that broaden professional development, increase knowledge and interoperability with the selected partner nation reserve forces as well as opportunities to display readiness, share best practices and foster international security cooperation while building and strengthening relationship with allies.

The four New Jersey Soldiers successfully integrated with their host units; they observed foreign battle drills, planning processes, and field training to bring that knowledge and practices home.

"In the early phases of the exercise, I embedded with the Estonian Defense League, who are similar in mission and structure to our Army National Guard," said Nagle. "With the Regional Command-South staff, I observed their planning and military decision-making processes."

During Spring Storm execution, Nagle was attached to the 2nd Brigade Fires Cell where he partnered with the brigade fire support officer to integrate, plan, and synchronize all fire support assets and build the brigade fire support plan.

Serving at the Estonian Division Headquarters, Wain participated in force protection, administrative support, and maintaining operational briefing products while observing multinational headquarters operations.

Spring Storm 2026 brings together U.S. and NATO Allied and partner forces in order to train defensive and offensive operations to enhance interoperability and warfighting skills. The exercise is part of Sword 26, U.S. Army Europe and Africa's premier annual exercise series taking place from late April through May 2026 across eight countries.

U.S. Army Capt. Jonathan D. O'Connor, 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, fourth from right, has his photo taken with Republic of Estonia Defence Forces soldiers in Estonia May 26, 2026. (Courtesy photo)

U.S. Army Capt. Jennifer L. Wain, 3rd Battalion, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, 44th IBCT, NJARNG, left, and two Republic of Estonia Defence Forces soldiers have their photo taken in Estonia May 20, 2026. (Courtesy photo)

Fara gained front-line experience serving with an Estonian infantry squad mortar section. "MREP enables Soldiers to train in ways they couldn't back home," said Fara. "Estonia is preparing for a different war than the U.S."

Estonia, which is a NATO and European Union member, borders Russia to the east. The majority of Spring Storm 2026 main activities are in south-eastern Estonia.

O'Connor operated as the Artillery Battalion intelligence officer. "I got real world training as an intelligence officer with NATO Forces and learned how another nation's artillery battalion operates in comparison to ours," said O'Connor. "It was also a firsthand lesson on the threat Russia imposes on Europe and its neighbor countries."

The exercise comprised 12,000 soldiers from Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States. The exercise's goal is to enhance the operational readiness and effectiveness of the Estonian Defense Force, and its allied units. The primary focuses is on defensive multi-domain operations and integrates various training elements to prepare units for potential confrontations with the Russian Armed Forces.

"Getting to represent my nation and military is a huge responsibility that I do not shy away from," said Fara. "Sharing knowledge and immersing myself in their culture to foster closer relations was one of my favorite parts of this exchange."

"The MREP experience was one of the absolute highlights of my 18-year career and one I would highly recommend everyone to apply to," said Nagle. "It allowed us to build stronger alliances and gain and share knowledge with the Republic of Estonia. This program was beneficial for everyone involved."

Operation Eagle Strike 2026

U.S. Army Officer Candidate Christopher Hale, New Jersey Army National Guard, right, participates in a group exercise with other Officer Candidates during Operation Eagle Strike at the Rreth-Greth Training Complex, Republic of Albania, May 19, 2026. During Operation Eagle Strike, New Jersey and New York Officer School Candidates trained alongside cadets from the Albanian Armed Forces Military Academy in movement to contact, squad attack, squad ambush, destroying a bunker, reacting to ambush, and squad reconnaissance. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the State Partnership Program between the New Jersey National Guard and the Republic of Albania as they continue to strengthen NATO interoperability through joint-training efforts. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Hayes)

Memorial Day

The New Jersey National Guard Joint Color Guard stand at attention during the Memorial Day ceremony at the Global War on Terrorism Memorial at the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs campus, Lawrenceville, New Jersey, May 21, 2026. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

NCO wins Communicator of the Year Award

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Schwenk, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office

U.S. Army Sgt. Seth Cohen, New Jersey National Guard Recruiting Battalion, center, accepts the Soldier Communicator of the Year award from Sgt. Maj. Mary Ferguson, Sergeant Major of Army Public Affairs, right, and Ms. Alayne Conway, Director, Army Communications and Outreach Office, at the 2026 Public Affairs Forum in Alexandria, Virginia, May 29, 2026. Introduced in the 2025 competition year, Cohen is the inaugural winner of the Soldier Communicator of the Year award, which is a one-time award that recognizes the top Army enlisted Soldier up to sergeant first class serving in the Army Public Affairs enlisted career field.

A U.S. Army public affairs specialist with the New Jersey Army National Guard is the inaugural winner of the 2025 Soldier Communicator of the Year in the Maj. Gen. Keith L. Ware Communications Awards Competition.

U.S. Army Sgt. Seth Cohen, a public affairs specialist with the New Jersey Army National Guard's Recruiting & Retention Battalion, earned this notable designation, setting the standard for future competitors in the new category.

"Being the award's first winner makes me both humbled and grateful," said Cohen. "In many ways this award reflects the many professionals who came before me and took the time to mentor me."

Introduced for the 2025 competition year, the Soldier Communicator of the Year award is a one-time award that recognizes the top Army enlisted Soldier up to sergeant first class serving in the Army Public Affairs enlisted career field.

Cohen enlisted in December 2019 and completed his public affairs training at the Defense Information School in December 2020, entering the field with no prior media or journalism experience.

"I joined the Army because I wanted to take control of the trajectory of my life," Cohen said. "I had no idea I would be stepping into the most fulfilling career field."

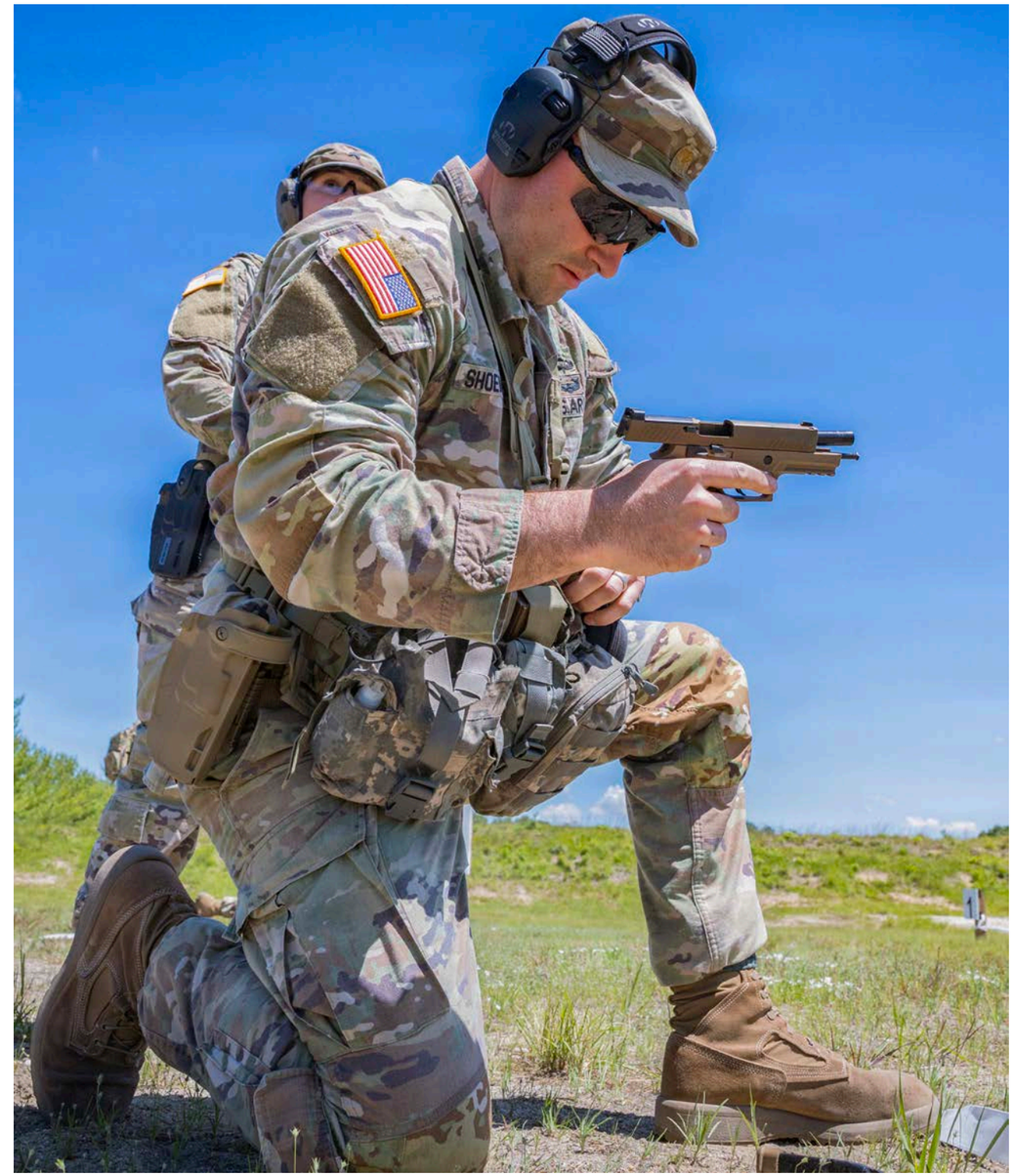
Now seven years later, as a public affairs specialist, Cohen is responsible for capturing training and events that the New Jersey National Guard is involved in and creating multimedia content to support the recruiting efforts that can turn into enlistments.

"Every day I put on the uniform, it is a privilege to continue telling the Army story," Cohen said. "Whether it is in the dark of night in the field or a hail and farewell, these experiences need to be remembered."

Established in 1970, the Maj. Gen. Keith L. Ware Communications Awards Competition recognizes Soldiers and Department of the Army civilian employees for excellence in achieving the objectives of the Army Public Affairs Program. On behalf of the Secretary of the Army, the Army Communications and Outreach Office conducts the competition annually in order to recognize, cultivate and inspire excellence within the Army public affairs community.

M17 Qual

Photos by Sgt. Seth Cohen, New Jersey Army National Guard's Recruiting & Retention Battalion



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 508th Military Police Company, 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, conduct M17 pistol qualification at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, June 3, 2026. The SIG Sauer M17 is the standard-issue sidearm for military police across the U.S. Armed Forces. Qualification with the weapon system is essential to maintaining proficiency and supporting military police duties.

Above: A U.S. Army Soldier with the 508th Military Police Company, fires a M17 pistol in the kneeling position during qualification at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, June 3, 2026.

Below: A U.S. Army Soldier with the 508th Military Police Company, fires a M17 pistol in the standing position. Each Soldier fired a combined total of 30 rounds while transitioning through three positions: standing, kneeling, and advancing forward.

New Jersey and Albania celebrate 25 years as State Partners

New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen

Ermal Nufi, Minister of Defence, Republic of Albania; U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, along with New Jersey National Guard leadership and Albanian Defence Ministry leadership tour the State House in Trenton, New Jersey, June 8, 2026. New Jersey and the Republic of Albania are celebrating the 25th anniversary ceremony commemorating the bilateral agreement fostered by the State Partnership Program. The New Jersey National Guard's partnership with Albania, traces its roots back to 1995 and officially became part of the National Guard State Partnership Program, Jan. 17, 2001, making it one of the oldest SPP relationships in the nation. The State Partnership Program is administered by the National Guard Bureau, which 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.

Above: U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey and Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs, center right, discuss future opera-tions with Ermal Nufi, Minister of Defence, Republic of Albania, center left, at the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, June 9, 2026.

Below: Lt. Gen. Arben Kingji, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, Republic of Albania, left; Ermal Nufi, Minister of Defence, Republic of Albania, center, and U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey and Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs, move to the Joint Operations Center in Lawrenceville.

Above: The New Jersey National Guard Joint Color Guard present the colors during the 25th anniversary ceremony commemorating the bilateral agreement between New Jersey and the Republic of Albania fostered by the State Partnership Program at the National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, June 10, 2026.

Below: U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey and Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs, addresses the audience during the 25th anniversary ceremony commemorating the bilateral agreement between New Jersey and the Republic of Albania fostered by the State Partnership Program.

Lt. Gen. Arben Kingji, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, Republic of Albania, second from left, and U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey and Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs, second from right, applaud after Ermal Nufi, Minister of Defence, Republic of Albania, left, and New Jersey Gov. Mikie Sherrill, cut a commemorative cake in honor of the New Jersey–Albania State Partnership Program during the 25th anniversary ceremony commemorating the bilateral agreement between New Jersey and the Republic of Albania fostered by the State Partnership Program at the National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, June 10, 2026.

113th reenlistment ceremony at 177th

U.S. Army Soldiers with 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, conducted a reenlistment ceremony at the Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey, June 12, 2026. The Soldiers toured the 177th Fighter Wing, learning about the equipment and capabilities of the wing. Following the tour, U.S. Army Lt. Col. Joseph D. Grillo administered the Oath of Enlistment to the reenlisting Soldiers. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Capt. Sean M. Leonard)

Final Formation

U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Arthur C. Roscoe Jr., Deputy Adjutant General of New Jersey, and Command Sgt. Maj. John R. Hicks, State Command Sergeant Major, New Jersey Army National Guard, officiated a Last Formation ceremony at the National Guard Armory in Bordentown, New Jersey, March 8, 2026. The ceremony recognizes Soldiers, Airmen and their families who are departing from service or retiring from the military. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Walker)