

Bluegrass Guard



Vol. 29 Issue 1 July 2026

Serving the men and women of Kentucky's Army and Air National Guard

AIR GUARD TAKES PART IN

*Emerald
Warrior*

State Partnership Air Assault
Planning Exchange p. 10

Kentucky Guard helps local
food banks p. 16

AROUND THE GUARD



ON THE COVER:

A U.S. Air Force special tactics Airman from the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing prepares to jump into Henry E. Rohlsen Airport near Christiansted in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, Aug. 26, 2025 as part of Emerald Warrior 25. (Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Phil Speck)



JFHQ - During the unit's October drill weekend, Sgt. 1st Class Stephen Parker, Staff Sgt. Charles Dickerson, Staff Sgt. Mason Smith, and Sgt. Chandler Posey were promoted. (Courtesy photo)



149th MEB - The Kentucky Army National Guard's 149th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB) officially welcomed a new commander during a change-of-command ceremony at Madison Central High School's football field, Oct. 18, 2025. The event recognized the service of outgoing commander U.S. Army Col. Brandye Williams, and formally transferred authority to Col. Terry Durham. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Destini Keene)



138th OFC - Command Sgt. Maj. Joshua Matlock passes the brigade colors to 1st Sgt. Justin Cron during a Change of Responsibility ceremony at the Lexington Armory Aug. 10, 2025. Command Sgt. Maj. Robbie Rogers relinquished responsibility as the brigade's senior enlisted leader during the event. (Courtesy photo)



63rd TAB - Col. Greg Armstrong conducts his final flight in a UH-60 Black Hawk at the Army Aviation Support Facility on Boone National Guard Center in Frankfort, Nov. 21, 2025, concluding more than 30 years of military service. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Alan Royalty)



75th TC - Members of the 75th Troop Command attended the unit's inaugural Dining Out Jan. 10, 2025, bringing together Soldiers and leaders for an official social event focused on fellowship and unit tradition. (Courtesy photo)



123rd AW - Tech. Sgt. Cristen E. Lane, an aerospace medicine technician, was one of four members of the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Medical Group that were recognized for excellence in the 2024 Air National Guard Medical Service Awards. (Photo by Lt. Col. Dale Greer)



238th RTI - When asked to reclassify Florida National Guard Soldiers mid-deployment, halfway around the world, our instructors demonstrated their ability to train Soldiers in critical skills wherever needed. (Courtesy photo)



38th DIVARTY - The 38th Division Artillery Counter UAS training held Oct. 19, 2025 at Wendell H. Ford Regional Training Center in Greenville. Mr. Frank Peak shared that what he values most is witnessing Soldiers make the connection between virtual instruction and real-world application. That moment of realization the "aha" moment is what drives his passion for teaching. (Courtesy photo)

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BLUEGRASS GUARD

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A LETTER FROM THE ADJUTANT GENERAL



Securing the Digital Commonwealth and Beyond

When you look through this edition of the Bluegrass Guard, you will see exactly what makes our team exceptional. You will see our versatility, our readiness, and our deep roots in supporting our communities. This issue highlights our Soldiers and Airmen performing at the highest levels. You will read about the Air Guard's 123rd Special Tactics Squadron homing in maritime skills in the Caribbean during Exercise Emerald Warrior, and our rapid response closer to home assisting local authorities after a fatal civilian plane crash. You will also see our community service in action as we supported the Feeding Kentucky network during a lapse in federal funding, and our global impact as we celebrate a decade-long partnership with Djibouti and entered three decades partnered with Ecuador.

While we continue to excel in these traditional areas, we must also face the shifting threats of modern security. Today, some of our most significant threats do not come from the air or the ground, but through fiber-optic cables and digital networks. Cyber defense and cybersecurity are everyone's concern. This affects daily computer users and everyone else indirectly connected to our systems. Think about this: the FBI reports over 4,600 cyber incidents in Kentucky each year. Even worse, law enforcement suggests that about 85% of cyberattacks go unreported. While these incidents happen in the general public, threats in our military world are in a different category.

Our Guard members live and work all over this state. Because we are everywhere, governments at all levels look to us to protect our critical infrastructure. The National Guard enterprise holds seven annual cyber exercises, including Cyber Shield. Yet, historically, we lacked such an exercise in FEMA Region IV, which covers the southeastern United States. Now, with Cyber Bluegrass, that gap is closed.

We initiated Cyber Bluegrass from Nov. 4 to 6, 2025. This groundbreaking exercise was our first cyber-focused event. It brought together multiple partners from the military, government, and the private sector. Our approach follows a vital first responder saying: "You do not want to make your initial introduction at the scene of an incident." By bringing together partners like the Kentucky Office of

“The threat is not going away—cyberattacks are happening today, and they will happen tomorrow. But through proactive training, strategic partnerships, and relentless preparation, the Kentucky National Guard will remain a step ahead.”

Homeland Security, Kentucky Emergency Management, the Department of Military Affairs, the FBI, and CISA, we built the professional relationships we need to stand together before a crisis hits.

Under the leadership of Lt. Col. Dayna Sanders, commander of the 103rd Brigade Support Battalion, this exercise was designed, organized, and executed with remarkable success. This collaborative spirit also reached right into our communities. Our cyber personnel visited Fayette County Public Schools to teach students about digital defense and inspire the next generation of defenders.

The year 2025 was only year one for Cyber Bluegrass. We have already gathered lessons from our after-action reviews, and we will build those lessons into our 2026 exercise. Our goal is to make this an annual, enduring event. The threat is not going away—cyberattacks are happening today, and they will happen tomorrow. But through proactive training, strategic partnerships, and relentless preparation, the Kentucky National Guard will remain a step ahead.

Whether defending our digital networks, saving lives during physical emergencies, or deploying across the globe, I am incredibly proud of the professional, resilient, and selfless service of our Soldiers, Airmen, and Civilians. You make up a necessary and best part of our society.

Always Ready. Always There.
Fight as Kentuckians!

MAJ. GEN. HAL LAMBERTON ★ ★

CYBER BLUEGRASS 2025

STRENGTHENS KENTUCKY'S CYBER DEFENSE

By Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Crane, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs

The Kentucky National Guard hosted the inaugural Cyber Bluegrass, a cyber exercise held at the State Emergency Operations Center on Boone National Guard Center, Nov. 4-6.

The three-day event brought together nearly one hundred participants, including cyber professionals from across Kentucky, the FBI, Kentucky Emergency Management, and the North Carolina National Guard's Cyber Task Force.

At the heart of the exercise was Crimson Serpent, a scenario-based training environment developed by the Kentucky National Guard's Cyber Resilience Initiative in partnership with Murray State University and the University of Louisville's School of Engineering. The exercise challenged participants to respond to simulated cyber intrusions and attacks, testing both their technical skill and teamwork.

Eight teams operated on-site with four additional teams working remotely. Their shared mission: "Harden and defend the network from malicious cyber-attacks and restore the damage" caused by the Crimson Serpent simulation team.

"This exercise is about more than technology—it's about strengthening homeland defense at the state level," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Dayna Sanders, deputy chief information officer and cyber program manager. "It exposes weaknesses and tests the ability of team members from different agencies to work together effectively."

Cyber Bluegrass 2025 marked a major step forward in Kentucky's cyber preparedness, fostering collaboration among military, academic,

and civilian partners. Through joint training and shared expertise, the exercise aimed to build stronger, more resilient networks capable of defending critical infrastructure across the Commonwealth.

"The last place you want to introduce yourself is at the scene of an incident," said U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Haldane Lamberton, Kentucky's adjutant general.

Collaboration was the prevailing theme throughout the event, as leaders encouraged everyone to get to know each other, learn what everyone does and share expertise.

By bringing state, federal, and regional cyber defenders together under one roof, the Kentucky National Guard continues to play a leading role in keeping Kentucky cyber-secure.

Soldiers and civilians take part in Cyber Bluegrass at the Emergency Operations Center on Boone National Guard Center in Frankfort, Ky., Nov. 4, 2025.



Capt. Kelli Ryan, cyber exercise planning officer, speaks to the Soldiers and civilians taking part in Cyber Bluegrass at the Emergency Operations Center on Boone National Guard Center Nov. 4, 2025.

Brig. Gen. Brian Wertzler, Kentucky's deputy adjutant general, speaks to the distinguished visitors from around the Commonwealth during the inaugural Cyber Bluegrass at Boone National Guard Center Nov. 4, 2025.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Bluegrass Guard values opinions

To comment, keep remarks under 150 words, include your name, rank and address and send them to:

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100 Minuteman Parkway, BLDG 145 JFHQ
Frankfort, KY 40601

E-Mail KYNG.PAO@army.mil

We reserve the right to edit letters for tone, length, clarity, and factual accuracy.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

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BLUEGRASS GUARD

TRAIN AS YOU FIGHT

Build Strength - Increase Readiness - Stay Lethal

WORKOUT *of the* MONTH

- 10 DEAD LIFTS
- 30-SECOND PLANK
- 10 KB SWINGS
- 20-METER SPRINT

(REPEAT THREE TIMES)

IMPROVE YOUR **SPRINT-DRAG-CARRY** TO UNDER 2 MINUTES:

- FOCUS ON LATERAL MOVEMENT
- BUILD GRIP STRENGTH
- PRACTICE TRANSITIONS

Once a week:

- RUCK 4 MILES
- DO AS MANY 2-MINUTE PLANKS AS YOU CAN

RECOVERY + NUTRITION

HYDRATE: HALF
BODY WEIGHT (OZ)
FUEL: PROTEIN +
CARBS WITHIN 30
MIN.
RECOVER: 7-8
HOURS SLEEP

QUICK TIP:
USE FOAM ROLLER
AFTER LONG RUCKS

NO EQUIPMENT?
use
Sandbags
or
Ammo Cans





Two Kentucky Guardsmen Reach World CrossFit Finals, Embody Army's H2F Principles



By Maj. Cody Stagner, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Two Kentucky Army National Guard Soldiers, 1st Lt. Erik Thomas and Col. Eddie Simpson, pushed their limits at the 2025 CrossFit Games in Columbus, Ohio — showing how fitness and readiness go hand in hand.

From August 21–24, Simpson and Thomas, competing in age groups 50–54 and 35–39 respectively, were tested in every dimension of physical fitness. From running and weightlifting to gymnastics and various endurance events, the competition demanded elite-level strength, speed, and adaptability.

The CrossFit Games are the sport's premier global competition, which attracted over 200,000 of the fittest athletes in the world through a series of qualifiers held across thousands of gyms worldwide.

Simpson, who finished 21st worldwide, reflected on winning the clean and jerk, a two-phase weightlifting movement that involves lifting a heavily weighted barbell overhead.

"I haven't hit that weight [305 pounds] in four or five years," the commander of the Kentucky National Guard Garrison Training Center said. "It reminded me that with the right preparation, you can still surprise yourself."

That preparation, Simpson and Thomas both emphasized, is rooted in the principles of the Army's Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) program, which takes a holistic approach to improving fitness by focusing on five readiness domains: mental, spiritual, physical, nutrition, and sleep.

Thomas, the KYARNG H2F coordinator and a transportation officer with the 307th Support Maintenance Company, finished



Col. Eddie Simpson competes during the 2025 CrossFit Games in Columbus, Ohio, August 21–24, 2025. Simpson, commander of the Kentucky Army National Guard Garrison Training Center, finished 21st overall in the men's 50–54 age group. (photo courtesy of Hercules Media)

13th in his age group by overcoming a rocky start and practicing what he teaches to Soldiers across the state as part of H2F

outreach.

"Coming into the event, I was ranked 17th, so my goal was just to improve on that. And after the first three events, I was in 26th place," he said. "I was a little down on myself, so I had to rely on mental fitness principles I've taught others in the past, like keeping things in perspective and adding some positive self-talk after those three events."

Thomas said he looked back on his performance during training sessions leading up to that point as a reminder of how physically prepared he truly was for each of the next events in the competition.

"Coming back to that next event, I won my heat and took sixth overall—climbing back up to the cut line. The next day, I won another heat, and it pushed me further up to the cut line as well. That became the highlight of the weekend for me," he said.

Their success, according to Thomas, is about more than competition. Competitive environments like CrossFit develop not just physical strength, but mental resilience, attention to detail, and adaptability under pressure—traits essential to modern warfighters.

Thomas claims it's a demonstration of how the Army's Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) program is shaping a new generation of fit, resilient, and lethal Soldiers in Kentucky.

"H2F is not just about getting in shape," Thomas said. "It's about building total Soldier readiness, physical, mental, and emotional."



SCAN QR CODE FOR FULL STORY



KENTUCKY CYBER VISITS FAYETTE COUNTY SCHOOLS

By Chief Warrant Officer 2 Catherine Strobel, Kentucky National Guard
Public Affairs

Soldiers from the Kentucky National Guard Cyber Resilience Initiative (KYNG-CRI) visited students in Lexington to demonstrate real-world cybersecurity concepts and explore cyber career path opportunities in the Guard, Sept. 17-18, 2025.

U.S. Army Capt. Kelli Ryan, cyber exercise planning officer, and Staff Sgt. Billy Penley, cyber capabilities developer, partnered with the cybersecurity program at Fayette County's Hub for Innovative Learning & Leadership – commonly referred to as 'The HILL'. Over the course of two days, Ryan and Penley worked with approximately 50 students to show how cyber concepts could be applied to real-world scenarios, and the opportunities that exist for cyber professionals in the Guard.

Students learned about the Guard's mission, what Soldiers do, and about the different cyber careers in the KYNG for enlisted personnel, officers, and warrant officers. Ryan also spoke to students about the mission of KYNG-CRI, ongoing efforts to build statewide partnerships to enhance cyber capabilities across the state, and supporting communities through teaching, training, and assisting in cyber defense tactics.

"We live in a time when nearly everyone has access to the internet," said Ryan. "Whenever something becomes public-facing, malicious actors are a click away from exploiting it. The Cyber Resilience Initiative is working

to help make Kentucky more cyber-secure."

Penley also took the students through a demonstration, showing how hackers can find and exploit vulnerabilities in servers, emphasizing the importance of



U.S. Army Capt. Kelli Ryan, cyber exercise planning officer, speaks to students in the cybersecurity program at Fayette County's Hub of Innovative Learning and Leadership in Lexington, Kentucky, Sept. 18, 2025. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Crane)



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Billy Penley helps a student at Fayette County's Hub for Innovative Learning and Leadership in Lexington, Kentucky, Sept. 18, 2025. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Crane)

keeping systems updated.

The demonstration included an outdated game server, which exposed a vulnerability that could be targeted by an attacker. Students learned indicators of compromised networks, how to identify them, and how to defend against them.

"Today's students are entering a cyber

threat landscape previous generations didn't face," said Penley. "Demonstrating a real-world example, like exploiting an outdated game server creates an impactful learning experience. These young people represent the future of our cyber workforce, and this early interaction is a vital opportunity to cultivate their skills and interest in cybersecurity."

Bryan Quillen, cybersecurity instructor at The HILL, also expressed the relevance for his students.

"Students were able to see the importance of software updates as an outdated Minecraft server was hacked," said Quillen. "The attack combined their knowledge of malware, command line, and query language showing that what we're learning in class is really preparing them for the real world."

The HILL specializes in career and technical education and offers three pathways – technical trades and public service, advanced technology and engineering, and healthcare and human services.



SCAN QR CODE FOR FULL STORY

CYBER, RADIO EXCHANGE DEEPENS US, DJIBOUTI MILITARY COOPERATION

DJIBOUTI — In the East Africa region where a single breached network can ripple across borders, Djiboutian soldiers and U.S. service members spent four focused days, July 13 to 16, shoulder-to-shoulder inside classrooms and comms bays, testing defenses, hunting cyber threats, and refining the radio skills that keep missions moving.

U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), Combined Joint Task Force — Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), and the Kentucky Army National Guard teamed up with Djiboutian forces for a cybersecurity and radio communications fundamentals skills-sharing initiative that blended instruction, live

demonstrations, and practical exercises.

Participants drilled on network monitoring, threat detection, and the employment of essential cybersecurity tools, then shifted to radio communications principles and operational techniques that underpin crisis response and day-to-day coordination between the two nations.

"Combining all these efforts is an opportunity not only to strengthen CJTF-HOA's relationship with the Djiboutian armed forces, but also AFRICOM's broader engagement with Djibouti through the State Partnership Program," said U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Jacob Henley, CJTF-HOA's cyber planner.

By Staff Sgt. Marcus Hardy-Bannerman, Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa

SCAN QR CODE
FOR FULL STORY





U.S. Army Maj. Ryan Hubbs congratulates an Ecuadorian marine on the completion of air assault training during an exchange in Latacunga, Ecuador, Aug. 21, 2025.

By Staff Sgt. Caleb Sooter, 133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



U.S. Army Maj. Ryan Hubbs shows servicemembers of the Ecuadorian 9th Special Forces Brigade a demonstration on mounting and dismounting rotary wing aircraft during air assault operations as part of a joint air assault planning exercise in Latacunga, Ecuador, Aug. 20, 2025.

LATACUNGA, Ecuador — Members of the Kentucky National Guard took part in a four-day air assault planning exchange with the Ecuadorian 9th Special Forces Brigade as part of the National Guard's State Partnership Program, Aug. 18-21.

The Soldiers and Airmen with expertise in aviation, pathfinding, and air assault were sent to the 9th Special Forces Brigade headquarters in Latacunga, where Ecuadorian Special Forces train in pathfinding, mountain warfare, airborne operations, combat diving, and their elite "commando school" course.

"Although the objective of this mission was to be a subject matter expert exchange concerning planning for air assault operations, the primary mission of any SPP exchange is to build a better relationship with our state partners," said U.S. Army Maj. Ryan Hubbs, inspector general of the Kentucky National Guard. Hubbs served as the officer in charge for the exchange, and provided expertise as a ranger and air assault subject matter expert during the mission. "To that end, the exchange went fantastic. So often, we don't get that chance to conduct joint planning, even with our own sister services. The passion that they had and the level of seriousness with which they executed the planning was also great to see."

The training exchange consisted of six Soldiers of the Kentucky Army National Guard and one Airman of the Kentucky Air National Guard. Most had previously participated in SPP exchanges in Ecuador, and were both excited and honored to participate in yet another exchange.

SHIP PROGRAM T PLANNING EXCHANGE



Soldiers and Airmen of the Kentucky National Guard and servicemembers of the Ecuadorian 9th Special Forces Brigade pose for a photo at the conclusion of an air assault planning exchange in Latacunga, Ecuador, Aug. 21, 2025.



Members of the Ecuadorian 9th Special Forces Brigade back-brief their simulated air assault concept of operations during an air assault planning exchange as part of the Kentucky National Guard's State Partnership Program in Latacunga, Ecuador, Aug. 20, 2025.

"Learning to work together, sharing ideas, and understanding one another's perspectives on the battlefield is my favorite part of [these missions]," said U.S. Air Force 1st Sgt. Oscar Cerna of the 123rd Security Forces Squadron. Cerna served as a subject matter expert to teach what the air force can provide to support air assault operations. His career started in the Army, where he went to Air Assault school at Sabalauski Air Assault School at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

The training exchange began in the classroom, where Kentucky air assault subject matter experts (SMEs) briefed the Ecuadorian servicemembers on the details of how the U.S. Army conducts air assault missions. The Ecuadorian cohort consisted of servicemembers from the Army, Air Force and Navy, with each participant being a member of their respective branch's special forces. Once briefed on U.S. Air Assault operations, they exchanged how they differ in their own country due to the different nature of their defense operations, unique climate and terrain, and different equipment.

U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael Richardson and Capt. Sean Lough, both rotary wing pilots in the 63rd Theater Aviation Brigade of the Kentucky Army National Guard, exchanged flight operation considerations in the context of air assault to the Ecuadorian cohort, working together to compare and contrast similarities while also bridging the gap between aviator and infantryman in air assault operations.



Soldiers and Airmen of the Kentucky National Guard exchange patches with members of the Ecuadorian 9th Special Forces Brigade at the conclusion of an air assault exchange in Latacunga, Ecuador, Aug. 21, 2025.

KENTUCKY AIR GUARD SPECIAL TACTICS FLEXES MARITIME SKILL IN CARIBBEAN

Emerald Warrior



By Lt. Col. Dale Greer, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

CHRISTIANSTED, U.S. Virgin Islands – A squadron of special tactics Airmen from the Kentucky Air National Guard completed a grueling five-day exercise here Aug. 30, testing their ability to perform a broad spectrum of operations in a maritime environment while responding to an enemy threat.

The Airmen, including combat controllers, pararescuemen and special reconnaissance troops, operated from the island of St. Croix to conduct land, sea and air missions with fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft as part of exercise Emerald Warrior 25.2, according to the special tactics officer who served as lead planner.

“Our Airmen exercised their unique skillsets to parachute into contested territory, establish airfield operations, control aircraft, respond to search-and-rescue scenarios, manage notional medical evacuations, and conduct reconnaissance and targeting operations on a very tight timeline,” the officer said.

St. Croix and its neighboring islands provided an ideal training environment, he added.

“Operations in the Caribbean simulate many of the geographical features our forces may encounter when deployed around the globe,” he said. “Having to overcome the kinds of challenges presented here will make us a more lethal and effective force the next time we conduct littoral operations

anywhere in the world.”

The St. Croix event was just one piece of Emerald Warrior, a large-scale special operations exercise staged in multiple locations by Air Force Special Operations Command to train special operations components, sister service, interagency and partner forces. The exercise simulates missions for a theater campaign to support combatant commanders operating in a volatile environment against strategic competitors.

A key focus was Agile Combat Employment, meant to advance the ability to project air power in complex, unfamiliar or contested environments while working from distributed locations with limited support, the officer said.

The exercise here, staged and executed by

forces from the Louisville, Kentucky-based 123rd Airlift Wing, kicked off Aug. 26 when six special tactics Airmen parachuted into the Caribbean Sea with an inflatable boat, 3 miles off the shore of St. Croix, from a Kentucky Air Guard C-130J Super Hercules. Eleven more combat controllers and pararescuemen then jumped directly into Henry E. Rohlsen Airport from the same aircraft, with both forces combining to take control of the airfield. Within minutes, the Airmen had cleared the runways, established perimeter security and implemented air traffic control, allowing the C-130 to land and offload crucial assets.

In another mission, spanning two days, a group of Airmen traveled 75 nautical miles by boat to conduct reconnaissance and targeting operations on a nearby island held by simulated enemy forces.

Two other scenarios tested the squadron’s ability to conduct search-and-rescue operations and provide medical care in challenging environments.

In the first event, six pararescuemen and combat controllers were tasked with finding survivors floating in life rafts on the open ocean after their plane crashed at sea. Over the course of a 32-hour scenario, the Airmen located the victims while flying over the crash site in a C-130J, parachuted into the ocean with two inflatable boats, provided on-scene medical care, and controlled medical evacuations via helicopter hoist operations.





"This was a particularly demanding scenario designed to test both the rescue capabilities and the survival skills of our Airmen on the open ocean," the planner said.

Other training included exfil and infil operations on land and sea from UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, provided by the Mississippi Army National Guard's 185th Aviation Brigade; and a mass-casualty exercise involving civilians wounded by an industrial accident. In that event, Airmen were required to triage patients, provide battlefield medical care, and control their evacuation via Black Hawk helicopters from the Virgin Islands Air National Guard Station.

Such complex operations required coordination with numerous entities, the planner said, including the U.S. Coast Guard; the U.S. Virgin Islands Governor's Office, Police Department and Air National Guard; officials at Henry E. Rohlsen Airport; local marinas; and dozens of area businesses. The exercise also relied on essential capabilities provided by the squadron's combat mission support team, including radio technicians, diving gear specialists, parachute riggers, vehicle maintenance troops and administrative specialists.

"An exercise of this scope, which has been in the planning stage for over a year, would not have been successful without the combined efforts of everyone involved, from our combat support troops to the governor's office to local citizens who were so supportive of our efforts to ensure our nation's security."

Special tactics Airmen from the Kentucky Air Guard are among the most highly trained military operators in the world. The unit's combat controllers, pararescuemen and special reconnaissance specialists are capable of deploying by land, sea or air into almost any environment for combat or humanitarian operations.

Mission sets include clandestine deployment into contested environments to establish and control austere airfield and assault-zone operations; environmental reconnaissance and tactical weather forecasting; battlefield trauma care; and personnel recovery operations, including casualty evacuation and combat search and rescue.

The unit's Airmen have been heavily employed in humanitarian-response operations over the years, including earthquake and hurricane recovery missions. They were among the first U.S. forces on the ground following a devastating earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010, directing initial C-17 airdrops of humanitarian aid and controlling a massive resupply effort that delivered 20,000 pounds of food, water and medicine.

Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, special operators from the wing established and operated a helicopter landing zone on a highway overpass in New Orleans, helping evacuate nearly 12,000 citizens. In 2017, following Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, the unit deployed 18 personnel to the Houston area to rescue 336 citizens stranded by flood waters; and 23 Airmen to the Virgin Islands to provide air traffic control for 636 rescue aircraft, evacuating 1,286 U.S. citizens from the Dutch island of St. Maarten.

A U.S. Air Force special tactics Airman from the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing measures the guide slope of the runway at Henry E. Rohlsen Airport near Christiansted in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, Aug. 26, 2025.



KENTUCKY NATIONAL GUARD RESPONDS TO FATAL CIVILIAN PLANE CRASH

By Chief Warrant Officer 2 Catherine
Strobel, Kentucky National Guard Public
Affairs



LOUISVILLE, Ky. – Firefighters from the Kentucky Air National Guard were among hundreds of emergency workers who responded to a fatal civilian plane crash just south of Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport here Tuesday night.

Eight Guard firefighters and four fire trucks were deployed to the crash site around 5:20 p.m., said U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Ty Allen, fire chief for the 123rd Airlift Wing. That was approximately five minutes after the port wing of a McDonnell Douglas MD-11 caught fire and its engine detached from the aircraft during take-off, according to an official from the National Transportation Safety Board, causing the United Parcel Service cargo plane to lose altitude and burst into flames upon impact with the ground near Grade Lane and Fern Valley Road.

The accident has claimed 12 lives so far, said Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg — all three crew members on the plane, plus nine people on the ground. At least a dozen people were injured.



Master Sgt. Kyle Miller was one of eight firefighters from the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing who responded to a fatal civilian plane crash just south of Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport in Louisville, Ky., Nov. 4, 2025. (Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Phil Speck)



Members of the Kentucky National Guard's 41st Civil Support Team survey the site of a fatal civilian airplane crash in Louisville, Ky., Nov. 5, 2025. The team is testing air quality to evaluate the presence of toxic chemicals. (Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Phil Speck)



Firefighters from the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing deploy firefighting foam at a petroleum recycling facility near the impact of a fatal civilian airplane crash in Louisville, Ky., Nov. 4, 2025. (Photo by Master Sgt. Kyle Miller)

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Kentucky National Guard supports food banks in Lexington and Louisville during government shutdown

Photos by Dale Greer, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs and Sgt. 1st. Class Benjamin Crane, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs



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FULL LOUISVILLE
STORY



SCAN QR CODE FOR
FULL LEXINGTON
STORY

LEADERSHIP PROFILE:

By Milt Spalding, Kentucky
National Guard Public Affairs

FRANKFORT, Ky. — For U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Brian Wertzler, Kentucky's deputy adjutant general, nearly 36 years of service have forged a clear leadership philosophy: strip out emotion, focus on what's best for the organization, and empower your people to find the solution.

"Leading is explaining what needs to be done and why and letting them develop the how," Wertzler says, a title he honed moving from an enlisted Soldier to a commissioned officer.

That people-first mindset has been a guiding principle throughout his career, from pulling guard duty as a young Soldier to commanding thousands during a crisis.

He joined the Guard at 18, drawn by the opportunity to serve and pursue education while charting his future. Early mentorship within his first unit encouraged him to attend Officer Candidate School at the Kentucky Military Academy, an experience he credits with shaping his leadership foundation.

Over time, his leadership style evolved. As a young officer, he admits he was more directive, focused on proving himself and executing tasks precisely as envisioned. With experience came the pivotal shift in perspective from managing to leading. Trusting his Soldiers to innovate, he found their solutions often exceeded his own expectations, reinforcing his belief that empowering people is the key to organizational success.

Having entered the Guard as an enlisted Soldier before commissioning, he also carries a lasting appreciation for those at every level. He remembers pulling guard duty, driving vehicles and performing the routine but essential tasks that keep units running.

"I don't ask Soldiers to do anything I wouldn't do myself," he said.

That principle was tested when Winter Storm Fern swept across Kentucky earlier this year. The response was swift and historic, marking the Guard's largest mobilization since the 2009 ice storm. As more than 3,000 Soldiers and Airmen assessed damage across 120 counties, moments like these clarified the value of his approach.

"When faced with uncertainty," said Wertzler, "I strip out emotion and ask: What's best for the organization?"

His focus on people extends to talent management and recruitment. Through the Guard's Kentucky Enlistment Enhancement



perspec-
Soldier to a



Photo by Kentucky National Guard Visual Information

Program (KEEP), more than 600 recruits have joined since 2023. Wertzler personally reviews packets and presents incentive checks, reinforcing both accountability and appreciation.

"We're changing lives," he said. "It's more than a paycheck. It's leadership development, education and opportunity."

In addition to his state responsibilities, he served two years in a dual-hat assignment as deputy commanding general at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, reconnecting with his artillery roots while helping shape future force capabilities.

Through natural disasters, recruiting challenges, and evolving missions, one constant remains for Wertzler: people are the Guard's center of gravity.

"It's not a sprint — it's a marathon," he said, offering advice he would give his younger self about the balance of leadership and self-reflection. "Everything isn't always urgent."

After decades of service, his focus is not on personal recognition, but on preparing the next generation.

"I'm proud to be part of this team," he said. "With the right people, we can accomplish anything."



(Photos are courtesy of
BG Brian Wertzler)



A U.S. Air Force special tactics Airman from the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing prepares to jump into Henry E. Rohlsen Airport near Christiansted in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, Aug. 26, 2025 as part of Emerald Warrior 25.2, a large-scale special operations exercise being staged in multiple locations by Air Force Special Operations Command. The Airman, joined by 10 other combat controllers and pararescuemen, took control of the airfield to receive follow-on aircraft in support of simulated combat and contingency operations.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Photo by Phil Speck

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Jason Rhodes, of the 38th Infantry Division Artillery, competes in the Rifle Excellence in Competition match during The Adjutant General's Match. (Courtesy photo)



Twelve Kentucky Guardsmen earn 'Governor's Twenty'

By Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs

GREENVILLE, Ky. — Nearly sixty Soldiers and Airmen from the Kentucky National Guard competed in The Adjutant General's Match held at the Wendell H. Ford Regional Training Center July 11-13.

The Adjutant General's Match, commonly known as the "TAG Match," is an annual marksmanship competition in the National Guard. The competition tests Guardsmen in realistic, combat-focused shooting scenarios, designed to sharpen weapons proficiency and lethality.

Participants competed in both team and individual events. The top performers are awarded the coveted "Governor's Twenty" tab, a state-level award recognizing the best marksmen in the field.

This year's participants included Soldiers and Airmen from across the state, with the top performers from the Garrison Training Center (GTC), Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ), 123rd Contingency Response Group (CRG), 438th and 940th Military Police Companies, 38th Infantry Division Artillery (DIVARTY) and 101st Main Command Post-Operational Detachment (MCP-OD).

Twelve Soldiers and Airmen earned the Governor's Twenty tab, including: Maj. Albert Galvan, GTC; Lt. Col. Aaron Grimm, JFHQ; Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Walton, GTC; Tech. Sgt. Austin Goldman, 123rd CRG;

Sgt. Cole A. Hubbs, 438th MP CO; Spc. Cameron Thomason, 438th MP CO; Tech. Sgt. Nicholas Miller, 123rd CRG; Staff Sgt. Michael Bradley, 123rd CRG; Maj. Joshua Birchfield, 101st MCP-OD; Sgt. 1st Class William Thum, 101st MCP-OD; Staff Sgt. James Grant, 38th DIVARTY

Sgt. Timothy Gallogly, 940th MP CO

Galvan, Grimm and Walton were the top overall performers, with Galvan and Grimm finishing in the top three for both pistol and rifle events. The top-performing teams were the 438th, 38th DIVARTY, and the 123rd CRG.

Beyond the tab, high scorers move on to compete at national-level matches. Several Soldiers were chosen to represent Kentucky at the Marksmanship Advisory Committee Region III Competition at Fort McClellan, including Walton, Hubbs, Thomason and Gallogly, as well as Staff Sgt. Adam Brown, Sgt. 1st Class Ben Harman, Lt. Luke Gibson and Sgt. 1st Class Edward Cole.

The TAG Match not only challenges Soldiers and Airmen to maintain and refine their marksmanship skills but also provides a unique opportunity to build camaraderie and reinforce the warrior mindset, enhancing the overall readiness and lethality of Kentucky Guardsmen to meet state and federal missions.



(Courtesy photo)



(Courtesy)



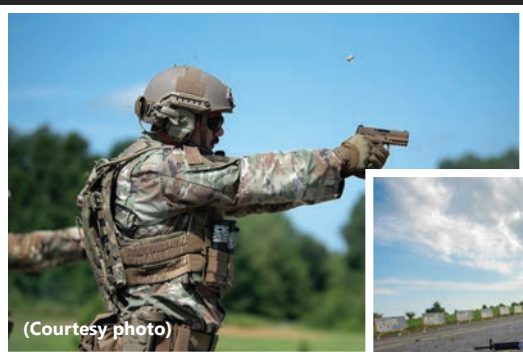
Kentucky Air Guard Marksmanship Team places 3rd in Adjutant General's Match

By Airman 1st Class Angelee Barnett, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

GREENVILLE, Ky. — The Kentucky Air National Guard Marksmanship Team placed third overall in the 2025 Adjutant General's Match at the Wendell H. Ford Regional Training Center here, with three Airmen claiming the "Governor's Twenty" tab for scoring in the top 20 percent of all competitors.

The annual event, held July 11-13, drew nearly 60 competitors from across the Kentucky Army and Air National Guard. It tested Soldiers and Airmen with realistic, combat-focused shooting scenarios designed to sharpen weapons proficiency and lethality.

Tech. Sgt. Michael Bradley of the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, and Tech. Sgts. Nicholas Miller and Austin Goldman of the 123rd Contingency Response Group earned the Governor's Twenty recognition, while Goldman also placed second in the individual rifle category.



(Courtesy photo)



(Courtesy photo)



(photo)



(Courtesy photo)

FROM THE CHAPLAIN LIFE SUPPORT

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By Chaplain (COL) Angie White, State Chaplain
Kentucky Army National Guard

How can one speak with enough gravity about the courage and the faith of Kentucky's National Guard members. There has always been war and there has always been a threat of war.

When I consider what our Soldiers and Airmen do, I often compare them to Abraham. Remember, Abraham is the father, the spiritual leader who unites people of many faiths, Jewish, Christian and Muslim. I would suggest that Kentucky's service members are the sons and daughters of Abraham even beyond shared faith traditions. Kentucky's veterans are the sons and daughters of Abraham because of the great faith required to serve.

Abraham is the archetype, the personification of faith. By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he did not know, obeyed and went. By faith, he left his general peace and safety to go to a foreign land where he knew he would be met with hostility. By faith, Abraham did this to obtain a prosperity and peace not for himself, but for a nation, for people many generations in the future.

By faith, Kentucky's Service members when called to go to foreign lands, obey and go. By faith, they pursue justice for neighbors and justice for strangers. By faith they labor to bring prosperity to people in Kentucky, our nation and to people in foreign lands.

And so, I say again, our courageous Kentucky Soldiers and Airmen are sons and daughters of Abraham because of their great faith. Faith that justice and peace can be secured. Faith that their bodies and minds can achieve the impossible. Faith in the men and women to their right and to their left. And most certainly faith in God.

We must also acknowledge that it is through great faith that your families send you. You and your families are a testimony of great faith indeed.

Angie White
Chaplain



THE LAST WORD

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Kentucky Guard aviation celebrates pioneer pilot and 110th anniversary

By Chief Warrant Officer 2 Catherine Strobel, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs

The Kentucky National Guard (KYNG) honored U.S. Army Capt. Bee Osborne, Kentucky's first Army aviator, and celebrated the 110th anniversary of Army aviation during a ceremony at Boone National Guard Center, Aug. 15, 2025.

Held at the Army Aviation Support Facility, the ceremony highlighted Osborne's accomplishments and contributions to Army aviation, as well as the continued impact of Kentucky Army aviation for both the state, and the nation.

Maj. Gen. Haldane Lamberton, Kentucky's adjutant general, provided keynote remarks for the ceremony.

"We in the Kentucky National Guard and in the Commonwealth of Kentucky have justification to be proud of your relative," said Lamberton. "I'd offer that everything you see here, the majority of folks that you see in uniform today, and well beyond Kentucky — that your relative is a pioneer."

Kentucky State Army Aviation Officer Col. Michael Armstrong, former commander of the 63rd Theater Aviation Brigade (TAB), provided remarks on Osborne's contributions and presented a heritage print in Osborne's honor.

Osborne was a native of Midway, and



joined Kentucky's first signal company in Lexington in 1915. He was the first Kentucky Guardsman to become an Army aviator, and piloted the first flight of the first American-made fighter plane, the DH-4 Liberty, in 1918 during World War I.

"Osborne helped establish aviation as an essential component of Kentucky's National Guard capabilities — laying the foundation for future missions, modern technologies, and the generations of pilots who would follow," said Armstrong. "He elevated standards, raised expectations, and lifted the Kentucky Guard to new heights — literally, and figuratively."

Col. Gabriel Spicer, commander of the 63rd TAB, also provided remarks on the history of KYNG Army aviation, and presented another heritage print depicting two KYNG UH-60A Black Hawk helicopters from Detachment 1, Company B, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment flying over the Tigris River. The 1/189th was the first Kentucky helicopter unit mobilized in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Andy Dickson, Kentucky military history consultant, spoke briefly on behalf of the Kentucky Historical Society on the significance of the historical marker, which was followed by the unveiling of the plaque by members of Osborne's family.

Man o' War C-130 returns to 'Old Kentucky Home' for retirement

By Lt. Col. Dale Greer, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs



A military plane named in honor of a famous thoroughbred racehorse has returned to its old Kentucky home for retirement, concluding more than three decades of historic service.

Man o' War, a C-130H Hercules, arrived at the Kentucky Air National Guard Base here Sept. 22, ending its final flight after traveling millions of miles around the world in support of thousands of missions ranging from combat operations to humanitarian relief.

The cargo aircraft — serial number 91-1231 — began service here in 1992 but has spent the past four years assigned to the Delaware Air Guard. Now, it's being put out to pasture in Louisville as the Air Force continues a transition to newer models.

Man o' War was the 2000th C-130 ever produced, rolling off the assembly line at Lockheed-Martin 33 years ago. It was delivered to the Kentucky Air Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing straight from the factory in Marietta, Georgia — one of a dozen Herks the unit received to complete an upgrade from Vietnam-era C-130B airframes.

Befitting a unit based in Louisville, home of the Kentucky Derby, all 12 aircraft were named after legendary racehorses, said Master Sgt. Matt Killen, a dedicated crew chief here. Tail number 1231 was christened by the late U.S. Sen. Wendell Ford, who was instrumental in securing a Congressional appropriation to purchase the stable of airlifters.

Killen was on hand for the plane's homecoming, marshaling it to its final parking spot on the base flight line. Wing maintainers will soon begin the process of making it ready for static display near operations and maintenance, he said. Engines and other valuable gear will be removed, while livery will be restored to original markings, including Man o' War insignia and a distinctive tail flash indicating the plane's historic status as the 2000th Herk.

Man o' War first arrived in Louisville on May 16, 1992, flown here by a Kentucky aircrew comprised of Lt. Col. David Moreman, Maj. Paul Rhodes, 1st Lt. Kathleen Luken, Tech. Sgt. Jeff Bishop and Staff Sgt. Joe Dawson. During 29 years of service with the wing, 1231 flew 11,040.7 hours around the globe supporting humanitarian missions like hurricane relief in the Caribbean and combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Other missions included Restore Hope, Provide Relief, Provide Promise, Joint Forge and Freedom's Sentinel.

Kentucky and Djibouti celebrate decade-long partnership

By Sgt. Jose Pena, 133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



Key leaders from the Kentucky National Guard (KYNG) and the Djiboutian Armed Forces (FAD) participated in a three-day key leader engagement and information exchange held from July 21–23 across multiple cities in Kentucky.

The gathering marked and celebrated the 10th anniversary of their partnership and ongoing cooperation through the Kentucky National Guard State Partnership Program (KYNG SPP), which aims to deepen strategic relationships between the United States and Djibouti.

“Whenever we come together—with this type of dynamic, this type of relationship—we learn from each other,” said U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Haldane Lamberton, Kentucky’s adjutant general.

Leaders from both delegations emphasized the engagement as a unique forum for strategic dialogue, relationship-building, and sharing high-level perspectives on military operations and civil-military cooperation.

The representatives for Djibouti included senior leader Colonel Amina Mohamed Moussa, Colonel Ali Aden, Colonel Siad Abdilahi Houssein, Captain Eleyeh Mohamed Bogoreh and Madame Zeinab Abdi Ainanche.

The U.S. delegation included Lamberton, U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Bruce Bancroft, assistant adjutant general for Air, and U.S. Army Lt. Col. Daniel Cooper as well as many other civilian agency representatives.

Sign unveiled for Kentucky National Guard Memorial Highway

By Milt Spalding, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs



A section of U.S. Highway 127 in Frankfort has been renamed to honor fallen Kentucky Soldiers and Airmen. A sign bearing the new designation was unveiled during a ceremony at Boone National Guard Center, June 24, 2025.

The roughly one-mile stretch, from Louisville Road to Devil’s Hollow Road, also known as the West Frankfort Connector, has been designated the Kentucky National Guard Memorial Highway.

Retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Dean Stoops served as master of ceremonies, and spoke about the importance of the day and significance of the Kentucky National Guard.

“Today is a significant moment in the proud legacy of the Kentucky National Guard,” said Stoops. “On this day, 233 years ago, Governor Isaac Shelby officially established the Kentucky militia, laying the foundation for what would become the modern Kentucky National Guard. As we commemorate this 233rd anniversary, we also gather to dedicate the Kentucky National Guard Memorial Highway in honor of the brave men and women who have given their lives in the line of duty.”

Special guest speaker for the ceremony, Senator Gex Williams, serving Kentucky’s 20th district, said that the commonwealth played an integral role in the early days of the United States from the Revolutionary War to the War of 1812.

Soldiers awarded Army Sea Duty Ribbon

Courtesy of 1st Battalion, 623d Field Artillery



Twenty-one Soldiers assigned to Kentucky’s 1st Battalion, 623d Field Artillery Regiment (HIMARS), were recently awarded the Army Sea Duty Ribbon (ASDR) for their support to a joint mission alongside the U.S. Navy 5th Fleet during the unit’s deployment to the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of operations during fiscal year 2024.

The ASDR was awarded by the Chief of the Maritime Qualification Division, Headquarters Department of the Army, in recognition of more than 30 consecutive days of sea duty service in a designated combat zone aboard a qualifying Navy vessel. Areas of operation included the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and the Arabian Sea.

This mission was part of the battalion’s larger deployment in support of Operation Spartan Shield and Operation Inherent Resolve. The sea duty assignment highlighted the battalion’s flexibility and ability to integrate into joint maritime operations—a unique achievement for an Army field artillery unit.

Honoring Commitment on Sacred Ground

By Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Crane, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs



Twenty-three Kentucky Army National Guard Soldiers reaffirmed their commitment to serve the Commonwealth during a memorable reenlistment ceremony held on the court of the University of Kentucky men’s basketball program. The event brought together two groups dedicated to excellence, teamwork and discipline—Soldiers who serve Kentucky at home and abroad, and student-athletes who represent the state on one of college basketball’s biggest stages.

Before taking the oath of reenlistment, the Soldiers were welcomed to the Joe Craft Center in Lexington, where they had the opportunity to watch the Wildcats during practice. The behind-the-scenes experience offered a rare look at the preparation and effort that goes into competing at the highest level of collegiate athletics, drawing clear parallels to the training and readiness required of Guard Soldiers.

The moment highlighted a strong sense of mutual respect between the players and the Soldiers. Kentucky men’s basketball head coach Mark Pope expressed his appreciation for the Guard members’ service and presence.

“It’s an absolute honor to have these Soldiers here with us,” Pope said. “What they do for our state and our country is far bigger than basketball, and we’re grateful they chose to share this moment with our program.”



NEW G3 PODCAST

The Kentucky National Guard G3 has officially launched a new podcast, Fix Bayonets. The show highlights the people, missions, and stories that drive readiness across the Kentucky Guard, offering an inside look at how we prepare to serve the Commonwealth and the nation.

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PROMOTIONAL ITEM
*** PROMOTION OPPORTUNITY ***



ARR WHEN REFERRAL
SHIPS TO BASIC TRAINING

2ND LEAD TO ENLISTMENT

KYARNG PROMOTIONAL ITEM
BASED ON INVENTORY
*** PROMOTION OPPORTUNITY ***



3RD LEAD TO ENLISTMENT

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*** PROMOTION OPPORTUNITY ***



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