

Bluegrass Guard

1 August 2025

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

HELPING Ready when Kentucky calls HANDS

**Winter Storm Blair
leaves community
stranded p. 10**

**Air Guardsmen
awarded top honors
p. 15**

AROUND THE GUARD



ON THE COVER:

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Anthony Villier, a pilot with the 63rd Theater Aviation Brigade, flies a UH-60 Black Hawk during the flooding in Eastern Kentucky, Feb. 17, 2025. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jesse Elbouab)



JFHQ - 1st Sgt. Frederick Clough passed off the responsibility of Joint Force Headquarters to incoming first sergeant, Sgt. 1st Class Chazarrae Garcia, during a Change of Responsibility ceremony at the Wellman Army, Oct. 3, 2024. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Crane)



149th MEB - During the Legionnaire Ball, several distinguished awards were presented, recognizing excellence and dedication across various branches and units within the 149th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB) and beyond. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Destini Keene)



BLUEGRASS GUARD

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123rd AW - Five Airmen from the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron inflate a swift-water rescue boat in Frankfort, April 6, 2025, in anticipation of flood-response missions. Four days of rain inundated the Commonwealth, causing rivers to overflow their banks across the state. (Photo by Dale Greer)



138th OFC - Soldiers in the 138th Field Artillery Brigade supported Operation Spartan Shield and Inherent Resolve under the directive of CENTCOM. (Photo by Sgt. Nicholas Ramshaw)



238th RTI - Kentucky's Officer Candidate School Class 67-25 graduated and commissioned Apr. 12, 2025. Prior to their ceremony, they visited Daniel Boone's Grave at sunrise per their tradition. (Courtesy photo)



63rd TAB - Two Black Hawks and one Lakota conducted waterway and high water stream searches in Eastern Kentucky Feb. 17, 2025. Soldiers from the 63rd TAB, the Indiana National Guard, and Airmen from the 123rd Airlift Wing, Kentucky Air National Guard, evacuated nearly 300 Kentuckians stranded due to flooding. (Courtesy photo)



75th TC - Sgt. John Bishop, a gunner for Delta Company, 1-149th Infantry, explains how to operate the ITAS system to Col. Steven Engels at Fort Knox, March 15, 2025. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Crane)



38th DIVARTY - Following the recent flooding, the 38th DIVARTY initiated support for the families affected in the neighboring small town of Boston. Army Capt. Nocomis Miner, accompanied by Staff Sgt. Roe, worked with the volunteers of the American Red Cross to provide assistance for natural disaster relief efforts in the community. (Courtesy photo)

IN THIS EDITION

8 AIR GUARD SUPPORTS SPP

17 LEADER PROFILE: MSGT. JOHNSON

21 FAITHFUL SERVANT: CHAPLAIN SET TO RETIRE

A LETTER FROM THE ADJUTANT GENERAL



In the past five years, the Commonwealth of Kentucky has declared 14 State of Emergencies - a significantly higher number than any comparable period in my more than 28 years with the Kentucky National Guard. In this past Spring alone, the Commonwealth experienced both flooding and tornadoes, resulting in devastating damage and even the loss of life. In each of these and countless other instances, the National Guard was called upon to assist.

While the causes behind these increasingly frequent weather events - climate change, shifting weather patterns, or other unknown factors - remain a subject of study, the men and women of the Kentucky National Guard consistently answer the call when our communities need us most. It is that type of community-focused response by each of our Airmen, Soldiers, and Civilians that make me proud to be part of this organization.

The unique capabilities we provide across the Commonwealth are unmatched. From providing aerial support with our helicopters and high-water transport with our high-axle vehicles, to conducting specialized missions with our search and rescue (SAR), fatality search and recovery teams (FSRT), and swift water boat teams, we stand ready to respond. This, combined with our expertise in planning - and sometimes even our sympathy and empathy in the communities we serve - allows us to make a critical difference in times of need.

I recall a recent flooding event where the family was facing a dire situation, and they found reassurance in the arrival of a team of Guardsmen. "The Guard is here! We'll be alright," a family member reportedly said. Having that sort of impact - bringing a positive outcome and creating a lasting memory - is deeply rewarding. My belief is this sort of volunteerism on the part of our folks and the public reaction is why many new Soldiers and Airmen join the KYNG.

Craig Fugate, a former FEMA Administrator, understands our incident response systems remarkably well, despite never having served in the National Guard himself. His background as a Florida State Emergency Management (EM) director, county EM manager, firefighter, and paramedic provided him with a deep understanding of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) at all levels.

“The Kentucky National Guard has gained a reputation and positive regard for its early, fast, and appropriately equipped arrivals at the scene when these incidents occur.”

He advocated to pre-position assets for an early response, even if there is a redundancy of resources - a principle we strive to implement within the KYNG whenever possible because we know this saves lives.

The Kentucky National Guard has gained a reputation and positive regard for its early, fast, and appropriately equipped arrivals at the scene when these incidents occur. This is largely due to the monitoring, pre-planning, experience, and subsequent response by the folks in our Joint Operations Center (JOC).

While we are not primarily first responders, such as local fire, police, and EM services, our response is often just as essential. Local first responding organizations can get overwhelmed by the scope and scale of an incident, or they may not have the necessary capabilities or manpower that only we can provide to some areas, such as SAR or aviation support.

Our State Active Duty (SAD) missions - responding to the needs of our fellow citizens through disaster relief, security support, and community assistance - highlight the unique role of the National Guard within the U.S. Military. No other branch serves this vital function within their communities. Ultimately, this makes each one of us special to our neighbors and the Commonwealth as a whole.

I'm proud to serve with each one of you. You make up a necessary and best part of our society.

MAJ. GEN. HAL LAMBERTON ★ ★



207th Engineer Construction Company assists after Eastern Kentucky Floods

By Capt. Wesley Watkins, 133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

LESLIE COUNTY, Ky. – The Kentucky Army National Guard’s 207th Engineer Construction Company conducted debris removal and route clearance operations throughout the city of Hyden, in Leslie County, in order to support recovery from the Eastern Kentucky floods that caused significant damage there from Feb. 14-15.

The missions have required engineer equipment to include a 10-ton dump truck, a High Mobility Engineer Excavator (HMEE), a grader, and five qualified horizontal construction engineers. Debris removal missions were ongoing in Leslie, Pike and Martin Counties with 27 Soldiers, three HMEEs, one grader, two dump trucks, and two HMMWV’s being utilized.

The engineers’ mission consisted of clearing major roadways blocked in the aftermath of a mudslide and removing large rocks from culverts to allow water to properly flow through the channels of the stream that was previously stalled. The 207th ECC also completed road grading missions to restore the driving surface of bridges and roadways that were impassable, allowing for better drainage and citizens to reach their homes in a safe manner.

Spc. Charlie Hudson, of Breathitt

County, responded to what it means to him to be a part of recovery operations in eastern Kentucky.

“Honestly, it means the world to me, and it’s one of the biggest reasons why I joined the Guard,” said Hudson. “It means that I could stay in my local community and help the people that I love and know and be able to make a difference.”

Additionally, Sergeants A.J. Stidham, of Perry County, and Shane Wilson, of Leslie County, both with the 207th ECC, echoed Hudson’s sentiments in



doing all they can possibly do to help their own because of how special the people of Eastern Kentucky are.

The Soldiers emphasized that they supported them, not only as Kentucky Guardsmen but also as first responders in the area. They said they feel like it’s their responsibility and honor to help in any way they possibly can.

The Kentucky National Guard and emergency management officials have worked closely over the past several years in keeping a strong relationship to facilitate the best possible response in emergency situations while safeguarding lives and restoring the community back to normal as quickly as possible.

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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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

Don’t miss an issue

All change of address requests should be made by the unit clerk using IPPSA for all current Army or Air National Guardsmen. The Bluegrass Guard is mailed out via alert roster addresses at the unit level.

Army Retiree address changes should be made through Personnel Services Branch at 502-607-1497 or email ng.ky.kyarnng.list.ky-RaDiO@army.mil

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~~ACFT~~

As the Army makes changes to its Soldiers fitness test, the questions might be adding up.

What changes? What stays the same? What do I need to know?

The new Army Fitness Test (AFT), which replaces the Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT), is a

FIVE EVENT ASSESSMENT

designed to ensure combat readiness. The AFT focuses on functional fitness and removes the ball throw from the test. The focus will be on these five events.

1. Three-repetition maximum deadlift
2. Hand-release push-up
3. Sprint-drag-carry
4. Plank
5. Two-mile run

Will there be combat specific standards?

For Soldiers in 21 combat military occupational specialties (MOSs), there are specific, neutral standards.

When will this be implemented?

The Army is phasing in the AFT with the new standards for combat MOSs taking effect on January 1, 2026, for active duty and June 1, 2026, for Reserve and National Guard.

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MORE INFORMATION





GUARD ENGINEERS CONTINUE FLOOD RESPONSE IN EASTERN KENTUCKY

By Andy Dickson, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs

HINDMAN, Ky. — Engineer Soldiers from the Kentucky Army National Guard continued road work construction on county roads in Hindman and Hyden, Ky., April 1, 2025. Soldiers from Detachment 1, 149th Engineer Vertical Construction Company, 149th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, based out of Olive Hill, worked to repair culverts, driveways and road shoulders in both Knott and Leslie Counties in conjunction with the Department of Transportation.

In Hindman, a team of four Soldiers repaired driveway culverts that had completely washed away due to flooding. According to the engineers, the county helps maintain those driveways to a standard to keep water flowing and prevent more damage along the streams.

Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Brock, a non-commissioned officer with the 299th Chemical company out of Burlington, is the liaison officer between Knott County and the Kentucky National Guard. Brock was in charge of directing the engineers on where their work was needed the most.

“The assessment we got when I arrived down here, according to the road department, was that the road department is responsible for 918 roads in total,” said Brock. “That covers 274.3 miles, and the surveys showed that 60 to 63 percent of the roads have been impacted.”

“Many of those roads were impassable due to water still covering the roads, trees and debris blocking them, or were completely washed away. Also, there were 10 major bridges that were blocked when we first got down here.”

The roads being worked on that day were smaller, one-lane roads in the bottom of a holler, or valley low-lands in a completely rural area.

“But the people that live along these roads have been extremely happy to see Army vehicles, especially the dump trucks, skid steers, and backhoes working to rebuild their ways out,” said Sgt. 1st Class Ron Clere.

“They come out offering us drinks and hot food. It’s incredible to see their support.”



Command Sgt. Maj. Jesse Withers, State Command Sergeant Major, Staff Sgt. Micheal Holtgraver, and Spc. Devon Middleton tie a culvert pipe on a county road in Hindman, Ky. Apr. 1, 2025.



U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Brian Wertzler and Sgt. 1st Class Ron Clere discuss repairs to critically damaged county roads in Hindman, Ky. Apr. 1, 2025.

SCAN QR CODE FOR FULL STORY



HISTORIC FLOODING CANCELS THUNDER OVER LOUISVILLE AIR SHOW AND FIREWORKS



River Road and the boat dock at 4th Street in Louisville, Ky., are under about four feet of water April 5, 2025. This year’s Thunder Over Louisville air show, scheduled for April 12, was cancelled due to flooding on the banks of the Ohio River.



River Road and the boat dock at 4th Street in Louisville, Ky., are under about four feet of water April 5, 2025.

By Dole Greer, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Flooding along the banks of the Ohio River has led officials here to cancel this year’s Thunder Over Louisville air show and fireworks display, originally scheduled for April 12 downtown.

Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg made the announcement today during a 3 p.m. press conference.

Aerial demonstrations featuring the Kentucky Air National Guard’s C-130J Super Hercules aircraft and pararescuemen from the Guard’s 123rd Special Tactics Squadron were slated as key air show events.

Matt Gibson, president and CEO of Thunder sponsor Kentucky Derby Festival, said organizers were left with no option after Louisville had received more than 5 inches of rain since Thursday. Even more is forecast through Sunday, according to the National Weather Service.

“Safety is always the top priority of the Kentucky Derby Festival and Thunder over Louisville,” Gibson said. “This weather event is like nothing we’ve seen — a Top 10 historic flooding event. While there is nothing we’d like to do more than bring everybody together on Saturday to watch one of the best air shows in the country and, arguably, the best fireworks show in the nation, we realized that, at this time, it’s logistically impossible to do what we would do, and to do it safely.”

The Ohio River is currently at flood stage and expected to rise at least 10 more feet next week, Greenberg said, leading to inaccessible riverbanks and fast currents clogged with large amounts of dangerous debris. City officials have spent the past two days installing flood walls downtown, and many roads are now impassable.

Gibson noted that viewing areas along the Ohio will still be strewn with mud and debris next Saturday, and fast-flowing water would make it too dangerous for fireworks crews to access the river barges used as launch platforms during the show.

“Believe me when I say that we are just as disappointed as anyone,” Gibson added. “It is absolutely a labor of love for our staff, the board of directors, all of our sponsors and partners and those who help us make this happen. Our focus needs to be on the community and all of those affected by the weather. There are a lot of people in need right now.”

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear declared a state of emergency Wednesday in anticipation of a series of storm fronts that have spawned multiple tornadoes and major flooding across the Commonwealth.

Members of the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Security Forces Squadron demonstrate vehicle interdiction techniques at Camp San Luis Obispo, Calif., May 17, 2024, as part of an information exchange between 27 Kentucky Guard Airmen and six Ecuadorian special forces Airmen.



KENTUCKY AIR GUARD SECURITY FORCES CONDUCT INFORMATION EXCHANGE WITH ECUADORIAN PARTNERS

By Tech. Sgt. Chloe Ochs, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

CAMP SAN LUIS OBISPO, Calif. – Twenty-seven Airmen from the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Security Forces Squadron teamed with six Ecuadorian Air Force special forces here recently for a week-long information exchange supporting domestic law enforcement operations.

"Our days were focused on responding to scenarios involving civil unrest in an urban setting," said Master Sgt. Neil Goodlin, combat arms section chief for the 123rd. "The goal was to enhance how we could assist civilian police to control a large group of people."

The Ecuadorians were included for the first time under the auspices of the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program, which pairs foreign military allies with National Guard units across the United States for mutual exchange of information and cooperation over a broad range of civil and military affairs. The

Kentucky Guard has been partnered with Ecuador since 1996.

The event, held May 16-22, covered close-quarters combat tactics, room-clearing procedures, active shooter and hostage-rescue exercises, hand-to-hand combatives, and simulated traffic stops for vehicle interdiction.

"This is the first time our security forces have done any kind of information exchange with the Ecuadorians," Goodlin said. "It's a



Lt. Col. Joshua Elwell, right, commander of the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Security Forces Squadron, greets his counterpart from the Ecuadorian Air Force Special Operations Command during an information exchange event at Camp San Luis Obispo, Calif., May 17, 2024.



Members of the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Security Forces Squadron demonstrate riot-control techniques at Camp San Luis Obispo, Calif., May 16, 2024, as part of an information exchange between 27 Kentucky Guard Airmen and six Ecuadorian special forces Airmen.

country as well as the Ecuadorian Special Operations Command," Correa said. "For me, and for the others on my team here, it's very difficult to come to a different country and not be able to understand everything perfectly. But we are glad to be here, and when we get back to Ecuador, we will continue our efforts to use new approaches and tactics."

"I think this has been a big milestone and a huge step forward," Goodlin said of the exchange.

Staff Sgt. James May, a security forces specialist with the 123rd, said the experience offered valuable perspective.

"This information exchange with the Ecuadorians is a different kind of experience for me, but it's also very interesting and exciting," May explained. "This is my first time interacting with them, and it has truly been a pleasure."

great opportunity for both of us, and it's definitely strengthening bonds."

Sgt. Darwin Anchundia Correa, a combat and tactics instructor with the Ecuadorian Special Operations Command, recognized the challenges and benefits of working with the 123rd in the United States.

"I am really glad to be here representing my



Members of the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Security Forces Squadron pose for a photo with a team from the Ecuadorian Air Force Special Operations Command as part of an information exchange event between the two groups at Camp San Luis Obispo, Calif., May 20, 2024.

SCAN QR CODE FOR FULL STORY



KENTUCKY MUSICIANS PERFORM AT NATIONAL-LEVEL WORKSHOP

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

*"I first saw this display when I attended
this workshop as a college student in 2007.
Being able to be a part of that same display
was a dream come true for me."*

-Sgt. Cody Williams

U.S. Army Sgt. Cody Williams and Spc. Steven Betts-Jimenez perform with the 202nd Army Band's Tuba-Euphonium Quartet at the Tuba-Euphonium Workshop, hosted by The U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," Jan. 30, 2025. Military musicians from across the country attend the workshop each year for world-class performances, lectures, and masterclasses. (Photo courtesy of Alexander Rogge)

FRANKFORT, Ky.— Kentucky musicians performed at the Tuba-Euphonium Workshop, hosted by the U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," at Fort Myer, Virginia, Jan. 29 to Feb. 1.

Four Soldiers from the 202nd Army Band, 63rd Theater Aviation Brigade, were invited to perform at the national-level workshop. The five-day workshop consisted of multiple concerts, recitals, lectures and masterclasses by world-renowned musicians and clinicians. The team was featured as a guest artist during the Tuba-Euphonium Workshop's military recital, as well as invited to perform with the Armed Forces Tuba-Euphonium Ensemble at the culmination of the event. Outside of their performances, they attended other concerts, recitals, and masterclasses, further developing their technical skills on their assigned instrument, and enhancing their ability to train for and execute musical

missions at a high level.

U.S. Army Spc. Steven Betts-Jimenez, Sgt. Elliott Nickeson, Sgt. Cody Williams, and Staff Sgt. Grant Browder made up the highly specialized team of musicians who participated in this exceptionally rare training opportunity.

"These service members overcame adversity in preparing music with little rehearsal time and pushed themselves as musicians to perform at higher levels than they may have thought possible," said Williams, team leader of the quartet.

Getting invited to and preparing for a musical mission at this level can be extremely demanding, especially given the part-time nature, limited training time, and high operational tempo of Army National Guard bands.

"This event was proof that the National Guard band program has just as many



(Photo courtesy of Alexander Rogge)

talented musicians as the active-duty side and has the ability to perform on the same stages and in the same venues as our full-time counterparts," said Nickeson.

Each of the workshop participants were invited back to the stage to join The U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," at the culmination of the event for the finale.

"I first saw this display when I attended this workshop as a college student in 2007," said Williams. "Being able to be a part of that same display was a dream come true for me."



Tuba-Euphonium Workshop participants perform at the culmination of the event in the Armed Forces Tuba-Euphonium Ensemble, Feb. 1, 2025. (Photo courtesy of Sgt. 1st Class Rachel Minto)

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FOR FULL
STORY





WINTER BLAST BRINGS OUT GUARD TO THE COMMUNITY

By Staff Sgt. Matthew Damon, 133rd Public Affairs Detachment



FRANKFORT, Ky. - Soldiers from the Kentucky Army National Guard came to the aid of fellow Kentuckians across the Commonwealth after Winter Storm Blair left ice and snow along its path of disruption Jan. 5-6.

In a display of interagency operability, Soldiers and their counterparts from Kentucky Emergency Management and Kentucky State Police provided transportation to essential medical personnel and first responders who would otherwise have not been able to safely travel to their critical and essentials jobs.

As a proven and effective means of transportation in extreme conditions, Soldiers made use of their assigned High Mobility Multi-Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV) in a supportive way.

"I didn't think I would have any issues getting to work since I have a four-wheel drive SUV," said Sherrie Judson, a licensed practical nurse at Bradford Square nursing home. "I never thought I would need to ride in a humvee to make it to my job."

Soldiers not only transported personnel, but they were also responsible for the delivery of critical medications to areas where the storm hit hardest.

Anita Lawson, a pharmacy buyer at Frankfort Regional Medical Center, also relied on the Guard for transportation to and from the hospital.

"I went outside, and my truck was iced over," stated Lawson. "I wasn't able to even open the door to see if it would start. I am so happy that you all are great and able to provide this

much needed help."

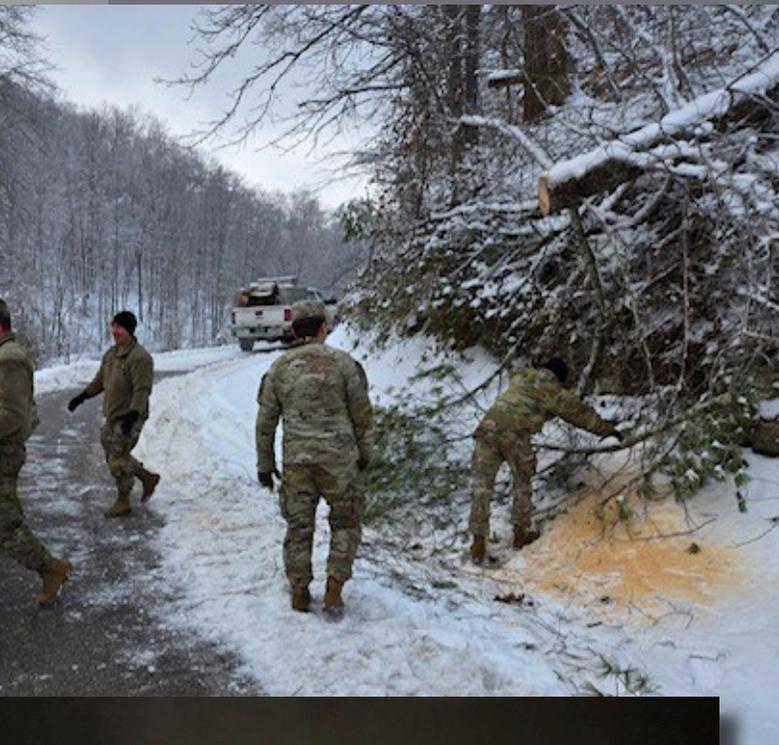
This encounter led Lawson and Staff Sgt. Aaron Cook, a petroleum supply specialist with Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion (Assault), 147th Aviation Regiment, 63rd Theater Aviation Brigade, to discover a connection that goes back years before the storm.

Through pleasant conversation, the two discovered that they lived relatively close to each other on opposite ends of the same street; although their connection goes back further than that. They lived near each other several years before, in fact they lived on the same street at one time.

"You really realize how small the world is when you have these conversations," said Cook. "As we were pulling up to her house, I mentioned that I lived down the street. From there we talked about the location and how it was nicer than living right in town. We then realized we were right near each other, and I mentioned the street I grew up on; coming to find out that we were neighbors then, too."

Transportation of personnel was not the only mission that the Kentucky Army National Guard was able to fill. The delivery of aid in the form of essential supplies, like food and water, and critical medications was also tasked to the Soldiers.

As of January 9, 2025, about 120 Guardsmen were activated, conducting approximately 46 missions; 11 road clearing missions and 35 transportation mission. Through this, Guardsmen logged more than 5,500 miles throughout 10 counties.



Soldiers from the Kentucky Army National Guard's 63rd Theater Aviation Brigade respond to requests to transport critical and essential employees who could not make it to their jobs near Frankfort, Ky., Jan. 6, 2025.



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KENTUCKY PROVIDES HOPE TO

NORTH SLOPE

By Tech. Sgt. Chloe Ochs, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Ak. – Thirty-six Airmen from the Kentucky Air National Guard conducted **Operation Arctic Haven** here Aug. 30 to Sept. 6, airlifting 39 tons of residential building supplies to the North Slope of Alaska to support local communities in need.

The mission, which enables the construction of affordable housing in the Arctic Circle, was made possible through two Defense Department programs, Innovative Readiness Training and Mission Readiness Airlift. Both efforts give service members real-world deployment experience while offering lasting benefits to civilian populations, explained Maj. Nick Dobson, a pilot in the Kentucky Air Guard's 165th Airlift Squadron and Arctic Haven's mission commander.

"For the duration of this mission, we're facilitating training for ground personnel and aircrews, while still meeting community needs in rural Alaska," Dobson said.

The operation helps address a housing shortage on the North Slope, where transportation expenses often account for 60 percent of the cost of a new home, Dobson said.

The Tagiugmiullu Nunamiullu Housing Authority currently has a backlog of more than 400 single-family homes that can't be built affordably.

Mission planning started in November 2023. Now, in this final step, aircrews from the 165th flew the cargo aboard a Kentucky Air Guard C-130J Super Hercules aircraft from Elmendorf-Richardson to Wainwright and Nuiqsut, Alaska, where Kentucky aerial porters offloaded the supplies.

Throughout the week-long mission, the Kentucky team was augmented by six Airmen from the Rhode Island Air National Guard, who assisted with personnel and cargo transport.

"Rhode Island is here doing the same thing the Kentucky Air National Guard is doing from the airlift perspective," said Dobson. "We're both here under the MRA program umbrella. They're also flying the exact same sorties we are. They're bringing the residential housing supplies from Elmendorf to our planned destination of Wainwright."

Dobson, who also serves as assistant director of operations for the 165th Airlift Squadron, explained that Alaska's unpredictable climate necessitated regular interaction with National Weather Service meteorologists to formulate a plan that allowed them to transport cargo under harsh conditions.

One unique scheme used during cargo offload at both locations

Members of the 123rd Airlift Wing upload cargo to a Kentucky Air National Guard C-130J Super Hercules aircraft in support of Operation Arctic Haven at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Sept. 2, 2024. Thirty-six wing Airmen supported the Innovative Readiness Training mission, which airlifted 39 short tons of residential building supplies to two remote villages in northern Alaska. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Chloe Ochs)



KENTUCKY AIR
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is called Combat Offload Method B. It's typically employed only in austere locations where forklifts or specialized cargo-handling equipment are unavailable.

Using this method, Kentucky Airmen carefully rolled palletized cargo off the aircraft and onto steel barrels staged on the flight line. The technique requires precision, patience and communication between crew members, giving aerial porters enhanced expeditionary skills.

Azara Mohammadi, tribal liaison for the Alaska National Guard, highlighted the benefits of the IRT and MRA programs, not only for Alaskan communities, but also for the networking and training opportunities they provide to Guard members.

"The Innovative Readiness Training program is a win-win," Mohammadi said. "The community gets what they need, and usually that's infrastructure in rural Alaska. Housing is a major need here, and a lot of that has to do with transportation logistics in Alaska.

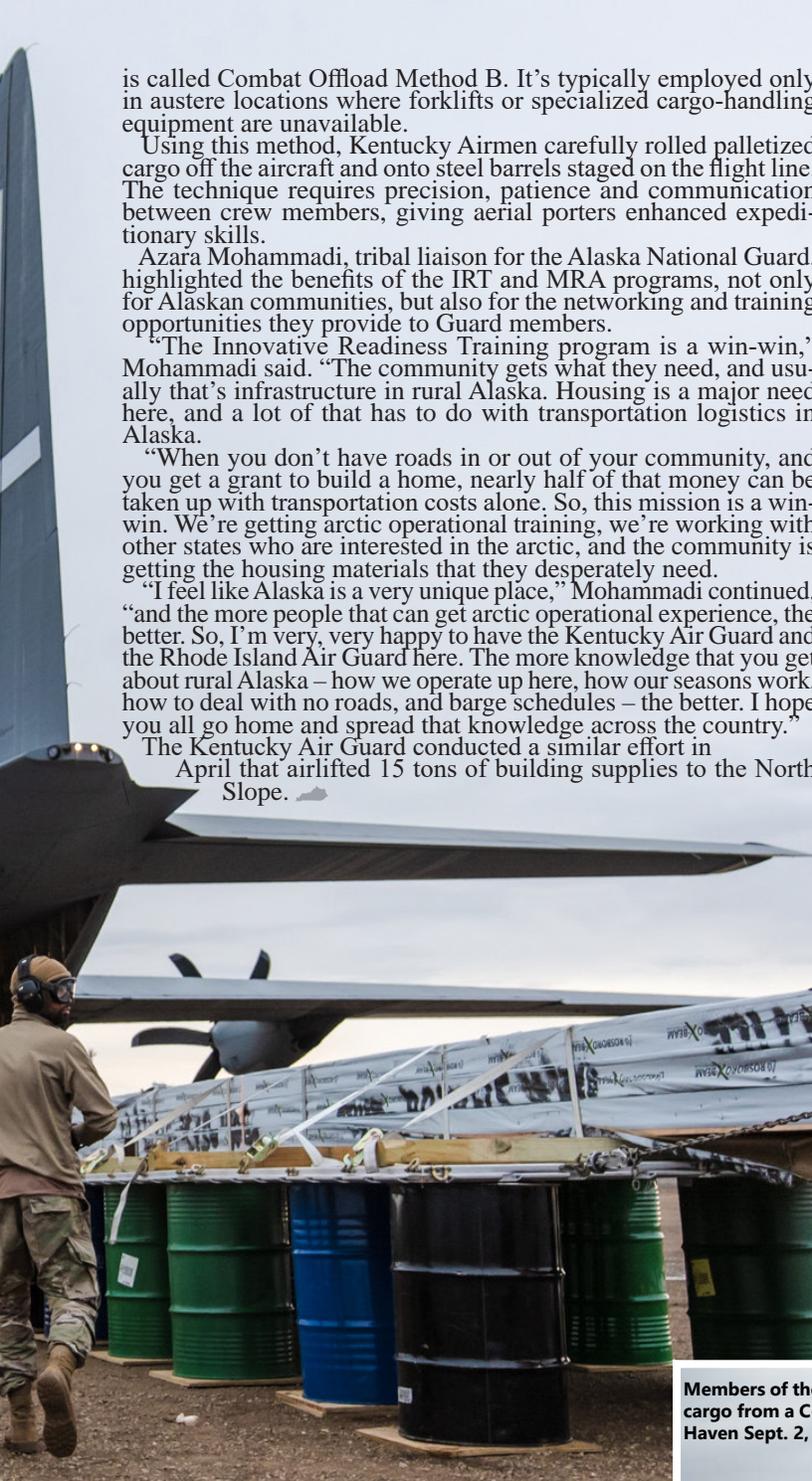
"When you don't have roads in or out of your community, and you get a grant to build a home, nearly half of that money can be taken up with transportation costs alone. So, this mission is a win-win. We're getting arctic operational training, we're working with other states who are interested in the arctic, and the community is getting the housing materials that they desperately need.

"I feel like Alaska is a very unique place," Mohammadi continued, "and the more people that can get arctic operational experience, the better. So, I'm very, very happy to have the Kentucky Air Guard and the Rhode Island Air Guard here. The more knowledge that you get about rural Alaska – how we operate up here, how our seasons work, how to deal with no roads, and barge schedules – the better. I hope you all go home and spread that knowledge across the country."

The Kentucky Air Guard conducted a similar effort in April that airlifted 15 tons of building supplies to the North Slope.



Master Sgt. Jason Newby, a supply specialist with the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing, assists with a combat offload of cargo from a C-130J Super Hercules aircraft in Wainwright, Alaska, as part of Operation Arctic Haven Sept. 2, 2024.



Members of the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing conduct a combat offload of cargo from a C-130J Super Hercules aircraft in Wainwright, Alaska, as part of Operation Arctic Haven Sept. 2, 2024. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. Chloe Ochs)

**GUARD HELPS
THE ARCTIC
SLOPE WITH AIRLIFT
AS PART
OF
ARCTIC HAVEN**





BANCROFT TAKES COMMAND OF KENTUCKY AIR NATIONAL GUARD

By Dale Greer, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – Brig. Gen. Bruce Bancroft took command of the Kentucky Air National Guard during a ceremony at the 123rd Airlift Wing here March 14, pledging to continue a rich heritage of excellence and teamwork as the state’s new assistant adjutant general for Air.

“I’m incredibly humbled and thankful to serve the Soldiers and Airmen of the Kentucky National Guard,” Bancroft said, speaking to an audience of friends, family and Airmen in the Fuel Cell Hangar at the Kentucky Air National Guard Base.

“There is no place I would rather be. I’m extremely proud of the accomplishments of the Airmen of the 123rd Airlift Wing, and I could not ask for a better group of professionals representing Kentucky’s Air Force.

“October will mark my 30th year in uniform, and this will be my sixth command,” Bancroft continued. “While priorities may change and duties of the office may differ, my beliefs have remained constant throughout my career. I believe that, apart from service to our families, serving in the defense of our nation is the highest calling. I believe that everything executes at the squadron level. I believe in building teams and surrounding myself with people who

are better than I am. I believe the senior NCO is the greatest achievement the military has ever created. And I believe, at the end of the day, when the fog of war and the rush of our daily responsibilities subside, it has always been about the Soldier and the Airman.

“Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to serve.”

Bancroft, who was promoted to brigadier general during a ceremony earlier in the day, replaces Brig. Gen. David Mounkes as assistant adjutant general for Air. Mounkes has served in that role since 2022 and is retiring.

U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Haldane

Lamberton, adjutant general for Kentucky, called Bancroft a superior leader and said the state was blessed to have his expertise.

“Working with quality folks such as General Bancroft makes it a pleasure for me to be in the Kentucky National Guard,” said Lamberton, the ceremony’s officiant.

“I’m honored to be able to continue to work with you, and I look forward to benefiting from your knowledge, experience and continued service.”

Bancroft, a former commander of Kentucky’s 123rd Airlift Wing, first joined the active-duty Air Force after graduating from the University of Louisville in 1996. He completed Officer Training School at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, and went on to attend Air Command and Staff College before completing Air War College in 2016.



Photo by Dale Greer



SCAN QR CODE FOR FULL STORY



BILLINGS, TROJANOWSKI, & WOODARD

NAMED TOP KENTUCKY GUARD AIRMEN

By Senior Master Sgt. Vicky Spesard, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – Airman 1st Class Annaliese Billings, Tech. Sgt. Philip Trojanowski and Master Sgt. Kevin Woodard were honored as the Kentucky Air National Guard’s 2024 Airmen of the Year during the Airman’s Gala held at Woodhaven Country Club March 15.

“These Airmen have demonstrated that they are the best of the best, and their unwavering commitment to our mission is an inspiration to us all,” said Chief Master Sergeant Steve Best, command chief master sergeant of the 123rd Airlift Wing. “Two thousand twenty-four was another busy year for our Wing, and these amazing individuals were able to showcase their skills and talents on the largest scale.”

Billings, representing the Airman category, is a journeyman public affairs specialist for the 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs Office. In 2024, she produced three news stories that were featured on the National Guard Bureau website, one of which also was spotlighted by the Director of the Air National Guard. The coverage gained further national exposure for the unit and kept the Kentucky Air Guard at the forefront of the public conscience.

Billings was also coined and recognized for excellence by Kelly McKeague, director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, for her superior coverage of a 123rd Airlift Wing member’s successful repatriation of the remains of two Marine aviators lost in combat over Vietnam. The agency’s visit to the base fostered a strengthened relationship of interoperability between wing leadership and the DPMAA.

Additionally, Billings traveled to the north slope of Alaska in support of the 123rd Logistics Readiness Squadron and the 165th Airlift Squadron’s mission to provide construction materials for affordable housing in the Arctic Circle.

The accomplished Airman is a student at Bellarmine University and graduated cum laude in May, having completed 18 credits in accelerated communications courses and allowing her to graduate with her original class despite missing two semesters for military training.

“In a short amount of time, Airman Billings has proven to be an exceptional and highly motivated troop who covered a variety of important off-station and home-station missions with enthusiasm,” said Lt. Col. Allison Stephens, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs chief. “She’s always in learning mode, and looking to share what she’s learned with others, both through her personal and military experiences.”

Trojanowski, representing the Non-Commissioned Officer category, is a combat control craftsman assigned to the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron. In 2024, he deployed in support of Africa Command’s Operation Juniper Shield as the sole air traffic controller for a Joint

Special Operations team. He expertly managed 22 C-130, 156 rotary wing and 96 light tactical fixed-wing aircraft sorties, as well as the transportation of 253,000 pounds of cargo and 155 units of blood, showcasing exceptional situational awareness and operational precision.

Additionally, Trojanowski delivered a comprehensive 15-day course on light and crew-served machine guns, along with five courses on small unit tactics. His expert instruction significantly mitigated risk-to-force for partner personnel during counter terror operations, enhancing their operational effectiveness.

As a knowledge expert for the STS, Trojanowski partnered with 123rd Airlift Wing recruiters to conduct more than 200 hours of engagement with 53 Air Force recruiting candidates. He organized four comprehensive recruiting training events that included 315 hours of candidate assessments, resulting in over a dozen successful enlistments into the Air National Guard.

“Tech. Sgt. Trojanowski is a phenomenal combat controller and NCO,” said Maj. Bryan Hunt, commander of the 123rd STS. “He voluntarily deployed for six months to Africa this past year and did amazing work there. He is an up-and-coming leader within the STS, and we are proud he is being recognized as the Kentucky Air National Guard’s outstanding NCO of the year.”

Woodard, who represents the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer category, is a base services manager with the 123rd Force Support Squadron and the non-commissioned officer in charge of the Kentucky Air National Guard’s Fatality Search and Recovery Team, which he led during Task Force Pisgah following Hurricane Helene in 2024.

During that mission, his team handled 79 casualty cases and processed 48 remains, covering more than 500 miles of mountainous terrain. His partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation was key to the successful identification of 21 bodies, giving closure to grieving Appalachian families.

These actions culminated in his selection as the National Guard Bureau’s subject matter expert on fatality recovery and spurred invitations for him to speak to congressional representatives about FSRT procedures and the state mission of the Air National Guard.

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FOR FULL STORY





KENTUCKY GUARD HOLDS FIRST LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE OF ITS KIND

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

FRANKFORT, Ky. - More than 400 Kentucky Army National Guard staff sergeants and promotable sergeants gathered at Kentucky State University for a two-day leader development event Feb. 8-9.

The training focus was on the future of the Guard and the crucial role non-commissioned officers (NCOs) will play in building and training strong teams.

This event brought Staff Sergeants (E-6s) together from across the state to listen to impactful speakers, including State Command Sgt. Maj. Jesse Withers and several other senior NCOs. They shared their thoughts on how the Guard's success will depend on the leadership and teamwork of these squad and section leaders. The goal was to make sure that the NCOs prepared with the right tools and mindset to lead their Soldiers effectively.

The first day of the conference kicked off with a welcome from Withers, who aimed to inspire and motivate everyone in the room. "The strength of the Kentucky Army National Guard lies in its NCOs," he said. "They are the ones who will guide your Soldiers through the challenges ahead, and their leadership is what keeps the

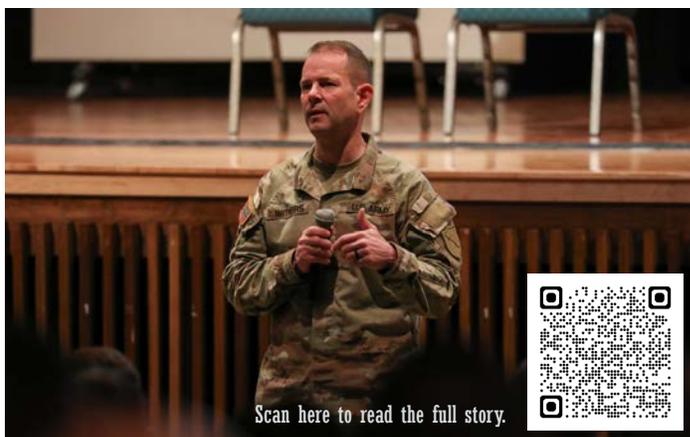
Guard strong."

Throughout the event, the focus remained on leadership and understanding the vision for the Kentucky Army National Guard. 1st Sgt. Joseph Rhodes helped organize the event and explained that it was all about giving leaders the tools they need to succeed.

"We want to empower our squad and section leaders," he said. "They are the center of gravity for our organization. If they are strong and motivated, the entire Guard will be stronger."

Rhodes also said that being able to gather the staff sergeants from all warfighting functions in one event allowed us as an organization to determine training shortfalls and work towards providing our Soldiers the best training possible – a point that was echoed by Command Sgt. Maj. Naarah Stallard, from the 198th Military Police Company.

"Bringing over 400 NCOs from across the state and planning this event presented some challenges," she said. "I believe everyone left with a better understanding of how important it is to have leader development sessions. From KSU personnel, in and out of state briefers, and support personnel, they all contributed to the success of the first ever SSG leadership engagement."



Scan here to read the full story.

LEADERSHIP PROFILE:

JOHNSON NAMED KENTUCKY AIR GUARD'S FIRST SERGEANT OF THE YEAR

By Senior Master Sgt. Vicky Spesard, 123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – Master Sgt. Jamarrel Johnson was selected as the Kentucky Air National Guard's 2024 First Sergeant of the Year and was honored at the Airman's Gala March 15 at Woodhaven Country Club.

Johnson is first sergeant for the 123rd Maintenance Squadron here. His responsibilities include leading a team of back shops to include aerospace ground equipment, aircraft pneumatics and hydraulics.

He also advises maintenance squadron commanders on the readiness, health and overall morale of their Airmen, helping ensuring quality of life for Airmen and their families to maintain a mission-ready force.

Over the past year, Johnson deployed to fulfill a critical role at Maintenance University, leading 591 personnel for 12 days through 219 training events and more than 3,000 hours of instruction to bolster aircraft maintenance proficiency.

Johnson also facilitated the deployment of 56 maintainers to Germany for Operation Silver Arrow, which logged 409 flying hours transporting 400 tons of cargo, 372 passengers and 56 critical patients across the area of operations.

On the home front, Johnson organized a base-wide food drive for Dare to Care that contributed to the provision of more than 22 million meals. He also organized various community events, including a car show that raised \$1,691 for the WHAS Crusade for Children, a community cookout and a Fourth of July celebration for families.

"His exceptional leadership, commitment to excellence and selfless dedication to his team and community make him an outstanding role model and a deserving selection as our First Sergeant of the Year,"

-Lt. Col. James D. Campbell



"Master Sgt. Johnson's exceptional leadership, commitment to excellence and selfless dedication to his team and community make him an outstanding role model and a deserving selection as our First Sergeant of the Year," said Lt. Col. James D. Campbell, commander of the 123rd Maintenance Squadron. "His tireless efforts to foster resilience, develop his Airmen and give back to the community have had a profound impact on our unit's mission readiness and overall well-being."

"We recognize not only his exceptional leadership and achievements but also his embodiment of the Air Force's core values: integrity, service and excellence," Campbell continued. "He is a shining example of what it means to be a true leader and a credit to our unit and the Air Force as a whole. I am honored to serve alongside him and look forward to seeing the continued impact he will have on our team and community."



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE
MULTI-ROLE BRIDGE COMPANY

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Soldiers with the 206th Engineer Battalion conduct health and welfare checks along the flooded areas around Owensboro, Kentucky, Apr. 10, 2025, after heavy rains fell in the area over several days.

KY. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD ARTILLERY ALIGNING WITH ACTIVE-DUTY CORPS



By Andy Dickson, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs

LEXINGTON, Ky.- In a first-ever effort to provide modernization to the U.S. Army's fires warfighting function, a National Guard artillery brigade has been chosen to realign with an active-duty corps.

On Nov. 27, 2024, Lt. Gen. Jonathan Stubbs, director of the Army National Guard, formally notified Kentucky's adjutant general, Maj. Gen. Haldane Lamberton, that the 138th Field Artillery Brigade (FAB), Kentucky Army National Guard, is uniquely chosen as the first Operational Fires Command (OFC).

The new mission will bring active and reserve components together as the 138th converts to become command and control of lethal and non-lethal fires for the U.S. Army's V Corps, with headquarters at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and forward headquarters in Poznan, Poland.

According to Army Col. Robbie Andersen, commander of the 138th, his unit was chosen for this alignment based on readiness and experience.

"We just came off a combat deployment where we achieved a high level of readiness. We were primed and ready as the best choice for showing what an Operational Fires Command should look like," said Andersen. "We are also fortunate that V Corps is located on Fort Knox here in Kentucky."

Andersen is leading the conversion and will validate the unit's modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) as recommended by the U.S. Army Fires Center of Excellence (FCOE).

Andersen takes on this mission alongside the dual-hatted, FCOE deputy commanding general and Kentucky deputy adjutant general, Brig. Gen. Brian Wertzler.

Wertzler, also a former commander of the 138th, said this conversion is something that has not been seen in the reserve forces.

"The force structure within the KYARNG will allow Soldiers and leaders within the KYARNG field artillery community to learn, grow, and employ fires from the battery, battalion, division, and corps echelons," Wertzler said. "Kentucky will be the only state that has this capability across the 54 within Compo Two."

The FCOE, located at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, provides guidance and oversight for this conversion, however, the 138th will provide bottom-up refinement by working closely alongside V Corps counterparts to ensure the MTOE is manned and equipped effectively in support of corps fires.

As an OFC, the 138th will teach themselves and the Army how to be a "one-stop-shop" for the corps commanding general and the command and control for FAB commanders.

This will give the corps commander an advantage over the previous Army structure that places the FAB commander in that dual-role mission as brigade commander and corps fire support coordinator.

Having a dedicated OFC provides high command for the field artillery commanders while synchronizing non-lethal fires to support operational and tactical needs.

Andersen and the 138th have two-years to convert the FAB into the OFC.

"Like every transformation, we have to have lines of effort," said Andersen. "Our three lines of effort are training, manning, and equipment. So, most of our time will be making a bigger investment in our NCOs, warrant officers, and officers."

Andersen is planning the next two years of training to be oriented to support the V Corps' warfighter exercise in 2026.

"We are going to see what equipment is going to be the most relevant in each role," Andersen said. "After each training evolution, we will sit down with FCOE and go line-by-line to see what we need or was not relevant, which will be based on what we feel is what right looks like."

The 138th will be doing a one-for-one conversion to the OFC. However, its subordinate battalions--the 2/138th Field Artillery and the 1/623rd Field Artillery--will be reassigned to the 38th Division Artillery. This will allow the new OFC to focus on supporting V Corps requirements and the OFC mission of commanding aligned field artillery brigades. 🇺🇸



A Faithful Servant:

Chaplain William Draper prepares for retirement after decades of service

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

After more than four decades of dedicated service, Chaplain (Col.) William Draper is set to retire from the Kentucky National Guard in June 2025, leaving behind a legacy marked by compassion, commitment and spiritual leadership.

Draper, a Kentucky native born in Cynthiana, began his military journey with the Army Reserve in 1982 as an armorer (92B) where he served until 1989. He continued his military service by joining the Kentucky National Guard soon after as a human resources specialist.

According to Draper, his decision to leave school after the 11th grade to join the Army Reserve was driven by both necessity and a lack of motivation.

"I joined the military partly to get away from home and partly to help my mom," he said.

As the son of a single mother raising seven children, Draper saw an opportunity to support his family.

"I wasn't very motivated in school," he added. "So I saw a way to help and I took it."

Never intending to make the military a full-time career, Draper admits he is still surprised at how far he has come.

"I thought joining the Army would allow me to get some money to help out at home," he said. "I never thought I'd stay in, but I enjoyed it. It gave me structure, brought me maturity and connected me to a lot of people."

That connection with people would eventually become the foundation of his success as a chaplain.

When he made the decision to become an Army chaplain in the late 1990s, Draper brought with him a passion for ministry and a deep desire to serve those who serve. Over the years, he became a steady and reassuring presence for Soldiers and Airmen alike, offering guidance through deployments, friendships, and the moments in between.

Draper said his transition from administrative assistant to chaplain was the result of a personal crisis that led him to seek guidance from then-State Chaplain Roger Dill. That guidance opened the door for Draper to pursue a commission as a chaplain. He completed his seminary education at Asbury Theological Seminary in 2004 and was appointed as a chaplain in May of that year.



FROM THE CHAPLAIN

LIFE SUPPORT

State Chaplain
Chaplain (Col.) Angie White
KYARNG
angela.r.white12.mil@army.mil

State Support Chaplain
Chaplain (Maj.) Eric Honeycutt
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By Chaplain (Maj.) Greg Granderson,
38th Division Artillery

DEDICATION & DISCIPLINE

On June 24th, 2024, the Kentucky National Guard celebrated its 232nd birthday. As I sat amongst fellow Soldiers and Airmen in Louisville, Kentucky, at the Air Wing to commemorate this momentous occasion, looking back on two centuries of remarkable history; it dawned on me that the Kentucky Guard in late 2023 was awarded the Association of The United States Army Trophy for the best National Guard Command. Like a fine wine, the Kentucky Guard gets better with time!

From a humble but ambitious militia during the Civil War era, to the tenacious titan of state and national support and protection it is today, our old Kentucky home exemplifies excellence and what it means to be the best. But what does that mean exactly? And what does it take to be the best? It starts with comprehending our Army Values: Duty, Loyalty, Honor, Respect, Selfless Service, Integrity, and Personal Courage. Once these values are understood and absorbed within our mind, there are two ingredients to embody them within our character DNA, and they are personal dedication and discipline. These are what it will take to communicate these values consistently. It's one thing to know them, but it is something else entirely to demonstrate these values.

In addition, the Kentucky Guard as an organization communicates these values at the highest level. This means, is there are a substantial number of individuals that have allowed these values to permeate throughout their lives, which takes tremendous dedication and discipline. Because it starts with us, it is important to encourage each other in remembering to execute these values to the best of our abilities. This makes us the best, and is a consistent reminder to find every opportunity to illustrate our values. The old saying, "practice makes perfect" resonates here.

We live in a culture where those values will be challenged, and the pressure to compromise is seemingly overwhelming. But this is the time to reach out to resources that will help us get back or stay on track. The Kentucky Chaplain Corps, stands at the ready to meet you right where you are, encouraging the spiritual dedication and discipline it takes for you to continue to be your absolute best.

Thank you to all our Kentucky Guard Soldiers and Airmen for your dedicated service and commitment to excellence. Congratulations on being the best and 'Always a Leader'!

CHAPLAIN TATE SAYS...



"THEREFORE ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER AND BUILD ONE ANOTHER UP, JUST AS YOU ARE DOING."

GCG

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

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THE LAST WORD

TO READ THE FULL VERSION OF THESE STORIES, SCAN QR CODE OR GO TO KY.NG.MIL



Kentucky Guard breaks ground on its first machine gun range for enhanced readiness

Staff Report

Leaders from the Kentucky Guard, along with state and federal representatives, were on hand for the groundbreaking of the new multi-purpose machine gun range at the Wendell H. Ford Regional Training Center in Greenville, Dec. 13, 2024.

The new range will have five firing lanes for Soldiers to utilize. Three lanes will be capable of firing up to 1,500 meters and two lanes at up to 800 meters. The range will enable units to train and qualify on light and heavy machine guns, as well as long-range rifles, grenade launcher, and sniper systems. This new training capability will increase unit training efficiency by reducing reliance on outside agencies while enhancing overall combat power and lethality.

According to retired U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Steven King, chief of staff, Kentucky Army National Guard, this project is “two decades in the making.” The project has been up for approval on the Future Years Defense Plan six times but was removed each time for one reason or another. It was originally approved in 2009 but removed in 2015 when Army regulations changed. With the help of federal and state partners, the KYNG secured \$9 million in funding to convert the existing land and infrastructure at WHFRTC for



developing the new training range.

Kentucky Guard units have struggled in previous years to compete with Active Army and Reserve units for training space and time at locations like Fort Knox, Fort Campbell and Camp Atterbury. The Soldiers may be part-time, but readiness is a full-time mission for the Commonwealth. The new range built and controlled by the Kentucky Guard gives leaders more flexibility to train at our own facilities, minimize travel time and maximize training time.

“As a new battalion commander, having adequate training areas to use was one of the challenges that we faced,” said King. “You have to arrange for meals and mess halls. We had to overcome a lot of obstacles to actually get to the training sites to get our folks trained. So, this is a big day for us!”



Leadership group visits Boone National Guard Center

By Milt Spalding, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs

Members of the Leadership Jessamine County class visited Boone National Guard Center, Thursday, Feb. 13.

The group, consisting of Jessamine County business leaders learned about the Kentucky National Guard and the resources available through the organization. Leadership Jessamine County is made up of business and community leaders. The group gathers each month and delves into themed topics such as education, communications and state government.

“We want to expose our class members to what all goes on in state government,” said Cathy Weaver, class organizer. “That’s not just at the Capitol, in the General Assembly, with our representatives. I think this shows them that state government is much wider than a session in the spring at the Capitol.”

Various resources and capabilities were outlined to the group, including the Kentucky National Guard’s response to the tornadoes in Western Kentucky in 2021, and flooding in Eastern Kentucky in 2022.

Army Lt. Col. Brian Stafford, Kentucky DOMS Plans and Operations officer, says that having groups like Leadership Jessamine County is important, as it allows an opportunity to tell the Kentucky National Guard story to a cross section of the community.

“It’s a good audience to communicate what the Guard is about, what we do, and how we work with other branches of state government,” said Stafford.

The KYNG frequently goes out into the communities of the commonwealth to participate in a variety of events allowing Soldiers to interact with the public. However, by bringing citizens onto the base they are afforded the opportunity to see a little more of the of the behind-the-scenes aspect of the Guard and how the organization is postured to support the communities of the commonwealth along with other local, state and federal agencies.

Following their visit to the Boone National Guard Center, the group headed to the Capitol building in downtown for a tour.





Gold Star families at Survivors' Day at the Races

By Staff Sgt. Jessica Elbouab, 133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

The Kentucky National Guard, in partnership with Kentucky Survivor Outreach Services, hosted the 14th annual Survivor's Day at the Races at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Nov. 3, 2024.

The event provided a day of camaraderie and remembrance, offering Gold Star families a space to gather, reflect, and celebrate together.

Before the day's first official bugle call, retired Chief Master Sgt. Mark Grant, a familiar face in the Survivor Outreach Services program, welcomed top leaders from the National Guard Bureau, the Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio National Guard, the Woody Williams Foundation, the U.S. General Services Administration, and event sponsors like Humana Military. In his opening remarks, Grant emphasized the event's legacy and its role in ensuring that fallen heroes are "Never Forgotten, Never Alone."

As part of the ceremony, Matthew Paynter with Humana Military, reaffirmed his organization's commitment to supporting the Survivor's Day program, symbolizing unity within the survivor community.

This year's event welcomed over 250 Gold Star families. His remarks highlighted the collaboration among military and community organizations, including the Woody Williams Foundation, represented by CEO Dr. Mark Harris.

Kentucky National Guard supports Bardstown Christmas Parade



By Milt Spalding, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers with Charlie Battery, 2nd Battalion, 138th Field Artillery Brigade, Kentucky Army National Guard, participated in the 2024 Bardstown Christmas Parade, Dec. 5. The Soldiers provided color guard and supported local police during the parade.

More than 100 other entries participated in the annual holiday parade, including cadets from the Bluegrass Challenge Academy (BCA) at Fort Knox.

A highlight of the event was Guardsmen meeting Ethan, the parade's canine grand marshal and star of the upcoming film, "Ethan Almighty." The film follows Ethan's story of survival after neglect, abandonment, and near death when found at the doorsteps of a Louisville animal shelter. His life's story prompted a change in state law, making animal abuse a felony for convicted offenders.

A California-based film crew recorded video of the parade for inclusion in the upcoming feature.

Wilma Sorrell, chair of the Bardstown Christmas Parade Committee, said that the Kentucky National Guard support of the event was indispensable and key to the success of their event.

"I truly want to send our thanks and appreciation to the Kentucky National Guard unit who provided so much assistance for the 2024 Bardstown Kiwanis Parade," said Sorrell. "The crowd was down due to the extreme cold temperatures we experienced, but these amazing men and women monitored our parade and kept the crowds from closing in at the stage area and kept them safely off the streets. Their support was invaluable."



Kentucky's Military Kids Honored at Kids' Day at the Capitol

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

The Kentucky State Capitol was filled with the sounds of over 150 children, whose parents serve in the military, during Military Kids Day Feb. 25, 2025.

Kids from around the commonwealth representing all military branches from the Kentucky National Guard, Fort Knox, and Fort Campbell came to learn, explore, and have fun. One of the things they learned during their visit was that the Capitol building doesn't belong to the governor—it belongs to the people of Kentucky.

They toured the Capitol, saw military vehicles up close, and tried out flight simulators from the Aviation Museum of Kentucky in Lexington. Some of the kids even had a chance to meet Kentucky's Lt. Governor, Jacqueline Coleman.

McCoy Harvey, the son of Col. John Harvey of the Kentucky Army National

Guard, was excited to be at the event.

"I'm having a whole lot of fun," he said. "I'm learning new things. It's great! I'm really thankful I came today. I've been here before, but I learned a lot of new things today."

While touring the Capitol, the children visited the Supreme Court chamber, the House chamber, and the Senate chamber. In the Senate chamber, Karen Lamberton, wife of Maj. Gen. Hal Lamberton, the adjutant general of Kentucky, spoke to the group about the importance of their visit.

"We're here to celebrate you and show you behind the scenes of how lawmakers make laws that affect us all," she said.



Kentucky National Guard Soldier commended for heroic rescue following storm-related crash

Story by Milt Spalding, Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs, Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Crane, 75th Troop Command

A routine trip home took a dramatic turn for a Kentucky National Guard Soldier, Mar. 15, 2025.

Spc. Brandon Pollard was headed to his home in Lexington following drill at the Bowman Field Readiness Center in Louisville when he came across an overturned vehicle on I-64 near Simpsonville in Shelby County. The accident had happened during heavy rainfall and storms.

Pollard discovered the vehicle off the roadway in a trench with the driver trapped inside. He pried the door open, removed the airbag and, along with another bystander, helped the victim from the wreckage.

Pollard said his only focus in the moment was providing help.

"I honestly didn't even think about anything. I just literally thought about helping and getting to her," said Pollard. "That was the only thing that was on my mind."

U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Benzie Timberlake praised Pollard for his actions and courage that day, and says that it demonstrates the degree of dedication of Kentucky Guardsmen.

"Adversity does not build character, it reveals it," said Timberlake. "Spc. Pollard's actions show what Soldiers can do when placed in difficult situation. He showcased unparalleled courage, resilience, and selflessness that truly highlights our Kentucky National Guard's extraordinary capabilities." Because of his actions, Pollard was recognized with the awarding and presentation of an Army Challenge Coin and a Brigade Commander/Command Sergeant Major Coin.



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Public Affairs, Bluegrass Guard
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Frankfort, KY 40601

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