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2023: a year in review

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Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

From deployments to groundbreakings, 2023 was a busy year for the Connecticut National Guard. It would be impossible to list all the incredible achievements our Guardsmen have accomplished this year, but we're going to do our best to break down some of the biggest events from the past year.

January

The Army and Air Guard, as well as the state militias, kicked off the new year hosting Gov. Ned Lamont's second inauguration at the Governor William A. O'Neill Armory in Hartford. We also hosted the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame class of 2022 induction ceremony in Hartford. This group of veterans included former Connecticut Adjutant General Thaddeus Martin and recognized the service members for their sustained and significant contributions to the military and veteran communities.

February

The second month saw our first deployment of the year as C Co., 3-126 and C Co. 3-142 Aviation Regiments mobilized to deploy to the Central Command area of responsibility in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, the global coalition's military operation against ISIS. Two of our Soldiers, Capt. Scott Stone and Sgt. 1st Class Chris Vincent participated in the Edelweiss Raid mountain warfare race in Austria. We also started The Stand Guard Podcast, a show dedicated to discussing the incredible stories of our service members and our nation's military history.



U.S. Army Sgt. Kevin O'Connell and his working dog Misha, walk across the tarmac of Bradley Air National Guard Base in East Granby, Conn. to investigate a C-130H aircraft as part of a training exercise Aug. 29, 2023. This joint training was designed to help handlers and their K-9 step outside their comfort zone, train in an unfamiliar environment, and build rapport with their sister service.

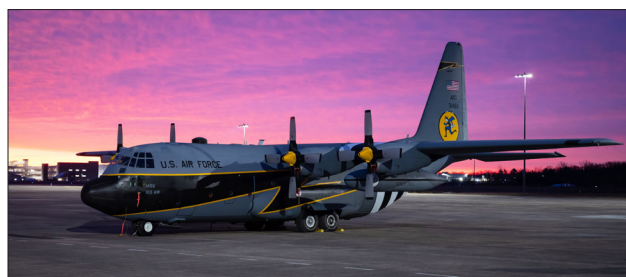
March

The 103rd Airlift Wing saw a change of leadership as Col. Stephen R. Gwinn relinquished command to Col. Neil R. Byrne III. We also had our first all-female color guard

from the 1109th Theater Aviation Support Maintenance Group participate in the Big East Women's Basketball

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A C-130H aircraft, painted to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 118th Airlift Squadron, Flying Yankees, sits on the flight line at sunrise, January 18, 2023 at Bradley Air National Guard Base, Conn. Members of the 103rd Maintenance Group, Connecticut Air National Guard painted the aircraft. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Tamara R. Dabney)

Flying Yankees hit 100

Curt Jans
Contributor

EAST GRANBY, Conn. — “Tactical airlift has been around a very long time. It is about specific capabilities, and we know what the C-130 does in terms of airland, airdrop and formation flying,” said Col Neal Byrne, Commander 103rd Air Wing. “However, you’re not going to execute your training in an uncontested environment and expect to be successful on today’s battlefield.”

To build tactics and capabilities at the next level, the training team at the 103rd AW includes staff from each aircrew position: pilot, navigator, flight engineer and loadmaster. For local training, the team builds scenarios simulating a contested environment and adds ‘frustrations’ to missions to challenge aircrew. Greater mission and threat complexity training is conducted as part of an integrated mission sortie at regional electronic ranges with sophisticated, threat replication capability. The top-tiers of flying training include multinational exercises and especially large-formation, fully integrated exercises on instrumented ranges, such as the Nevada Test and Training Range.

Last year, the Flying Yankees deployed to Europe for three weeks as part of Swift Response 22, an annual exercise supporting NATO defense strategy, deterrence, and interoperability. At Swift Response, the unit conducted airlift and airdrop missions with European allies as part of airfield seizures and air assault/airborne operations. In addition, the Wing and Squadron have participated in Joint Forcible Entry exercises at Nellis Air Force Base the last four years to leverage the best of tactical airlift training on a simulated contested battlefield.

ACE and SFO

“In light of near-peer threats, we have to rethink the way we employ the airplane,”

said Col Byrne. “Agile Combat Employment (ACE) and specialized fueling operations (SFO) – things this airplane has always been capable of – are now necessary. Our fuel is a game changer in a combat environment, and we have the capacity to carry a lot of fuel to a location along with cargo.”

Air Force doctrine describes ACE as a “proactive and reactive operational scheme of maneuver executed within threat timelines to increase resiliency and survivability while generating combat power.” The ACE doctrine shifts operations from major operating bases that are static and easily targeted to a network of smaller, scattered locations. The objective is to complicate adversary planning and execution through dispersal of assets to multiple locations that are defensible, sustainable, and quickly relocatable. Aerial refueling tankers, like Air Force MC-130s and Marine Corps KC-130s, have conducted ground-based refueling for decades, but specialized fueling operations is a recent application to airlift squadrons. In a scenario where airfields are targeted and unusable, the Flying Yankees can operate from remote, austere sites supporting fighter aircraft dispersion and forward operating bases, one of the primary objectives of ACE doctrine. The C-130 can “bring everything you need to set up operations anywhere – munitions, fuel, support equipment, vehicles,” said Col Byrne.

In 2021, a team from the 103rd OG developed, tested and standardized wet-wing defuel for the C-130H. Wet-wing defuel is the process by which a C-130, with engines running, transfers fuel directly from the onboard fuel tanks to an intermediate fuel storage system such as a storage bladder, storage tank or R-11 fuel truck. The local team on the ground subsequently dispenses the fuel to aircraft and support equipment. Within a year, the process was validated and employed in combat operations during a deployment to the Africa Command (AFRICOM) area of responsibility. The 103rd OG are now the subject matter experts actively training other C-130H units.

FLYING YANKEES HIT 100

The Forward Air Refueling Point (FARP) process is the next phase of specialized fueling operations. FARP provides a direct aircraft-to-aircraft refueling capability from Air Mobility Command C-130s to other aircraft, bypassing the intermediate fuel storage system with wet-wing defuel. While the FARP equipment is the same as HC-130J Rescue and MC-130J Special Operations aircraft, the application is different with airlift C-130s using the single-point refueling panel instead of rapid ground refueling from the wing mounted refueling pods. The 103rd OG was identified by Air Mobility Command as the Major Command C-130H FARP lead, and as such, collaborated with the Air Force Special Operations Command to develop the H-model FARP training syllabus and operations manual.

As part of ACE tactics, the wing has crafted procedures to launch the C-130H in a quick response, expedited manner. Sometimes called launch-to-survive, aircrew use an expedited process and flush checklist to get off the ground quickly in a contested environment or upon notification that the aircraft or location is being targeted. It's about escape and evade: "You can never get comfortable with the technology our adversaries have. Our tacticians want to use every capability of the C-130, and they are volunteering to create those procedures and tactical developments that make the C-130 a lethal and valuable contributor," said Col Byrne.

Real-world execution

The most recent Wing deployment, in 2022, was to support the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, currently a rotational assignment for Air National Guard Airlift Wings. The primary mission was support and resupply of US and coalition ground forces in the Horn of Africa through daily sorties – mostly airland missions with sporadic air-drops. During the air-land missions to forward operating bases, the training and process for ACE and SFO became part of normal operations. Capt Jennifer Petrow, executive officer for the Operations Group and a C-130H pilot, described a mission during the deployment. After offloading supplies "...we moved into position to offload fuel - completely blacked-out and operating on NVG's." As they were offloading fuel and watching the onboard fuel levels drop, "a helicopter popped over the base perimeter, lands 100ft away, refuels and took off within minutes," said Petrow. "It was really rewarding to see the mission play out in front of us, and we continued to give them more and more fuel on subsequent sorties."

As part of the deployment, the Wing maintained an alert mission to transport the East Africa Response Force (EARF) – wheels up within an hour if needed. The EARF is a rapid deployment force, manned by a rotation of US Army divisions, which responds to contingency and security operations including protection of US personnel and diplomatic facilities, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and personnel evacuation and recovery.

During the deployment, the Flying Yankees flew over 100 combat missions, moved 2.1 million lbs (952,544 kg) of cargo and delivered 150,000lbs (68,038 kg) of fuel to combat outposts in austere and often contested areas of Somalia and Kenya through the wet-wing defuel process developed at the Wing. Col Byrne recalled: "There was a time during the deployment when overland fuel shipments were being disrupted by the enemy. To keep the recovery task force and the ISR airplanes flying, we were able to wet-wing defuel into bladders and keep them flying" until ground shipment routes were secured. Real-world validation of

wet-wing defuel tactics and procedures in a combat environment.

Into the next century

The 103rd AW has adapted to the new Air Force Force Generation (AFFORGEN) model which dictates a two-year deployment rotation cycle based upon four, six-month phases: prepare, certify, ready/available [to deploy] and reset. The Wing is currently in the prepare phase focused on aircrew qualifications, currencies, proficiency training and specialized training in advance of Wing level graded exercises and certification prior to an expected ready/available cycle in 2024. The dates and location of a potential deployment have yet to be determined, but it will likely be the final Flying Yankees deployment in the C-130H.

On September 14, 2023, the Air Force announced selection of the 103rd Airlift Wing and three additional Airlift Wings as the preferred locations to receive C-130J Super Hercules to replace aging C-130Hs. The final decision will not come until 2025 pending a required environmental impact analysis at each location, so the actual J-model conversion

process will not start for at least two years and could be six years away depending upon the order in which the four Airlift Wings convert to the C-130J.

New and more capable airframes are certainly welcomed, but they also come with significant transition training requirements for pilots, loadmasters and maintainers. Additionally, the loss of roles such as Navigator and Flight Engineer will lead to retirements, departures and conversions to new jobs for some. Col Byrne knows the Wing is up to the challenge: "There is no preordained pedigree that ensures success in combat aviation. A lot of us that make serving our nation a career find real meaning in this type of work, which is why we grow to love so much the diversity and resilience of the Flying Yankees who expertly execute tactical airlift – anytime, anywhere!"

HERITAGE HERK

While in Asia during World War II, the 118th TRS adopted the black lightning insignia created by Lt Phil Dickey. First painted along the engine cowl and fuselage of P-51s, the black lightning has graced multiple airframes as part of the squadron's heritage including the A-10 Thunderbolt II and the 100th anniversary C-130H Hercules.

In February 2023, the 103rd AW debuted C-130H, serial 93-1456, in a commemorative paint scheme celebrating the centenary of the 118th AS. The design illustrates wing and squadron heritage through multiple features. The yellow and black lightning bolt down both sides of the fuselage and at the top of the tail recalls the paint scheme first applied to aircraft flown by the 118th TRS in World War II. The 118th AS emblem on the tail recalls American colonial history. In 1687, England's King James II revoked the right of self governance from the colonies, and his representative arrived in Connecticut to reclaim the original parchment charter which granted autonomy to the Connecticut colony. Depicted on the emblem is Capt Joseph Wadsworth, an officer in the colonial militia, who spirited the original document to its hiding place in a large oak tree which became known as the Charter Oak. At the top of the emblem are three letters in Morse code, F-E-A, which stand for 'Fidelis Et Alertus', Latin for 'faithful and alert', the code of the Connecticut Air National Guard. The black and white D-day invasion stripes on the wings and fuselage represent the

parent 103rd AW, a descendent of the famous 324th Fighter Group which fought in the European theater during World War Two.

FLYING YANKEES HISTORY

The 118th Observation Squadron (OS) was activated on November 1, 1923, as one of 29 National Guard observation squadrons established the 1920's. Initially equipped with surplus Curtiss JN-4 'Jennies', the unit flew observation missions in support of the US Army.

In February 1941, the squadron was ordered to active service anticipating increasing American involvement in the war underway in Europe. Deployed to the southeast United States, the 118th OS conducted antisubmarine and defensive patrols along the Atlantic coast until 1943 when the squadron was redesignated the 118th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (TRS) for combat missions. Deployed to the China-Burma-India theater of operations, the squadron joined the famous 'Flying Tigers' of the 23d Fighter Group and flew the P-40 Warhawk and the P-51 Mustang from bases in China and India. After the war, the squadron became the 118th Fighter Squadron and was assigned to the 103rd Fighter Group of the Connecticut National Guard at Bradley Field.

From the 1950s, the 118th spent nearly three decades in interceptor or tactical fighter roles while flying the F-84D Thunderjet, F-94B Starfire, F-86H Sabre, F-100 Super Sabre and F-102 Delta Daggers. In 1979, the unit received new A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft and was redesignated the 118th Fighter Squadron in 1992. Flying the A-10 for 29 years, the Base Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC) of 2005 recommended distribution of the Wing's A-10s to the 104th Fighter Wing at nearby Barnes Air National Guard Station in 2008. After the loss of the A-10s, the Wing and Squadron redesignated to the 103rd Airlift Wing (AW) and 118th Airlift Squadron (AS) and retained a flying mission through transition to C-21A Learjets for executive airlift and counter narcotics missions. The Learjets proved a critical bridge assignment during the tumultuous BRAC years and ultimately led to the Wing transitioning again in 2013 to the C-130H Hercules which are still employed today.

Editor's note: this article first appeared in the January 2024 issue of Combat Aircraft and was reprinted with permission.

Review

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Tournament and hosted a Women's leadership panel with Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz. Our first partnership with the Special Olympics of the year saw us handing out medals at their event at Powder Ridge. And following his participation in the Edelweiss Raid, Sgt. 1st Class Vincent also served on the United States' team for the Guerrier Nordique in Valcartier, Quebec.

April

April saw the start of the 103rd Airlift Wing's centennial celebrations with a 5k road race at Bradley Air National Guard Base in East Granby. We also hosted a suicide prevention meeting with the American Legion's National Commander to discuss how we can help lower veteran and service member suicide rates. And we hosted our first ever 92G cookoff challenge at Camp Nett, a friendly competition among all the Connecticut National Guard's cook and culinary specialists.

May

This was a busy month for our veterans which started with Brig. Gen. (ret.) Ron Welch taking the helm of the state's department of veteran's affairs and then we helped send off a group of veterans to Washington D.C. as part of Honor Flight Connecticut. The Foot Guard participated in the annual Powder House Day in New Haven. We saw a change in state senior enlisted adviser as Command Sgt. Maj. Roger Sicard retired and was replaced by Command Sgt. Maj. Arthur Fredericks. Camp Nett hosted an Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage event and Cyber Yankee, the only DoD cyber exercise that focuses on protecting critical infrastructure and key resources outside the DoD network. Staff Sgt. Conrad Sheldon won the regional Best Warrior competition in Maine. And the 246th and 256th Engineer Detachments responded to real-world fires at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania.

June

In June we welcomed President Joe Biden to Connecticut as Air Force One landed at Bradley Air National Guard Base at Bradley Airport. We hosted a 2.5 mile Color Fun Run at Camp Nett to celebrate pride month. And Staff Sgt. John Cogshall broke the 600-yard record at the 62nd Annual Inter-Service Rifle Championship.

July

2023 was a difficult year for recruiting across the Department of Defense. In response, the state of Connecticut launched the CT JEEP program which offers a \$500 recruiting bonus to any service member who refers a friend and they enlist in the Connecticut Army or Air National Guard. Staff Sgt. Conrad Sheldon competed in the National Best Warrior Competition in Alaska. The 103rd Civil Engineer Squadron helped build houses for disabled Cherokee veterans in Oklahoma. The National Guard celebrated the 30-year anniversary of the State Partnership Program. And we provided a color guard and honors for former Gov. Lowell Weicker's funeral, he passed away on June 28th and was buried at State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown.



Governor Ned Lamont, his wife Annie, and Maj. Gen. Fran Evon, adjutant general for the Connecticut National Guard, are welcomed by a formation of Airmen and Soldiers as they step out of the Governor William A. O'Neill armory in Hartford following the state's 89th Gubernatorial inauguration hosted here, Jan. 4, 2023.

August

Bravo Company, 2-104th Aviation Regiment kicked off August by participating in Rhode Island's Leap Fest, and annual exercise which develops the command and control of Army Aviation and Airborne qualified personnel to deliver a maneuver force on the tactical objective with precision and in a timely manner to conduct combat operations. The 250th Engineer Company bridged the Black River at Fort Drum and D Co., 1-102nd Infantry Regiment crossed the bridge as part of the Connecticut National Guard's "super AT". We hosted the Tactical Rescue Challenge, a medical challenge for military, police, and rescue forces from around the country, at Camp Hartell. Chief Warrant Officer 2 Emily Frost earned the Rising Eagle Award, an annual recognition for the achievements and dedicated service of Army National Guard Warrant Officers who have demonstrated outstanding leadership, technical skills, and professionalism in their services to country and community. And we helped celebrate our SPP partner Uruguay's Independence Day in Washington D.C.

September

We presented the first-ever Military Funeral Honors ribbons to our Army and Air Force Funeral Honors Teams. Our continued support of the Special Olympics saw us helping participants rappel off Mohegan Sun tower as part of the Over the Top program. We hosted suicide prevention awareness 5K runs at Bradley Air National Guard Base and Camp Nett. The 103rd Airlift Wing was selected for modernization to replace their C-130H with the C-130J aircraft. We hosted the Purple Resolve course, a resilience program specially tailored for the National Guard community, at our annual leadership symposium at Camp Nett. And Master Sgt. Jilian Leca became the first woman to complete the Connecticut State Police Motor School.

October

Bradley Air National Guard Base broke ground on its new Aerospace Support Equipment Vehicle Maintenance Composite Facility which will provide the space and

equipment necessary for the Wing to provide exceptional air support to our state, nation, and the world. We helped the state police collect and destroy more than 9,000 pounds of drugs on their DEA Drug Take Back Day. And we built and delivered a Sgt. Stubby display for the National Guard Bureau's new heritage room at Fort Myer.

November

Our funeral honors team helped the Department of Veterans Affairs inter the unclaimed remains of six Connecticut veterans at the state veterans cemetery in Middletown. The Connecticut National Guard Service Member and Support Center hosted an Operation Homefront holiday meal distribution event to give away food for Thanksgiving to those in need. Captain Robin Felder received the Gen. Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award for her efforts in recruiting. Medics from the 142nd Medical Company completed medical skills training at Hartford Hospital's Center for Education, Simulation, and Innovation (CESI). And the 103rd Air Control Squadron became the first Air National Guard unit to complete Mission Systems Operator (SMO) conversion training.

December

Brigadier Gen. Karen Berry, the Connecticut National Guard's former assistant adjutant general and director of staff, retired after more than 36 years of service. Camp Nett opened a 24-hour Grab and Go mart. We celebrated the National Guard's 387th birthday at the state capitol. And we hosted the 22nd annual Operation E.L.F. (Embracing Lonely Families) for deployed service members and their families with Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz.

With 2023 in the books, we're incredibly proud and humble of everything our Soldiers, Airmen, and civilian employees have done over the past year. We don't know what the future has in store, but we can rest assured the Connecticut National Guard will be always ready, always there to tackle every challenge and continue to shine as members of our community.



Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief, National Guard Bureau, and Lt. Gen. Vesa Virtanen, chief of Defense Command, Finnish Defense Forces, meet with Col. Mika Rytönen, commander of Finland's South-Eastern Border Guard District, near Vaalimaa, Finland, Oct. 13, 2023. Hokanson visited Finland to enhance bilateral ties between the National Guard and Finland.

Guard Caps 2023 Supporting Defense Strategy, Domestic Missions

Master Sgt. Erich Smith
National Guard Bureau

ARLINGTON, Va. — As December draws to a close, the National Guard wraps up a dynamic year, leaving an indelible mark supporting the warfighter and protecting communities. From fortifying a world-leading state partnership program to pioneering advancements in cyber and space operations, the nation's oldest military organization shined as a trailblazer in 2023.

The Air National Guard's key role in Air Defender 2023 was a notable example. The German-led multinational exercise showcased NATO's defensive capabilities and marked the largest air force redeployment exercise since NATO's inception.

"Moving 100 aircraft over the ocean in a matter of four flying days is a monumental feat," said Air Force Maj. Brandyn Dietman, with the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing, was one of several units providing an "air bridge" to Germany, where the exercise primarily occurred.

The notable efforts of more than 25,000 Guard members deployed during the year reflect what Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, cites as a testament to the Guard's inherent value as a member of the Joint Force and integral part of U.S. military might.

"As a combat reserve of the Army and the Air Force, our Soldiers and Airmen are built to fight our nation's wars," said Hokanson. "It's our primary mission — our reason for existing."

He also said that the Guard is equally adept at responding to natural disasters and emergencies on the home front, citing nearly 400 domestic operation responses in 2023.

Hokanson underlined the interconnectedness of Guard federal and state missions, stat-

ing, "It is the manning, training and equipping for combat that allows us also to serve our communities in their time of need."

One of those communities was Lahaina, Maui, where the Guard conducted aerial water drops, search and recovery efforts, and assisted local law enforcement during destructive wildfires.

Hawaii Army National Guard Soldier Spc. Kaimana McBrayer emphasized the personal connection, being embedded in the affected community.

"It's unreal, especially as a Hawaiian, because we have a special connection to the land and the people — so this hits close to home," said McBrayer, whose unit had just completed a warfare exercise before being mobilized to respond to the disaster.

Earlier in the year, Senior Enlisted Advisor Tony Whitehead, the National Guard's top enlisted leader, witnessed firsthand the operational readiness of Hawaii Guard members.

"Some of us are built for training, and others are built for execution," he said. "When we find out that we can do both, we find out what our Soldiers and Airmen are made of. I am proud to see the Guardsmen of the Hawaii National Guard can do both."

The Guard also responded to Rhode Island, Louisiana, and Wisconsin wildfires.

Additionally, Guard members played a crucial role in responding to Hurricane Idalia on Florida's Gulf Coast, activating about 6,500 Guard members.

Several air assets were sent to the Sunshine State from Kentucky, South Carolina and Tennessee Guard units. Some Georgia, North and South Carolina Guard members were also on duty, focusing on search and rescue, clearing roads of debris, and assessing damage caused by the storm.

In February, the Ohio National Guard and West Virginia National Guard swiftly responded to a hazardous materials train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, highlighting

the Guard's unique capability in responding to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear emergencies.

"Our team members are highly trained for these exact types of situations, and we are proud to assist our neighbors in Ohio," said Lt. Col. Jerry Floyd, West Virginia Army National Guard's 35th Civil Support Team commander.

In late May, Typhoon Mawar wreaked havoc on Guam, a 210-square-mile American territory with a population of nearly 180,000, also serving as a strategic focal point in the Indo-Pacific Command.

"I knew immediately after the typhoon [hit], and after seeing all the damage, that I needed to help out," said Spc. Alora Finey, a combat medic with the Guam Army National Guard. "I wanted to help out."

Guard members quickly took action, setting up traffic control points, establishing collection points for debris and distributing emergency commodities to assist the affected community.

As Mawar made landfall, Guam faced an additional challenge as its telecommunication system was targeted by a cyber code originating from China. Two months later, the Guam National Guard convened a conference attended by several U.S. agencies, emphasizing the critical need for building and maintaining a robust cybersecurity program.

Army Lt. Col. Bumjin Park, the chief information officer for the Guam Guard, emphasized the importance of relationships in homeland defense and integrated deterrence.

"It starts with relationships, and the human element, like partnerships, provides a strong front against any adversary," he said.

In Estonia, the Maryland Air National Guard collaborated with the nation's armed forces to build an information-sharing platform, enhancing defense against cyber threats.

"The work we are doing now will help the United States and our allies exchange cyber information efficiently and effectively during peacetime or active cyber threats," said Lt. Col. Charles Gruver, an operations director with the Maryland Air Guard's 275th Cyber-space Operation Group.

This effort was part of the Department of Defense's State Partnership Program, where Guard elements partner with nations globally for military-to-military applications and homeland security training.

In July, the Guard celebrated the program's 30th anniversary, adding four countries and bringing the total to 100 partner nations and 88 partnerships in 2023.

Retired Gen. Mark Milley, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, commended the SPP as a pivotal relationship builder among like-minded countries, "working together for democratic ideals, self-determination, and the rule of law."

"We've seen the richness of these relationships develop through the State Partnership Program, and they play a very large role in the world crisis," Milley said.

In March, Washington National Guard members participated in Cobra Gold, a Thailand-based exercise focusing on the shared understanding of systems and collaboration in responding to natural disasters.

Warrant Officer Kristen Retherford, a decontamination adviser with the Washington Guard's 10th Homeland Response Force, said training among nations is critical because natural disasters are increasing.

"We have to get used to helping each other and responding to [potential disasters], so we all have a shared understanding of the system and how to work together," she said.

Similarly, the New Jersey National Guard trained with Albania's armed forces, focusing on tactical combat casualty care, care under fire, and treatment of combat injuries.

Spc. Samantha Fernandez from the New Jersey Guard highlighted the strengthening of relationships and expressed anticipation for future missions.

"Through this trip, we were able to hone our skills as instructors and strengthen our relationships with our Albanian counterparts," she said. "Their hospitality and openness to share ideas is remarkable, and we look forward to future missions together."

In October, Gen. Daniel Hokanson traveled to Sweden to discuss its prospects of joining the SPP following its NATO bid, emphasizing the importance of learning from each other, especially in the cyber and space domains.

Meanwhile, the Guard continued its critical role in space operations. In August, the Ohio National Guard's 178th Wing hosted the exercise Vulcan Guard, incorporating diverse space weapons systems in realistic scenarios.

Defense officials credit the Guard with supplying 60 percent of all space electromagnetic warfare capability to the Space Force's Space Operations Command.

Given the high demand for unfettered access to space for combatant commanders, space-based units like the Florida Air National Guard's 114th Electromagnetic Warfare Squadron conducted Exercise ThunderMoose in Maine during the summer.

The exercise showcased the ability to airlift a new electromagnetic warfare system



Lt. Col. Khadidja Harrell, a flight surgeon with the 194th Medical Group poses for a photo with her Malaysian counterpart during Indo-Pacific Military Health Exchange (IPMHE) from Sept. 26-29, 2023, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

while establishing a base location, made possible by the expertise of satellite communications, radio frequency, intelligence, security, and aerospace ground equipment specialists.

"This is about continuing to make the connections with each other, learning from each other, understanding the problems that we face so we can help each other as Guard members," said Lt. Col. Anthony Surman, the operations officer for the 114th EWS, adding the exercise showed how "integrated Guard Airmen can execute space electromagnetic warfare missions."

During a visit to the New York Air National Guard's 222nd Command and Control Squadron, Air Force Maj. Gen. Edward Vaughan, director of space operations for the National Guard Bureau, highlighted how high-tech civilian jobs seamlessly translate into Guard roles.

"More than half of the squadron members hold civilian employment in the intelligence community or with private sector space contractors," said Vaughn. "This provides high-quality expertise and readiness to deter or fight in the next war."

The year also commemorated exceptional acts of service from Guard members, such as Air Force Maj. Katie Lunning, the first Air National Guard flight nurse to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross for her actions during Operations Allies Refuge and the evacuation of Kabul.

Lunning's civilian Intensive Care Unit nursing skills complemented her role as a Critical Care Air Transport nurse, resulting in lifesaving actions for 22 casualties while operating under continued small-arms fire and the possible threat of a second suicide bombing.

Reflecting on Lunning's dual role as a civilian nurse manager for a VA hospital and her voluntary deployment in support of OAR, Lt. Gen. Michael Loh, director of the Air National Guard, emphasized, "The uniqueness of the Guard is that Citizen-Airmen serve both their nation and their communities. That is exactly what Katie does."

Army Guard Soldiers demonstrated their exceptional skills in tactical competitions, securing victories in prominent events such as the 2023 International Sniper Competition and the U.S. Army "All Army" Small Arms Championships.

On the Air side, Airmen from New England achieved remarkable success in the William Tell 2023 Competition, dominating nearly half of all categories. The 158th Fighter Wing of Vermont emerged victorious in the Top F-35 Lightning II Individual Superior Performer and Top F-35 Wing categories. At the same time, the 104th Fighter Wing of the Massachusetts Air National Guard claimed the equivalent honors for the F-15 Eagle.

As the year concluded, the Alaska National Guard continued a 68-year-old tradition: Operation Santa Claus, spreading holiday cheer and gifts to children in remote communities using air assets, underscoring the invaluable relationship between the Guard and the communities it serves.

Through consistent improvement in recruiting new members and achieving historically high retention levels, the National Guard's top officer emphasized that now is not the time for the nation's oldest military organization to become complacent amidst the looming challenges of 2024.

Comprising 20 percent of the Joint Force and continuing its service across nearly every zip code in America, Hokanson added the organization's success would continue to be defined by its people – the 430,000 Guard members who stand "Always Ready, Always There."

"We are the nexus of our nation's defense strategy," he said. "We need to tell our story."

WANTED

OLD UNIFORMS & EQUIPMENT



There is a project in the works at the William A. O'Neill Armory in Hartford to display more recent historical uniforms of Connecticut military service. The intent of these new displays is to incorporate them with the other significant historical displays, pictures, and items as a walking tour for visitors to the capital, especially school children field trips for generations.

If you have any of the following uniforms that you would be willing to donate to the CT Military Department for this purpose, please contact us at (860) 524-4968 or email military.history@ct.gov. We would like as much of the uniform as possible, to include foot gear, head gear, and pins/patches/accoutrements. The list of uniforms (with accoutrements) we are looking for are as follows:

Vietnam – OG 107 – olive drab combat uniform - tropical/ light weight
1970's – OG 107 – olive drab uniform temperate (preferably with a Fritzy Badge on pocket)
Army Flight Suit (Green, ACU, or OCP)
Army Mess Dress
Army Blue ASU (female either pants or skirt)
Army Khaki uniform
Era equipment that can be added to period dioramas.

CONGRATULATIONS

CTNG PROMOTIONS

SSG Robert F. Addison
SSG John J. Allegra
SFC Elijah P. Amendola
SGM Patricia L. Archambeault
SSG Cristian Barragan
SFC Jack D. Bennett
SSG Vitor H. Brandao
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SRA Olivia Giuffria
AMN Stacy Ann Cerone Bennett



OVERVIEW

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STEP 02

ASSIST THE ASSIGNED RECRUITER WITH THE PROCESS TO ENLIST THE LEAD INTO THE CTNG WITHIN 180 DAYS OF ENTERING THE LEAD INTO CT JEEP 500

STEP 03

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Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, and Senior Enlisted Advisor Tony Whitehead, SEA to the CNGB, center left and center right, respectively, with competitors of the 2023 National Guard Bureau Innovation Challenge at the Herbert R. Temple Jr. Army National Guard Readiness Center, Arlington Hall Station, Virginia, Dec. 7, 2023. Arizona Army National Guard members took home top honors for their concept of exportable maneuver live-fire capabilities that could help units achieve training requirements.

National Guard Members Showcase Innovation

Master Sgt. Erich Smith
National Guard Bureau

ARLINGTON, Va. - The 2023 National Guard Bureau Innovation Challenge showcased the inventive prowess of Guard members nationwide Dec. 7 at the Herbert R. Temple Jr. Army National Guard Readiness Center. Among the concepts featured: a virtual reality application by the Arkansas National Guard, a South Carolina Army National Guard initiative for robotic automation of personnel data, and a Michigan National Guard medical system revolutionizing casualty care in austere environments.

"This is an opportunity for you to show us how we can become a better organization," said Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, who hosted the event. "As I looked through the topics that each of you are presenting today, many of them are unique to the Guard but can also have applicability to the entire Joint Force."

Ultimately, the Arizona Army National Guard clinched top honors at the competition with its pioneering idea — an exportable live-fire range.

"We're pleasantly surprised and very honored," said Army Lt. Col. Loong Lee, the state training officer for the Arizona National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters.

The team bested the three other finalists — all with solutions that support one of Hokanson's key priorities: modernization, which the 2022 National Defense Strategy stresses as crucial in building "enduring advantages across the defense ecosystem" and sharpening "the Joint Force's technological edge."

The competitors submitted their proposals at the state level, followed by elimination rounds conducted in four regions and then semifinal rounds. The finalists created visual products showcasing their ideas, followed by a presentation to Hokanson and three other senior leader judges.

The competitors were chosen based on their ability to identify a challenge, develop a unique solution and explain the overarching benefit, said Keith E. Buchholz, the NGB's programs and resources comptroller, who coordinated and organized this year's challenge.

"By virtue of the fact you are here today as finalists, you have already shown your initiative to seek answers to the questions of how we will do things better, faster, cheaper in the Guard," Buchholz said.

For Lee, the training officer for the Arizona Guard, this meant identifying challenges in meeting live-fire and training requirements while complying with environmental and safety regulations.

That kind of training at major installations hundreds of miles away from a home station, he said, also "results in loss of time, increased costs, and potential unresolvable conflicts for resources against other units."

"A solution to these problems is increased utilization of short-range training ammunition as well as a combination of battery-powered simulation devices and training scenarios" that follow Army guidance, said Lee in his team's presentation.

This provided the means to produce what amounted to a mobile range.

"Through these tools, we can create an exportable maneuver live-fire range that can be safely established in existing training areas that are traditionally too restrictive for standard ammunition," Lee said.

While minimal transportation can cut costs, the "time savings" could propel units forward, said John Ralph, an Army budget analyst for the Arizona Army Guard's operations and training directorate.

"In a Guard environment, where you typically get one weekend a month and two weeks to train, every minute is precious," he said. "And we can give back that time to

those commanders to let them get after [the mission]."

Many Guard members who hold relevant civilian jobs helped bring the team's proposal to fruition, said Sgt. 1st Class John McCrory, a transportation management coordinator with an Arizona Guard training center.

"With one of my technicians, if he was just brought up as a Soldier in the active-duty Army, I don't think he would have the civilian experience with electronics" needed to "adapt to whatever situation we were in," said McCrory, who also headed the team's "proof of concept" efforts for the proposal.

Ralph said Soldiers and Airmen should always consider themselves part of the innovation ecosystem and always push ideas — however big or small they may be.

"Don't be afraid to say something if you see something that needs to be done better because we can always do anything better," he said.

The National Guard Bureau will further explore each team's presentation to determine the feasibility of advancing ideas from concept to reality, according to senior leaders. The factors they will consider include funding, scope and impact on the Guard force.

Hokanson closed out the event by emphasizing innovation is imperative and that more competition is on the horizon.

"The four teams that got here did remarkable work, and we were fascinated by the level of innovation going on in our organization," he said. "And that just inspires us just to continue to do this."

The NGB plans to conduct innovation competitions biannually through December 2025. Guard members are encouraged to work with their designated innovation lead specialist, typically positioned at a state's headquarters element, to advance their ideas.



Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall speaks at a panel regarding Artificial Intelligence at the Reagan National Defense Forum at Simi Valley, Calif., Dec. 2, 2023. The Reagan National Defense Forum, celebrating "10 Years of Promoting Peace Through Strength," brings together leaders from across the political spectrum and key stakeholders in the defense community. (Courtesy Photo)

DAF leaders emphasize adapting AI for warfighting success

Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs Contributor

ARLINGTON, Va. (AFNS) -- Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall made it clear that the Air Force and Space Force are fully committed — and pushing hard — to develop and deploy artificial intelligence as a key element in meeting security challenges posed by China and other adversaries Dec. 2.

Kendall's remarks were not new, but by voicing them during a session at the influential Reagan National Defense Forum, he added additional weight to the Department of the Air Force's efforts to use AI as part of a larger push to modernize.

"I care a lot about civil society and the law of armed conflict," Kendall said. "Our policies are written around those laws. You don't enforce laws against machines, you enforce them against people. Our challenge is not to limit what we can do with AI but to find how to hold people accountable for what the AI does. The way we should approach is to figure out how to apply the laws of armed conflict to the applications of AI. Who do we hold responsible for the performance of that AI and what do we require institutions to do before we field these kinds of capabilities and use them operationally."

Kendall pointed out that China and other adversaries are aggressively using AI, and while the U.S. maintains an edge, it is shrinking. Kendall's comments dovetailed with those from Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Allvin, who said at a separate session during the conference that the Air Force must modernize to properly meet the security threats of today.

Part of that effort, Allvin said, is diligently working to integrate AI and machine learning into new capabilities that mesh seamlessly with mission needs and proven technologies, while understanding performance tradeoffs.

"I do believe the future is going to be about human-machine teaming," Allvin said. "Optimizing the performance and being able to operate at speed. That investment in our collaborative combat aircraft program is what is going to get us there."

Speed and automation of AI systems have vastly shortened decision timelines. That's why the DoD's National Defense Strategy focuses on accelerating decision making and the way information is analyzed and shared.

"We are leveraging algorithms and starting with data fusion and being able to gain insights," Allvin said. "The changing character of war is speed. If we are going to be privileging speed and have massive amounts of data, the ability to have algorithms and

the tools that support and let the analysts do what only humans can do which is make that human decision."

"Our job on the government side more than anything else is to thoroughly understand this technology, have the expertise we need to really get into the details of it and appreciate how it really works," Kendall said. "To be creative about helping industry find new applications for that technology and developing ways to evaluate it get the confidence we're going to need to ensure that it can be used ethically and reliably when it is in the hands of our warfighters."

Replacing obsolete, legacy systems by harnessing emerging information, communications, and AI technologies to provide operational targeting and decision support with the speed, adaptability and resilience needed to fight in a highly contested environment is a priority for DAF and falls under Kendall's Operation Imperatives.

"The critical parameter on the battlefield is time," Kendall said. "The AI will be able to do much more complicated things much more accurately and much faster than human beings can. If the human is in the loop, you will lose. You can have human supervision and watch over what the AI is doing, but if you try to intervene you are going to lose. The difference in how long it takes a person to do something and how long it takes the AI to do something is the key difference."

Rapid AI development requires DAF to be agile and adaptable in its approach, focusing on rapid testing, experimentation and deployment. The Department of Defense continues to maintain a robust regulatory and ethical framework to ensure the responsible use of AI in defense.

Both men stressed the importance of innovation. Allvin said that innovation is a critical element of modernization and is necessary for maintaining readiness.

"War is a human thing and the ability to leverage technology with human innovation is something we can never walk away from as we're continuing to develop and more sophisticated systems," Allvin said.

The Reagan National Defense Forum, celebrating "10 Years of Promoting Peace Through Strength," brings together leaders from across the political spectrum and key stakeholders in the defense community, including members of Congress, current and former presidential administration officials, senior military leadership, industry executives, technology innovators and thought leaders. Their mission is to review and assess policies that strengthen America's national defense in the context of the global threat environment.



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Hokanson at Reagan National Defense Forum: National Guard part of the fabric of America

Sgt. 1st Class Zach Sheely
National Guard Bureau

SIMI VALLEY, Calif. — When he returned from a tour in Iraq as the commander of the Oregon National Guard's 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team in 2009, then-Army Col. Daniel Hokanson saw how the unit's 3,500 personnel returned to their communities.

"We brought the fabric of America to the war because there are no active-duty bases in Oregon, they came from every corner of the state," said Hokanson, the Guard Bureau chief. "They were teachers, police officers, firemen ... and they deployed. Then they came back to their community, and they showed, look, you can do this. You can serve and you can go back and reintegrate into your communities."

At the 2023 Reagan National Defense Forum — an annual gathering of national security and defense leaders — Hokanson spoke about recruiting and readiness and listened to remarks from key leaders.

During his keynote address, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III painted the backdrop of the current global environment as "challenging," citing "the major conflicts facing our fellow democracies, Israel and Ukraine; bullying and coercion from an increasingly assertive China; and a worldwide battle between democracy and autocracy."

"And let me be blunt about our mission," Austin said. "The U.S. military is here to win our country's wars — and to win them decisively. We will always try to deter conflict. But if we have to defend our country, we will fight — and we will win."

On the recruiting front, the DoD is in competition with corporate America for the same talent pool, especially in high-tech areas like cyber defense and space. This issue was heightened in the wake of the pandemic. Employers have been offering incentives once unique to the military, including education benefits and healthcare packages.

In the 2023 Reagan National Defense Forum survey — a public opinion poll — about half of the respondents would encourage a friend or family member to join the military for reasons of patriotism, service and honor. More than 20% responded that a key point to discourage service is that it's too dangerous and not worth the risks.

Hokanson joined U.S. Sen. Kevin Cramer of North Dakota, Under Secretary of the Army Gabriel O. Camarillo, and Karl Rove to discuss these issues on the "Celebrating and Encouraging Service: How to Boost Recruitment and Ensure Readiness" panel.

Camarillo acknowledged recruiting as a long-term challenge for the Army. The service announced a major overhaul of its recruiting operations in October.

"This is the biggest transformation since the all-volunteer force was established in 1975," Camarillo said of Army recruiting, citing increased prospecting and marketing and a revamped recruiting workforce to closer resemble Fortune 500 companies.

Hokanson sees recruiting as a tactical matter with strategic implications.

The Guard is 20% of the joint force funded at 4% of the defense budget. With about 430,000 members, it is the



second largest military organization after the Army. There are eight full Army divisions and 90 Air wings within the Guard.

Hokanson emphasized that the National Guard exists to fight and win America's wars as the Army and Air Force combat reserve. He noted that many Guardsmen either joined or renewed their commitment to serve after 9/11, with an expectation to deploy or mobilize overseas.

He said Guardsmen bring "a treasure trove" of experience and expertise.

The Air National Guard won big in September's Air Force William Tell fighter competition. The Vermont Guard's 158th Wing earned the title of top F-35 Wing, along with other individual awards.

Four Army National Guard sniper teams emerged as the best contenders in the 2023 International Sniper Competition, and all finished in the top 10, with the Guard taking first place.

The Guard is also at the forefront of future warfighting domains. The Army Guard has more than 1,095 Soldiers working in cyber units. There are more than 11,500 Airmen assigned to Air Force cyber specialty codes in the Air Guard.

In September, Hokanson presented a joint Guard cyber team with the 2022 SANS NetWars Department of Defense Services Cup, marking the third consecutive year the Guard team has won the cybersecurity competition.

"These Soldiers and Airmen embody the best of the Guard: experts in their civilian jobs who use their skills to serve their states and nation," he said.

This warfighting posture enables the Guard to perform the most visible of its missions.

"Because we're manned, trained and equipped to do arguably the most difficult task there is," Hokanson said, "you can ask us to do almost anything within the local communities, and we will be there immediately to respond."

"We provide Guardsmen the opportunity to respond to their communities in times of need."

Other panelists echoed the appeal of serving in the Guard.

"Because the [Guard] mission is right in front of you," Cramer said, "you're helping your neighbors during a flood or rescuing people in a snowstorm. And I think that

does resonate."

The CNGB spoke of the value and flexibility the Guard offers its members to serve as part-time Citizen-Soldiers or -Airmen.

"Many of our Guardsmen are college students because they can go to school and serve at the same time," Hokanson said. "Another great advantage is if you're from Des Moines, Iowa, or Medford, Oregon, and your family's there and you want to live there, we offer you the opportunity to do all that."

Still, Hokanson said the Guard is focused on connecting with the groups that have little or no association with the military.

He encourages Guardsmen to tell the story of the Guard, which includes almost 7.5 million personnel days supporting combatant commands at home and around the world. Last year, more than 8,500 people were rescued from disasters, and four countries were added to the 100-nation Department of Defense National Guard State Partnership Program.

A Pentagon data point says that 78% of those who entered military service had an immediate family member, friend or relative in the military.

"The difficult thing is, if you've not had contact with somebody in the military, and if you get your perception of the military from what you see on the news or the stuff that grabs headlines, you could have potentially a negative view of it," Hokanson said.

"But those that actually know servicemembers realize there are great advantages and incredible opportunities," he said.

The Guard has seen steady improvement in recruiting new members since the disruption of the pandemic, while retention is at historically high levels. Hokanson summarized some of his key initiatives to continue these trends.

"No-cost healthcare for our Guardsmen, the same incentive pay as active-component Soldiers and Airmen and duty status reform," he said. "And our whole goal is for every Guardsman to have two retirements: their National Guard and civilian retirement."

We want to show the value of serving our country and the long-term payback for you and your family," he said.

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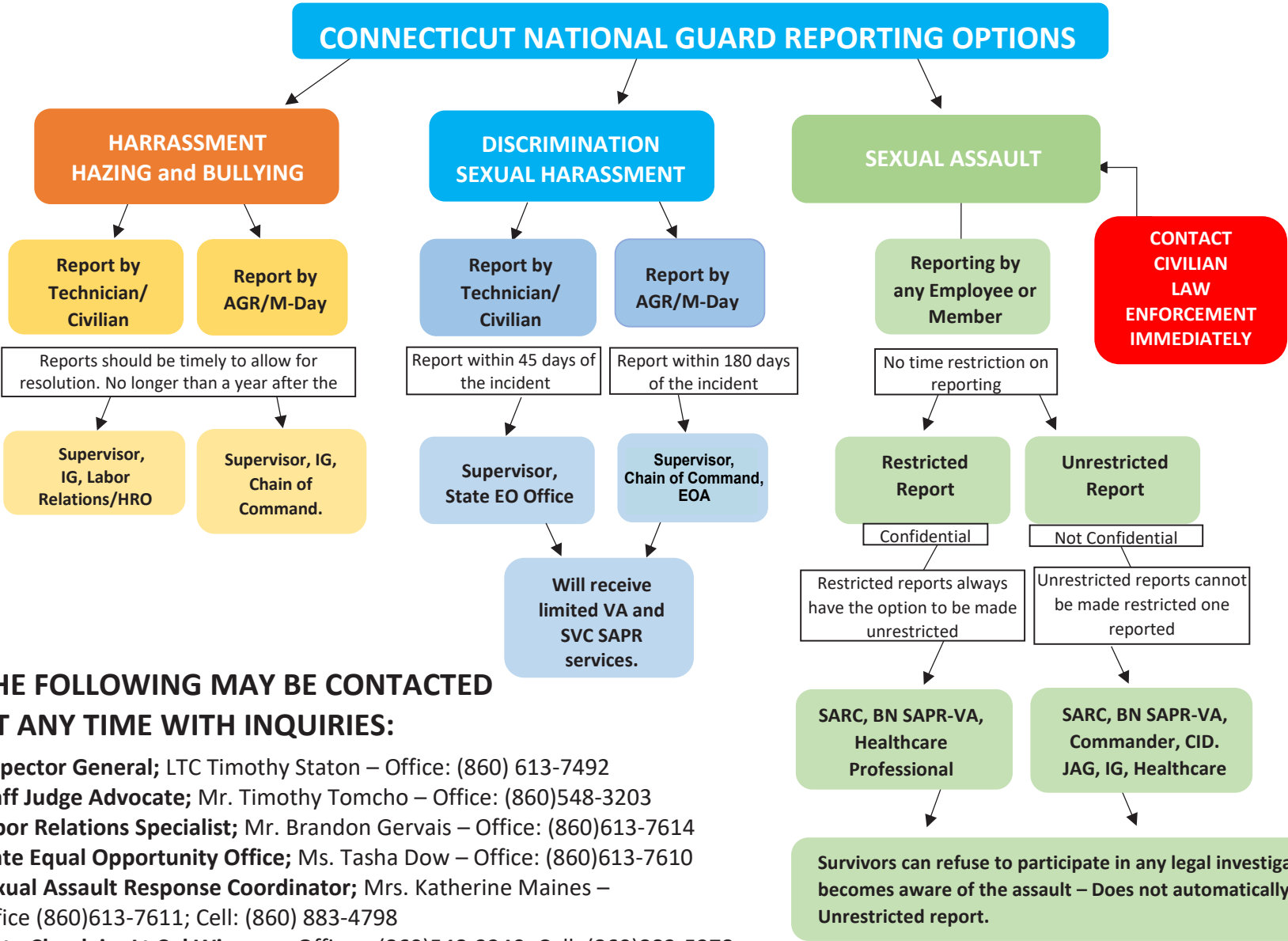
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Military and Family Readiness Specialist	Michelle McCarty	michelle.m.mccarty4.civ@army.mil	(860) 548-3254 (desk) (860) 883-6953 (cell)
Military and Family Readiness Specialist	Linda Rolstone	linda.b.rolstone.civ@army.mil	(860) 739-1637 (desk) (860) 680-2209 (cell)
Windsor Locks Readiness Center: 85-300 Light Lane, Windsor Locks, CT 06096 Open Fridays			
Military and Family Readiness Specialist	Kelly Strba	kelly.a.strba.civ@army.mil	(860) 292-4601 (desk) (860) 500-3813 (cell)
Military and Family Readiness Specialist	Rich Timberlake	richard.k.timberlake.civ@army.mil	(860) 493-2797 (desk) (860) 500-3189 (cell)
103rd Airlift Wing: 161 Rainbow Road, East Granby, CT 06026			
Airman and Family Readiness Program Manager	Selva Cabrera	selva.cabrera.1@us.af.mil	(860) 292-2730 (desk) (860) 734-7482 (cell)
Yellow Ribbon Support Specialist	Roberto A. Rodriquez III	roberto.rodriguez.43.ctr@us.af.mil	(860) 292-2772 (desk) (860) 819-4636 (cell)
Waterbury Armory: 64 Field Street, Waterbury, CT 06702			
Survivor Outreach Services Coordinator	Reisha Moffat	reisha.a.moffat.ctr@army.mil	(860) 883-6949 (cell)
Military OneSource Consultant	Scott McLaughlin	scott.mclaughlin@militaryonesource.com	(860) 502-5416 (cell)

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