



# Connecticut GUARDIAN

*And Yankee Courier*

VOL. 23 NO. 5

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

May 2023

## Fredericks takes the reins as new State CSEL

**Tim Koster**  
Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Roger Sicard relinquished responsibility as the Connecticut National Guard's State Command Senior Enlisted Leader to Command Sgt. Maj. Arthur Fredericks during a ceremony at Camp Nett, Niantic, Connecticut May 7, 2023.

This change of responsibility ceremony also marked the end of Sicard's military career as he is set to retire after more than forty years of dedicated service to his state and nation.

"In an ever more complex, ambiguous, and inflammable world, the command senior enlisted leader of today and tomorrow needs to understand these connected variables that commanders and units face across all domains," said Maj. Gen. Francis Evon, adjutant general for the Connecticut National Guard. "Thanks to Roger, he was instrumental in building that understanding in the minds of these young Soldiers and Airmen to succeed in complex and ambiguous situations, while reminding officers to trust the 'mission command' philosophy and empower their subordinates to come with game-changing solutions."

Sicard enlisted in the Connecticut National Guard on February 28, 1980, as an infantryman, completing One Station Unit Training at Fort Benning, Georgia. Later, he was also awarded the Combat Engineer and Automated Logistics Military Occupational Specialties. Sicard deployed in support of overseas operations to both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iraq and domestically for multiple counter-drug operations, storm relief, and the COVID-19 pandemic response.



*U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Roger Sicard, the outgoing Connecticut Senior Enlisted Leader, shakes hands with the incoming CSEL, Command Sgt. Maj. Arthur Fredericks during their change of responsibility ceremony at Camp Nett, Niantic, Connecticut May 7, 2023.*

Fredericks enlisted in the U.S. Army on June 20, 1988, as an infantryman assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. He joined the Connecticut National Guard following the completion of his initial entry contract as a member of the 102nd Infantry Battalion. His operational deployment experience includes support of Operation Noble Eagle, in the direct aftermath of 9-11,

and a tour to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Following the ceremony, family, friends, and fellow guardsmen gathered at Camp Nett's The Point to thank Sicard for his service and welcome Fredericks into his new role.

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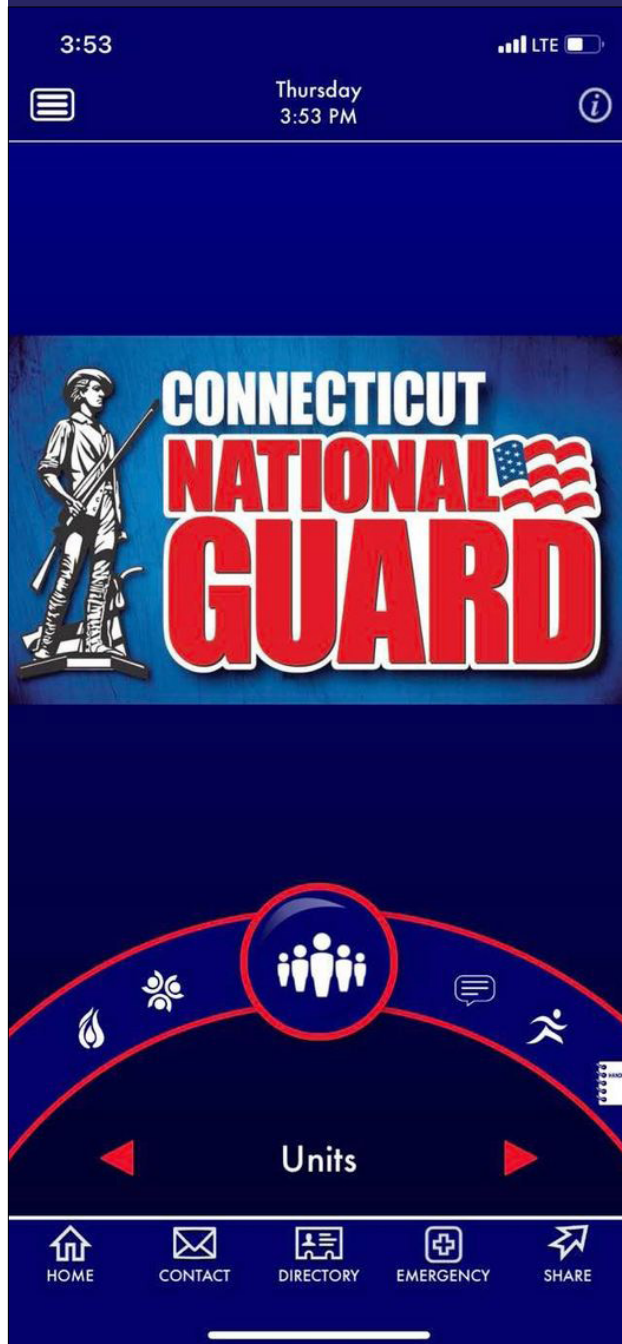
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Members of the Connecticut National Guard Fire and Emergency Services, alongside 103rd Medical and Security Forces Squadrons perform Tactical Combat Casualty Care on a high fidelity training manikin at Bradley Air National Guard Base, East Granby, Connecticut, March 8, 2023. TCCC is the fundamentals of life-saving techniques developed for service members to provide trauma care in all situations. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Tamara Dabney)

## CT Guard adapts TCCC training to active shooter scenarios

**Master Sgt. Tamara Dabney & Airman Emme Drummond**  
103rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Members of Connecticut Air National Guard Fire and Emergency Services, alongside members of the 103rd Medical and Security Forces Squadrons, refreshed their skills in Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC). TCCC is the foundation of first-aid skills and life-saving techniques for service members. While the TCCC course typically simulates trauma care in a combat zone, the 103rd has adapted the course toward aiding casualties in active shooter scenarios.

“We were asked by the firefighters here to come down and give a broad overview of [TCCC] or tactical combat casualty care, said Army Sgt. 1st Class Megan Authier, Course Manager and Training and Readiness NCO at the 169th Regional Training Institute, Camp Nett, Connecticut. “It is part of their bigger picture of active shooter drills or an active shooter response.”

In combat scenarios, service members expect to engage a potentially deadly threat in a hazardous environment. By contrast, active shooter incidents are unpredictable and typically occur in locations that are considered safe. Adapting the TCCC course to simulate active shooter scenarios enables Connecticut Guard first responders to prepare for conditions that they may face while providing emergency services in their local communities.

“It’s extremely impactful and enhances the base’s readiness to continue our mission and be prepared for anything that’s thrown at us,” said Anthony Authier.

The training is also meant to encourage teamwork among training participants from various units.

“With an [active shooter situation], having the security forces understand what the fire

department’s role is, and for the fire department to understand what security force’s role is, and how those two both come together in a unified function to neutralize that emergency, is beneficial across the board,” said Anthony Authier, Crash Rescue Fire Captain with Connecticut Air National Guard Fire and Emergency Services.

During TCCC training, course participants provide aid using the “MARCH” acronym:

- Massive hemorrhage
- Airway
- Respirations
- Circulation
- Head injury/hypothermia

“What MARCH does, is it gives the parameters and the priority of treatment in order to work in the confines of a scene that isn’t necessarily safe,” said, Megan Authier. “Identifying and treating those life threats in a very specified order, or priority, improves your patient outcome overall.”

Connecticut Air National Guard Fire and Emergency Services plans to hold the TCCC course more frequently and open the training to their mutual-aid partners, who may not be accustomed to providing care in hostile, life-threatening conditions.

“The purpose of this training is to provide that bridge, to go from a scene is safe, normal, EMS posture, to providing care in a more tactical environment, where we can render aid immediately to patients that need it, even though there may be a threat element,” said Anthony Authier.



# Orlando receives first ever Military Funeral Honors Ribbon

Tim Koster  
Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Francis Evon, adjutant general for the Connecticut National Guard, presented the first-ever Connecticut Military Funeral Honors Ribbon to U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Salvatore Orlando during a ceremony at the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Rocky Hill, Connecticut May 6, 2023.

At 96 years old, Orlando is the longest and oldest serving veteran service organization volunteer performing military funeral honors in Connecticut, having conducted more than 2,200 funerals since the state started keeping track.

“We’re honored that we’re able to present Sal with the first ribbon; we couldn’t think of anyone better,” said Evon, adding that many citizens of the state don’t realize how many funerals the Connecticut National Guard, the state militia, and veteran service organizations perform – about 3,500 a year.

The Military Funeral Honors Ribbon was created by an act of Connecticut general assembly to recognize service members who participate in the military funeral honors program ensuring Connecticut service members receive the honor and respect they deserve for their service to our country.

Orlando was orphaned when he was 14 months old and spent the better part of his childhood at the children’s home until he was adopted by his older sister when he was 14 years old. He was drafted into the Army in 1950, which he says, “gave him a home”.

Before retiring from the military in 1987, Orlando rose through the ranks from a private to a sergeant major, but his service to his community didn’t end when he hung up his uniform. In addition to being a continuous member of the Funeral Honor Guard, he has also actively served as a member of the Shriners, Boy Scouts, Governor’s Foot Guard, the Masons, and many more.

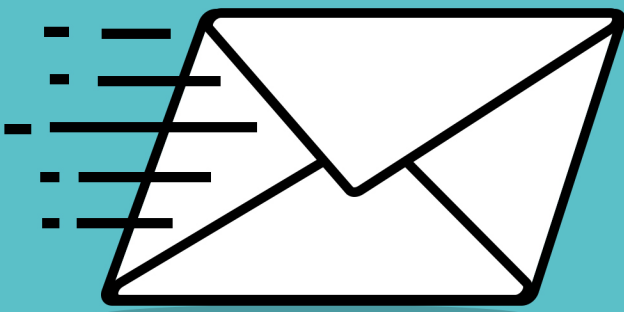
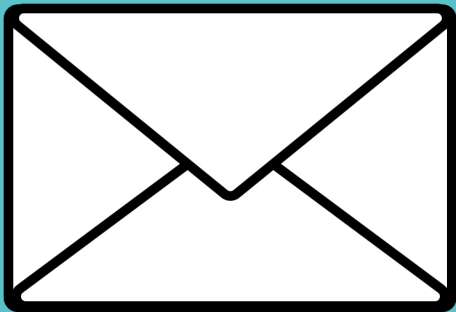
“His life of service and his sense of community are equally exemplified in his volunteer work that he touched the lives of so many citizens, so many organizations, and worthy causes,” said Lisa Marotta, the mayor of Rocky Hill, while reading a proclamation of celebration for Orlando’s service. “It is because of his bravery and sacrifice that we are able to wake each day to a life of freedom and we are able to go to sleep every night knowing our liberties are protected.”



U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Salvatore Orlando smiles for a photo with fellow members of the Funeral Honor Guard at the Veterans of Foreign Affairs in Rocky Hill, Connecticut, May 6, 2023. Orlando was awarded the first-ever Connecticut Military Funeral Honors Ribbon to honor his continued service to the state, performing more than 2,200 funerals in his career.

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The survey is available until 30 June 2023





U.S. Army Sgt. Edward Hutwagner, left, and U.S. Army Sgt. Vincent Ruocco, right, culinary specialists assigned to Detachment One, 906th Quartermaster Platoon, Connecticut Army National Guard, pose for a photo in front of a mobile kitchen trailer at Camp Nett, Niantic, Connecticut, East Lyme, Connecticut, April 28, 2023. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Lucibello)

## Hutwagner, Ruocco named CTARNG's top chefs

**Tim Koster**  
Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

NIANTIC, Conn. — Teams of Army Culinary Specialists from around the Connecticut National Guard were pit against one another in a brand-new cooking competition as the capstone to their annual Military Operational Specialty training at Camp Nett April 28, 2023.

Four teams of two entered the competition and, in the end, Sgt. Edward Hutwagner, from Headquarters Company, 192nd Military Police Battalion, and Sgt. Vincent Ruocco, from Detachment 1, 906th Quartermaster Platoon, were crowned the state's top chefs.

"Every year we have a cooks' class to refresh the new soldiers on the processes we go through," said Hutwagner, who works as the director of dining at Masonicare Assisted Living Center in Wallingford outside of his military service. "I think it's great that they added the competition just to throw in something different so they're not just looking at slides."

The idea for the competition came from Chief Warrant Officer 5 Brian Erkson, the state command chief warrant officer, who thought it would be a good marketing and recruiting opportunity for the Guard by inviting culinary students from the various high schools around the state to serve as judges for the competition.

"I started to develop a plan to execute [Erkson's suggestion] and pulled ideas from T.V. shows like Chopped and Next Level Chef," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Nicholas Berube, state food advisor. "When I was a judge during the ProStart Cooking Competition for the high schools, I met Chef Marc Hussey who oversees all the culinary programs at the technical schools. I asked him for his assistance in getting some of his students to be judges for our event."

Each military cooking team had a pair of student judges assigned to their kitchen for

the duration of the competition. These teams had a set list of criteria to judge, from sanitation and prep to plating and taste.

Each cooking team was provided the same three main ingredients, chicken, broccoli, and potatoes. They had five minutes to gather any other ingredients they wanted to use in their dish before being given ninety minutes to prepare, cook, and plate five servings of their recipe. In a classic cooking show move, the administrators also surprised the competitors with an additional required ingredient – a pineapple – about fifteen minutes into their cook time.

When asked about the biggest challenge his team faced during the event, Hutwagner said it was all about time management. "Time is always a challenge when you're cooking, especially when they throw an ingredient fifteen minutes in."

In the end, each team overcame the challenges of the competition and delivered a delicious meal that any Soldier would be happy to devour after a long day in the field.

Hutwagner and Ruocco's winning dish was a chicken fromage stuffed with broccoli, cream cheese, and garlic topped with a chicken velouté sauce and a twice baked potato on the side. With the surprise ingredient, the duo baked a pineapple crisp for dessert.

Overall, the competitors and judges had a positive outlook on the outcome of the competition and are looking forward to seeing it grow in the future.

"It was a very pleasant experience," said Jaidyn Brown, a senior from Ella T. Grasso Southeastern Technical High School in Groton and judge in the competition. "I've never really been inside a military place before and I also got to see how [Army cooks] cook and operate. It was pretty cool to watch."

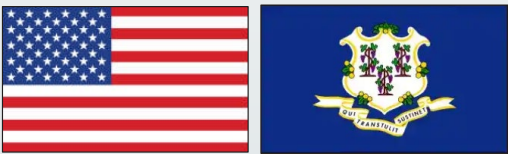
Army Culinary Specialists undergo nine weeks of advanced individual training on meal preparation, food safety, food inspection, and facility sanitation in both fixed locations and austere field environments. If you are interested in becoming an Army Culinary Specialist, contact Chief Warrant Officer 2 Nick Berube at [nicholas.d.berube.mil@army.mil](mailto:nicholas.d.berube.mil@army.mil)



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**CHRISTINE PITTSLEY**

**EPISODE**  
**004**

- Special Projects Director  
of the Museum of  
Connecticut History at the  
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# 192nd conducts multi-weapon qualification training

Sgt. Henri Malicdem  
Contributor

The 192nd Engineer Battalion conducted a multi-weapon qualification training event at Fort Indiantown Gap Pennsylvania May 17, 2023. A high percentile of the soldiers assigned to the 192nd have met the requirements to qualify with their individual and crew served weapons.

It is very important that Soldiers remain proficient with their assigned weapons to boost overall readiness of troops in the Connecticut Army National Guard. The 192nd ran the individual and crew-served weapon ranges to ensure a safe training event. Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers took charge of the ranges and put safety as top priority. The Soldiers had high morale spending three days in the field and on the ranges which made a huge impact on the training event's success.

The event also included a convoy, communications, and field operation training in preparation for the unit's major two-week training event that takes place every summer.

The 192nd enjoyed great weather at Fort Indiantown Gap which has one of the best National Guard weapons qualification training sites. The great weather ensured the training events ran smoothly and gave an opportunity for the Soldiers to focus on training and improving their marksmanship skills for their assigned weapons.

The units from the 192nd performed Preventive Maintenance Checks and Services (PMCS) on their vehicles and proven that attention to detail will have a huge impact on mobility at the battalion level. All these tasks were properly delegated into truck teams, and it guaranteed a safe convoy operation to-and-from Fort Indiantown Gap.

Training events like this are very crucial in overall readiness, it gives leadership an opportunity to identify what aspects need to be sustained and improved. The overall goal of the 192nd Engineer Battalion is to maintain a high standard readiness to build and defend, at home or overseas.



A Soldier assigned to the 192nd Engineer Battalion fires the 240B Machine Gun during a multi-weapon training and qualification event at Fort Indiantown Gap, Penn. May 17, 2023. The event was designed to help Soldiers of the Battalion maintain their readiness and efficiency on their assigned weapons as well as prepare them for his unit's annual two-week annual training over the summer. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Henri Malicdem, 248th Engineer Company)

## UPAR PHOTO CONTEST

- o Open to all Unit Public Affairs Representatives (UPARs) and Connecticut National Guard Soldiers and Airmen
- o Winner will be submitted for an Army Achievement Medal (AAM) and, if eligible, be entered into the annual National Guard Media Contest
- o Photos will be judged by the Connecticut National Guard state Public Affairs Office
- o Photos must showcase Connecticut National Guard units during training, real world missions, or official events.
- o All photos must be submitted in a timely manner by Aug. 31, 2023 to [timothy.r.koster.civ@army.mil](mailto:timothy.r.koster.civ@army.mil)





# 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](mailto: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.**



# Connecticut Army Guard's Fitness Improvement Program Does More Than Just Burn Calories

Sgt. Matthew Lucibello  
130th Public Affairs Detachment

Are you struggling to maintain a proper diet? Do you have difficulty passing the Army Combat Fitness Test? Want to get in better shape but don't know where to start?

Have you heard of the Fitness Improvement Program?

The Fitness Improvement Program, or FIP, is a new concept in the Connecticut Army National Guard. The program, run by 2nd Lt. Jeremy Slen and Staff Sgt. Ashton Christopher, intends to revitalize Army fitness culture and improve the holistic health of the Connecticut National Guard.

In the past, soldiers that were struggling with their physical fitness or failed to pass their physical fitness tests, resulting in being barred from reenlisting or other career advancement opportunities, were given generic, one size fits all style workout plans. These cookie cutter plans rarely worked. With this new program, the FIP team intends to get to know the soldier, identify the source of their deficiencies and work with them to tackle the issue head on.

To do this, the team brings soldiers in and looks at their nutrition, their spiritual health, and possible risk factors or issues that could be negatively impacting their wellbeing.

"What we really tailor on is focus," explained Christopher. "Putting our energy into each individual soldier, utilizing motivational interviewing and helping them develop their own plan based off of their life and their environment."

After the soldiers are mentored by the FIP staff, they are then put into a working group with other soldiers. Here, they can work out and motivate each other while also learning additional tips and tricks from each other.

One such example of success began on Oct. 18th, 2021, Sgt. Isaac Rodriguez of the 1048th Medium Transportation Company, entered his work group of seven. Unable to reenlist for six years like he hoped, and also missing out on a bonus, joining FIP was required for him to continue serving.

"It was during Covid," explained Rodriguez. "Things were going downhill, it was a really discouraging moment in my life."

It was so discouraging that Rodriguez nearly left the course not long after it started upon hearing he had to do a preliminary height and weight examination and Army Physical Fitness Test, the standard fitness test for the Army at the time. If a soldier fails either of these tests, they are flagged, and thus, unable to promote, unable to receive awards and unable to reenlist and continue their service. Fail twice, and the Army would begin the process of separating the soldier and discharging them.

"He almost left the course in the very beginning because he didn't want that [to be flagged and possibly separated] to happen," recounted Christopher. "But he stuck with it."

In fact, Rodriguez did fail his preliminary PT test, but that would be one of his last failures before the wind hit his sails. Not long after that test, he began taking his regimen very seriously, losing 4.4 pounds in two weeks during Phase One of the program. About one month after starting, during his first follow up, he lost 7.2 pounds. By his fourth and fifth assessment, near the end of his time with the



U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Jeremy Slen, left, and U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ashton Christopher, right, pose for a photo inside the Governor William A. O'Neill Armory, Hartford, Connecticut, March 29, 2023. Slen and Christopher are the lead coordinators for the Connecticut Army National Guard's Fitness Improvement Program, which is designed to improve the physical and emotional health and welfare of the organization's soldiers. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Lucibello)

program, Rodriguez lost 18 pounds. When his time with the program finally ended in January 2022, Rodriguez lost 42.2 pounds, the most significant individual weight loss the program has achieved thus far.

In addition to the weight loss, Rodriguez found a sense of solace through talking to the instructors at FIP. One of the reasons his health declined was due to being caught in the middle of a toxic relationship.

"I got out of a pretty bad relationship, all my stuff in the back seat, it was the break I needed," explained Rodriguez. "I was really comfortable speaking with them, I didn't have as much of an outlet back home, they were really understanding."

This new found peace inspired Rodriguez. He set his sights on becoming a nutritional health coach. His goal: to help others as the FIP team had helped him. In March he signed up for nutritional health coaching classes with the Institute for Integrative Nutrition, or IIN.

"After the Fitness Improvement Program, I was motivated to help individuals as a whole because it's more than just eating right and working out, it's figuring out how to take things day by day," said Rodriguez. "How the program is scheduled, how it's laid out, yeah there is nutrition and a workout portion, but there's also a big mental health factor, like resiliency, positive self talk, how important sleep is, coping with stress."

Those additional skills, like coping with stress, and being able to deal with the good and the bad would soon come in handy as not long after completing the program

Rodriguez faced another challenge. Unexpectedly, his cousin passed away from suicide.

This development rocked Rodriguez to the core but he persevered. The lessons he learned from the experience he incorporated into his toolkit. Now Rodriguez, armed with that toolkit, aids his fellow soldiers. Having graduated IIN, he now serves as an instructor part of the FIP team and has instructed two classes since January.

"As an instructor he can relate to the students," said Christopher. "He knows how to talk to them because he was just there [struggling with his mental health]."

This combination of training and experience has already proved invaluable. Rodriguez has been able to help other soldiers in the program keep their heads above the water and rise above the tide, both with their physical health, and their emotional and mental health.

"I had a soldier come up to me and ask to speak to me offline, they were going through something themselves," explained Rodriguez. "Due to my resilience, and my cousin passing away from suicide, I had the right words to say, the right empathetic words to say, to help them out in that situation. After we were done talking, I made them work out with me, and I asked them if they wanted to speak to BH [Behavioral Health] and they went and spoke to BH the next day and got some help."

Being able to make a difference matters to Rodriguez.

"It's encouraging," explained Rodriguez. "It's just heartfelt to know I'm a part of making a change in someone's life."



Slen and Christopher are working to be proactive, rather than reactive, by building relations with incoming Connecticut National Guard soldiers, part of the Recruit Sustainment Program, or RSP and with future leaders of the Connecticut Army National Guard, soldiers participating in Officer Candidate School.

New recruits of the RSP are kept in check by the FIP team, who monitor and track their physical fitness levels, creating a baseline which can be used to judge their overall fitness. This baseline is used to judge whether or not they are ready to ship to basic training. Additionally, the recruits will learn more about nutrition and how crucial proper nutrition and healthy diets are to their overall health. For slightly overweight recruits, the team teaches them effective exercise and dietary habits to lose weight and be within tolerance to go on to basic training.

“We work with them to help dial in their diet,” explained Slen. “A lot of times what we see happen is we enlist a soldier, they have no idea about nutrition or fitness, we send them down to basic training, right then and there that’s where we see that decline back into where they were when they enlisted...so trying to start by building a good foundation for them is what we’d like to do with RSP and we’re working to build more into their curriculum.”

Officer candidates who are struggling physically can also turn to the expertise shared by Slen and Christopher, who guide and build training plans based on the candidate’s branch choice.

Lastly, the team is working with units within the organization to educate and train leaders, so they in turn, will impart this knowledge on their soldiers.

“Our goal over the next five years is developing a fitness program that is working more at the team leader, squad leader level so that we can train them [leaders in the organization] to be those leaders in their units, and their squads and platoons, so that they can actually teach [physical fit-



*Before and after shot of U.S. Army Sgt. Isaac Rodriguez, assigned to the 1048th Medium Transportation Company, Connecticut Army National Guard. Rodriguez enrolled in the Fitness Improvement Program to continue his military career, by the time he was finished with the 3 month course, he lost 42.2 pounds. (Courtesy photo by Sgt. Isaac Rodriguez)*

ness and proper nutrition], so they can actually see the issues,” said Slen. “The biggest problem we find is, if I have a soldier come to me who’s been overlooked for the past five years, it’s very hard for me to get them back on track in two weeks or the three months that they’re with us rather than if somebody is with them every month and they can see those changes, if we get more squad leaders and

team leaders in the course, I think we’ll see more success within the ranks.”

If you are interested in enrolling in the Fitness Improvement Program, talk to your unit training noncommissioned officer to be enrolled through the Digital Training Management System, or DTMS.

# BENEFITS

**Connecticut National Guard Soldiers receive full-time benefits for their part-time service, these include:**

- Free tuition to Connecticut State Colleges
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- Affordable insurance - health, dental, life
- Montgomery G.I. Bill
- Federal Tuition Assistance
- Enlistment bonuses available if qualified
- Retirement benefits and Thrift Savings Plan
- Paid training and job experience



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# COLOR FUN RUN

**This event is FREE and open to CTNG Members and their Families!**

**A Pride Month Celebration!**  
**Join the 143rd RSG as we celebrate pride month with a Color Run Event!**

**What: A 2.5 Mile Color Fun Run (or Walk)**

**When: 23 June 2023**

**Where: Camp Nett**

**Why: To celebrate Pride Month and members of the LGBTQ+ community who have made positive impacts in the military and throughout the world!**

**What to Wear: Civilian PTs (white is recommended)!**

**RUN STARTS PROMPTLY AT 10:00**

**THE EVENT IS FREE!**

**PLEASE REGISTER USING THE QR CODE PROVIDED  
NLT 5 JUNE 2023.**



<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/pride-month-color-run-tickets-628698412877>



# What's Your Story?

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For more information contact CPT Robert Ragos, 1943<sup>rd</sup> Commander, at Robert.j.ragos.mil@army.mil





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- Hopeless

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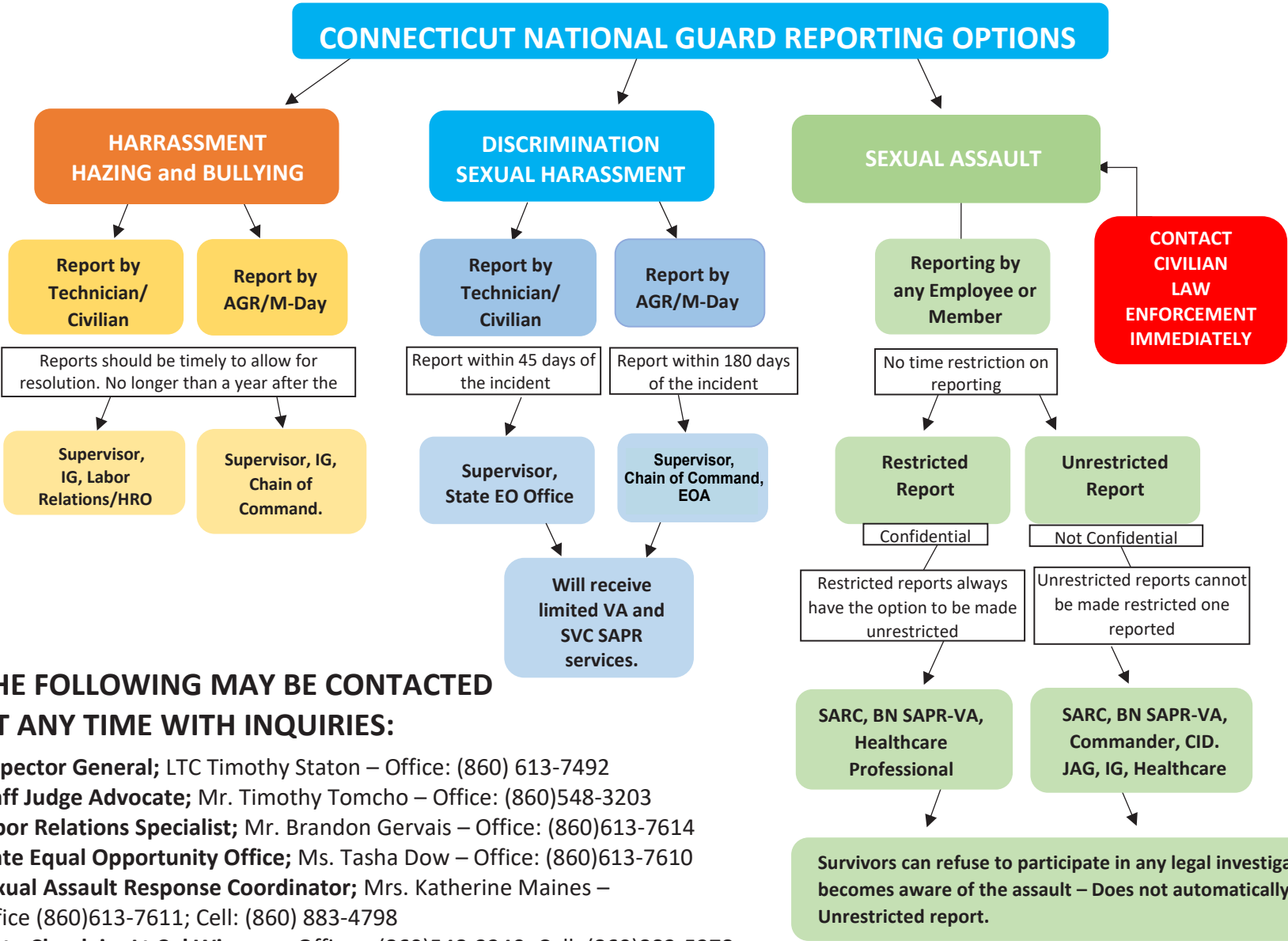
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CT Special Victim's Council ..... 703.607.2263

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Military Treatment Facility (Westover) 413.557.2623

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THE FOLLOWING MAY BE CONTACTED AT ANY TIME WITH INQUIRIES:

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Staff Judge Advocate; Mr. Timothy Tomcho – Office: (860)548-3203

Labor Relations Specialist; Mr. Brandon Gervais – Office: (860)613-7614

State Equal Opportunity Office; Ms. Tasha Dow – Office: (860)613-7610

Sexual Assault Response Coordinator; Mrs. Katherine Maines – Office (860)613-7611; Cell: (860) 883-4798

State Chaplain; Lt Col Wismar – Officer; (860)548-3240; Cell: (860)883-5278



# SPP Adds 3 New Partner Nations in Africa

Air Force Lt. Col. Allison Stephens  
National Guard Bureau

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Department of Defense National Guard State Partnership Program has added three new partner nations on the African continent, bringing the total number of partnerships in the 30th year of the program to 100.

Gabon, Malawi and Zambia join the existing 17 African nations in the SPP.

Established in 1993, the SPP is a security cooperation program and now involves more than 45% of the world's countries paired with the National Guard of every U.S. state and territory.

The SPP supports the security cooperation objectives of the United States and the geographic combatant commands by developing enduring relationships with partner countries and carrying out activities to build partner capacity, improve interoperability, and enhance U.S. access and influence, while increasing the readiness of U.S. and partner forces to meet emerging challenges.

The program creates strong, strategic partnerships through military-to-military engagements, exercises and key leader engagements. The relationships often lead to co-de-

ployments and close civil, government and commerce ties.

Through the SPP, the National Guard has forged lasting partnerships with nations across the globe for 30 years while helping to build U.S. and partner capabilities to meet 21st-century security challenges. The SPP also provides National Guard members opportunities to train and learn with their foreign counterparts and become more aware of the global environment in which they operate.

The program will be refined and expanded in the coming months and years, said Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, National Guard Bureau chief.

"We don't come with preconditions," he said. "We have no hidden agenda. We're here to advance whatever is best for both America and our allies and partners, based on shared values and common interests."

The DOD program is administered by the National Guard Bureau and guided by the State Department's foreign policy goals. It is executed by the adjutants general in support of the combatant commanders, the U.S. Chief of Mission security cooperation objectives and the DOD's strategic objectives.

## Memorial Day set aside for remembering heroes

Chuck Cannon  
Contributor

"We are the dead; short days ago we lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, loved and were loved, and now we lie in Flanders Fields."

Those haunting words were written by the Canadian poet, soldier and physician John McCrae in 1915. He penned the lines as a memorial to those who died in a World War I battle near an area known as the Ypres Salient in Belgium.

The words serve as an example of the true meaning of Memorial Day — to remember those who gave their all in defense of our nation.

Too often, Memorial Day is used to honor all Veterans. Veterans Day, celebrated on Nov. 11 each year, is set aside to honor military veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces.

The date was chosen to coincide with the armistice signed signaling the end of World War I on Nov. 11, 1918, and was originally called Armistice Day.

But Memorial Day is reserved for those who never came home from war, who left their all on the battlefields of Yorktown, Chancellorsville, Berlin, the Chosin Reservoir, Saigon, Iraq and Afghanistan.

My first memory of the significance of Memorial Day occurred in November 1968.

My classmates and I were sitting in our eighth grade math class at Woodlawn Junior High School in West Monroe, Louisiana, when there was a knock on the door. Through the door's window I could see a local pastor.

Our teacher stepped outside, spoke with the pastor for a moment, then reentered the room and said, "Terry, you need to come outside for a moment."

Terry Bratton got up, left the classroom, and didn't return that day. Our teacher, with tears in his eyes, solemnly told us Terry's older brother, Cpl. John Leslie Bratton, had been killed in action while serving in Vietnam.

Until that day, the Vietnam War had only been a daily report on the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite. It almost seemed unreal as it had not touched those of us who lived in the rural area of Southwest Ouachita Parish. But now, it was as if our entire class, and our church, was

in the middle of the conflict.

Leslie, as he was known to us all, was a happy, fun-loving young man with his whole life in front of him.

Leslie was an ordained minister and could have received an exemption when his draft number came up, but said that wouldn't be fair to those who had to serve. He enlisted, attended infantry school and headed to Vietnam on June 15, 1968, a member of Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division.

On the morning of Nov. 11, 1968, Pfc. John Leslie Bratton, nicknamed "Preacher" by his fellow Soldiers, was walking point for his unit in Pleiku Province, South Vietnam, when it came under hostile fire. Bratton, along with Sgt. James Humphrey and Spc. Gary Rust were killed in the ensuing firefight. Bratton was 23.

Leslie's was not the only casualty suffered by our small, tight-knit community.

Shortly after his death, Bratton's best friend, Charles Beard, committed suicide, unable to handle the loss of a person he considered closer than a brother. It took Terry and his Family a long time to accept that Leslie was gone, another resident of Flanders Field.

For me, the war became real. It now had a face. If Leslie could be killed, anyone over there could be killed — and I knew others who were there, some of whom were Family members.

Through the years, every Memorial Day, I thought of Leslie, of a life gone too early, of friends and family wishing they could have seen him come home.

I wish I could say Leslie was the only specific service member I personally knew who never came home, but there is another.

Capt. Thomas Felts was a company commander in the 519th Military Intelligence Battalion at Fort Bragg, North



Carolina, when I was stationed with the same unit in the mid-1980s. Felts was a great commander and an all-around good person.

Fast forward to November 2006 during my tenure as editor of the Ruston Daily Leader in North Louisiana. When the war on terrorism began, I began to run the photograph of a service member killed in action on the left lower corner of our front page.

As I read the casualties of Nov. 14, 2006, I caught my breath — Col. Thomas Felts was listed as KIA by an improvised explosive device. Another who joined the list of those in Flanders Field.

As a veteran, married to a veteran and the father of two sons who are veterans, I by no means advocate slighting those who served — they deserve their day. But on Memorial Day, let us remember who that day is for — those who never returned, and left their friends and families with, longing for one who will never return.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Opinions expressed within this article are those of the writer and do not constitute endorsement by the Connecticut National Guard





## ALL CONNECTICUT ARMY NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIERS

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(Not to exceed the grade of E4)

**\* AWARDED THE ARMY RECRUITING RIBBON**  
(Up to 4 times)

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**All Connecticut Army National Guard  
Soldiers are eligible!**




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