



Connecticut GUARDIAN

And Yankee Courier

VOL. 23 NO. 4

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

April 2023

Driving simulator bolsters readiness for Connecticut Guard

Airman Emme Drummond
103rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

The 103rd Airlift Wing at Bradley Air National Guard Base is using computer-generated imagery (CGI) to enhance readiness.

In 2021, the wing used innovation funds to purchase a driving simulator. The simulator, used by members of multiple units in the Connecticut National Guard, enables members to practice driving maneuvers in various military vehicles through different courses and scenarios. The simulator helps airmen and soldiers become more comfortable driving large vehicles, such as fuel trucks, which are common in many units across the Guard.

“...You can simulate basically every vehicle we have on base, whether it’s a fuel truck, a box truck, and all different kinds of tractor trailers,” explained Senior Master Sgt. Michael Mungavin, distribution superintendent assigned to the 103rd Logistics Readiness Squadron.

The simulator is capable of programming forty different vehicles with automatic and manual transmissions. The level of gears is also interchangeable depending on the vehicle chosen. There are multiple driving courses to practice on, including a defensive driving course, night-time driving, and winter driving.

“...I’ve noticed more things on the road, you’re actually paying more attention, believe it or not, so I think that is a huge benefit of [the simulator],” said Mungavin.

The versatility of the simulator helps support the multi-capable airmen concept of training airmen to be competent in skills outside of their Air Force specialty.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Corey Beecher, assigned to the 103rd Logistics Readiness Squadron, is shown using a driving simulator, April 4, 2023 at Bradley Air National Guard Base, Connecticut. The driving simulator is used to practice driving skills through various scenarios and military vehicles. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman Emme Drummond)

Bradley, being the only base in New England to have this technology, allows neighboring units to conduct training using the simulator.

“There’s all these different units that could come and benefit from it,” said Mungavin, “So getting them prepared and driving, that is a huge help for people.”

Aside from teaching valuable road skills, the simulator optimizes instruction time, allowing instructors to teach multiple people at once, compared to previous training

sessions which only allowed a ratio of one instructor to one student.

“...One person could just be in there on their own, getting training, while the trainers are actually driving with somebody else,” said Mungavin.

The simulator bolsters readiness for the many situations Connecticut Guard members may face, on base or in a deployed environment.

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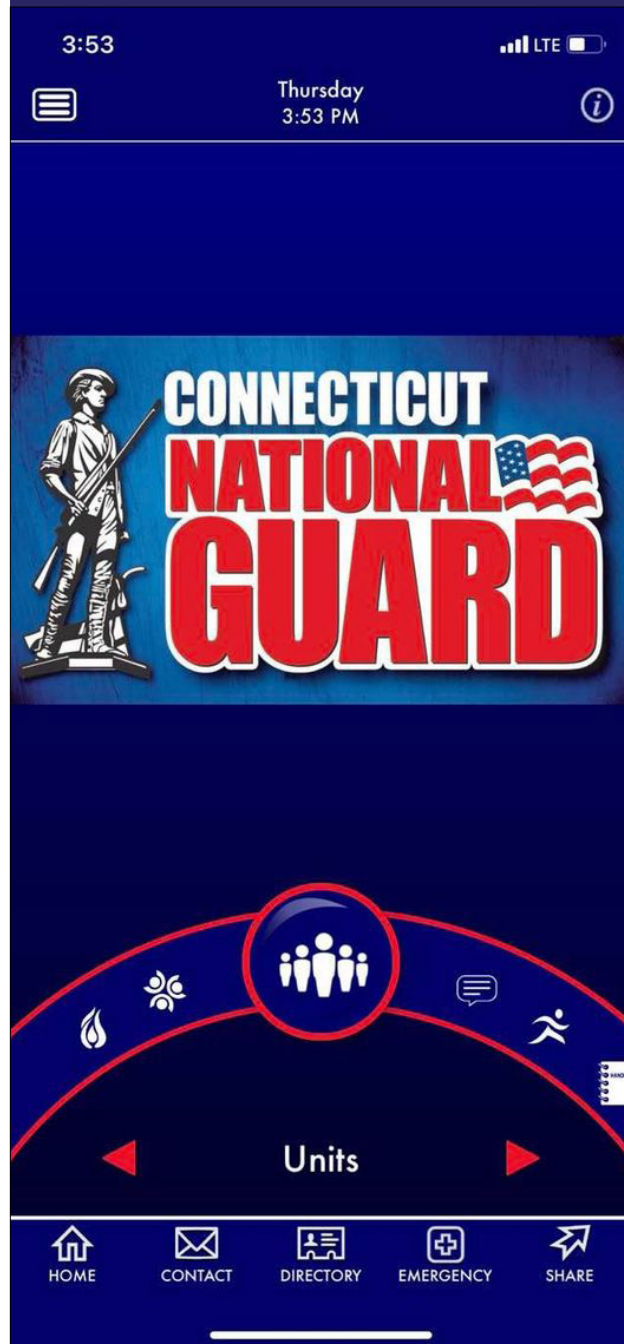


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Second Company Governors Foot Guard

The *Connecticut Guardian* is an authorized publication for and in the interest of, the personnel of the Connecticut National Guard, State Military Department, State Militia and their families. The editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of the CTNG Hartford Public Affairs Office and is not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, and the Department of the Army or the Department of the Air Force. *Connecticut Guardian* is published monthly in accordance with AR 360-1 and is printed through the Government Printing Office. **Deadline for the May edition is May 20th.**



Connecticut Army and Air National Guard recruiters conduct a tour of a C-130H aircraft, October 12, 2022 at Bradley Air National Guard Base, East Granby, Conn. The tour highlighted aviation and support functions performed by members of the Connecticut Army and Air National Guard. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Tamara R. Dabney)

Connecticut National Guard recruiters give joint tours

Airman Emme Drummond
103rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Connecticut Army and Air National Guard recruiters conduct joint base tours every year. The tours give educators and potential national guard recruits the chance to see what goes on behind the scenes in the Connecticut Army and Air National Guard.

“The idea behind this event is to get [potential recruits] onto the base with Army and Air National Guard aviation to explore opportunities and options that the Guard has to offer,” said U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Todd Wilkinson, Recruiting Flight Chief. “We’re focusing on our domestic operations and how we respond to contingency operations.”

In contrast to movies that often depict soldiers in extreme land warfare scenarios, the tours highlight aviation and support functions performed by members of the Army and Air National Guard.

“For the recruiting efforts, it’s very helpful because, in my time in recruiting, everyone thinks of the military as the ones kicking in doors,” said U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Jose Quinones, Recruiting and Retention Noncommissioned Officer. “However, that’s not always the case...By showcasing the aviation side of both Air and Army Guard, [tour

participants] could see that they could be the ones who make sure the helicopters and planes are up to par.”

A tour with students enrolled in the Controversies and Conspiracies Course at Mark T. Sheehan High School gave the students a first-hand glimpse of the day-to-day operations in the Connecticut Guard. The students visited the Connecticut Army National Guard Aviation Support Facility (AASF) as well as the aviation facilities at Bradley Air National Guard Base.

“It’s important to me that these students understand, not only the nation’s history, but what happens behind the scenes, where people in uniform go out and protect us,” said Heather Smolley, instructor for the Controversies and Conspiracies Course.

In addition to aviation facilities, base tours may also include other areas, such as the air transportation and security forces facilities at Bradley.

“It’s just an opportunity to highlight the joint readiness that we have with the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard, specifically on the recruiting front,” said Wilkinson. “We like to show that there are options and opportunities that we have, and it’s a joint effort.”

FUTSAL LEAGUE



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Finding purpose and worth with camaraderie and fitness

Sgt. 1st Class Silas Holden
Contributor

In a world full of “likes, emoticons, and digital socialization,” a simple “good morning,” a handshake, or a hug can mean the world to anyone. We live in a world where the illusion of connection is separating us from one another. Individuals can be sitting in the same room and be completely disconnected from one another. This is not healthy, and it most certainly is one aspect that is feeding the rise in loneliness, depression, and anxiety. Just as in everything else, there is no one solution that will fix the issue. It will take a team effort with constant attention to combat the disconnection that is occurring.

We all must ask ourselves as leaders, “do our seniors, peers, and subordinates trust us enough to seek help through us?” When senior leaders are not taking a path to heal and connect through others it states that we have a deeper-rooted problem. It is our job to continually analyze it and find solutions to the problem. As a staff-sergeant I was always a somewhat bitter person who didn’t portray a persona that was approachable. Thanks to many discussions during deployment with my acting first sergeant, personal life struggles, and changed perspectives, this has changed.

As a Sergeant First Class, and a more matured individual I can now say that my persona is different, and I became more of an approachable leader to others. Last month alone I had two Soldiers come to me for advice in their personal lives, that made me feel better than accomplishing any duty related mission that I could complete. It told me that I am now making an impact and being seen by others as someone they can come to for the difficult talks.

Last month during the NGA CT conference there was a briefing put together by Staff Sgt. Peter Nichio for the state wellness initiative that struck home with me and many others in the audience. It was real, it was heartfelt, and most of all it was an honest briefing which re-stated what we all know, everyone is vulnerable. Far too often we are told to “suck it up” and “stop being so sensitive.” This is not how we help others heal. Doing that simply pushes others away from us and erodes trust. Once trust is eroded it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get back.

Recently I put together some ruck marches with the intent of getting together with other Soldiers and veterans away from drill and duty days. No rank, just human being to human being hiking and walking in nature to talk and heal. I have had some individuals join me on the hikes and it has been great to walk and talk with others outside of duty. Physical activity and human socialization improve both physical and mental health.

I would like to push this initiative out to the masses and ask for some help. As one NCO I cannot cover the entire state. What I would like to do is put together one Saturday per month for a group hike in each region of the state, I will take the Southeast CT area. If one or more people from each region of the state would like to step up as a leader for their region, please contact me. This way that person can run the initiative regionally and we can reach more Soldiers and Veterans to make this grow.

For this initiative the state would be set up into six different regions: Northwest Corner, Southwest Corner, Central North Region, Central South Region, Northeast Cor-

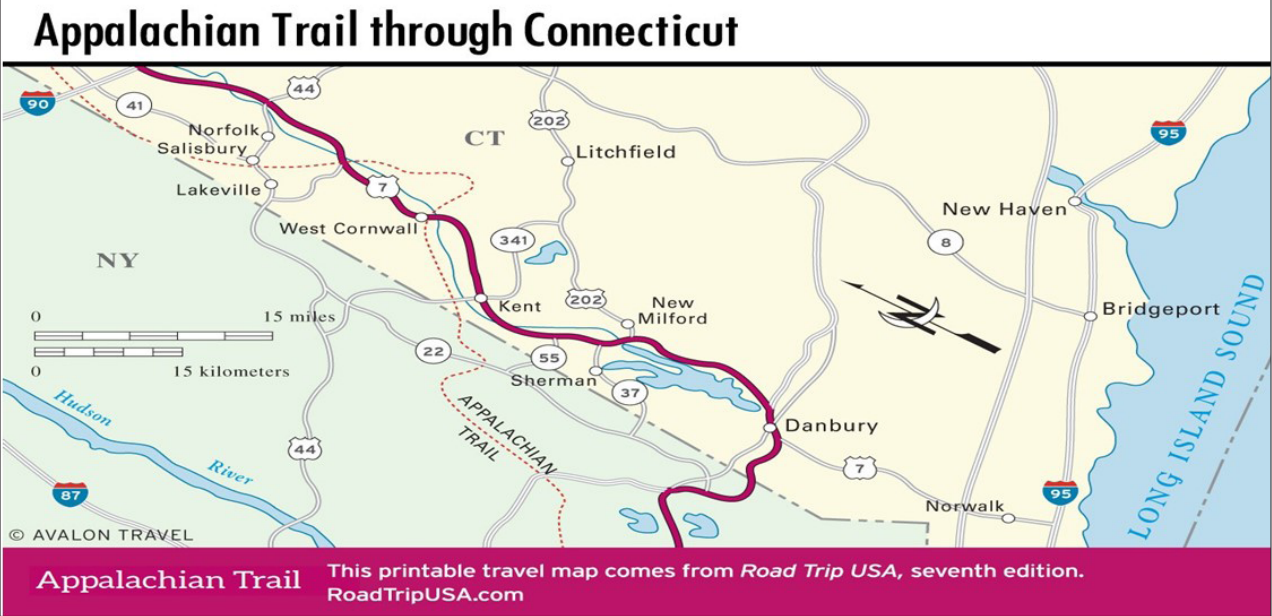


Calling all adventurers!
Inaugural Three Day TACTLETE Ruck March for Resiliency and Suicide Awareness

Sponsorship Opportunities Available
Contact SFC Silas Holden for more information
Sikholden@gmail.com or 860-514-9317
Civilian clothes (This is not a military event)

53 Miles along the Appalachian Trail in Connecticut
Saturday, August 19, 2023 0530 to Monday, August 21, 2023 @ 1200

Overnight stops will be planned along the route at designated camping areas. Plan is to stick together as a group and set pace to finish in two and a half days. While we will stop overnight to rest and recover it will not be a full night’s sleep as we will push through this as fast as possible without risking safety.
Trail vehicle will be meeting at pre-determined checkpoints during the event for first aid needs and resupply. There will be lunch and dinner cook-outs planned to stay fueled.



ner, and Southeast Corner.
In August I will be conducting the inaugural TACTLETE Appalachian Trail Ruck March. This ruck will cover the entire 53 miles of Appalachian Trail in the state of Connecticut. There is no cost for this three-day event from August 19 -21. If you would like more information about this event that I am putting together to promote Suicide Awareness and Resiliency please reach out to me (information is in the attached flyer). This event will honor Soldiers and Veterans we have lost to suicide and help bring



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The survey is available until 30 June 2023

Purpose

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more attention to a tragic reoccurrence within our ranks and community.
See the image if you would like to put the dates in your calendar. Until next month, stay disciplined, stay hydrated, stay fit, and put down the phone and connect with others in person!

Ruck March/Hike to build veteran/military community and support network
No set distance or time limit, come out and build camaraderie

Saturday, May 6th: Lantern Hill @ 0800
Saturday, May 13th: Gillette Castle @ 0800
No prescribed uniform or ruck weight (personal choice).
POC: Silas Holden (860) 514-9317



Major Gen. John C. Andonie, Deputy Director, Army National Guard presents the Officer Strength Manager of the Year National award to Capt. Mark Soltau, Connecticut Army National Guard Recruiting & Retention Battalion,, who executed 160% of his officer recruiting mission in fiscal year 2022, accessing 65 officers into the Connecticut Army National Guard, 23 of which were true end strength gains for a small state.

Soltau earns OSM of the year award

Timothy Koster
Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

In a year where almost every component and sub-component of the military missed their recruiting and retention goals, Capt. Mark Soltau, assigned to the Connecticut Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion stood out amongst his peers.

Soltau not only hit his officer recruiting mission, he surpassed it by an additional 60-percent, accessing a total of 65 officers in to the state’s Army Guard. Because of this incredible achievement, he was honored with the Officer Strength Manager of the Year award at the annual Army National guard’s Strength Maintenance Awards and Conference on March 24, 2023.
The last CTARNG recruiter to ean this title was Lt. Col. Giancarlo D’Angelo in 2011.



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'Stepping Forward' to prevent sexual assault

Denis R. St. Jean
Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, 103rd Airlift Wing

EAST GRANBY, Conn. -- Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month (SAAPM) is recognized in April by both civilian and military communities. With that in mind, I'd like to highlight a few initiatives here in Connecticut and across the DoD.

Each year the DoD releases a new theme. As stated on [sapr.mil](https://www.sapr.mil), the United States Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response website, "The Department of Defense observes SAAPM by focusing on creating the appropriate culture to eliminate sexual assault and requiring a personal commitment from all service members."

The theme for 2023 is 'STEP FORWARD. Prevent. Report. Advocate'. This new theme is a call to action for in-

dividuals at all levels of the Department of Defense to use their personal strength to advance positive change in preventing sexual violence. We ask that you join us in taking a "Step Forward" and highlighting the power of acts that can bolster prevention, increase reporting, and promote advocacy for a safer DoD Community.

What could those acts look like? We all have personal barriers that might make it difficult to step forward. What can we do to overcome those barriers? We, as a community of Soldiers and Airmen, owe it to each other to promote a culture where individuals feel safe from sexual violence and supported if they choose to come forward.

I'd also like to highlight the Men's SAPR Campaign. According to a statement released by the DoD Sexual Assault Prevention Response Office, the campaign "focuses on sexual assault experienced by male service members and addresses the personal impact and negative effects on

readiness and unit cohesion when sexual assaults occur. The campaign also provides vital education and access to important resources to both SAPR professionals and victims of sexual assault. The campaign is an initiative developed based on the "2016 DoD Plan to Prevent and Response to Sexual Assault of Military Men".

"All Service Members deserve to work and live in a respectful, inclusive environment while serving our nation. While this campaign is focused on sexual assault of male Service Members, it is inclusive of all Service Members affected by sexual assault or at higher risk of sexual violence. This includes the experiences of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+ Service Members."

(<https://www.sapr.mil/mens-sapr-campaign>); Powerful acts of Courage can fuel change (<https://www.sapr.mil/mens-sapr-campaign>)

CNGB Fitness Challenge Continues with Team Building

Air Force Master Sgt. Erich B. Smith
National Guard Bureau

ARLINGTON, Va. - National Guard Soldiers and Airmen working as a team can do far more than when working alone.

That's why team building is April's theme for the National Guard Holistic Wellness Challenge.

Driven by Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief, National Guard Bureau, wellness experts at the Army National Guard Professional Education Center (PEC) designated April's emphasis. Teamwork directly supports CNGB's priority on readiness.

Fresh off its launch in March, which emphasized sleep enhancement, the challenge focuses on a different holistic health and fitness topic each month.

"Combat is the ultimate team sport. We all work on a team made up of teams," said Hokanson. "And it's the team – no matter how large or small – that provides an extra layer of resilience."

Army Maj. Benjamin L Seims, a human performance optimization coordinator at the PEC, said increased demand for Guard capabilities requires more physical stamina from Soldiers and Airmen.

That demand, he added, has created "an even greater need to be agile and resilient," especially "due to the competitive advantage the Guard gives our military — the health and fitness of our formations play an integral role in the National Defense Strategy."

For Army Maj. Robert Killian, a plans and project coordinator at NGB's command, control, communications and computers directorate, team fitness activities are about more than just achieving optimal fitness.

"The most important thing about a team concept is accountability," said Killian, who was part of the first Army National Guard team that won the Best Ranger competition in 2016. "Whether it's ensuring that team members don't leave each other behind or showing up for a workout on time, team exercises keep individuals motivated."

But for the "sake of competition," he said, team activities help improve individual performance.

"You just can't get to a level of going past your threshold unless you're competing," said Killian, adding the team concept inspires others to "gravitate toward someone who's going to push them and make them stronger."

Some team fitness activities range from contemporary military exercises, such as medical ball slams and air squats, to the Dynamic Duo, where one group running in place determines how long another group exercises. Even the traditional ruck march is encouraged, Seims said.

Whatever the activity, he said, the benefits highlight the interpersonal skills of trust, cohesion, diversity and leadership — all critical elements in a "teamwork-driven world."

"We are constantly surrounded by the challenge and satisfaction of working with diverse, uniquely organized groups of individuals that require the mastery of interpersonal



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Task Force Orion, 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New York Army National Guard, run alongside Soldiers, civilians and family members in a 5K "Turkey Trot" fun run at Rose Barracks in Grafenwoehr, Germany, Nov. 19, 2022. U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria holds the annual event to boost morale and promote physical fitness before the Thanksgiving holiday. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jordan Sivayavirojna)

skills to navigate successfully," he said.

Hokanson said team building in physical fitness activities creates good spirits and inspiration.

"Be dedicated, be disciplined, measure your progress and try to have fun," Hokanson said. "But you don't always have to go it alone. Inspire others, and be inspired by others, as a team."

To learn more about this month's challenge and team-building exercises, log on to [pec.ng.mil](https://www.ng.mil) for more information.



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Hokanson: SPP Stable, Steadfast, and Growing

Sgt. 1st Class Zach Sheely
National Guard Bureau

DENVER — The Department of Defense National Guard Bureau State Partnership Program — built on enduring relationships, common interests and trust — is stable, steadfast and growing, the Guard's top leader said Thursday.

The program started with 13 partnerships in 1993. It now boasts 100 nations paired with National Guard elements from every state, territory and the District of Columbia, with more to come.

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

"We're looking at streamlining processes, ensuring funding, and expanding existing partnerships, while selectively looking at where we add additional partnerships," Hokanson told the Guard's annual SPP conference.

In the last year alone, the Guard added seven SPP security cooperation agreements — Austria and Vermont, Norway and Minnesota, Samoa and Nevada, and most recently, Oman and Arizona. Three nations are awaiting partner announcements.

The State Partnership Program began 30 years ago after the breakup of the Soviet Union to help countries emerging from behind the Iron Curtain. Now, 25 European nations are partnered with National Guard elements, with partner nations in every geographic combatant command area of responsibility.

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

Guardsmen, who often serve in the same state for an entire career, offer the continuity to build lasting relationships with foreign military counterparts. These relationships also provide the DOD with regional access, as evidenced by Russia's ongoing unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

"We never want to see another Ukraine," Hokanson said. "We never want to see another country's borders violated. As our Guardsmen work with their counterparts in different countries, we can help identify and hopefully prevent these things from happening in the future."

The 2022 National Defense Strategy names partnerships with foreign allies as a key strategic advantage: "Mutually-beneficial alliances and partnerships are an enduring strength — and will be all the more critical in the years ahead."

In support of that NDS goal, Hokanson said the Guard is postured to grow the SPP in the next decade.

Partnerships start at the military-to-military level, with Guardsmen training side-by-side with foreign counterparts at home and abroad. They often evolve into whole-of-society relationships between states and nations.

Hokanson said the Guard executes 20%-30% of the nation's security cooperation engagements that are SPP-related or enabled, with 1% of the U.S. security cooperation budget.

"I don't think you can find a better value than the State



Lt. Gen. Bashkim Jashari, commander of the Kosovo Security Force, is briefed on unit operations by the commander of the 1st Battalion, 133rd Infantry Regiment, Iowa Army National Guard, during a tour of training at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, May 19, 2022. Approximately 15 KSF troops embedded with companies in the 1-133rd Infantry during a two-week annual training exercise. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Tawny Schmit)

Partnership Program," he said.

Retired Army Gen. Stephen Townsend, a conference keynote speaker, said value, flexibility and persistence are three characteristics exemplified by the SPP.

"In my view, these three features embody state partnerships and are the reason why SPP is so useful both to our combatant commanders and our National Guard," Townsend said.

In his final assignment as the commander of U.S. Africa Command, Townsend said he saw the value of the SPP firsthand.

"I know this because it was always a talking point during my visits to Africa," he said. "It wasn't just service chiefs or chiefs of defense asking me about the partnership program. It was the presidents and ministers."

"If they didn't have an SPP, they wanted one," he said. "If they had an SPP, they wanted more of it."

There are 17 African nations in the SPP. The Utah Guard was one of the first state partnerships established in Africa, pairing with the Kingdom of Morocco in 2003. Townsend lauded the effectiveness of this partnership.

"I designated African Lion as AFRICOM's priority joint and multinational exercise in 2019," he said. "The Utah National Guard has really stepped up to the plate with everything from self-propelled howitzers to special forces, military bands and KC-135 tankers."

Townsend said the special sauce of the SPP is the extended relationship reach.

"It's not just a program for the Guard; it's a partnership for the whole of state government," Townsend said, citing Iowa and Kosovo's close ties, with foundations in the SPP.

The Iowa Guard and Kosovo were paired in the SPP in 2003, and shortly after that, Iowa designated Kosovo

as a sister state. Kosovo has since established a consulate in Iowa, the first foreign diplomatic representation in that state.

The global environment is changing and the Guard's efforts and relationships with state partners are paramount, Hokanson said. As partnerships mature, an increased emphasis on multidomain operations has emerged, including cyber- and space-related deterrence.

"Space is big, and we need our partners and our allies to make sure that we are resilient in this domain," said Air Force Brig. Gen. Michael Bruno, chief of staff, Colorado Air National Guard. "Strengthening our relationships with our partners is crucial to maintaining a secure, safe and sustainable space environment."

Bruno said highlighting the importance of the space domain begins with education. He added that including partners in space-related exercises, like U.S. Space Command's Global Sentinel, can increase global space situational awareness and enable Guardsmen to learn from partners.

"That's the great thing about the SPP," he said. "It's not one-sided; we learn from each other and we grow from each other's knowledge."

Hokanson said the SPP is intended to be mutually beneficial.

"We are all trying to do the same things, ensure the safety and security of our citizens, and preserve our borders and sovereignty," he said. "It is an incredible two-way exchange of information."

--

Air Force Lt. Col. Allison Stephens contributed to this story.

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



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Army Medal of Honor recipient and Korean War veteran remains identified

U.S. Army Public Affairs
Contributor

WASHINGTON — The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has positively identified the remains of Army Corporal Luther H. Story, a Medal of Honor recipient from Buena Vista, Georgia, who was killed in action while serving with Alpha Company, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division during the Korean War.

Story was a 19-year-old private first class when he was killed in action on Sept. 1, 1950, near Agnok, Korea. After being missing in action for nearly 73 years, he will be laid to rest at Andersonville National Cemetery in Georgia.

After the battle, Pfc. Story's remains could not be located or identified, and he was not recorded as captured. On Jan. 16, 1956, his remains were declared unrecoverable.

In June 2021, as part of the plan to disinter 652 Korean War Unknowns from the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, the DPAA disinterred a set of remains recovered near Sangde-po, South Korea.

Scientists from the DPAA used dental and anthropological analyses, and scientists from the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System used mitochondrial DNA analysis, to identify the remains as Story, who was posthumously promoted to corporal.

President Joseph Biden and President Yoon Suk Yeoland, Republic of Korea, attended a ceremony in on April 25 at the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., with Story's family in attendance.

A joint statement was issued by the presidents of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea on the identification.

Corporal Luther H. Story Award Citation:

Pfc. Story distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action. A savage daylight attack by elements of three enemy divisions penetrated the thinly held lines of the 9th Infantry.

Company A beat off several banzai attacks, but was bypassed and in danger of being cut off and surrounded. Pfc. Story, a weapons squad leader, was heavily engaged in stopping the early attacks and had just moved his squad to a position overlooking the Naktong River when he observed a large group of the enemy crossing the river to attack Company A.

Seizing a machine gun from his wounded gunner, he placed deadly fire on the hostile column, killing or wounding an estimated 100 enemy soldiers. Facing certain encirclement, the company commander ordered a withdrawal. During the move Pfc. Story noticed the approach of an enemy truck loaded with troops and towing an ammunition trailer. Alerting his comrades to take cover, he fearlessly stood in the middle of the road, throwing grenades into the truck.

After running out of grenades, he crawled to his squad, gathered additional grenades, and again attacked the vehicle. During the withdrawal, the company was attacked by such superior numbers that it was forced to deploy in a rice field. Pfc. Story was wounded during this action but, disregarding his wounds, rallied the men about him and repelled the attack. Realizing that his wounds would hamper his comrades, he refused to retire to the next position and remained to cover the company's withdrawal. When last



Pfc. Luther Story, circa 1950 (U.S. Army photo)

seen, he was firing every weapon available and fighting off another hostile assault.

Pvt. Story's extraordinary heroism, aggressive leadership and supreme devotion to duty reflect the highest credit upon himself and were in keeping with the esteemed traditions of the military service.

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Sgt. Maj. Thomas Payne shares a laugh during his visit to the Pentagon, on Sept. 10, 2020. Payne received the Medal of Honor by President Donald J. Trump at the White House on Sept. 11, 2020 for his actions on Oct. 22, 2015 during a nighttime hostage rescue in Iraq. Payne along with other Medal of Honor recipients took part in a special awards ceremony commemorating National Medal of Honor Day on March 25, 2023 in Pentagon City. (DOD Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Carlos M. Vazquez II)

Army's MOH recipients set example for next generation

Joe Lacdan
Army News Service

WASHINGTON — When Sgt. Maj. Thomas Payne and Master Sgt. Earl Plumlee received the nation's highest military valor award, they joined a select group of Soldiers who earned the Medal of Honor while on active duty.

Now the recipients have taken the responsibility of representing the Army while also helping draw interest of potential recruits to the service.

Plumlee and Payne attended the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's 2023 Citizen Honors Awards on March 25, which recognized fellow recipients and other service members.

"I feel like wherever I go I represent the Army even more so than before," Plumlee said during the event that commemorated National Medal of Honor Day in Pentagon City. "I think it does come with that obligation to hold yourself to a slightly higher standard of conduct but it's that beautiful burden."

"You're constantly representing the Army and the United States," Payne said. "Anytime our boots hit the ground, we're ambassadors of the American way of life, and it's an honor and privilege to take the fight and crush the enemy when we have to."

On Aug. 28, 2013, Plumlee and fellow Green Berets successfully defended a forward operating base from an insurgent attack. His bravery first earned him the Silver Star which was later upgraded.

Plumlee said he now embraces his role as a Medal of Honor recipient after initially being reluctant to step into the national spotlight. Plumlee said in 2021 said he did not want to take attention from his elite unit of Green Berets.

On Dec. 16, 2021, President Biden awarded Plumlee the Medal in the White House's East Room. Plumlee deployed shortly after the week of ceremonies honoring his actions.

Following his reception of the Medal of Honor, Plumlee later returned to his home state of Oklahoma in October 2022 during an outreach tour where he spoke to potential Army recruits at different schools. Plumlee also attended the Oklahoma State University homecoming game.

The Soldier stepped away from his duties as a Green Beret and represented the Special Forces Recruiting Battalion as well as the Army Recruiting Command, based in Fort Knox, Kentucky, to encourage potential recruits to join the Army. After falling short of

its recruiting goals in 2022, the Army aims to recruit 65,000 new Soldiers into its ranks in 2023.

"I share with [recruits] how meaningful my service has been to me, how proud I am when I look back at what the country is," he said. "I've played that part of creating the system that we have."

Payne, who on Oct. 22, 2015 led one of the largest rescue operations in U.S. history to earn the Medal, echoed Plumlee's sentiments. Payne said he has done some recruiting outreach for the Army, but his duties as an Army Ranger take precedence.

Payne, standing with the Medal adorned around his neck, said that the Army presents a unique profession for recruits providing personal growth and career development.

"If you were to lay out 100 careers for me today, knowing what I know about it now, I would pick this career 100 times over," Payne said. "I've had the honor and privilege to serve with the greatest servicemen that this country has to offer."

During the 2015 mission, Payne joined a Special Operations Joint Task Force to liberate more than 70 Iraqi prisoners from an Islamic State group prison in Hawija, Iraq.

The South Carolina native enlisted in the Army as an infantry Soldier after graduating high school in 2002. Now he serves as an instructor for Army Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

On Sept. 11, 2020, President Trump placed the Medal of Honor upon Payne's shoulders in a White House ceremony.

"I've had the opportunity to serve with the 75th Ranger Regiment ... the most elite Soldiers in the United States military," said Payne, 38. "And they set the foundation of how to be a warrior on the battlefield. And I'm grateful for that leadership and I'm carrying on their legacy ... We're just paving the way forward for the next generation."

Both Soldiers are nearing the end of their military careers. Plumlee said that he expects to retire within the next two years and take some years off to spend time with his wife and children.

Although Plumlee and Payne have not yet decided on their plans after the Army, they both said they will continue to represent the Army and become productive citizens.

"Just be productive members of society," Payne said. "We'll go back to our hometowns, kind of like that Vietnam and World War II generation that coached itself in youth football and baseball. [We'll] just give back."

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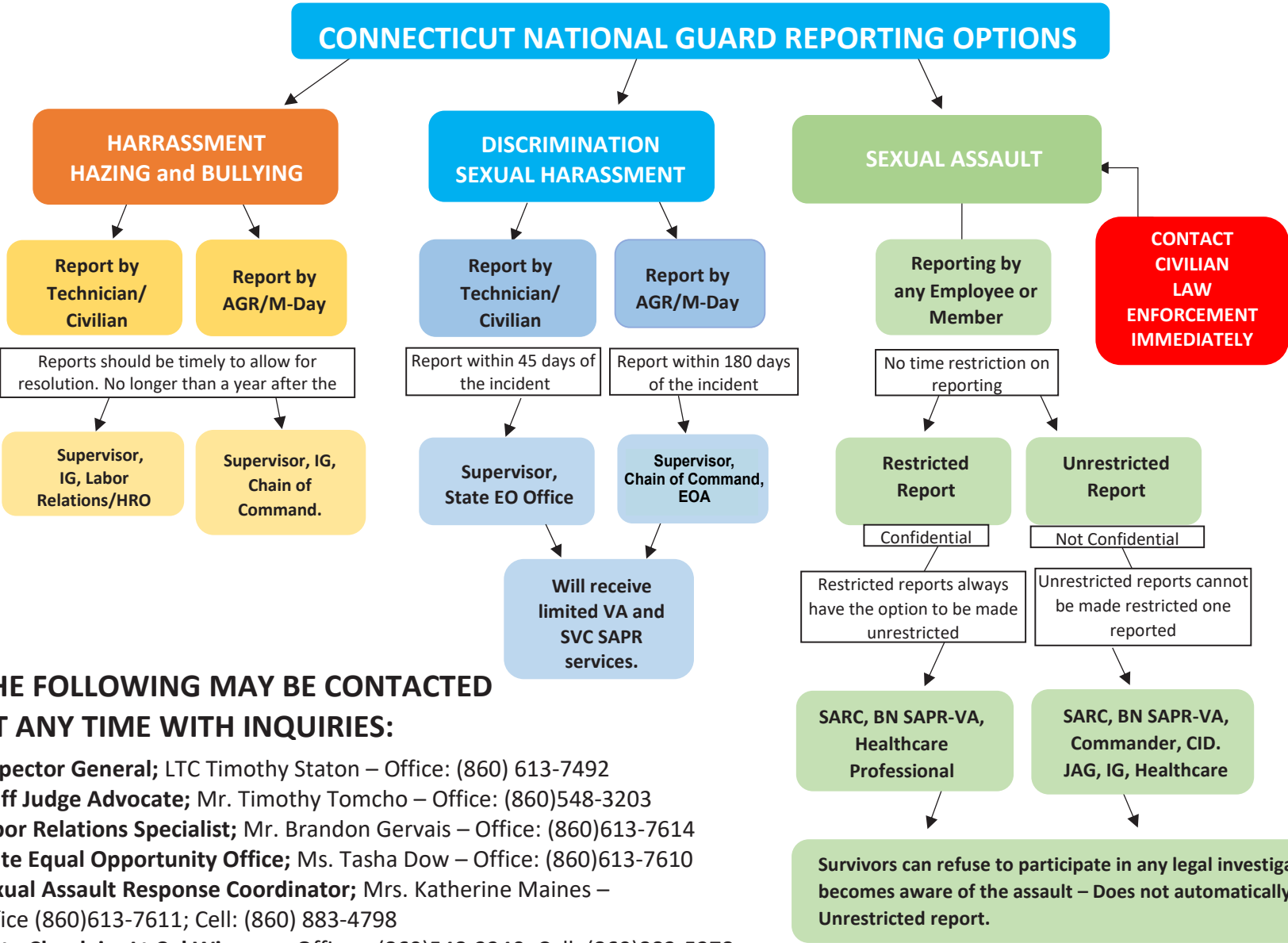
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Expanded academic program offers additional benefits for initial recruits

Christopher Hurd
Contributor

WASHINGTON — Walking into his local Newark, New Jersey, Military Entrance Processing Station, Army hopeful Adam Vega was running on no sleep and little preparation as he sat down to take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test.

The ASVAB is an exam that helps predict future academic and occupational success. The military uses it to determine whether an individual qualifies for service, if they can receive any monetary incentive and what jobs are available based on their score.

Vega struggled to stay awake during the test, and the exam proved to be a difficult task under those circumstances.

“Everything just didn’t go my way,” he recalled. “I was struggling with everything.”

After dropping out of college, he was trying figure out where he was going in life and thought the Army was a great opportunity. His plan would hit a snag after seeing his test results.

“It almost brought a tear to my eye because I knew I was capable of reaching a higher score,” he said.

His score of 38 allowed him to enlist in the Army with a waiver, but it didn’t offer him the job opportunities in the medical field he hoped for.

Vega spoke to his recruiter, who told him about a new academic program that could possibly help him improve his scores and keep his dream job a reality if he was interested.

He jumped at the chance.

Last year, the Army launched the Future Soldier Preparatory Course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, with the hope of helping eligible Americans overcome academic and physical fitness barriers to service.

The three-week-long course allows perspective recruits, with an ASVAB score between 21-30 or those who cannot meet physical standards, the opportunity to improve and retest. If they meet standards by the end of the course, they move on to basic training, while those who don’t are allowed to repeat the course for up to 90 days.

The initial results of the program were very encouraging with students on average increasing their academic scores by 17 points. This success led the Army to expand the academic portion of the program to Fort Benning, Georgia, in early February.

There, volunteer recruits already under contract, who have an ASVAB score of 31-49, participate in the Academic Skills Development Program. They work with drill instructors, civilian teachers, as well as their fellow students to improve their arithmetic reasoning, word knowledge, paragraph comprehension and mathematics.

“Being surrounded by the instructors and students helped me better understand things,” Vega said. “We worked so well together. It was a team effort.”

While going through the course, the students learned militarization to prepare them for basic training. Every day they wear the uniform, march to class and have an hour-long Army-focused lesson. They also work on their physical fitness and learn proper nutrition.



Pfc. Adam Vega poses for a photo after completing the Academic Skills Development Program at Fort Benning, Georgia, March 31. Vega improved his scores during the three-week course from 38 to 72, allowing him to renegotiate his contract to become a combat medic. (Photo Credit: Army photo by Christopher Hurd)

“We do all of this so they can be a step ahead when they get to basic training,” said 1st Lt. Randall Dunlap, Delta Company commander for the Academic Skills Development Program. “We want them to be as prepared as possible.”

At the end of the course, the students take the Armed Forces Classification Test to see if they improved. If they make the jump over 50 and into the higher classification category, they have the chance to renegotiate their contract. That opens the possibility of a new job, potential bonus, student loan forgiveness and duty location preference.

“[The course] is definitely a benefit to the individual if they want to better themselves,” Dunlap said. “It just depends on what effort they put in and how much they want it.”

The program has only pushed a few classes through, but they are already seeing encouraging results with the last two classes having 43% and 50% of the students reaching a higher classification category.

After retaking the test, Pfc. Vega was able to increase his score from 38 all the way up to 72. This allowed him to renegotiate his contract and fulfil his dream of entering the medical field as a combat medic. He also received a

bonus of \$7,500.

“I qualify for so much more now,” he said. “[This course] just expanded my opportunities, and I’m grateful for that.”

Other recent students also received expanded benefits including bonuses up to \$20,000, student loan forgiveness up to \$50,000, career field changes and duty station changes.

These benefits have the potential to make a significant impact in the recruit’s careers and lives. It certainly did for Vega, who said others interested in signing up for the program should not hesitate.

“Do it,” he said emphatically. “You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The opportunities are endless when you take that route.”

Improved scores also allow Soldiers to qualify for schools in the future as well as possible commissioning programs. The program continues to refine the curriculum and can tailor the instruction for each classes’ needs. Soldiers unable to improve their scores keep their existing contract and head to basic training or One Station Unit Training upon completion.



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