



# Connecticut GUARDIAN

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## 2024 Connecticut Army Best Warrior Competition

Cdt. Aaron Sepot  
130th Public Affairs Detachment

The Connecticut Army National Guard hosts the annual Best Warrior Competition at Camp Nett. The purpose of the competition is to recognize an exemplary soldier who is determined through a series of events. These events are conducted over a period of four days and simulate real life situations that soldiers go through. The competitors are then graded on how well they perform based on Army doctrine. What makes this year special is the fact the competitors also have the opportunity to earn the German Armed Forces Badge for Military Proficiency (GAFPB) as well as the Norwegian Foot March foreign medal.

Day one of the competition primarily takes place in a classroom setting. A safety brief with the competitors is performed so as to understand risk management for these next few days. Then the competitors are seated so they can receive a course on range cards, sector sketches, and visual signaling techniques. Range cards and sector sketches are used in operations to illustrate surrounding terrain for sectors of fires. Visual signaling techniques are critical for elements to remain silent during movement operations. Following these classes is Army Warrior Training which covers common soldiers tasks. Lastly, the competitors are taken to Stone Ranch Military Reservation in East Lyme to perform Land Navigation. This event takes place twice, one in the daytime and once again at night.

Day two picks up in intensity, starting the day with the swimming event for the GAFPB. For this event, the competitors must swim 100 meters in under for minutes



Contestants participating in the 2024 Connecticut Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition work toward completing the German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge. (photo by Pfc. Emmanuel Gibson)

followed by undressing underwater. The swim event is followed by the GAFPB Basic Fitness Test. The test is composed of three events and it must be completed within 90 minutes. In the first event, the competitor must run 10 meters 11 times under a minute. Next is the chin-up test where the competitor performs a flexed arm hang for more

than five seconds. Lastly, there is a 1,000 meter run where the competitor must complete it under six minutes and 3 seconds. Once the fitness test is concluded, they are taken to the range to complete the pistol qualification portion of

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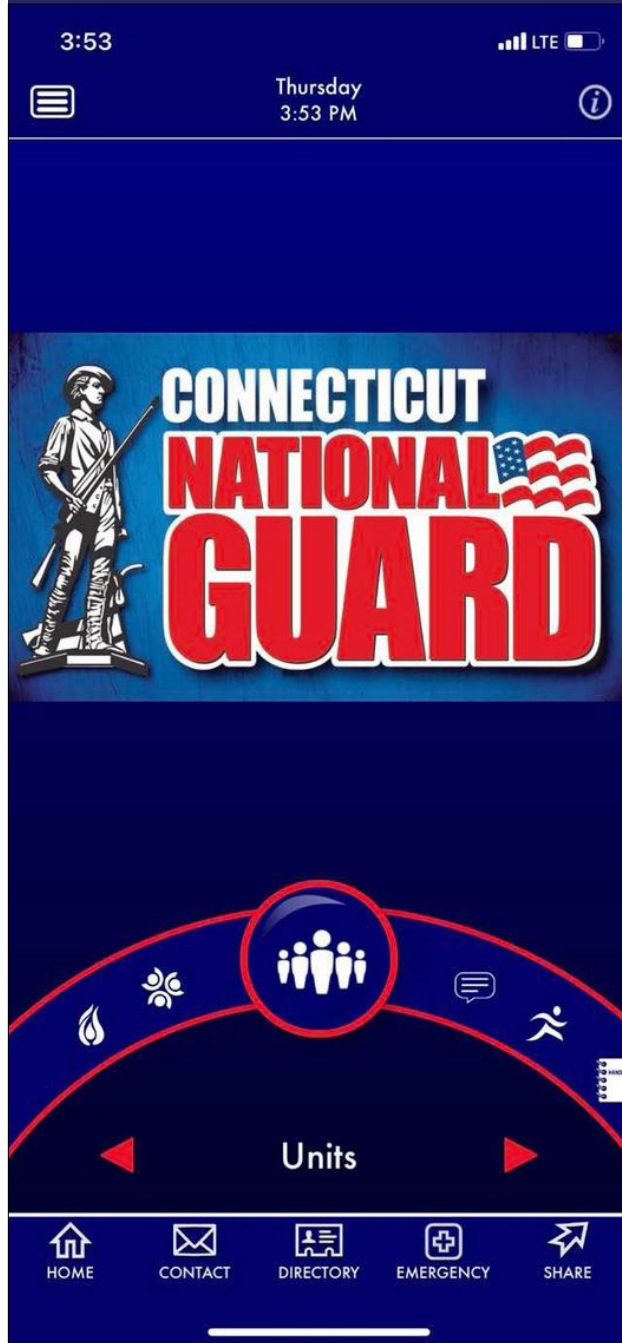
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Connecticut Air National Guard Tech Sgt. Conor Westling, a command and control battle management operations airman assigned to the 103rd Air Control Squadron, or 103rd ACS, sets up radar and electronic systems, part of the Tactical Operations Center - Light, or TOC-L, at Camp Nett, Niantic, Connecticut, March 5, 2024. This exercise was the first time the TOC-L was tested in a live environment by the 103rd ACS. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Lucibello)

## Connecticut Air Guard unit tests battle management system of the future

**Sgt. Matthew Lucibello**  
130th Public Affairs Detachment

NIANTIC, Conn. – Airmen from the 103rd Air Control Squadron, Connecticut Air National Guard, mounted their vehicles during the early morning hours of March 5 and braved the rainstorms as they convoyed from their home station in Orange, CT to Camp Nett in Niantic, to conduct Exercise Agile Panda.

The goal of Agile Panda, an exercise five months in the making, was to field test the Tactical Operations Center - Light, or TOC-L, the latest, most modular air battle management system currently undergoing evaluation within the U.S. Air Force for use by control and reporting centers, or CRCs, like those operated by the 103rd ACS.

Tactical Operations Centers, or TOCs, are command and control, or C2, nodes usually composed of multiple tents and or tactical vehicles, built to accommodate communications and data collection platforms for use by military commanders and their staffs to guide tactical units within areas of operations under their command.

TOC-L is an experimental system, which, if adopted, will replace legacy systems and their accompanying components, such as older versions of the AN/TYQ-23A Tactical Air Operations Module, currently in use throughout the Air Force.

“[The AN/TYQ-23A Tactical Air Operations Module, or 23 Alpha] is a mobile air control system. It uses something called the MSCT, which is a Multi-Source Correlator Tracker, which takes in radar feeds from any surrounding areas like the FAA or a local Topsy 75 (AN/TPS-75) tactical radar,” said Connecticut Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Brian Wilson, a computer maintainer with the 103rd ACS. “It takes all the tracks and

correlates them into a singular picture that [flight controllers in air battle management] can use in order to perform missions like establishing a no-fly zone, mid-air refueling [orbits], surveillance operations, [coordinating] fighter strikes and [facilitating deep strike] bombing missions.”

The immediate need for a new TOC system comes as the Air Force better prepares itself to fight and win in large-scale combat operations, or LSCO, where units would have to rapidly deploy to and from contested, degraded environments against potential near-peer adversaries.

Currently, there are only 16 systems spread out amongst the force, two of which are being tested by Air National Guard units. These units are the 103rd ACS in Connecticut, which was the first Air Guard unit to receive TOC-L in December 2023, and the 128th Air Control Squadron out of Wisconsin.

Exercise Agile Panda marks the first time the 103rd ACS has tested the system outside of their normal base of operations and is the first time they have utilized it to perform the unit’s primary function, controlling live aircraft conducting aerial warfare training.

“The Maine Air National Guard is flying a KC-135, the New Hampshire Air National Guard, a KC-46, the [103rd Airlift] Wing a C-130, and the Massachusetts Air National Guard, the 104th Fighter Wing, is putting up eight F-15s,” said Connecticut Air National Guard Maj. J. Seth Bopp, Director of Operations for the 103rd Air Control Squadron. “All of these units are supporting the 103rd ACS and, more broadly, the testing of the

See **FUTURE**, page 9



# 12 Connecticut Veterans inducted into state hall of fame

**Timothy Koster**  
Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

Twelve Connecticut veterans were enshrined in the state's veteran's hall of fame as part of the class of 2023 during a ceremony at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Rocky Hill, Jan. 25, 2024.

The Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame was established to increase the awareness of the lifetime contributions of veterans after their completion of honorable military service. The founding class was inducted in 2005.

The class of 2023 includes:

## **John Michael Chan, Air Force**

John Michael Chan was born on August 24, 1948. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1968 after graduating high school. Following basic training, he attended technical school at Chanute Air Force Base, Illinois, receiving his certificate as a Flight Simulator Specialist. Following tech school, John was assigned to the 6200 Air Wing, Clark Air Base, the Philippines, serving as an instructor on instrument flying, emergency procedures, and tactics in the F-100, F-4 and C-130 aircraft. John was also responsible for teaching pilots bombing tactics using Air to Ground Missiles. In 1971, he became a crew chief on the C-130, flying missions into Vietnam from Clark Air Base. In 1972, he returned to United States where he instructed pilots on the A-7 aircraft. In 1974, John had earned enough college credits to compete for the highly competitive Airmen's Education and Commission Program (AECPP) and was accepted. He was to attend Louisiana Tech University, earning his Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering Management. Upon graduation from Officer Training School in 1976, John returned to Chanute Air Force Base to serve as an Aircraft Maintenance Officer. John's state-side assignments as a maintenance officer included Luke AFB, AZ, Pease AFB, NH.

His overseas assignments included Royal Air Force Base Richmond, Sydney, Australia and Taegu Air Base, South Korea. He served as a maintenance officer for the F-15, F-16, C-141, F-4, and F-86. John also completed a n assignment as a munitions officer at NATO Italian Ghedi Air Base. John retired from the United States Air Force as a Captain in 1988 following a serious injury sustained in an aircraft accident.

Upon retiring, he accepted a position as Integrated Logistics Systems Manager at Kaman Aerospace in Bloomfield. He moved to Avon, CT where he has resided since then. John is a life member of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and member of The American Legion. He has developed many historical and educational programs to preserve the memorial of the sacrifices of those who fought or lost their lives in the defense of our freedom. John has devoted his life to helping those in need, and mostly for fellow Veterans and their families. For the last six years, he has refurbished Durable Medical Equipment to donate to needy Veterans, through his "Heroes on Wheels" program. His program has helped thousands of Veterans throughout Connecticut with manual and motorized wheelchairs, wheelchair ramps, motorized scooters, hospital beds, oxygen concentrators, walkers, etc. These gifts have helped restore the mobility and quality of life for those that John has had the



*U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal, Connecticut Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz, and other local political leaders pose for a photo with the 12 veterans inducted into the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame, class of 2024, following a ceremony at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Rocky Hill, Connecticut Jan. 25, 2024.*

privilege to help.

## **Michael John Dalton, Army**

Michael J. Dalton was drafted into the United States Army at the age of 18 and served for three years, including a one-year tour in Vietnam. Michael had the option of returning to Ireland and not serving, he made the decision to not leave and enlisted. Michael's unselfish decision led him to experience twelve months of continuous life-threatening combat leadership assignments, functions, and roles including service on the Ho Chi Minh convoys and during the Tet Offensive Battle of Hue. Michael was discharged from the Army with the rank of Specialist Five.

Michael is a lifelong resident of Waterbury. He is a citizen with exemplary moral character beyond reproach and an unwavering commitment to country, state, and city. He has spent most of his adult life as an advocate for the Veteran community. His advocacy for Veterans over the years has entailed several leadership roles including Originator/Director of the Veterans Headstone/Tombstone Restoration Project honoring all deceased servicemembers, and the Veterans Affairs Contact Person for the City of Waterbury, managing communication with Veterans, their families, caregivers, survivors, supporting entities, and the public. Additionally, Michael is a member of the Army Historical Foundation, which fundraises to educate future Americans to fully appreciate the sacrifices that generations of American Soldiers have made to safeguard the freedoms of this nation, and the Wounded Warrior Project, which offers a variety of no-cost programs, services, and events for wounded Veterans and Veteran families. Michael is a subscribing Life Member of the NAACP Greater Waterbury Adult Branch. Mr. Dalton is an avid supporter of Paralyzed Veterans of America, an organization that

empowers our disabled heroes to live more independent and fulfilling lives. He is a member of Vietnam Veterans of America, which promotes and supports the full range of issues important to Vietnam Veterans, including the creation of a new identity for our current generation of Veterans. Michael's role as a community activist is rooted in volunteerism and dedicated to making a better world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. He is a Salvation Army volunteer and oversees the collection and distribution of donated items for homeless Veterans. Mr. Dalton is the Chairperson/Co-Founder of Mayor O'Leary's Kids Marathon Program and sits on the Board of Directors for New England Mentorship Corporation. As a committed public servant, Michael served as Waterbury's City Clerk for nine (9) consecutive 2-Year Terms.

## **Richard Guido DiFederico Jr., Navy**

Richard G. DiFederico Jr. enlisted in the United States Navy in 1981 following his graduation from Watertown High school. In 1983, while assigned to the U.S. Multi-National Force- Beirut he was involved in the Marine Barracks bombing. (USMNF) in Beirut (Bombing), Lebanon. He was also involved in United States' operations in Nicaragua in 1988 and served in Honduras.

After his Navy service, Richard returned to his hometown where he met and married his wife and raised two children. Richard was elected to the local Town Council and served several terms making the community a better place for all. Mr. DiFederico is a member of VFW Post 7330 in Oakville, serving in several positions including Post Commander. Mr. DiFederico is a three-time VFW State Commander, the first and only person to do so. Richard has been a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars for over 30 years. Since 2000, he has been a National Dis-



abled American Veterans Service Officer and Veterans of Foreign Wars Service Officer. He continues to serve as Watertown's Municipal Veteran's Representative, helping veterans and their families with benefits, resources, and questions. In 2005, he was given a plaque in honor of the number of veterans (7,330) he has assisted over the years. A grateful Veteran gave Richard the special license plate "VFW7330" to express gratitude for all that Mr. DiFederico does to support his fellow brother and sister Veterans.

Richard was honored for his commitment to excellence in the community with a plaque on the Watertown High School Wall of Honor in 2021. He has served as the VFW Voice of Democracy/Patriot Pen Essay Contest Chairman for over 10 years.

#### **Maurice Joseph Fradette, Navy**

Maurice "Moe" Fradette has always welcomed opportunities to serve community and country. After graduating from Farmington High School, he attended the University of Connecticut where he served on the Student Senate and was President of his fraternity and the University's Inter-Fraternity Council. After graduating in 1964, he followed the example of his older brothers who had served in the Army and Navy and entered the U.S. Navy and attended Officer Candidate School at Newport, RI. He received his commission in 1965 and completed Communications and Cryptography Systems training.

Moe's initial assignment was to the USS Power (DD-839). While aboard the Power, he served as Electronics Material Officer, CIC Officer, Navigator, and OOD Underway. In 1965, the Power served as part of the recovery team for Gemini 6 & 7. Power completed Mediterranean cruises in 1966 and 1967 serving with the 6th Fleet. Her 1966 deployment included transit of the Suez Canal and Red Sea to serve with Middle East Forces. In January 1968 he left the USS Power and returned to Connecticut as a Reservist and to this day still maintains communications with fellow shipmates.

In 1973, Moe married his wife Suzanne and they moved to West Hartford to raise their family before moving to Farmington in 2021. Moe's professional career was in technology sales as a Global Account Manager for Nortel Networks, where he received multiple awards for sales achievements. As a member of St. Peter Claver Church, West Hartford, he served as Trustee for 15 years. In 1973, as a Veteran, a title he is very proud of, he joined the American Legion Hayes-Velhage Post 96 in West Hartford to assist in the support of the Vietnam Moving Wall's visit to West Hartford. As an active member of Post 96 he has served multiple terms as Post Commander, Vice Commander, and currently serves as Post 96 Adjutant and editor of the Post's newsletter. In 2011, he organized and headed a committee to plan and execute a weeklong tribute to over 600 WWII Veterans, "The Greatest Generation", residing in West Hartford. The Memorial Day parade that year, in honor of the WWII Veterans, attracted one of the largest crowds in the history of the parade. In 2015, he met with the West Hartford Public Schools Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent to discuss a program to recognize high school seniors choosing to enter military service. The event was given full support by the West Hartford Public Schools and the initial Inductees Ceremony was held in 2016. The event, attended by the Inductees and their parents, provides an opportunity for Inductees to be recognized for their commitment to serve. The Military Induct-

ees Ceremony is held annually on the Tuesday following Memorial Day and over 175 graduates have been formally recognized. When Hayes-Velhage Post 96 celebrated its Centennial in 2022, he helped plan the Post's Centennial promotions and Centennial Banquet.

#### **Michael Salvatore Gozzo, Marines**

Michael "Mike" Gozzo is a 1979 Graduate of Bassick High School in Bridgeport. During high school he participated in the Boy Scouts of America and later became a cubmaster within the organization. He joined the cross country and track teams, which he used as a springboard to prepare for the Marine Corps. Mike enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1979 and completed recruit training at San Diego, CA.

Mike's first duty location was Camp Lejeune, North Carolina as a legal clerk followed by assignments in Okinawa, Japan, Quantico, Virginia, and back to San Diego, CA for Recruiting school. Mike served as a recruiter in Hartford, CT from 1984-1988. He returned to Quantico and completed Advance Combat training in 1990, followed by a tour of duty in support of Operation Desert Shield/ Desert Storm. Following his service in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, now SSgt Gozzo Mike returned to Camp Lejeune, serving with Marine Corps Security Forces Battalion, Norfolk, VA.

Gunnery Sergeant Gozzo retired in January 2000. His personal awards include the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, two Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, Kuwait Liberation Medal (SA), Kuwait Liberation Medal (KU), and the Combat Action Ribbon.

Mike graduated from Park College (Parkville, MO) (BS- Management), and Old Dominion University (Norfolk, VA) (MS- Education) while in the Marine Corps. He later earned a second master's degree (History) from Southern Connecticut State University.

Mike started his career as an educator following his retirement, becoming a substitute and later a full-time teacher in Virginia. Mike taught in the Norfolk and Hampton public schools until June, 2006 when he accepted a position with the Derby Public Schools, currently serving as an 8th grade social studies teacher.

Mike was a central figure in constructing the middle school cross country and track programs. In addition, for the past 14 years, he volunteers his winters as an advisor for the Derby Middle School Running Club and summers with the Derby Parks and Recreation Running Club. In 2015 he helped establish the Bella Vita Foundation. The foundation awards an annual scholarship to worthy Derby High School graduate to help navigate their future. Mike was selected as the 2018 Teacher of the Year for Derby Public Schools and is dedicated to supporting his students academically and athletically.

#### **Richard Thomas Christopher LeFave, Army**

Richard "Dick" LeFave was born in Everett, Massachusetts on December 9, 1951. He graduated and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army Medical Service Corps from Boston University.

During Dick's active military service, he was deployed for Operation New Life, supporting the evacuation of refugees from Vietnam. He was assigned as the Executive Officer of a combat medical company in Korea. His final Army assignment on active duty was as a Company Commander in the 9th Medical Battalion, 9th Infantry Divi-

sion. Dick left active duty in 1978 and served in the Army National Guard in both Washington and Massachusetts, achieving the rank of Major. His awards include Meritorious Service Medal (2), the Army Commendation Medal (2), the Humanitarian Service Medal, the Korean Service Defense Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, and the Expert Field Medical Badge. He is a recipient of the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal.

Dick left active military duty in 1978, taking a position with the Boeing Company in Seattle, WA. He returned to New England and settled in Massachusetts where he held various leadership positions in technology, including as the Chief Information Officer with Southern New England Telephone, and Nextel/Sprint Telecommunications. He is a board member of Amdocs Computer Corporation, a Fortune 500 technology provider. Dick runs his own technology consulting firm, D+L Partners, LLC which provides consulting services to global companies.

Dick attended the Harvard Business School, Advanced Management Program in 2003. Dick is a published author on technology, management, and photography.

After a stay in Guilford, the LeFave's chose to relocate to Voluntown, Connecticut to an old farm where he and his family have resided since. He married Linda Greenlaw in 1973 and has shared his journey with her as a true-life partner. The family grew to include three talented children and 6 grandchildren of their own. The LeFave's recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in September 2023. Dick and his family have provided volunteer support in Cambodia for 8 years where they engage in house construction and the opportunity to help and support an underprivileged population. He is dedicated to providing technology leadership and service to help the citizens of Connecticut and those disadvantaged in foreign countries. Giving forward has been a major tenant of his legacy.

#### **Joseph Luca, Marines**

Giuseppe (Joseph) "Joe" Luca was born in April 1946 to Natalina and Vincenzo Luca in the town of Mammola, province of Reggio Calabria, Italy. In 1959, his uncle and father applied for immigration, and Joe remembers begged with his father to allow him to apply as well. In 1960, Joe was on his way to America. Once in America, Joe attended Our Lady of Mount Carmel an Italian Catholic elementary school run by the Sisters of St. Lucy Filippini. After high school, he enrolled in the Part Institute of Hair Design. After graduation, he went to work in hair design.

In 1965, the Vietnam conflict was escalating, and Joe was drafted into the U.S. Marine Corps. Fighting in Vietnam was extremely difficult on a multitude of levels across all the services. Joe served in Company F, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines. Joe was assigned as a runner and interpreter for several languages.

While on patrol with his fellow Marines, the lead elements of the patrol came under very heavy fire. Joe took charge of the defense of the patrol, moved across open terrain to gain a more favorable position, and assisted in the medical evacuation of the wounded. Joe was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions on March 5, 1967.

After receiving his third Purple Heart, he was sent to Okinawa as an instructor and from there he was honorably discharged from the Marine Corps.

Joe is an active member of numerous Veterans Service Organizations including the Marine Corps League, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam



Veterans of America, and the Military Order of the Purple Heart. He volunteers his time and energy to numerous community and civic organizations.

Joe would have never dreamed it possible that an Italian kid from the small town of Mammola in the Province of Reggio Calabria, Italy would be here standing amongst a group of highly distinguished men and women accepting such an honor. Joe says being admitted to the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame 2023 “is one of the most prestigious awards an Old Veteran Marine could be honored to accept. I am so proud to be an American and honored to have the opportunity to represent our Great Country, the United States of America. The Marine motto is “Semper Fi” which means “Always Faithful.” So, Semper Fi, God Bless, and Thank You so very much.

#### **Daniel Bernard Reilly, Air Force**

Daniel Bernard Reilly is a resident of Torrington, Connecticut. He served over 24 years as an enlisted civil engineer in the 103d Civil Engineer Squadron. As a civil engineer, he served with distinction and a high level of professional competence, leadership, and enthusiasm. He was instrumental in the 103d Civil Engineer Squadron’s sustained record of excellence. He is a Veteran of deployments to numerous named operations around the world including Southern Watch, Noble Eagle, Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, and Unified Response. Additionally, Dan served extensively in the National Guard Counter Narcotics Program, working tirelessly on both drug demand and supply reduction efforts. Dan retired from the U. S. Airforce and the Connecticut Air National Guard in May, 2022.

Daniel B. Reilly is employed by AmeriTech Contracting as the Vice President of Business Development. His background in construction, plumbing, mechanical specialties, project management, and his industry experience as a general and operations manager for premier mechanical companies has allowed him to accomplish improved program delivery timelines and quality improvements with increased team efficiencies, resulting in millions of dollars of annual savings. His people-focused, collaborative approach is contagious while providing much-needed solutions to address the organization’s needs, objectives, and challenges. Daniel’s innovative business acumen led to his recognition and inclusion in Stanford’s Who’s Who of executives, entrepreneurs, and professionals.

In addition to serving on multiple national nonprofit boards of directors, Dan is the President of the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS). EANGUS serves over 450,000 members of the National Guard and over 480,000 retiree Veterans. In his role as the EANGUS President, Dan advises senior DOD leaders and elected officials on the readiness, employment, quality of life, health care, and compensation on behalf of almost one million current and former enlisted servicemembers. He routinely provides expert testimony to various Congressional committees, including the Armed Forces and Appropriations Committee.

Dan holds an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) in Mechanical and Electrical Technology and a Professional Managers Certification from the Community College of the Air Force. Daniel is a graduate of the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans (EBV) Program at the University of Connecticut’s School of Business. Dan serves as the chair for the leadership development Community of Inter-



*Twelve Connecticut veterans listen to guest speakers during a ceremony where they were inducted into the state's veterans hall of fame for their contributions to the veteran community during and following their time in service at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Rocky Hill, Connecticut, Jan. 25, 2024.*

est (COI) for the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME).

He attributes his drive for success solely to his four beautiful children, Aunchlee, Hunter, Aydan, and Bradley. His other passions are his extensive philanthropic work, nonprofit volunteerism, and altruistic manner of serving those who have served. Daniel is enthusiastic about the entrepreneurial spirit, assisting and collaborating with VSOBs and SDVOSBs.

#### **William Ford Law Rodgers, Marines**

William F.L. Rodgers was born and raised in Massachusetts and has resided in Connecticut since 1985. He has lived in Newtown since 1992. He graduated from Phillips Academy, Andover, MA, then received his B.A. and A.M. degrees concurrently from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA, followed by his J.D. from Boston University School of Law in Boston, MA. He is an attorney admitted to the CT, NY, and D.C. bars.

Colonel Rodgers joined the U.S. Marine Corps as a college sophomore and served tours of active duty in Quantico, VA, Newport, RI and Oceanside, CA. After his release from active duty, he returned to private practice in Connecticut and continued to serve as an active Marine Corps Reservist in military law billets in Washington D.C. In 2006, Colonel Rodgers volunteered to serve in Iraq and was deployed from August, 2006 to March, 2007, serving as a Liaison Officer between the Marine Corps and the United States Agency for International Development. He was awarded the Bronze Star at the completion of his tour. His final tour after return home was as an Appellate Military Judge for the Navy- Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeals. He retired in 2009 after 30 years of service.

Colonel Rodgers has been active in local politics, serv-

ing as both the Chair of Newtown’s Legislative Council for six years and on its Board of Selectmen for eight years. After the Sandy Hook shooting, he helped create and run the largest charity to emerge, the Sandy Hook Community Foundation. On the State level, he served as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, advising the Commissioner of Veteran Affairs. Colonel Rodgers is married to Moira Buckley Rodgers, also an attorney and former Probate Judge. They have a married daughter, Amelia, an attorney in CA, and two granddaughters.

#### **Lorenzo Anthony Santamaria, Marines**

Lorenzo “Larry” Santamaria enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1968, served thirteen months of combat in Vietnam with the 1st Marine Division, and was awarded the Purple Heart.

Larry lives his life in service to others. His actions are driven by a selfless sense of duty for his community and a genuine concern for others. His long record of service to his fellow Veterans is extensive and noteworthy. Our ability to describe his accomplishments is severely limited by space.

He joined the Edward A. Norton VFW Post #7666 in 1971 and has served as its Commander since 1979. He has organized the Memorial Day Parade each year since 1979, along with ceremonies and services for Veteran’s Day, Pearl Harbor Day, 9/11 and other Veteran-specific events. During the ‘80s and ‘90s Larry initiated and helped to coordinate color guard services for funerals and ceremonies throughout the state as needed. In 1991, Larry was instrumental in reviving the American Legion Post #48 in Guilford. Larry is a member of the American Legion, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Marine Corps League, and the





Twelve Connecticut veterans listen to guest speakers during a ceremony where they were inducted into the state's veterans hall of fame for their contributions to the veteran community during and following their time in service at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Rocky Hill, Connecticut, Jan. 25, 2024.

#### DAV.

Larry has worked on many community projects, including activities for the elderly, youth groups, and scout troops. Services include assisting, collecting, and distributing food with the Guilford Thanksgiving and Christmas Food Baskets Committee (1985 – 2022).

As the kitchen chef for the Town of Guilford, he provided 40,000 meals annually, working on weekends and holidays, for the Interfaith Volunteers Meals on Wheels program and the Seniors Lunch Program, including evening senior events, dances, and movie nights. Under the fundraiser auspices of the Guilford Interfaith Ministry and Chef Larry, the Guilford Veterans Day Lasagna Dinner has annually welcomed Veterans for almost 20 years, for a complimentary dinner that raises money from all 200 paid participants. Larry is also the chef for the Guilford Rotary's yearly Frosty 5K on New Year's Day.

In recognition of his service to others, he has been awarded several honors, including the Guilford Rotary's highest honor, the Paul Harris Award, and the Chamber of Commerce Volunteer of the Year Award. He was honored for his volunteer work for the town of Guilford with a proclamation from the Town naming "Larry Santamaria Day" and was recently presented with the Guilford Employee Recognition Award. Larry believes that serving others makes for a better community. Larry's commitment to serving others has been well established in Guilford and throughout the state. Unquestionably, his service to others has impacted many lives.

#### Charles Ferdinand Smith, Air Force

Charles "Charlie" Smith grew up in Hamden and grad-

uated from The Gunnery School in 1957 with 6 varsity letters. He continued his education at Franklin and Marshall College, graduating in 1961 with a B.A. in Sociology. There, he kept himself busy with Air Force ROTC, tennis, club hockey, and Chi Phi Fraternity.

Charlie was commissioned a Lieutenant in the United States Air Force. While in the Air Force he served as the Administrative Officer, in charge of a 7-bed dispensary in southern Italy. He was honorably discharged with the rank of Captain in 1966. Upon discharge, he remained on active reserve for a year, then inactive reserve until 1972.

The spirit of service has been a guiding light for Charlie since his days in the Air Force. Soon after moving to Killingworth, he helped form the Killingworth Ambulance Association and served as an EMT and CPR Instructor, a founding Board member, first President, and member on the Building Fund Committee. He assisted in the establishment of the Killingworth Chamber of Commerce. As a charter member of the Killingworth Lions Club, Charlie served in numerous positions, including as its 3rd President. Since 1972, he has been equally committed to the Killingworth Congregational Church where he served 12 years as a Trustee and in numerous other positions.

After retirement, Charlie became increasingly involved in Veterans' advocacy. He has served as the Chair for the Killingworth Memorial Day Committee since 2017. Charlies has been an integral member of The Community Soup Kitchen (CSK) in New Haven, working to feed approximately 250 people, 5 days a week. Charlie helped initiate and served as the Chair of the CSK walkathon for 12 years and has raised over \$200,000.00 to date.

Fundraising is of keen interest to Charlie. In addition

to his work with CSK, Charlie has helped raise over \$1.1 million for the Killingworth Town Library, more than \$440,000.00 for the Killingworth Congregational Church, and over \$100,000.00 for the Gunnery Alumni Association's Gunn Scholars Program

Charlie was inducted into the Haddam- Killingworth Board of Education Hall of Fame after serving in multiple positions over 30 years, including as President.

The State of Connecticut and the Town of Killingworth have certainly become a better place because of Mr. Smith's unending devotion to community service. His spirit of service is not just a notion, he has put his words into action from his time in Air Force ROTC to present day.

#### Peter Charles Tragni, Army

Peter Tragni joined the Connecticut Army National Guard in 1981 at the age of 17. He completed the basic combat medical specialist course and looked forward to a career in medical services. Fate deemed otherwise and Peter was chosen to attend airborne school as an R.O.T.C. cadet. He was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in Armored Cavalry at the age of 20 and took over as scout platoon leader in C Troop, 26 Cavalry, Connecticut Army National Guard. Peter soon transferred to the United States Army Reserve as a Civil Affairs Officer. When Desert Storm occurred, Peter was activated and commanded a Bradley Fighting Vehicle Scout Platoon in the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, and later retired as a captain. Peter was recently awarded The Order of Saint Maurice by The Infantry Association in recognition of his selfless dedication to soldiers mental health. Peter is very active in the 102nd Infantry Association, where he brings his collection of World War One military uniforms and equipment to displays and talks.

A career as a Danbury Police Officer started shortly after his service. As a Police Officer for 27 years, he taught D.A.R.E program and was a school resource officer, connecting with youth in positive ways. He became a trainer of Police Officers and School Resource Officers. As a Patrol Sergeant he helped train and guide new officers. Peter was a member of the Honor Guard, the critical incident stress debriefing team, and recruitment team. Peter was selected by the Department of State in 2004 to become an International Police Liaison Officer in Iraq, where he trained, evaluated, and mentored the new Iraqi Police Force.

Upon his retirement as a police officer, Peter went back to school and earned a double masters in clinical mental health and school counseling. He became a licensed professional counselor (LPC) and a middle school guidance counselor. Peter works for the Military Support Program, which embeds licensed therapists in Connecticut National Guard Units. He works as an integral part of the unit providing mental health services for soldiers and their families.

As a school counselor in Waterbury public schools, he brings a real-world approach to connecting with students who come from very difficult backgrounds. Peter is on the Western Connecticut Regional School Crisis Team, which deploys to schools when a major incident occurs such as the death of a student or faculty member to render counseling services. He is a life member of VFW Post 149 and is currently in a doctoral program in Educational Leadership, with the vision of taking his military and police leadership experience to train school leaders in crisis situations.



# CONGRATULATIONS

## CONNECTICUT NATIONAL GUARD PROMOTIONS

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# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

CONNECTICUT NATIONAL GUARD RETIREMENTS

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**SGM Marco Lopes**  
**CW5 Edward J. Pelletier**  
**MSG Mark S. Stuart**  
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## **AIR**

**COL Stephen R. Gwinn**  
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**MSgt Daniel L. Gay**





# Future

Cont. from page 3

TOC-L system by flying in the Whiskey 105 airspace (a warning area and military training airspace in the vicinity of Long Island, NY) and conducting a mission in order to showcase and prove the capabilities of the TOC-L.”

For the exercise, the 103rd ACS’ battle management team was split into two groups, the first stayed behind at the unit’s base in Orange to operate the legacy system, the AN/TYQ-23A Tactical Air Operations Module, while another small team of 11 airmen prepared to travel with the TOC-L system by air via a Connecticut Army National Guard CH-47 transport helicopter from the 2nd Battalion, 104th Aviation Regiment. Unfortunately, the airmen from the 103rd ACS had to adapt and overcome to accomplish their mission after a rainstorm blew in and grounded the helicopter. Due to the versatility of the TOC-L, and the expertise and quick thinking of the 103rd’s airmen, the team was able to load the system into a Light Medium Tactical Vehicle, or LMTV, and traveled by road to their proposed TOC location at Camp Nett in Niantic. Once on site, the team deployed their antenna systems and set up six of their scopes, specialized systems designed to receive radar data pulled in from the antennas, which is how aircraft are tracked when controlling an airspace, all within 65 minutes.

“We started the clock as soon as we started pulling the equipment cases off of the 5-ton,” explained Bopp. “That’s getting the equipment off the truck, into the building, out of the cases, set up, connections established and erecting a 60-foot antenna.”

TOC-L is designed to enhance the combat capabilities of command and control units and aims to be extremely versatile, scalable up or down to meet mission needs and the constraints of the operational environment. One goal of the system is to better enable the Air Force to minimize their footprint in the field, thus making units harder to detect and target. TOC-L accomplishes this by condensing the amount of equipment previously needed to meet operational requirements. Additionally, TOC-L enables units to create multiple smaller TOCs that can be spread out and decentralized if necessary, further minimizing their footprint on the battlefield.

“It’s a new, slimmer, agile version of the tactical operations module, the 23 Alpha,” explained Wilson. “It’s a similar system with an MSCT on it and instead of a large, deployable shelter, it’s encased in small Pelican cases that can be transported by a small man team via any vehicle like a helicopter, five ton [truck] or even a small truck as opposed to the 23 Alpha which requires a military truck or [other form of military transport] in order to arrive at location. [Additionally, these legacy systems] require heavy support equipment. [TOC-L] makes very little heat, so it doesn’t require a lot of cooling and uses very little power compared to [the] tactical systems that we currently use. We don’t have to have a large spot in the field, we can put it in any commercial building and use commercial power as opposed to [legacy systems] which require a tactical generator.”

TOC-L also comes with an entire new suite of antennas and communications equipment as part of the system, including an integrated Starlink system, which is used for long



Connecticut Air National Guard Senior Master Sgt. Jonathan Burr, a command and control battle management operations airman assigned to the 103rd Air Control Squadron, supervises other airmen erecting an antenna mast, part of the Tactical Operations Center - Light, or TOC-L, at Camp Nett, Niantic, Connecticut, March 5, 2024. This mast, which is 60 feet tall, and comes with a hand crank, supported multiple antennas that were critical to the 103rd ACS being able to safely and effectively control live aircraft operating in the Whiskey 105 airspace, a warning area and military training airspace in the vicinity of Long Island, NY. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Lucibello)



Connecticut Air National Guard Master Sgt. Jonathan Wolff, an expeditionary warfighting communications airman assigned to the 103rd Air Control Squadron, or 103rd ACS, cranks the handle of an antenna mast, part of the Tactical Operations Center - Light, or TOC-L, at Camp Nett, Niantic, Connecticut, March 5, 2024. Airmen from the 103rd ACS are conducting incremental testing of the TOC-L system for the U.S. Air Force. If adopted, this system will replace legacy command and control nodes and their respective subsystems. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Lucibello)

haul communications. Additionally, TOC-L provides the ability for controllers to pull radar data from the cloud, rather than through the traditional use of cables. Cables can be cumbersome, are detectable by enemy sensors and have the potential to be damaged in transport, during setup, or possibly by the enemy through acts of sabotage or in-direct fire.

“From a radio perspective, it is cool because we have the newest, latest and greatest radio equipment, the PRC-167’s bring a very modern communications capability as opposed to some of our legacy radios,” explained Connecticut Air National Guard Master Sgt. Jesse Barna, the radio superintendent of the 103rd ACS. “We’re supposed to be getting a newer version of our larger TOC radio suite within the next year or two, and it’s supposed to be a fully upgraded radio suite with newer [surface-to-air] radios, but this kit has a lot of the Special Operations Command radio systems. It came with a whole suite of antennas, including this new OCP tube roll antenna, which is neat. We’re going to be testing its range in relation to our more standard antennas. We actually brought one of our own antennas that’s not part of the system to see how this mobile gear stacks up against [the new communications equipment]. Our airspace is pretty far away, so we’re really pushing what this equipment is capable of. We’re getting some good data and we’re going to report all this and hopefully it goes into the development of the system.”

Currently, the 103rd ACS is implementing Increment One, the first step in a series of testing phases the TOC-L will undergo to test its capabilities and feasibility. Down the line, the 103rd ACS will also field the system at larger training exercises such as Sentry Savannah, the Air National Guard’s premier defensive counter-air exercise that has previously involved more than 1,000 personnel and 50 airframes.

“The 103rd ACS will be going to Exercise Sentry Savannah, in Georgia, later this year,” said Bopp. “We plan to move TOC-L using Georgia Army National Guard Chinooks (CH-47 transport helicopters) from Hunter Army Airfield and employing the TOC-L in different military training complexes and ranges around Georgia to conduct command and control operations with minimum crew compliments. During Sentry Savannah, the 103rd ACS will also be [experimenting with] dislocated radio and data link packages. The idea being that TOC-L will be in one location with the radios completely separate from it, in order to cut down on EMCON (Emissions Control) procedures.”

Airmen from the 103rd ACS are excited to be a part of the Air Force’s modernization and are eager to see how their efforts will affect the control and recording centers of the future.

“It feels good. It’s a first for us,” said Wilson. “We’re the first in the Air Force for a lot of achievements that we’ve made, like hooking up the [Cloud-Based Command and Control, or CBC2] system, deploying it in the field, getting the okay to hook up a Topsy 75 to it. So, being that tip of the spear as far as fielding it, given our unit’s history with the [Battlespace Command and Control Center-Theater, or BC3T], and multiple years of high tempo deployers, all that experience came into pretty good effect for fielding this piece of equipment. It feels really good to be out here and see it working.”





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*A contestant in the 2024 Connecticut Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition climbs over a wall during as part of the competition. The winners of this competition will go on to represent Connecticut in the regional competition. (photo by Pfc. Emmanuel Gibson)*

## Best Warrior

Cont. from page 1

the GAFPB. Competitors will be using the U.S. Army's M17. To finish the day, the competitors are back in the classroom for 9-line, Call for Fire, Soldier Counseling, and Enlisted Evaluation Reports presentations.

Day three begins with the Norwegian Foot March, a 18.6 mile ruck march. In order to earn this badge, the competitor must complete it under the time limit for their age/sex. This tests the competitor's endurance as they must wear a rucksack weighing at least 24.25 lbs. This event also covers the GAFPB road march requirements. After the completion of this event, the competitors now have to

take a written test to test their Army knowledge. After the test, the soldiers are then brought in front of a board full of high-ranking soldiers of the National Guard. The board not only tests their knowledge but how they handle the pressure and how they address not knowing the answer by referring to the correct doctrine where the answer could be found. Every year, the best warrior competition has one mystery event and it won't be revealed until it starts. Typically the event is going to be related to one of the classes they were taught prior.

The fourth day of the competition wraps up the competition of all the events. The competitors are given one last

safety brief, event counseling, and an after action report. The purpose of an after action report (AAR) is to have an open discussion to review and focus on improvements. The night of the fourth day is host to the Salute The Troops Ball at Mohegan Sun Casino and Resort. This ball celebrates the completion of the competition and recognizes the hard work that all the competitors put in.

There are two winners selected from this competition, one for Non-commissioned officers and another for junior enlisted soldiers. Those two winners then move up the regional competition where they try and win a chance to go to nationals.



## FY24 NGA CT SCHOLARSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT



**National Guard Association of Connecticut**  
**360 Broad Street, Hartford, CT 06105-3795**  
**[www.ngact.org](http://www.ngact.org)**

January 2nd, 2024

A Message from the Scholarship Committee of the National Guard Association of Connecticut (NGACT)

The National Guard Association of Connecticut (NGACT) proudly announces the F Y 24 Scholarship Application for NGACT members and their dependents. For a full list of those eligible to apply, please visit our website at <https://www.ngact.org>.

Background: NGACT was founded in 1994 as a combined officer and enlisted organization for the purpose of representing active and retired members of the Connecticut Army and Air National Guard.

NGACT was originally organized as a non-profit organization designed to serve as the collective voice of all Guard officer and enlisted personnel. Together, members share in the pride, patriotism, and vigilance that keep America strong, accomplishing together what no person could accomplish alone. This united voice helps keep the Connecticut Army and Air National Guard ready and equipped to defend our freedom and represented at the national level through the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS).

NGACT provides a means to express the wishes of its many members. In the past it has proven its value through improved benefits, modern facilities, and better equipment. Moreover, NGACT offers individual and family benefits otherwise not available; Group Insurance for members and families, annual NGACT Conference, and support services including co-sponsor of National Guard events and support of Send Off and Welcome Home Celebrations. The Scholarships program is just one of the many ways the organization gives back to the members, and recognizes its members for exceptional service and academics.

Please take a moment to review the online application at: <https://www.ngact.org>.

Complete and return no later than 01 June 2024.

Three (3) \$1,000 scholarships from the National Guard Association of CT.

One (1) \$1,000 scholarship from USAA.

Must be uploaded to website, or postmarked no later than 01 June 2024.

Best of Luck to our Applicants.

Please contact Mark Soltau for additional information at (203) 727-4379.

The Scholarship Committee

NGACT Scholarship SOP Updated JAN 2022  
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*Sgt. 1st Class Paul M. Dimond received the Purple Heart Medal March 28, 2014, for injuries he sustained from an improvised explosive device which was detonated five meters from him during a graduation ceremony at the Afghan National Army 205th Corps Training Center Dec. 8, 2011. The Purple Heart is one of the oldest commendations in American military history, dating back to the later years of the Revolutionary War and was originally designed as the Badge of Military Merit. (photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy Koster)*

## Connecticut and the Purple Heart

**Brig. Gen. (CT) Brien Horan**  
Contributor

The original Thirteen States have our nation's longest military histories. Connecticut, the fifth state to enter the Union, is no exception. Members of the Connecticut National Guard are carrying on a long military history which stretches back to the American Revolution and before. For example, there are 32 federally recognized U.S. Army units with lineages dating back to the 18th century. Of these, at least three are Connecticut Army National Guard units: the 1-102nd Infantry Battalion (Mountain), the 192nd Military Police Battalion, and HD/1109th Theater Aviation Support Maintenance Group.

One fascinating fact is this: when George Washington, as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, instituted what is today the Purple Heart Medal, he awarded it only three times - to three Revolutionary War soldiers. All three were Connecticut non-commissioned officers: William Brown of Stamford CT, Sergeant, 5th Connecticut Regiment (and later of the 2nd Connecticut Regiment); Elijah Churchill of Newington CT, originally Private, 8th Connecticut Regiment and later Sergeant, 2nd Continental Light Dragoons (a unit mustered in Wethersfield in 1777); and Daniel Bissell of East Windsor CT, Sergeant, 2nd Connecticut Regiment.

Although these are the only soldiers to whom General Washington gave the medal, we

do not know whether any of his subordinate commanders may have awarded it to others. SGT Brown fought at the siege of Yorktown. SGT Churchill was cited several times for gallantry at various engagements in New York. SGT Bissell's service was highly dramatic. With General Washington's approval, Bissell became a spy, enlisting in the British Army for 13 months and relaying valuable intelligence about British troop movements to the Continental Army.

When General Washington instituted the medal, it was called the Badge of Military Merit. The badge displayed a heart in purple cloth or silk. The medal was limited to non-commissioned officers and soldiers, which was somewhat unusual in the 18th century, a period when European armies tended to limit decorations to commissioned officers.

The Badge of Military Merit was the first decoration of the American military. It was awarded to recognize "not only instances of unusual gallantry in battle, but also extraordinary fidelity and essential service in any way." After the end of the Revolutionary War, the medal remained on the books but was not awarded again until 1932. In that year, on Washington's 200th birthday, the U.S. War Department revived the decoration as the Purple Heart Medal. The first recipient was General Douglas MacArthur, who had been wounded during World War I. It was awarded to U.S. Army personnel for meritorious service or wounds in action after 5 April 1917. In 1942, further regulations expanded it from the Army to all services and limited it to personnel wounded or killed in action.



# What's Your Story?

Do you have an interesting hobby, skill, civilian occupation, or recent life event?

We want to help you  
tell the world!

Contact the Connecticut National Guard  
Public Affairs Office:

Maj. David Pytlik  
david.c.pytlik.mil@army.mil  
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For more information contact CPT Robert Ragos, 1943<sup>rd</sup> Commander, at Robert.j.ragos.mil@army.mil





# Connecticut Guardsman represents Armed Forces at 2024 Florida Classic Tournament

**Sgt. Matthew Lucibello**  
130th Public Affairs Detachment

AUBURNDALE, Fla. — Stadium lights pierce the darkness and illuminate a finely groomed field beneath them as the sun gives its final bow over the horizon. As the light fades, a strong breeze rolls over Lake Myrtle, and takes the field, crashing into Spc. Ethan Mounts, a unit supply specialist with D. Co., 1st Battalion, 102nd Infantry Regiment, from Middletown, Connecticut, competing with the U.S. Armed Services soccer team in the 2024 Florida Classic Tournament at the Lake Myrtle Sports Complex in Auburndale. For a moment it feels like home to him.

Mounts has been playing soccer since he was five or six. His father threw him to the wolves one day, signing him up for a local parks and recreation league, eager for his son to pick up a sport. Mounts quickly fell in love with the game, playing throughout his school years, eventually progressing to play in Major League Soccer Next, the highest youth league in the U.S. for men.

“With MLS Next, you play a lot of the MLS Academy teams,” said Mounts. “We played Montreal Impact, Toronto FC, New York City FC, New England Revolution, and that’s just to name a few. You go into competing tournaments that are filled with teams [from across the nation] and a ridiculous number of college scouts are looking at you.”

Mounts performed well enough to be scouted by a few schools himself. Despite this, he yearned to be part of a different kind of team.

Since he was five years old, Mounts had an interest in the military. One of his favorite pastimes was always playing army with his brother. Mounts’ uncle, Kevin Miller, also played a part in cultivating this interest, serving a contract in the U.S. Marine Corps, Miller would constantly share stories of his time in uniform, which resonated in Mounts. Realizing he wanted to finish his education, and that the National Guard would cover the cost of college tuition, Mounts joined the Connecticut Army National Guard in June 2021. He initially enlisted as an infantryman with a split option contract, meaning he would start drilling, complete basic training following the end of his junior year of high school, return home, finish school and then finish his specialized job training, also known as advanced individual training, following his graduation.

After completing basic training at Fort Benning, now Fort Moore, and spending some time with his unit, Mounts decided he wanted to do more with his military career and become a commissioned officer. Not only that, Mounts wanted to surround himself with people who had a competitive drive like those he found out on the field, peers that would push him to do more than just pass. So, he decided to apply to the United States Military Academy, also known as West Point.

The U.S. Military Academy, founded in 1802 in West Point, New York, is the oldest of five military academies in the United States. Each of these academies is responsible for educating cadets to commission as officers in their respective branch of military service. The U.S. Military Academy is one of the hardest schools to gain admission



Connecticut Army National Guard Spc. Ethan Mounts, a unit supply specialist assigned to the 1st Battalion, 102nd Infantry Regiment, and member of the U.S. Armed Services Football team, poses for a portrait at the Lake Myrtle Sports Complex, Auburndale, Florida, Jan. 13, 2024. Prior to playing for the U.S. Armed Forces team, he played soccer for the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School and competed in the Major League Soccer Next youth league. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Lucibello)

to in the country, due to its high academic and personal character standards. Additionally, each cadet must pass a physical fitness assessment during the application process. The acceptance rate is around ten percent.

“The academic rigors of it are something you won’t get at any other school,” explained Mounts. “I do want a chal-

lenge, I want something that will put me outside my comfort zone and [cause me to] not be complacent. At West Point, everyone holds you accountable, even your peers there. You can’t cheat, you’re going to be held accountable for all your actions.”

Initially, Mounts had to attend the U.S. Military Acade-



my Preparatory School because his SAT scores were lower than the school's standard for admission. The Preparatory School is designed to assist applying cadets to meet the Academy's academic expectations.

While at the prep school, Mounts once again found himself on the field. Despite prioritizing his academics, he joined the school's soccer team in August 2022, playing for an entire season. Due to his drive and athletic skill, he was named the MVP for that season and also earned a preferred walk-on spot for the Academy's soccer team the following year. Unfortunately, despite eventually graduating from the prep school, Mounts wasn't able to take that spot due to not meeting the Academy's GPA requirement by 0.06 percent. By not meeting this requirement, Mounts was forced to return back to the Connecticut Army National Guard, although he was allowed to reapply and attend with the class of 2028.

Due to his initial contract being terminated following his application to West Point, Mounts chose to reenlist as a unit supply specialist and became qualified in his military occupational specialty in September 2023. While learning his job, he was contacted unexpectedly by U.S. Army 1st Lt. Oscar Pereira, his old soccer coach from the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School. Pereira explained that there was a U.S. Armed Forces team, composed of players from across the branches of the U.S. Military, that months from then would soon be participating in a public tournament, the 2024 Florida Classic.

Since 1948, the U.S. Military has had many sports teams under the banner of the U.S. Armed Forces Sports program. The goal of these teams, and the program, is to promote a positive image of the U.S. Armed Forces, promote and incentivize physical fitness among service members through competitive sports and to provide a means for military athletes to compete in national and international competitions, such as the CISM International Military Sports Council World Military Championships. There are currently 25 men and women team, and individual, sports in the program.

"He put a word in for me to the coach," said Mounts. "Before joining the Army, I had no idea the Army had soccer teams until 1st Lt. Pereira told me about it. He told me about the All-Army team and that I could do it. So I got more interested, did my own research into it, and then the coach (of the U.S. Armed Services Soccer team, U.S. Army Maj. Joshua Greene) hit me up and told me about this tournament and asked me to play. He gave me an opportunity to showcase myself [at the All-Army tryouts] in March."

Mounts communicated his desire to attend and represent the Connecticut National Guard to his leadership, who signed off on his trip.

"They were very supportive, said Mounts. "1st Sgt. [Zane] Barber (The enlisted leader of Mounts' unit) wanted me to showcase myself down here more than anything. He was a soccer coach and he wanted me to come down here and showcase myself to the Army and show what I can do. The support is everything, without that you wouldn't do well. [Support from unit leadership and friends back home] helps boost your confidence on and off the field."

On Jan. 9, 2024, as snow began to touch down in Windsor Locks, Mounts' commercial flight took off from Bradley International Airport and headed south. After collecting his belongings from the airport, he traveled to his hotel, only two miles away from the Lake Myrtle Sports



Connecticut Army National Guard Spc. Ethan Mounts, a unit supply specialist assigned to the 1st Battalion, 102nd Infantry Regiment, and member of the U.S. Armed Services Football team, intercepts a player from Czarni Jaslo Chicago during the 2024 Florida Classic tournament held at the Lake Myrtle Sports Complex, Auburndale, Florida, Jan. 14, 2024. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Lucibello)

Complex, and began mentally and physically preparing for the games to come.

The first day of practice was Jan. 11, at the National Training Center athletic fields, in Clermont, and was the only practice session the team, who never played together before, had before the start of the competition.

Introductions were quick and cordial. The players learned the most about each other as they were put through their paces by coaches Jay Reynard, the head coach for the All-Navy team, and U.S. Air Force coach Jeremiah Kirschman. Some players hadn't even arrived yet and would be falling in on the team at their first game. Unlike Mounts, not every service member who attended the trip was as fortunate enough to have their unit allocate the resources to send them at no cost. Many used their personal leave days and traveled on their own dime to participate in the competition.

Mounts was selected to play as a defender for the competition based on his experience playing as a center defensive midfielder and outside back in his youth and while playing for MLS Next. For the tournament however, Mounts only played as an outside back, covering both left and right back. As an outside back, his goal was to defend his area of responsibility and assist the goalkeeper in preventing any goals from being scored. Additionally, he would move to challenge opponents that were approaching his area of the field, where he could then intercept the ball and redirect it to his teammates so they would be able to attempt to score goals.

The first game was on Jan. 12 at 7 p.m. against the ISA All Stars. The U.S. Armed Services team started off strong and won 2-1.

"That's the hardest part, playing with a [brand new] team," explained Mounts. "The chemistry is not there, everyone's uncomfortable, you're in a new environment, no one's comfortable in the sense of like, knowing anyone, talking, communicating. So playing with them, for the first game, was hard, even in practice was hard. Then we got used to each other. Once we scored our first goal, we built the chemistry together, and each and every game after that we played better and better and better."

The following day, the team faced off against Scarborough Azzurri, but unfortunately lost 2-0. They came back

strong in the early afternoon of Jan. 14, winning against Drita Soccer Club 4-0. However, fatigue began to set in from games day after day. Later that same day, during the semifinal against Czarni Jaslo Chicago, an offensive push from the Armed Forces team resulted in a successful penalty kick goal. After that, the then tied score was beaten by a subsequent goal from Czarni. The Armed Forces team couldn't recover, despite fighting tooth and nail on the field, and ultimately lost 2-1, which knocked the U.S. Armed Forces team out of the competition.

"I felt disappointed at first," said Mounts. "Afterwards, I felt good with how our team played because we were able to keep up with teams that played for a while, we just got to know each other that weekend. I felt I did the most I could do at [my] position."

The following day, many of the players began their journey back to their duty stations. Those who already had a return flight later in the week came together one more time to reminisce and enjoy some time together. For some, this would be the last time they would play together. Others held out hope they would be able to try out and make their branch's respective team, knowing full well the possibility that some players may face off against each other at some of the inter-service competitions. Nevertheless, despite not going home with gold in hand, the team felt content playing their hearts out and having forged fond memories out on the field with their new found friends.

"This was a good opportunity to display myself, not only for me but for my unit and the National Guard. I gained a lot of experience trying to communicate with people I'm not used to," said Mounts. "It's good to have a new coach that gives you a new perspective on how to play the game. It was fun to play in Florida, compete against new teams, and compete with new faces I'm not used to. The trip was a blast."

Mounts is currently reapplying to attend West Point. Additionally, he is applying to attend the All-Army soccer tryouts at Fort Cavazos in March and participate in the U.S. Armed Forces Tournament, held at Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany, Georgia, in April. In the meantime, he continues to serve with his unit in the Connecticut Army National Guard.



# NOT FEELING LIKE YOURSELF?

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## Military Life is Hard On Your Mind And Body

Even pain or trouble sleeping can hurt mission readiness. Talk to your health care provider if you feel unusually:

- Tired
- Stressed
- Angry
- Sad
- Forgetful
- Worried
- Pained
- Hopeless

### Psychological Health Resource Center

Call/Chat with a health resource consultant 24/7 at 866-966-1020 or [realwarriors.net/livechat](https://realwarriors.net/livechat)

### Military Crisis Line

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MHS

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# 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.**



# SEXUAL ASSAULT. SEXUAL HARASSMENT. NOT IN OUR ARMY.

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**103rd AW SARC (24hr)** ..... 860.895.3526

## Chaplain and Legal

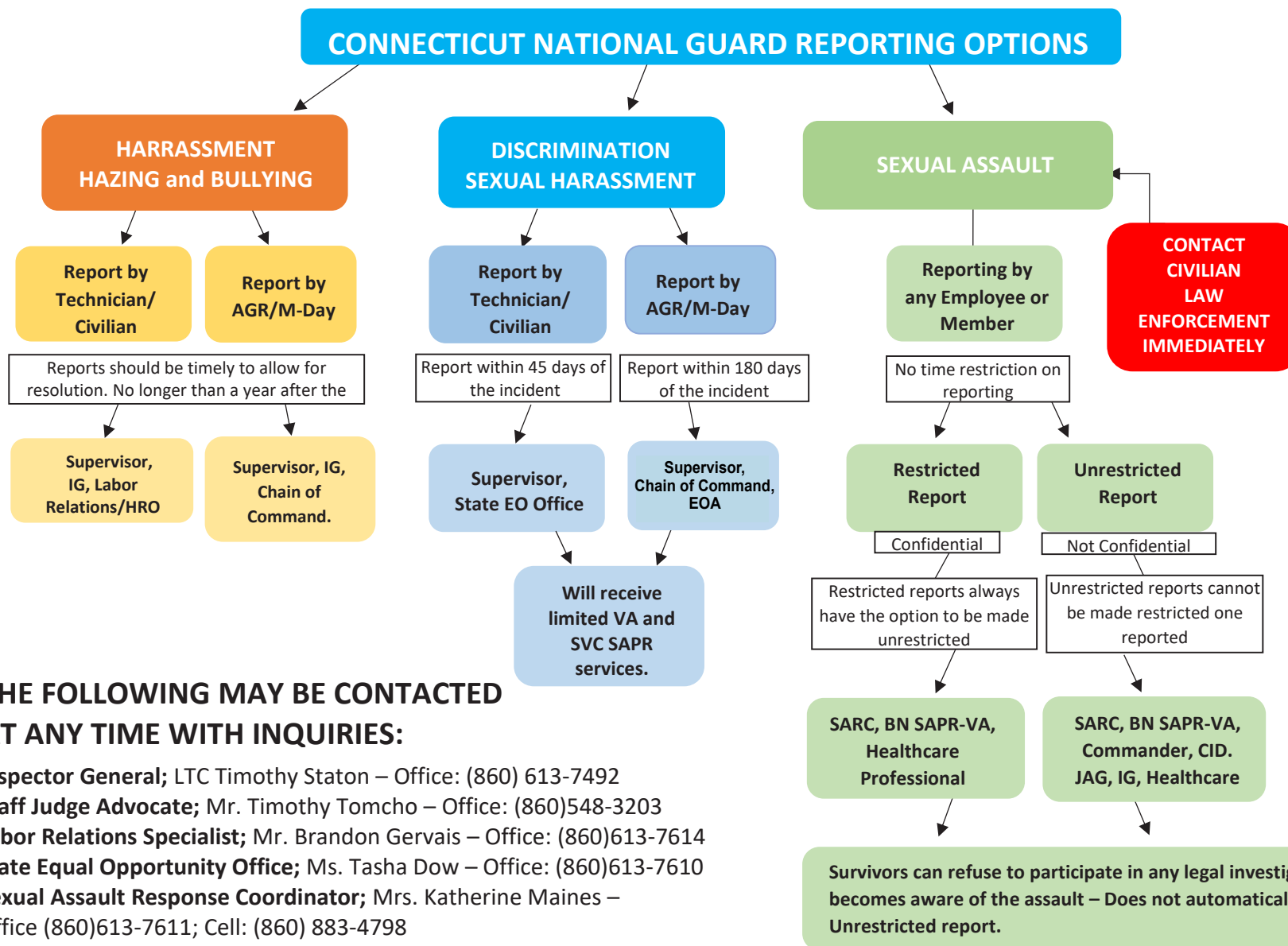
**CT Chaplain** ..... 860.548.3240

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

## Medical

**Military Treatment Facility (Westover)** 413.557.2623

**Navy Health Clinic New London** ..... 860.694.4123



### THE FOLLOWING MAY BE CONTACTED AT ANY TIME WITH INQUIRIES:

- Inspector General;** LTC Timothy Staton – Office: (860) 613-7492
- 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





the 103rd Flying Yankee hockey team poses for a photo following their annual game against the 104th Fighter Wing "Barnestormers" at the XL Center in Hartford, Connecticut.

## 103rd Flying Yankees Hockey Team beats 104th Fighter Wing "Barnestormers" in the Bradley-Barnes Brawl

**Sgt. 1st Class Shane Byrnes**  
Contributor

HARTFORD, Conn. — On Friday March 1, the 103rd Flying Yankees played Massachusetts' 104th Fighter Wing "Barnestormers" in the annual Bradley-Barnes Brawl at the XL Center in Hartford.

It was a great event as the XL Center hosted the two neighboring military communities for the second straight year.

The game didn't start off how the Flying Yankees (G.S.O.I) had planned after giving up three quick goals, ending the first period down 3-0.

The Flying Yankees finally gave the 200 plus fans something to get excited about after a relentless attack in the offensive zone gave streaking defenseman Michael Antoniou the first goal of the game with a beautiful pass from behind the net, making the game 3-1.

With tensions rising, the Flying Yankees brought the game to within one when Billy Cahill made an incredible pass across the ice to give me the opportunity to put it into the back of the net.

Down 3-2 in the 3rd period, Antoniou carried the puck into the offensive zone once again and picked the high glove side to tie the game at 3 all! With five minutes left in the

game and bodies flying in front of the net, Kyle Murkowicz found Steve Bava all alone on the back door, putting the Flying Yankees up 4-3.

The Barnestormers pulled the goalie with two minutes left in the game looking for the equalizer but ran out of time as the Flying Yankees won the Bradley-Barnes Brawl Trophy for the second straight year 4-3.

Special thanks to Head Coach Mark Maher, Assistant Coach Amy Robison and Co-Captain Jordan Knightly for all their hard work setting up these events. Thanks again to the Massachusetts Air National Guard for a hard-fought game! The Flying Yankees next game will be March 30, in the CT Hero's Cup. The event will include fire departments from New Britain, Hartford, Simsbury, Watertown, Greenwich, and East Hartford. The Flying Yankees will take on Simsbury FD in Game 2 of the CT Hero's Cup at 1:30 at the XL Center.

For more information on the event please visit the website [www.CTHEROSCUP.com](http://www.CTHEROSCUP.com). Tickets are \$20 ahead of time or \$25.00 at the door. Tickets will get you into the XL center for all the games as well as the Hershey Bears vs. Hartford Wolfpack game directly after at 7pm.

Any questions about upcoming events can be sent to [shane.p.byrnes.mil@army.mil](mailto:shane.p.byrnes.mil@army.mil)





Guardsmen from across the Connecticut Army National Guard's aviation career field speak with guests about the capabilities of Army aviation and their specific jobs during the Women Take Flight event at the New England Air Museum in Windsor Locks, Connecticut March 2, 2024. The event brought together women from across the aerospace industry to teach museum guests about opportunities for women in the industry.

## CT, MA guardsmen participate in 'Women Take Flight' event

**Timothy Koster**  
Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

In honor of Women's History Month, guardsmen from the Connecticut National Guard's 103rd Airlift Wing and various Army aviation units, as well as members of the Massachusetts National Guard's 439th Airlift Wing, based out of Westover Air Reserve Base, participated in the 'Women Take Flight' event at the New England Air Museum in East Granby, Connecticut March 2, 2024.

This annual event brings together women in the aerospace profession to showcase the variety of opportunities available to women in the career field while also providing hands-on STEM experiences to guests of all ages through activities, historic aircraft, flight simulators, and more.

"We're here at the air museum answering questions that anyone has, talking about our jobs and introducing what some of the women do at [Bradley Air National Guard Base] do," said U.S. Staff Sgt. Bailee Zollo, a hydraulics

technician for the C-130H aircraft. "It's been great, the kids have some great questions, some pretty funny questions as well."

The presence of these women in a museum filled with historic aircraft, including a Lockheed Electra 10E—the same model of aircraft Amelia Earhart used to fly across the Atlantic Ocean—really exemplified how far women have come in aviation.

"You get to be a beacon for younger children, especially as females in this industry, it's really important to us," said 2nd Lt. Gracyn Rothschild-Shea, a platoon leader with 2-104th Aviation Regiment, who also said her company currently has more women in the unit than at any other point in its history. "I think as females in the Army we go through a few different hoops that other people don't experience. Especially in a combat arms branch, it hasn't been super long since the Army has allowed females into them. So the fact you have other females by your side and in the cockpit with you ... it's an ode to all the hard work that



everyone has done before us and [today] is really important to show that we're still going."

This wasn't the first time the National Guard has participated in the Women Take Flight event. And for those who've attended in the past, they've noticed a significant uptick in overall participation from exhibitors and guests.

"There's definitely a lot more women that have shown up to support with all their different jobs," said Zollo, who is representing the 103rd for the second time at the event. "There's a lot more people coming through with a lot more kids as well, you get to see a little twinkle in their eye when they meet you, so there's just a bigger force in general helping and coming to ask the questions."

Overall, there was a high level of participation and excitement from both the exhibitors and museum guests and everyone is looking forward to next year's event. To learn more about the Women Take Flight event, visit the New England Air Museum website at <https://neam.org/blogs/news/women-take-flight-at-the-new-england-air-museum>



 <b>Service Member and Family Support Center Staff Directory</b> 			
<b>William A. O'Neill Armory: 360 Broad Street, Hartford, CT 06105</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Open Monday-Friday</b></span>			
Director, Service Member and Family Support Center	<b>Kimberly Hoffman</b>	<a href="mailto:kimberly.j.hoffman.civ@army.mil">kimberly.j.hoffman.civ@army.mil</a>	(800) 858-2677
Lead Military and Family Readiness	<b>Melody Baber</b>	<a href="mailto:melodycheyenne.c.baber.civ@army.mil">melodycheyenne.c.baber.civ@army.mil</a>	(860) 548-3276 (desk) (860) 883-2515 (cell)
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State Support Chaplain	<b>Lt Col Eric Wismar</b>	<a href="mailto:eric.a.wismar.mil@army.mil">eric.a.wismar.mil@army.mil</a>	(860) 548-3240 (desk) (860) 883-5278 (cell)
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Connecticut Military Relief Fund	<b>Russell Bonaccorso</b>	<a href="mailto:russell.bonaccorso@ct.gov">russell.bonaccorso@ct.gov</a>	(860) 524-4968 (desk)
<b>Middletown Armed Forces Reserve Center: 375 Smith Street, Middletown, CT 06457</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Open Mondays &amp; Wednesdays</b></span>			
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