

# GUARDLIFE

JULY - DECEMBER 2025



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- Back Cover: Down Range

Above: U.S. Army officer candidate Joseph Brown with the New Jersey Army National Guard, ruck marches on a trail in Manasquan, New Jersey, Sept. 12, 2025. The 254th Regional Training Institute hosts the New Jersey Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School, a program that trains Soldiers to become a part of the next generation of leaders in the U.S. Army. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth Cohen)

Cover: A U.S. Army Soldier with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, uses a AN/PVS-14 Monocular Night Vision Device during a low visibility raid at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Aug. 9, 2025. The course prepares Soldiers to provide precision fire in support of squad-level operations. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth Cohen)

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# OUR WORK CONTINUES

By Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays  
The Adjutant General of New Jersey



U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne Mays, The Adjutant General, New Jersey National Guard, seventh from left, and Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Leonard, State Command Sergeant Major, New Jersey Army National Guard, eighth from left, pose for a group photo with Soldiers from Task Force Integrator, 42nd Regional Support Group, at Baghdad, Iraq, Dec. 16, 2025. Mays paid a visit to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility to meet with New Jersey Guardsmen who are deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Armando Vasquez)

Across our formations, the New Jersey National Guard is training in conditions that prepare us to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

In Alaska, Airmen of the 108th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron executed missions under simulated deployed conditions, working with limited resources while maintaining operational output. These experiences reinforce the fundamentals required to generate and sustain combat power.

At Fort Drum, through Operation Belt Feed, the 177th Fighter Wing demonstrated its ability to deploy rapidly and operate with incomplete information. Airmen adapted, relied on their training, and executed the mission. This is the standard we must meet in future conflicts, where speed, judgment, and coordination will determine success.

In the Indo-Pacific, our participation in REFORPAC placed our Airmen alongside joint and coalition partners in a complex, distributed environment. These exercises strengthen interoperability and reinforce our role in a broader strategic context. They also ensure that our force remains capable of operating across multiple theaters.

Here at home, our units continue to

prepare for missions that directly impact the communities we serve. Training alongside law enforcement and emergency response partners reflects our responsibility to serve the people of New Jersey. We must be ready to integrate, respond, and support when called.

**"THE ENVIRONMENT WE FACE IS COMPLEX. THE EXPECTATIONS PLACED ON THIS FORCE ARE HIGH. WE WILL NOT ONLY MEET THOSE EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS; WE WILL EXCEED THEM."**

Leadership development remains central to our success. Officer candidates continue their progression through rigorous training, preparing to lead Soldiers in demanding environments. Noncommissioned officers are strengthening their skills through partnerships with allied forces, building the foundation for future leadership across the force.

Partnerships continue to define how we operate. Through engagements with the armed forces of Albania and Cyprus, our Soldiers and Airmen are sharing expertise and building relationships that enhance collective capability. These efforts strengthen not only our partners but also our own readiness.

At the same time, we recognize the demands of service. The deployment of the 42nd Regional Support Group to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility demonstrates the commitment carried by this force. Our Soldiers and Airmen continue to perform in complex environments, supported by families whose contributions remain essential to mission success.

The foundation of our success remains unchanged. Leadership. Readiness. Teamwork. A commitment to doing what is right.

We will continue to put people first. We will continue to build ready and resilient teams. We will continue to modernize and strengthen this organization.

The environment we face is complex. The expectations placed on this force are high.

We will not only meet those expectations and standards; we will exceed them.

Our work continues.

# 108th AMXS participates in Red Flag-Alaska

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Earick, National Air and Space Intelligence Center

Red Flag-Alaska 25-2 began June 12, 2025, bringing together approximately 1,500 participants and more than 70 aircraft from across the United States and allied nations for two weeks of multi-service, multi-platform, coordinated exercises.

The two-week exercise, which takes place at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson and Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska provides Airmen the opportunity to work with joint and coalition partners, including the Japan Air Self-Defense Force and the Republic of Korea Air Force, simulating what serving in a deployed environment may look like within the Indo-Pacific region.

During those two weeks, participants will train in contested, degraded, and operationally limited environments with missions including defensive counter-air, dynamic targeting, and close air support.

The exercise's unsung heroes, the ones who ensure aircraft are operational and ready to fly, are the maintenance Airmen.

"Operating in a simulated deployed environment, where resources and personnel are limited, is a good chance for many of our Airmen to

train under less-than-optimal situations," said Senior Master Sgt. John Allen, avionics superintendent, 108th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard.

The exercise helps Airmen maintain readiness required to effectively carry out the mission in real-world situations.

"Exercises like these are extremely important for us," said Tech. Sgt. Richard Weaver,

avionics technician, 108th AMXS. "It gives us a chance to practice as if we are in a deployed environment, with the bare bones and being able to generate aircraft to get the mission done."

For some, this exercise offers a first glimpse into what a deployed environment may look like.

For Airman 1st Class Jake Landy, KC-46A Pegasus crew chief, 108th AMXS, this will be his first exercise experience.

"Being here is exciting," said Landy. "It's so cool to see so many different aircraft and see how things would look in a deployed environment."

Despite the difference between New Jersey and Alaska, Weaver said the mission remains the same.

"There has not been much difference in our day-to-day operations," said Weaver. "We need to generate aircraft and get the mission done because the jets are going to need refueling at some point, and we're going to be there to do it."

Throughout the exercise, the 108th maintenance team has been consistently working to ensure the aircraft are ready to ensure mission success.

"The team has been performing exceptionally well," said Allen. "All the maintainers are working together to launch, recover, and fix any issues that arise on the aircraft, they are all of the same mentality that the mission comes first, and we work together to get it done."

**"It gives us a chance to practice as if we are in a deployed environment, with the bare bones and being able to generate aircraft to get the mission done."**

**TECH. SGT. RICHARD WEAVER  
AVIONICS TECHNICIAN  
108TH AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE SQUADRON**



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Jake Landy, crew chief, 108th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard, marshals a KC-46A Pegasus during Red Flag-Alaska 25-2 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, June 17, 2025.

# 63RD ARMY BAND ON TOUR

PHOTOS BY SGT. MICHAEL SCHWENK  
NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE



U.S. Army Sgt. Kobe S. Browne, a trombonist with the New Jersey National Guard's 63rd Army Band performs during their Summer Tour in Bradley Beach, New Jersey, July 3, 2025.



*Above: U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Zachary H. Appleton, commander, leads the 63rd Army Band during their performance at Bradley Beach.*

*Below: U.S. Army saxophonist Staff Sgt. Nicole R. Tamburro solos during the 63rd Army Band's performance.*



*Above: Flugelhornist U.S. Army Sgt. Gustavo A. Tuche performs a solo during the 63rd Army Band's Bradley Beach performance.*

*Below: U.S. Army Soldiers with the 63rd Army Band applaud during their performance at Bradley Beach.*





U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Jayson Humphrey, left, and Tech. Sgt. Stephanie Trotz, 177th Fighter Wing weapons technicians, prepare to load a missile onto an F-16C Fighting Falcon during exercise "Operation Belt Feed" at Fort Drum, New York, June 24, 2025.

# Operation Belt Feed tests 177th's ability to deploy

Photos and story by  
Airman 1st. Class Andrew Relyea  
177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office

U.S. Air Force Airmen with the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing participated in "Operation Belt Feed" a training exercise at Fort Drum, New York, June 24, 2025.

The exercise tested the Airmen's ability to rapidly deploy superior combat airpower with limited details of the mission.

"I want the Jersey Devils to continue to be the sharpest fighter unit in the Air Force," said Lt. Col. Michael Long, commander and exercise lead observer, 177th Operations Group. "This exercise gets everyone out of their comfort zone, adapt to the situation, and get the mission done."

The Airmen did not receive the mission details until after they arrived at Fort Drum. Airmen relied on each other and took instruction from their company grade officer and noncommissioned officer in charge, rather than higher grade officers.

"As an Air Force, we put a lot of emphasis on these large-scale events like 'Flags' and Weapons System Evaluation Programs," said Long. "They don't allow our Airmen to explore the space, think on their feet, truly make risk-assessments, or enhance the "agile" mindset we absolutely need."

Airmen used their knowledge and previous training to complete the mission with unfamiliar equipment. During the exercise, two 119th Fighter Squadron pilots would land their F-16 Fighting Falcons, taxi to the maintenance members for refueling, have their weapons reloaded, and take off again.

In the future, Long plans to vary the scope of exercises, such as this one, to strengthen the lethality and readiness of the wing's Airmen.

"We have the finest people in the United States Air Force – they continually inspire me," said Long.



Above: U.S. Air Force Airmen with the 177th Fighter Wing of the New Jersey Air National Guard, board a Delaware Air National Guard C-130H3 Hercules at the Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey, June 24, 2025.

Below: A U.S. Air Force F-16C Fighting Falcon pilot with the 119th Fighter Squadron, NJANG, prepares for hot-pit refueling during exercise "Operation Belt Feed" at Fort Drum, New York, June 24, 2025.



# Land Nav



New Jersey Army National Guard officer candidate Fanny Marte, left, conducts the land-navigation portion of Officer Candidate School at Stones Ranch Military Reservation in East Lyme, Connecticut, July 17, 2025. Officer candidates from the NJARNG's Officer Candidate School, part of the 1-254th Regional Training Institute at the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, New Jersey, traveled to Camp Nett in Niantic, Connecticut, to begin Phase One of their officer commissioning process. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Bruce Daddis)

# FIGHTER WING PARTICIPATES IN REFORPAC 2025

BY SENIOR AIRMAN DARION BOYD, 177TH FIGHTER WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

The 177th Fighter Wing of the New Jersey Air National Guard participated in exercise Resolute Force Pacific – REFORPAC – 2025, a first-of-its-kind Department Level Exercise at Komatsu Air Base, Japan, beginning July 10 and running through Aug. 8, 2025. The exercise demonstrates the armed forces’ ability to rapidly deploy personnel, equipment, and aircraft to the Indo-Pacific theater of operations.

The exercise encompasses all branches of the Department of Defense, along with allies and partners, employing more than 400 joint and coalition aircraft and more than 12,000 members at more than 50 locations across 3,000 miles.

“REFORPAC will help solidify Agile Combat Employment concepts and execution among the men and women of the 177th Fighter Wing,” said Lt. Col. Eric Emerson, commander, 119th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, NJANG. “Lessons learned from this exercise will have a direct effect on how we train, fight, and win our nation’s future conflicts.”

ACE concepts include the ability to rapidly deploy forces, altering enemy understanding of friendly intentions, capabilities, and posture to gain advantages.

“Every lesson learned here, every process refined, directly contributes to making our wing more capable and agile,” said Chief Master Sgt. Grant Holway, quality assurance senior enlisted leader, 177th Fighter Wing.

The exercise’s end goal for the units includes enhanced interoperability and readiness across the Pacific theater.

“This exercise tests our ability to generate airpower with limited support and resources as we repositioned multiple times around Japan,” said Emerson. “We relied on Airmen to step outside of their comfort zones, use their judgment backed up by their training while solving complex problems.”

REFORPAC offers Airmen an opportunity to interface with

service members of various U.S. military branches as well as service members from other allied countries.

“In addition to our State Partnership Program mission, this has been another successful venture in creating relationships with other nations and allies,” said Holway. “Overall, I have met nothing but friendly people overcoming language and logistical barriers to help each other.”

Maintaining strong relationships with allies ultimately enhances combined capabilities for all parties. During these engagements, the 177th FW members had the opportunity to teach as well as learn different tactics, techniques and procedures.

“Everything from refueling aircraft, towing aircraft, providing equipment, and training in emergency procedures, pilot extraction and hydrazine response, has been bilateral adding to mission success,” said Holway.

This iteration of REFORPAC is the largest crisis response exercise in Pacific Air Forces history.

“It is an honor to be part of such a monumental exercise,” said Emerson. “The lessons learned from this exercise will set the foundation of how we fight; projecting power and security throughout the 21st century. We had a part in that, and that’s pretty cool! I’m incredibly proud of what the Jersey Devils accomplished during REFORPAC.”

While the scale of the exercise was historic, it was the commitment and resilience of individual Airmen that drove the mission forward.

“From junior Airmen to senior non-commissioned officers, everyone has stepped up without hesitation, adapting to constant change, long hours, and new environments with professionalism and grit,” said Holway. “Exercises like this test not just our equipment and plans, but our people. It’s about shaping how we fight in the future, and that starts with the groundwork we’re laying right now.”

**“REFORPAC WILL HELP SOLIDIFY AGILE COMBAT EMPLOYMENT CONCEPTS AND EXECUTION AMONG THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE 177TH FIGHTER WING.”**

**LT. COL. ERIC EMERSON  
COMMANDER  
119TH EXPEDITIONARY FIGHTER  
SQUADRON**



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Tyler Bassett



Above: U.S. Air Force Airmen with the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, board a C-130J Hercules during exercise Resolute Force Pacific at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, July 22, 2025. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Airman Darion Boyd)

Below: U.S. Air Force Airmen with the 177th Fighter Wing are assisted by a Marine with a forward area refueling point during exercise REFORPAC at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, July 24, 2025. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Airman Darion Boyd)





Above: U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Cormick Feeley, left, and Senior Airman Taylor Downey, both 177th Fighter Wing tactical aircraft maintenance specialists, complete pre-flight checks on F-16C Fighting Falcons at Komatsu Air Base, Japan, July 24, 2025.

Below: U.S. Air Force Tech Sgt. Matthew Baruffi, aircrew egress systems specialist, 177th Fighter Wing, carries a ladder from an F-16C Fighting Falcon at Komatsu Air Base, July 24, 2025. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Airman Darion Boyd)



Above: U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Emily Lynd, tactical aircraft maintenance specialist with the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, marshals an F-16C Fighting Falcon during exercise REFORPAC at Komatsu Air Base, Japan, July 24, 2025.

Below: U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Elijah Ivey, left, and Airman 1st Class Nicholas Mascio, both 177th Fighter Wing tactical aircraft maintenance specialists, close a panel on an F-16C Fighting Falcon at Komatsu Air Base, July 25, 2025. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Airman Darion Boyd)



# NCO development course enhances SPP Program

Story and photo by  
Airman 1st Class Andrew Relyea  
177th Fighter Wing  
Public Affairs Office



Republic of Cyprus National Guard noncommissioned officers from multiple units met with several representatives of the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing for training sessions designed to enhance leadership development of NCOs within the two forces.

The classes, which were held at the Artillery Command of the Cyprus National Guard in Mosfiloti, Republic of Cyprus, July 21–25, 2025, took place as part of the State Partnership Program between the Republic of Cyprus and the state of New Jersey. They also are part of Cyprus's new NCO development course.

"Together we are building a career-long continuum of learning, where NCO skills and leadership abilities are refined and sharpened through continuous development over their span of service," said Chief Master Sgt. Justin Kelley, senior enlisted leader, 177th Fighter Wing. "The NCO Basic Leadership Course was developed jointly with the members of the New Jersey Air and Army National Guard and representatives from the Cypriot Army, Navy, Air, and National Guard team. It is the first step in a series of developmental courses."

The 177th's role was to support and refine the first ongoing class of the NCO Basic Leadership course, Class 001. This course was modeled after the U.S. Air Force's own NCO development courses. Plans on incorporating the other branches' NCO courses were discussed.

"This course is very important; we need to train our NCOs to improve their cognitive and leadership skills," said Cyprus Air National Guard Warrant Officer Andreas Christoforou, NCO Basic Leadership course lead observer and instructor. "We would like to thank the New Jersey National Guard and Chief Kelley

for his help and assistance to reach this goal."

The week's events included daily peer-led instruction and physical training led by Tech. Sgt. John Raebig, alert crew chief, 177th Fighter Wing, and concluded with a visit by U.S. Army Col. K. C. Evans, senior defense official and defense attaché, U.S. Embassy Cyprus.

The focus of the NCO Basic Leadership course is to increase leadership capacity in support of mentoring future NCOs.

"By modeling after U.S. Air Force NCO structure, we are introducing a proven framework that cultivates accountability, initiative, and adaptive leadership at every level of the enlisted force," said Raebig. "As these NCOs grow, they become more than just managers – they become trusted advisors, trainers, and role models."

The State Partnership Program between the Republic of Cyprus and the State of New Jersey began in 2023 and has involved multiple exchanges in both countries that aim to enhance collective security and to improve each country's

capabilities, including disaster response. Through the SPP, the National Guard conducts military-to-military engagements in support of defense security goals. This cost-effective program is administered by the National Guard Bureau, guided by State Department foreign policy goals, and executed by the state adjutants general in support of combatant commander and U.S. Chief of Mission security cooperation objectives and Department of Defense policy goals.

"This NCO development opportunity is very important for me and for other NCOs," said Sgt. Anastasia Giannoukou, course instructor, NCO Basic Leadership, Cyprus Army National Guard. "It's a dream for us to be better as NCOs."

***"Together we are building a career-long continuum of learning, where NCO skills and leadership abilities are refined and sharpened through continuous development over their span of service."***

**CHIEF MASTER SGT. JUSTIN KELLEY  
SENIOR ENLISTED LEADER  
177TH FIGHTER WING**

# LIVE FIRE

PHOTOS BY SGT. MICHAEL SCHWENK  
NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE





A U.S. Army Soldier fires M240B machine gun during the 1-254th Regional Training Institute, New Jersey Army National Guard's Infantry Advanced Leaders Course, at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, July 24, 2025. ALC is a branch-specific course that provides Soldiers selected for promotion to staff sergeant the opportunity to enhance their leadership, tactical expertise, and technical skills needed to lead squad-size units.

# NJNG AND ALBANIAN ARMED FORCES VEHICLE MAINTENANCE TRAINING

Photos by Sgt. Michael Schwenk  
New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office



U.S. Army Master Sgt. Adrian Abella 117th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, conducts vehicle maintenance training with Soldiers from the Albanian Armed Forces at the Combined Support Maintenance Shop at Joint Base McGuire-

Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, July 24, 2025. The Albanian Armed Forces Soldiers took part in training with NJARNG as part of the U.S. Department of Defense State Partnership Program. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Schwenk)



STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM  
REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA AND NEW JERSEY



Above: U.S. Army Sgt. Ermao Shala, 50th Chemical Company, 42nd RSG, right, gives a hands-on demonstration for Albanian Armed Forces soldiers.

Below: U.S. Army Master Sgt. Adrian Abella, 117th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 42nd RSG, left, works with an Albanian Armed Forces soldier.





*Above: U.S. Army Sgt. Ermao Shala, 50th Chemical Company, 42nd RSG, right, watches as an Albanian Armed Forces soldier demonstrates his vehicle maintenance skills.*

*Below: U.S. Army Soldiers with the New Jersey Army National Guard and Albanian Armed Forces soldiers have their photo taken at the Combined Support Maintenance Shop at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst New Jersey July. 24 2025.*



*U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Robert Wittig, left, works on a Man Transportable Robotics System while Staff Sgt. Russell Bongiovanni, both explosive ordnance disposal team technicians with the 177th Civil Engineer Squadron, observes his work during an exercise at Mercer County Park, West Windsor Township, New Jersey, July 31, 2025.*

# 177th trains for World Cup Security

*Photo and story by Airman Alex Cadavid  
177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office*

U.S. Air Force Airmen with the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Civil Engineer Squadron participated in a training exercise with the New Jersey National Guard's 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team and the New Jersey State Police Hazmat Response Team at Mercer County Park, West Windsor Township, New Jersey, July 31, 2025.

The training is in preparation for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which begins in June 2026 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford.

The exercise included briefings, command coordination, safety procedures, and joint decision-making tasks in a hazardous environment. The training prepared the units for real-world emergencies, whether they involved chemical, biological, or explosive devices.

"We scheduled and prepared the exercise with direct consultation and support from our partners at the 21st WMD-CST, National Park Service, and the New Jersey State Police," said Master Sgt. David Bernal, superintendent, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team, 177th Civil Engineer Squadron. "The 177th EOD team's objective was to provide explosive hazard support to our law enforcement partners."

During the exercise, the 177th EOD team used a Man Transportable Robotics system in a simulated hazardous material scenario before the 21st WMD-CST sampled and identified the material. In a follow-on scenario near a simulated concert stage, EOD Airmen performed on-site mitigation procedures alongside partner agencies.

"I think the biggest part of this was the interoperability between us, the CST, and the State Police," said Senior Airman Robert Wittig, an EOD technician with the 177th CES.

The 21st WMD-CST and New Jersey State Police Hazmat Response Team will be performing additional training in preparation for security operations at the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

"We want our Airmen and the public to know that we routinely conduct interagency training and joint operations to ensure public safety and security," said Bernal.

# FAREWELL CEREMONY HELD FOR RSG



U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Edgar M. Duran, left, holds the 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, guidon as Col. David S. Hampton, center, commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Jack A. Bowker, prepare to case the IBCT's colors during the 42nd RSG's farewell ceremony at Franklin High School, Somerset, New Jersey, Aug. 1, 2025. More than 80 NJARNG Soldiers will deploy in support of U.S. Central Command's Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve. As Task Force Integrator, the 42nd RSG provides and conducts base operating support integrator and headquarters and headquarters battalion functions at designated CJTF-OIR locations by enabling coalition and joint partners to maintain the enduring defeat of Da'esh. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

# OCS Class 68 graduates

By Capt. Kyle Marr, Joint Force Headquarters – New Jersey Public Affairs Office

The New Jersey Army National Guard commissioned eight second lieutenants at the Officer Candidate School Graduation and Pinning Ceremony at the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, New Jersey, Aug. 3, 2025.

The event was the culmination of months of intense physical and academic training designed to prepare officer candidates to lead Soldiers in the New Jersey Army National Guard. Friends, family members, and mentors gathered to witness the moment their loved ones received the gold bars of a commissioned officer.

"Today represents far more than the culmination of Officer Candidate School; it marks the commencement of a lifelong calling to lead, to serve, and to uphold the highest ideals of our profession," said Lt. Col. Magregoir Simeon, commander, 2nd Battalion, 254th Regiment (Combat Arms), NJARNG. "These graduating candidates have demonstrated exceptional dedication, resilience, and motivation. Through discipline and integrity, they have rightfully earned their commission and stand ready to lead with honor, purpose, and unwavering commitment to those they serve."

Class 68 honor graduate, 2nd Lt. David Bransfield, was the outstanding academic and leadership performance throughout the course. "OCS emphasized the importance of showing up prepared every

time, no matter what was thrown at us over the course of a year and a half," said Bransfield, who will be reporting to Bravo Company, 104th Brigade Engineer Battalion. "The eight of us who commissioned today came out of this stronger together. The whole experience made us all realize that we are capable of a lot more — and that is a great feeling."

Another graduate, 2nd Lt. Ashton Colangelo, echoed the sentiment. "At first, sixteen months seemed like a long time, but once we all started to gel, the time flew by quickly."

The OCS program includes a series of field training exercises, classroom instruction, and leadership evaluations designed to simulate the pressures of command. According to OCS course manager Sgt. 1st Class Franny Tavarez, watching the transformation is one of the most rewarding aspects of the job.

"The growth of these graduates — from their time as officer candidates to the moment they commission — is tremendous," said Tavarez. "This program not only tests the leadership skills and resilience of the candidates, but also to bring out the best in them."

These new officers will now serve in units across the New Jersey Army National Guard and continue their training to fulfill their duties as Army leaders.



The New Jersey Army National Guard's newest second lieutenants have their photo taken after graduating from New Jersey Officer Candidate School at the National Guard Training Center, Sea Girt, New Jersey, Aug. 3, 2025. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth Cohen)

# Black Hawk in town for Night Out

Photos by Sgt. Michael Schwenk, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office



A U.S. Army UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter, with the 1st Battalion, 150th Aviation Regiment, 57th Troop Command, New Jersey Army National Guard, prepares to land for the Wall Township Police Department's National Night Out at in Wall Township, New Jersey, Aug. 6, 2025. National Night Out is an annual event to enhance the relationship between neighbors and law enforcement while bringing back a true sense of community.



POLICE • COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



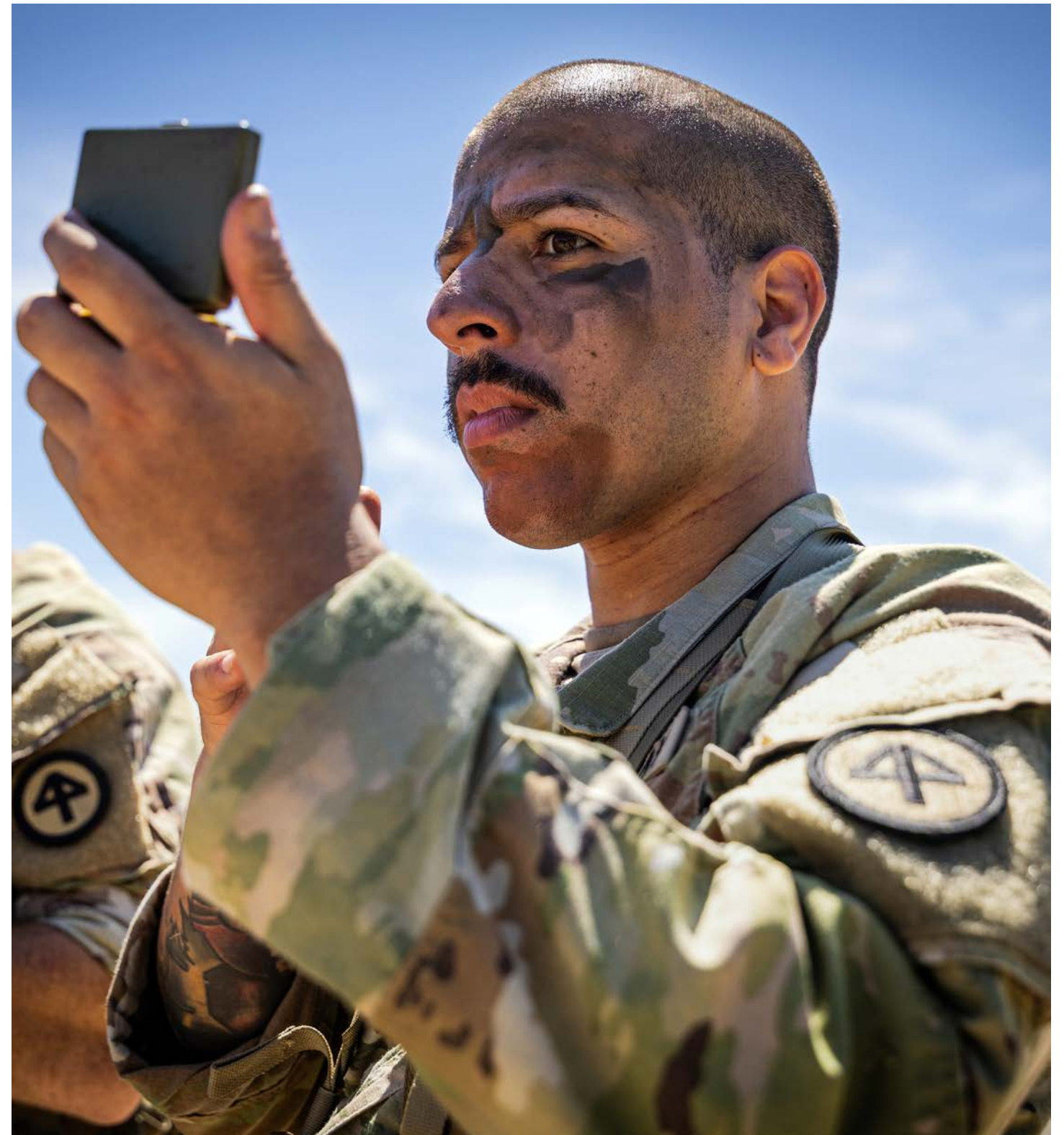
*Above: U.S. Army Col. Ryan J. Smith, UH-60M Black Hawk pilot, 1st Battalion, 150th Aviation Regiment, 57th Troop Command, NJARNG, high-fives a future aviator.*

*Below: U.S. Army aviators with 1st Battalion, 150th Aviation Regiment, 57th Troop Command, NJARNG, talk with visitors at the Wall Township Police Department's National Night Out.*



# THE NEXT SQUAD DESIGNATED MARKSMAN

PHOTOS BY SGT. SETH COHEN, NEW JERSEY ARMY NATIONAL GUARD RECRUITING & RETENTION BATTALION



*A U.S. Army Soldier with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, applies camouflage in preparation for a school assessment for the Army Squad Designated Marksman Course at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Aug. 9, 2025.*



*Above: U.S. Army Soldiers with the 114th Infantry Regiment perform a fireman's carry during the school assessment. The SDM course teaches Soldiers to fire at ranges beyond the normal engagement distances for riflemen, up to 660 yards.*

*Below: A 114th Infantry Regiment Soldier drops to the ground. SDM training includes learning to properly compensate for bullet drop, wind speed, and the three types of ballistics: internal, external, and terminal.*



*Above: A 114th Infantry Regiment Soldier performs a ruck march during the assessment. SDMs are trained in scouting and precise shooting as an element available to the Squad Leader.*

*Below: A 114th Infantry Regiment Soldier maneuvers through the woods at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. SDMs use specialized equipment including marksman rifles, long-range precision rifles, and advanced ballistic computers.*



# 42nd Departs

Photos by Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, board a plane at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Aug. 11, 2025. More than 80 NJARNG Soldiers are deploying in support of U.S. Central Command's Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent

Resolve. As Task Force Integrator, the 42nd RSG provides and conducts base operating support integrator and headquarters and headquarters battalion functions at designated CJTF-OIR locations by enabling coalition and joint partners to maintain the enduring defeat of Da'esh.



Above: U.S. Army Soldiers with the 42nd Regional Support Group, prepare to deploy from Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Aug. 11, 2025.

Below: A U.S. Army Soldier with the 42nd RSG takes a selfie prior at the passenger terminal at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.





Above: U.S. Army Soldiers with the 42nd RSG line up in the terminal before moving out to the flight line.

Below: U.S. Army Soldiers with the 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, board a plane at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Aug. 11, 2025.



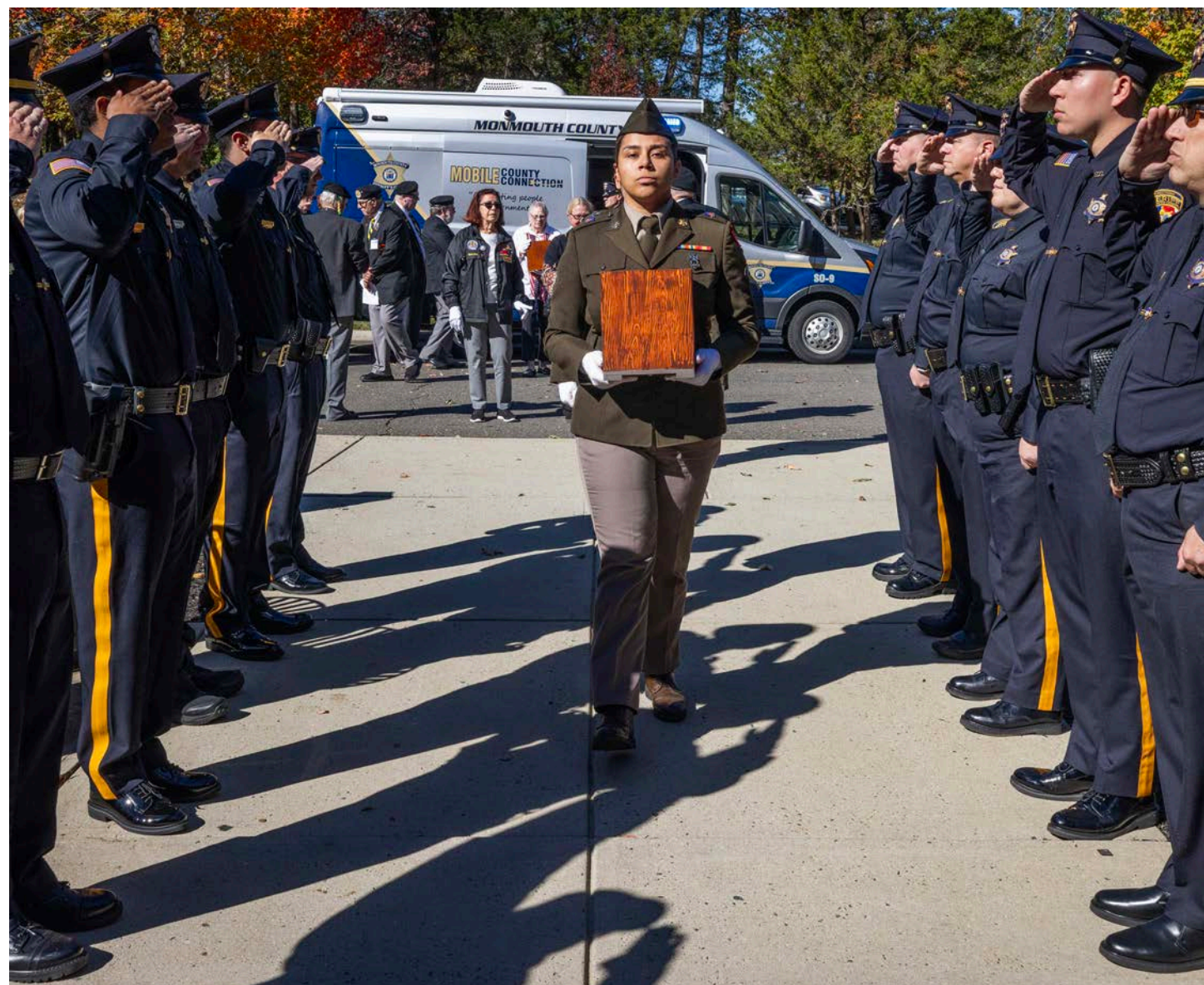
# M4 Qual

A U.S. Army Soldier with the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, checks his shot group at M4 carbine weapons qualification during the 254th Regiment (Combat Arms), NJARNG's Infantry Advanced Leaders Course at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, July 23, 2025. ALC is a branch-specific course that provides Soldiers selected for promotion to staff sergeant the opportunity to enhance their leadership, tactical expertise, and technical skills needed to lead squad-size units. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth Cohen)

# Final Honors

## Honor Guard provides closure for families

Photos by Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs Office



*U.S. Army Spc. Izabelle Labrador, New Jersey Army National Guard Honor Guard, carries an urn containing a Veteran's remains during the Veteran Interment Service at the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Wrightstown, New Jersey, Oct. 16, 2025. The remains of 20 World War I, World War II, Korean, and Vietnam War Veterans and two family members, some had gone unclaimed for as long as 55 years, were honored at the ceremony.*



*Above: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Bless E. Sherrill, 250th Brigade Support Battalion, left, and Sgt. Kaylie N. Ayres, 119th Division Sustainment Support Battalion, both with the NJARNG, salute an urn containing a Veteran's remains at the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Wrightstown, New Jersey, Sept. 9, 2025.*

*Below: U.S. Army Spc. Izabelle Labrador, left, and Pfc. Yulii Husak, second from left, both with the NJARNG Honor Guard, present American flags to family members during a interment service at the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Wrightstown, New Jersey, Oct. 16, 2025.*



# ALWAYS READY, ALWAYS THERE

By Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Derek Vasquez

For more than 130 years, New Jerseyans have stood on this parade field to train and prepare themselves to serve the people of the Garden State. In peace and in war, the New Jersey National Guard has been “always ready, always there.” Today, as our nation faces challenges at home and abroad, we continue that mission. This Military Review gives us, as it gave those before us, a chance to reflect on our achievements and our role in a changing world.

First, I want to thank our Commander in Chief, Governor Philip D. Murphy. It is a privilege to serve as your Adjutant General. Your strong support for those who wear our nation’s uniform has strengthened our force, supported military families, and helped bring veteran homelessness toward functional zero in New Jersey. Sir, throughout your tenure, you saw firsthand the unrelenting pace of operations. From hurricane response to pandemic and election support, to deployments overseas and humanitarian relief, the heavy lift of operations has been matched only by the wide variety of capabilities our Guard provides.

New Jersey’s citizenry and industry have always stood on the front line of national defense. We have it all: human talent, strategic location and a historic track record of excellence in critical missions. New Jersey patriots set the conditions for success and victory.

Today, as night falls in the Middle East, Soldiers of the 42nd Regional Support Group headquarters have marked off the first full month of their year long deployment in support of Combined Joint Task Force, Operation Inherent Resolve. As the sun sets

in the Western Balkans, Soldiers of the 328th Military Police Company are providing force protection and law enforcement at Regional Command East, Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, in support of NATO’s ongoing peacekeeping mission. To the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, many of whom are here today, last year your absence from this formation and the silence of your howitzers were stark reminders of the sacrifices our service members make when they mobilize. You left your jobs and families to provide mission command, security and sustainment operations in one of the most complex regions of the world. Your professionalism earned the respect of our active duty counterparts and our allies. You took care of your battle buddies downrange while your families held down the home front. You returned home with honor and adjusted back to civilian life. I urge you: keep doing those buddy checks, keep those lines of communication open and talk to someone if you need to. Thank you for your service.

Our Air National Guard also continues to answer the call, flying, fighting and winning alongside our active duty partners anywhere, anytime. Last October, a portion of the 177th Fighter Wing’s 119th Fighter Squadron deployed its F-16 Fighting Falcons to the U.S. Central Command area of operations. The squadron helped defend regional interests and maintain freedom of navigation before returning home safely in January. At the same time, the 108th Wing modernized its aerial refueling capability. Last autumn, Airmen from the 177th and 108th Wings deployed to

Aviano Air Base, Italy, for Operation Pegasus Dawn, sharpening Agile Combat Employment skills and supporting the KC 46 transition; the mission helped the 108th Wing move from KC 135 to KC 46 tankers. This summer, the 177th Civil Engineer Squadron joined the 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team and the New Jersey State Police to train for World Cup security, demonstrating our commitment to public safety ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Meanwhile, the 177th Fighter Wing continues its no fail Aerospace Control Alert mission, protecting the skies over the eastern United States every day of the year. Altogether, our Air deployments have supported four geographic combatant commands; NORTHCOM, SOUTHCOM, INDOPACOM and CENTCOM, covering most of the world’s surface.

To the spouses, families and loved ones of our deployed Soldiers and Airmen: you remain in our thoughts and prayers. Your support makes our missions possible, and the entire New Jersey family thanks you for your service.

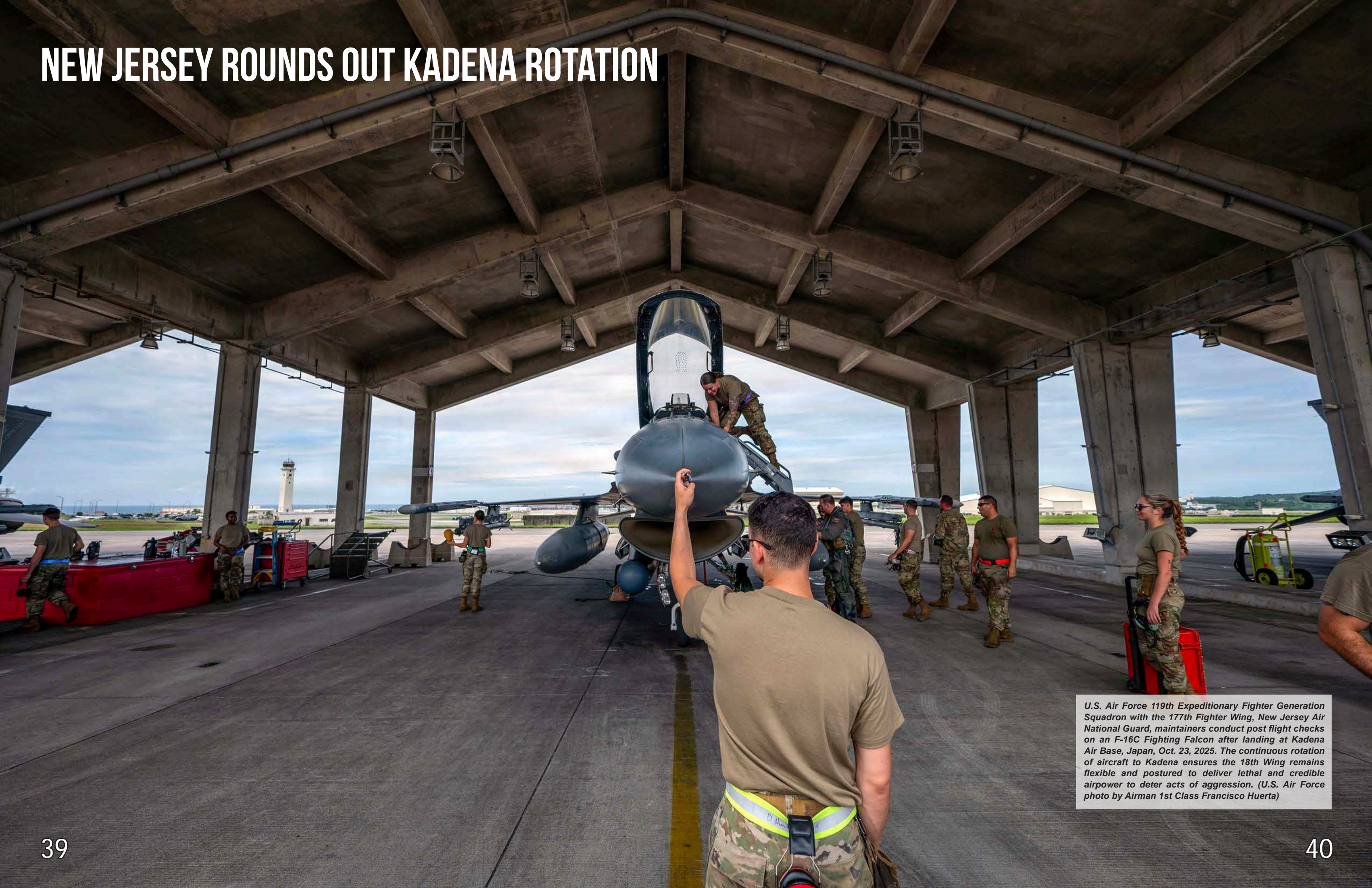
One more important note: through 62 engagements last year with our state partners, the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Cyprus, you, our Soldiers and Airmen have earned the respect of those we train beside and the gratitude of those we are privileged to serve. Your achievements are extraordinary. Your dedication keeps our citizens safe and helps defend democracy around the world. Our work continues. By pushing ourselves and our units to do better and aim higher, we can carry any load and accomplish any mission.

# State Partnership Program '25



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Joseph Figarelli, 254th Regiment (Combat Arms), New Jersey Army National Guard, seated, demonstrates Javelin weapons system firing procedures during a training session with Albanian Light Infantry Battle Group soldiers in Zall Herr, Albania, Sept. 16, 2025. The training was focused on heavy weapons capabilities ahead of future DEFENDER exercises. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Talia Badre)

# NEW JERSEY ROUNDS OUT KADENA ROTATION



*U.S. Air Force 119th Expeditionary Fighter Generation Squadron with the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, maintainers conduct post flight checks on an F-16C Fighting Falcon after landing at Kadena Air Base, Japan, Oct. 23, 2025. The continuous rotation of aircraft to Kadena ensures the 18th Wing remains flexible and postured to deliver lethal and credible airpower to deter acts of aggression. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Francisco Huerta)*



# Takeback Day

Drug Enforcement Administration agents in partnership with the Soldiers with the New Jersey National Guard Counterdrug Task Force collected 14,434 pounds of unwanted prescription medications from 235 collection sites across the state during Operation Take Back New Jersey and disposed of at the Covanta Resource Recovery Facility in Camden, New Jersey, Oct. 28, 2025. Operation Take Back is a biannual event that allows residents to safely dispose of unused or expired medications consequence-free. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Benjamin Martinez)

# MAINTAINING THE FUEL FORCE

Photos by Senior Airman Emily Saxton  
108th Wing Public Affairs Office



U.S. Air Force Airmen with the 108th Logistics Readiness Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard, conduct maintenance checks on a R-12 Hydrant Servicing Vehicle at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Nov. 1, 2025.



U.S. Air Force Airmen with the 108th Logistics Readiness Squadron perform weekly and monthly maintenance checks on an R-12 Hydrant Servicing Vehicle to prevent potential maintenance issues and ensure that proper refueling mission can take place. The R-12, which connects directly to the in-ground piping system can refuel up to 1,000 gallons per minute.



# STX Lane training

Photos by Sgt. Seth Cohen  
New Jersey Army National Guard Recruiting & Retention Battalion



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, conduct a low visibility raid as part of a situational training exercise at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Aug. 9, 2025. This training prepares Soldiers to provide precision fire in support of squad-level operations.



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 114th Infantry Regiment, maneuver during a situational training exercise.

Soldiers shoot, move, and communicate while engaging the opposing force.



# LAST PHANTOM AIRMAN RETIRES

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Bela Vaszlavik, 108th Wing Public Affairs Office

The bright sun pierced through the clouds above McGuire Air Force Base in late September 1987. The roar of the F-4E Phantom II thundered as it waited on the runway. The aircraft moved forward, amping up its speed as it accelerated down the runway.

Master Sgt. James Giquinto, a brand new young Airman, looked up as he saw the aircraft go into full afterburner and lift into the air.

The F-4E Phantom II fighter bomber was a part of the, then, 108th Tactical Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard.

Thirty-eight years later, Giquinto, the last F-4E maintainer in the 108th Wing, retired Dec. 7, 2025.

“Being the last F-4E maintainer in our Wing’s history seems so surreal,” said Giquinto. “I never thought my retirement would be such a legend. Everything just happened to fall into place.”

He worked on F-4E’s jet engines for four years, starting in 1987, when he began his Air Force career.

“The fighter jets were quick turn and burn where we had to get them ready to fly the next sortie,” said Giquinto. “I loved the pace, and I was eager to lend a hand to get the mission accomplished.”

Working on the F-4E had its difficulties, especially since it was extremely difficult to access some of the engine components while it was in the aircraft.

“Everything was compact to work on; at times you could not even see your hands working on the engines,” said Giquinto. “Whenever somebody got hurt, scratched, or bruised, you used to call them ‘Phantom bites’.”

He took immense pride in his work, even if the job gave him a few ‘Phantom bites’ along the way.

“We had to put the engine on a special stand to assess the engine for leaks in full afterburner,” said Giquinto. “I always had to get underneath the engine while a huge ball of flame was going out the back of the motor to ensure the engine

could uphold the mission.”

Giquinto deployed to the Middle East as part of the first wave of orders that former President George W. Bush issued in December 2001. He was busy around the clock, ensuring the mission stayed on track.

“Working nights, I saw missiles flying overhead with loud sirens going off, it was a ton of chaos,” said Giquinto. “All that training and skills I did my whole career were being put to use, which felt very rewarding.”

Since he enjoyed his work, he found a full time position to work on the KC-135 when he came home. He did that until 2009 when the 108th upgraded to the KC-135R.

“Once we got the R models, I felt like since I was getting older, I needed to get out of the elements,” said Giquinto. “I thought it was a good idea to go into Quality Assurance so that I could still be around the unit and continue to serve.”

He found a position in QA where he would inspect other people’s mechanical

work as opposed to doing it himself.

“I didn’t want to be turning wrenches my whole entire career and getting dirty everyday with fuel and oil,” said Giquinto. “In QA, I got to know more about the aircraft from nose to tail by interacting with all the units associated with the aircraft.”

Being a part of Quality Assurance allowed Giquinto to continue his thirst for knowledge and learn from different mechanical backgrounds. After 38 years and multiple deployments, Giquinto is ready for whatever life has to throw at him.

“As I reflect back, I feel proud I have accomplished so much serving my country,” said Giquinto. “Today, in a different capacity, I will continue to serve my country working in Federal Service as a public servant.”



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. James Giquinto, right, the last F-4E Phantom II maintainer, salutes the American flag during his retirement ceremony at the Heritage Building at the 108th Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Dec. 7, 2025.

was working properly.”

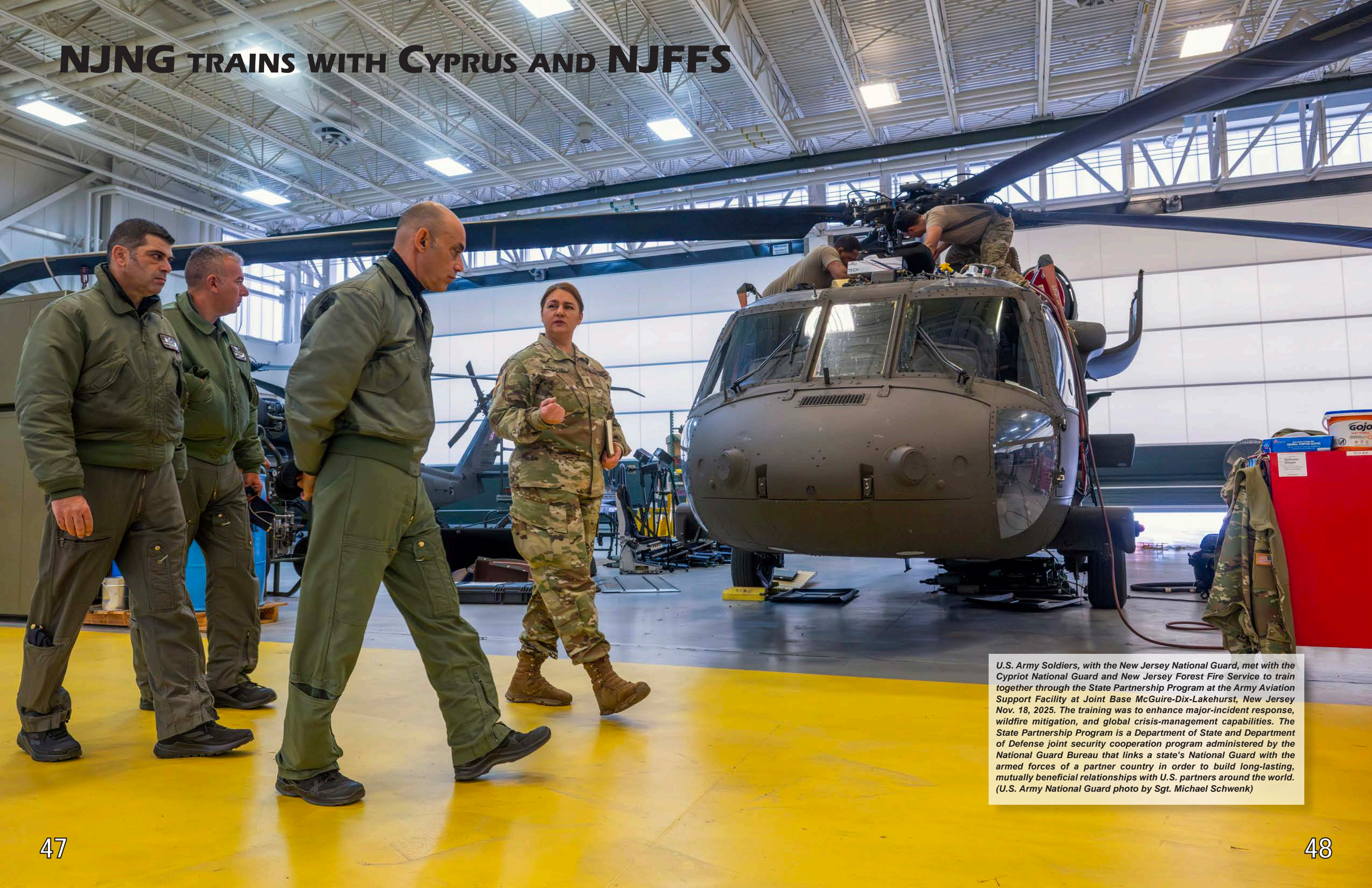
In 1991, the 108th Tactical Fighter Wing became the 108th Air Refueling Wing and with the new mission, came a change in aircraft – the KC-135 Stratotanker replaced the F-4E Phantom II.

“Being a young Airman, it was great having the fighter jets with the higher tempo since I had so much energy,” said Giquinto. “By the time we got the KC-135s I was slowing down. It took a couple of years still, but I found my footing.”

He was in a real groove for several years working on KC-135, but nothing could have prepared him for when tragedy struck the entire nation, Sept. 11, 2001.

“As soon as 9/11 happened, we were called up for one year under presidential orders,” said Giquinto. “We were prepared to take action when we needed to so we

# NJNG TRAINS WITH CYPRUS AND NJFFS



*U.S. Army Soldiers, with the New Jersey National Guard, met with the Cypriot National Guard and New Jersey Forest Fire Service to train together through the State Partnership Program at the Army Aviation Support Facility at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey Nov. 18, 2025. The training was to enhance major-incident response, wildfire mitigation, and global crisis-management capabilities. The State Partnership Program is a Department of State and Department of Defense joint security cooperation program administered by the National Guard Bureau that links a state's National Guard with the armed forces of a partner country in order to build long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with U.S. partners around the world. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Schwenk)*

# DOWN RANGE



*U.S. Army Sgt. Felipe DeSouza, 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey National Guard, conducts individual weapons training in Baghdad, Iraq, Nov. 6, 2025. The training, which consists of zeroing and completing various marksmanship exercises, reinforces a Soldier's discipline, focus, and precision. RSG Soldiers are currently deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in support of Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Katherine Valdivieso-Cedeno)*