

OREGON SENTINEL

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATIONAL GUARD

F-15EX Eagle II unveiled during ceremony held at the Portland Air National Guard Base



An Oregon F-15EX Eagle II, tail flashing 007 assigned to the 142nd Wing, and the new flagship for the unit, taxis on the flightline before take-off during the official Unveiling Ceremony for the new fighter jet at the Portland Air National Guard Base, Oregon on July 12, 2024. The 142nd Wing will be replacing the F-15 C/D model Eagles with the new F-15 EX II models.

Story and photos by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

PORTLAND, Ore. – The future of the 142nd Wing was on full display during a formal unveiling ceremony held on July 12, 2024 at the Portland Air National Guard Base, Oregon – as the first two operational U.S. Air Force F-15EX Eagle II fighter jets assigned to the unit made their official debut to the public.

With the delivery of the new F-15EX models to the Oregon Air National Guard’s 142nd Wing, the ceremony highlighted the first time a new weapons system has been introduced to the Air National Guard before being first implemented by the active duty Air Force.

Dignitaries, elected officials, members of the military and other aviation enthusiasts got an up-close look of the F-15EX model that will eventually replace the F-15C Eagle models currently operated by the unit.

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Adjutant General Gronewold Tours Oregon Guard’s Wildfire Operations



Story and photos by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

HARNEY COUNTY, Ore. – Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, the Adjutant General of Oregon, and senior leaders visited National Guard members deployed for wildfire response efforts on Tuesday, August 6, 2024 underscoring the Guard’s crucial role in protecting Oregon’s communities.

Gronewold’s itinerary included stops at the Harney County Fire Camp and a helicopter staging area near Cottage Grove, where he interfaced with soldiers and airmen on the front lines of the state’s wildfire battle.

At the Harney County Fire Camp, Gronewold and senior leaders shared breakfast with soldiers and airmen currently fighting the Telephone Fire.

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Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers mobilized for Middle East Assignment



Story and photos by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

FOREST GROVE, Ore. – Approximately 230 members of the Oregon Army National Guard’s 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment were formally recognized during their mobilization ceremony held at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon on August 9, 2024, as they prepared to depart for a year-long deployment to the Middle East.

Before departing overseas, they will first undergo additional training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma to enhance their proficiencies on the equipment and systems that they will operate as the primary air defenders that American and Coalition partners rely on for force protection.

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General Daniel R. Hokanson, Director of the National Guard Bureau and former Adjutant General of the Oregon National Guard retires after 38 years of service.

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Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers complete Joint Readiness Training at Fort Johnson, Louisiana, as they prepare for upcoming deployment.

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Command Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Brunk W. Conley, a distinguished veteran of the Oregon Army National is inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame.

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The Oregon Military Department

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Governor Tina Kotek

The Adjutant General
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Brig. Gen. Jenifer E. Pardy

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COMMAND

Our Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen continue to answer the call

As the season changes, I want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible accomplishments of our Oregon National Guard over the past few months and look ahead to the opportunities before us.

This summer, our Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen continued to answer the call to serve both at home and abroad. Whether supporting wildfire suppression efforts across the state, participating in large-scale training exercises, or deploying overseas in support of our nation's defense, you showcased the professionalism, dedication, and resilience that define our Oregon National Guard.

As we move into the fall, we remain committed to readiness, cohesion, and strengthening our capabilities. We will continue investing in the professional development of our Guard

Members, ensuring they have the training and skills necessary to excel in their roles. Fostering a culture of teamwork and mutual support that extends beyond individual units is paramount. We will also enhance our capabilities, constantly refining our ability to face any challenge that comes our way.

As we approach Veterans Day in November, let us take a moment to honor the service and sacrifice of all who have worn and continue to wear the uniform. Our duty is to carry on their legacy of service and support to our state and nation, and we will continue to build upon the foundations laid by those who came before us.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to each and every one of you for your continued unwavering commitment to the Oregon National Guard. Your dedication to excellence,



Brigadier General
Alan R. Gronewold,
Adjutant General,
Oregon National Guard



responsiveness to the force, and reputation as a winning organization are what make us the service of choice. I am honored to lead this remarkable organization and look forward to working alongside you as we continue to strive for excellence and ensure the Oregon National Guard remains a source of pride for all.

Always Ready, Always There!

A few items of importance for every Soldier and Airman

First, integrating new Soldiers and Airmen into your formations. This is an essential part of team building when you make new members feel part of the organization's family. We as an organization created a program called Integrate, Council and Retain Soldiers (ICRS). It is used statewide on the Army side, and in the future it would be my desire to see it integrated into the Air force side of the house as well. Its sole purpose is to integrate Soldiers returning from Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training (AIT) into your ranks. First impressions count! Make the new service members' first impression of your unit be a positive experience. Follow the checklists in the program, which is very simple to use and you cannot go wrong on the first step to creating a cohesive team.

Next, I can't overly stress the importance of being individually ready. What does that mean? It means to focus on each Soldier being ready to deploy – to include having your medical situations sorted out, having your dental records up to date, having your financial documents in order at your unit, striving towards to getting your military schools done, passing your physical fitness test, complete your annual PHA,

keeping your security clearance updated, etc. I am not talking about a list of advanced items; I am talking about getting the basic service member required items done and out of the way, and then making sure you maintain those important items.

Lastly, for this article, I want you to focus on building your team. Commanders and Senior Enlisted Advisors, I encourage you to empower the Company / Squadron level Command Teams to develop training schedules that are solely focused on training at the platoon and shop level and below. It has been proven time and time again that squads who are highly proficient in their skill set are a tight cohesive team. Tight cohesive teams, stay in the guard. Tight cohesive teams can function at higher levels of mission accomplishment. If all your squads or sections in your company/battery/squadron or troop were proficient and a cohesive team, you could accomplish platoon and company level missions proficiently. Try to train on your MOS/AFSC specific skills in a field environment as much as possible.

Our members didn't join the military to do recruiting events, they joined to do their Military Occupational Skill!



Command Sergeant Major
Lee G. Smith,
Command Senior Enlisted Leader,
Oregon National Guard



When a Soldier goes to drill, trains on their MOS/AFSC skill and then has fun doing it, and takes on challenging tasks associated with their skill specialty that builds effective teams. This is when Soldiers naturally recruit their friends to join our ranks. We have been talking about this for years, it's time to do it.

Training in the field at platoon level and below should be everyone's focus. I understand there's higher level requirements for CTC rotations however, we as command teams need to scrutinize what is absolutely necessary and what is not. We need our individual service members and their squads to master the basics and be subject matter experts in their MOS/AFSC vocation.

See you downrange!

ORNG hosts 'Bosslift' in Southern Oregon



Photo by Maj. Chris Clyne, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

Local educators and ESGR volunteers in front of an Oregon Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter at Medford Airport. The group flew along the Southern Oregon coast in a unique bosslift event on Sept. 14, 2024. The flight, sponsored by Det. 1, B Co., 1-168th General Support Aviation Battalion, and ESGR, marks the return of bosslifts to the region after a decade-long hiatus, aiming to strengthen community ties and showcase National Guard capabilities.

COMMAND

Joint Chiefs of Staff honors NGB Chief during retirement ceremony

Story by Matthew Olay,
Department of Defense News

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr., praised the leadership and accomplishments of outgoing Chief of the National Guard Bureau, U.S. Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson during a relinquishment of responsibility ceremony on Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Arlington, Virginia on August 2, 2024.

“General Hokanson’s tenure as the chief of the National Guard Bureau has been marked by exceptional leadership and transformative accomplishments,” Brown said. “His visionary leadership has ensured that the National Guard remains a vital and respected component of our national defense today and well into the future.”



Photo by U.S. Navy Chief Mass Communication Specialist James Mullen
U.S. Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, officiates the relinquishment of responsibility ceremony of Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, Joint Base Fort Myer-Henderson Hall, Virginia on August 2, 2024.

After explaining that Hokanson’s efforts since 2020 have led to over 50 legislative initiatives focused on his four principal priorities of people, readiness, modernization and reform, Brown then pointed out several of the National Guard’s accomplishments under Hokanson’s leadership as the organization’s 29th chief.



Photo by Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Zach Sheely
U.S. Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, hosts a relinquishment of responsibility ceremony for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Joint Base Myer Henderson Hall, Arlington, Virginia, on Aug. 2, 2024. Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson retires as the 29th Chief, National Guard Bureau, after 38 years of service in the Army and National Guard.

Brown listed such accomplishments as responding to historic wildfires and hurricanes in 2020, as well as flooding, typhoons and tornadoes in 2022. He was also involved in administering almost 60 million vaccine doses, conducting 35 million tests, disinfecting 71,000 facilities and supporting over 1,000 food banks during the COVID-19 pandemic; and delivering over 1 million meals to the American public.

Brown also spoke about how Hokanson oversaw multiple National Guard overseas mobilizations, including efforts to evacuate Afghan civilians in 2021 during what would become the largest non-combatant evacuation operation in U.S. history.

“Gen. Hokanson epitomizes the spirit of a citizen soldier, as one who felt his duty to defend our country and uphold the freedoms we enjoy today,” Brown said, just before addressing Hokanson directly.

“Your strategic vision, steadfast leadership and tireless advocacy have left an indelible mark on the National Guard and our national security,” Brown told the outgoing chief.

During his farewell remarks, Hokanson also commented on the Guard’s numerous accomplishments over the past four years.

“To be clear, these are not my accomplishments,” he said. “These are the accomplishments of our 440,000 soldiers and airmen. They are the accomplishments of citizen warriors ... the accomplishments [that] were earned through their service, their sacrifices and those of their families.”

Hokanson, whose career ends after 38 years of service — at first in the Army and then the National Guard — rounded out his remarks with praise for the organization he has spent decades serving.

“We are innovative and adaptable; we are prepared and professional; we are informed and experienced,” he said.

“We are well-trained, well-positioned and well-led; and we will keep our promise to America because we are the National Guard: ‘Always ready, always there.’ ... It has been the honor of my life to serve beside you and serve our nation.”



Photo by Aaron Perkins, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs
Gen. Daniel R. Hokanson, who is retiring as Chief of the National Guard Bureau, conducted his fini flight celebration at the Oregon National Guard Aviation facility, in Salem, Ore., Aug 15, 2024. Hokanson served as the Adjutant General, Oregon National Guard from August 2013 to July 2015.



Photo by Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Zach Sheely
U.S. Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, hosts the retirement ceremony for Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, the 29th Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Joint Base Myer Henderson Hall, Arlington, Virginia, Aug. 1, 2024. Hokanson retires after 38 years of service in the U.S. Army and National Guard.

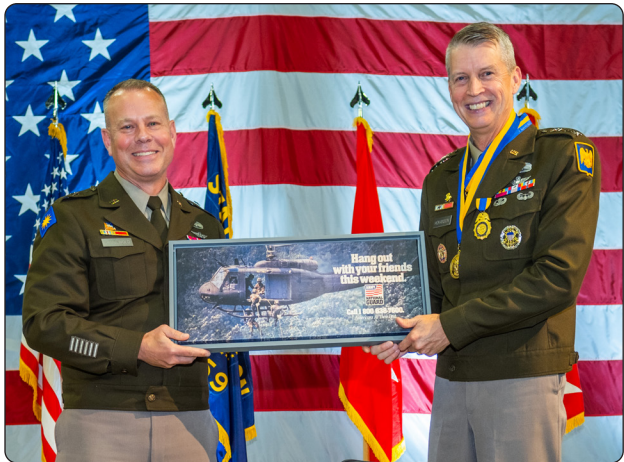


Photo by Maj. Chris Clyne, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs
Gen. Daniel R. Hokanson was honored with an Army National Guard special 1980’s replica recruiting poster, presented by Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, during a retirement ceremony at the Medford Armory in Oregon on Aug. 17, 2024, celebrating his 38-year military career.

The relinquishment of responsibility ceremony followed Hokanson’s formal retirement ceremony which also took place on the day before on Aug. 1, 2024 at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall.

A graduate from the United States Military Academy in 1986, Gen. Hokanson’s deployments included combat assignments to Panama, Afghanistan, and Iraq. From August 2013 to July 2015 Hokanson served as The Adjutant General of the Oregon Military Department.

A final retirement ceremony was held in his honor, paying tribute to his strong connection to the Oregon National Guard on Aug. 17, at the Medford Oregon National Guard Armory, serving as a homecoming – having grown up in Happy Camp, California just 75 miles to the south.

“Southern Oregon has always held a special place in my heart; it’s the closest to home I could get, and the Oregon Guard has been so amazing to Kelly [his wife] and I,” he said during the Medford ceremony.



Photo by U.S. Navy Chief Mass Communication Specialist James Mullen
U.S. Air Force General Charles. Q. Brown, Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, officiates the retirement ceremony for Gen. Daniel Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, at Joint Base Myer-Hendersen Hall, Virginia on August 1, 2024.

LEADERSHIP

F-15 EX Unveiling Ceremony
Continued from Front Page

In total, 18 F-15EXs will be delivered to the 142nd Wing, as the delivery of nearly 100 new operational F-15EX Eagle IIs are scheduled to be added to the Air Force inventory. Manufactured by Boeing, the F-15EX is fortified with the next-generation of radars, sensors and other modern software to keep pace with advances made by adversaries.

Opening the ceremony, Col. Michael Kosderka, 142nd Wing commander, welcomed those attending, acknowledging that he “couldn’t be more excited, more thrilled and more humbled,” to be representing the unit and the Oregon National Guard – “the home of the newest fighter.”



Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon National Guard gives an interview with local reporters prior to the start of the Unveiling Ceremony for the new F-15EX Eagle II fighter jet.

After recognizing an extensive list of elected officials and notable guests in attendance, Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, The Adjutant General for the Oregon National Guard, described the importance of the new F-15EX for the state and nation.

“The F-15EX represents a significant leap in modernizing the 142nd Wing – enhancing our operational readiness and effectiveness, to better protect our skies and communities,” Gronewold said, in describing this new juncture for the organization. “It also provides an incredible opportunity for our Airmen to train on one of the most significant fighter jets in the U.S. arsenal, ensuring seamless integration with active duty units and fostering greater interoperability within the United States Air Force.”

Gronewold had the honor of introducing Oregon Governor Tina Kotek, whom he recognized as “a tireless advocate for the security and wellbeing of all Oregonians.”

“This is an amazing day,” Kotek said to those filling the unit’s large maintenance

hangar for the ceremony, with the new F-15EX and current Oregon Air National Guard F-15C models poised as a backdrop on the flightline.

“Oregon values the exceptional contributions of our Oregon National Guard service members, not only to our state but to our nation,” Kotek said, detailing the vital geographical position of the state within the nation for air defense. “The 142nd Wing... is the sole defender of our skies of the Pacific Northwest.

The advanced capabilities of this unrivaled strike fighter will enhance our region’s ability to respond to potential threats, strengthening our homeland defense – for our region and our nation.”

The 142nd Wing’s primary federal mission is to provide aerospace superiority from Canada to the California border while supporting USNORTHCOM and NORAD. The 142nd Wing is one of three Air National Guard units that are set to operate the F15-EX. These units include the 144th Fighter Wing, Fresno Air National Guard Base, California and the 159th Fighter Wing, New Orleans Air National Guard Base, Louisiana.

Also in attendance was U.S. Senator Ron Wyden (D-Oregon), who has been a longtime advocate in the U.S. Senate for the Oregon National Guard and worked to secure the current 50-year lease of the Portland Air National Guard Base in early 2013 with the Port of Portland.

“Twenty years ago we were on the way to losing all of this...



An F-15EX Eagle II, assigned to the 142nd Wing, takes off during the official Unveiling Ceremony for the new fighter jet at the Portland Air National Guard Base, Oregon on July 12, 2024.

twenty years ago the base closing commission [Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission] was meeting and all of these people back east... didn’t think much of ‘fighter jets in Portland – what’s the big deal’ about that,” Wyden said, reflecting back to the 2005 BRAC report, when the 142nd (Fighter) Wing was relegated to closure.

Declaring fervently, Wyden said, “Not on our watch - not on our watch! We pulled together an incredible bi-partisan juggernaut, to protect the predecessor of the fighter jet [F-15 A/B model] we are talking about today. So give yourself a big round of applause for that one large community rally of support.”



U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Duke Pirak, the Acting Director of the Air National Guard, addresses those in attendance at the official unveiling ceremony for the F-15EX Eagle II fighter jet at the 142nd Wing at the Portland Air National Guard Base, Oregon on July 12, 2024.

The history of the F-15 Eagle fighter jet at the Portland Air National Guard Base began on May 24, 1989, as the replacement for the F-4 Phantom II. Most of the early planes came from the 318th Fighter Interceptor Group at McChord Air Force Base, Washington, which was being disbanded. For the next 20 years, the 142nd flew the F-15 A/B models, including the last ‘A model’ in the U.S. Air Force inventory, which was retired on Sept. 16, 2009, while phasing in upgraded C and D models in late 2007.

These newer models featured improvements in fuel efficiency,

boosting radar advances and avionics capabilities. The F-15EX Eagle II model is an all-weather multirole strike fighter, which will continue to perform homeland and air defense missions, serving as an essential platform, retaining advanced weapons to enhance mission proficiencies and work alongside the U.S. Air Force F-22 Raptor and F-35 Lightning II.

Speaking to this continued integration of the unit as part of the national defense strategy, Maj. Gen. Duke Pirak, the current Acting Director of the Air National Guard, and former 142nd Wing commander (Nov. 2016 to Aug. 2018), addressed some familiar faces, as well as the current Airmen in the audience.

“I could never have imagined that I would be standing before you on this stage while serving in this capacity and overseeing such a profound moment in the history of the Oregon Air National Guard,” Pirak said, reflecting on the weight of the opportunity. “Today we celebrate the arrival of the Air Force’s first operational F-15EX here at the Portland Air National Guard Base. This momentous occasion marks the first time in history in which an Air National Guard unit has received the very first operational aircraft off the assembly line.”

Pirak also described many of the conflicts that the U.S. military faces now and potentially in the future – pointing to the value this new aircraft brings to the nation’s overall security. “The cornerstone of our nation’s airpower is the F-15EX,” he said, noting the improvements in this particular airframe – “make it a national asset.”

“It will be the bedrock of American air supremacy for generations to come,” Pirak described. “When

we use this (aircraft) to fight and win our nation’s wars, it will be supported, maintained, and flown by Oregon Air Guardsmen.”

In closing, Pirak reminded everyone in attendance the importance of the mission and how far the unit has come in the past two decades, while issuing a challenge to imminent trials.

“To the men and women of the 142nd Wing, please know that you are literally standing on the shoulders of giants. Your ‘Redhawk’ forefathers have built an organization of strategic indispensability, I took the BRAC recommendation as a sort of invalidation,” he said, summarizing the implications of the new F-15EX and future mission responsibilities. “Well, let this new fighter jet be your validation and a reminder of the resolve you must have...never stop striving for excellence and never stop challenging yourself to continually earn this mark of indispensability.”



Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek (center-right) is joined by Col. Michael Kosderka, 142nd Wing commander (left), Brig. Gen. David Unruh, Air Component Commander, Oregon National Guard (center-left), Maj. Gen. Duke Pirak, Acting Director of the Air National Guard Commander (center) and Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon National Guard (right) as they gather for a group photo with the new F-15EX Eagle II.

LEADERSHIP

Wildland Fire Operations

Continued from Front Page

During this time, Gronewold awarded challenge coins to top performers from the four deployed crews, recognizing their exceptional efforts in the ongoing firefighting operations. Later, during the visit to the Cottage Grove site supporting the Lane 1 fire complex, an ORARNG CH-47 Chinook

helicopter was ready for water bucket operations. Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jeremiah Williams, a maintenance test pilot and production control officer with the Oregon National Guard, highlighted the importance of their mission. “The Oregon National Guard brings a special set of skills and the ability to deploy type one aircraft to assist in firefighting operations,” Williams said.



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, along with Command Sgt. Maj. Lee Smith, and Brig. Gen. Jen Pardey, confer with CWO 3 Jeremiah Williams in front of a CH-47 Chinook helicopter equipped with a fire bucket, Aug. 6, 2024, near Cottage Grove, Oregon.

“We’re augmenting civilian assets with our 2000-gallon water buckets, allowing us to put a lot of water on the fire quickly.” Williams and his team have been on station for three days, flying water bucket operations for two of the days. Their efforts complement those of civilian firefighting assets assigned to the fire.

Brig. Gen. Gronewold and senior leaders’ visit is part of the broader mobilization of approximately 90 Guard members who processed through Joint Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration (JRSOI) on Jul. 31 and Aug. 1. These personnel formed four hand crews, each consisting of 22 firefighters and additional support staff. The Oregon National Guard also deployed three HH-60 Black Hawk helicopters alongside the CH-47 Chinook. Two Black Hawks are on standby for medical evacuation, while one is available for fire bucket operations.



Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, and ORNG senior leaders share breakfast with Oregon Guardsmen at the Harney County Fairgrounds fire camp.

“It’s a real privilege to be out here to support the community, helping out local neighborhoods, and saving structures across the state,” Williams added, noting the positive impact of their presence on local morale. As Oregon battles another challenging wildfire season, the National Guard’s efforts remain crucial to the state’s response. Brig. Gen. Gronewold emphasized the Guard’s role: “These operations exemplify why the Oregon National Guard is the military service of choice for Oregonians,” underscoring their commitment to protecting the state in times of crisis.

Oregon seeks volunteers for Selective Service System Boards

Story and photo by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Department
Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. — As global tensions rise and military recruitment faces challenges, the Oregon National Guard is playing a vital role in supporting the Selective Service System, ensuring the state remains prepared for potential national emergencies. The Selective Service System, an independent agency within the executive branch, is responsible for rapidly providing personnel to the military in a fair and equitable manner if the President and Congress authorize conscription. While the United States has maintained an all-volunteer force for decades, the system remains a crucial component of national defense readiness.

“The Selective Service is a vital pillar in our national defense posture,” said Michael Kalberg, Oregon’s State Director for the Selective Service System. “Even though it may be overlooked by some, it’s an important component of our government.” In Oregon, the Selective Service State Headquarters is located at the Salem Armory on 17th St. The state’s mission includes maintaining staffing for local draft boards, preparing to activate a fully operational state headquarters if needed, and supporting the ongoing registration of 18-year-old males. Lt. Col. Robert Earhart, the Selective Service Reserve Service Member for Oregon, explained the system’s role: “Most people are familiar with the draft during World War II through Vietnam.

It’s been a volunteer force for the past several decades, so the draft has not been going on. But every state needs to have an apparatus in place in case the President and Congress reinstate conscription.” The Oregon National Guard provides critical support to the Selective Service mission. This partnership includes sharing facilities, logistical support, and personnel.



Lt. Col. Robert Earhart, Selective Service Reserve Force Officer for Oregon, conducts an interview on July 13, 2024, at the Salem Armory.

In addition to occupying space at the Salem Armory, National Guard Armory facilities and administrative equipment would be made available for temporary operations in the event of activation. “We’ve had a lot of success in Oregon over the last 50 years, and this office has been functional,” Earhart said. “A lot of great people have come through, and a lot of great volunteers helping us along the way.” However, the system faces challenges, particularly in rural areas. Oregon is divided into 18 local boards, with nine single-county boards and nine multi-county boards. As of July 2024, five boards are inoperable due to volunteer board member vacancies across 14 counties.

“We have quite a few vacancies around the state,” Earhart noted. To reach board capacity, “I could probably fill another 30 slots.” These local boards play a crucial role in the Selective Service process. In the event of a draft, board members would review and decide on draftee claims for exemptions, postponements, or deferments from military service. “It’s a big responsibility because you hold someone’s future in your hands,” Earhart explained. “It’s a matter of trust, logic, and an understanding of the story being told to you.” The time commitment for board members is minimal during peacetime — approximately five hours in the first year and two hours annually thereafter. However, their role becomes expanded and critical if a draft is reinstated.

Kalberg emphasized the unique challenges Oregon faces in maintaining the Selective Service System. “Oregon is not a high-visibility military state. We don’t have a lot of military footprint [in Oregon],” he said. For that reason, probably in particular, Oregonians have never had a history of high registration compliance when young men turn 18.” Despite these challenges, recent efforts to bolster the system have shown promise. Earhart has been conducting outreach with agency partners, the governor’s office, county commissioners, and service organizations like the VFW and American Legion, which has resulted in several new volunteers in the pipeline.

The Selective Service is also adapting to potential changes on the national level. Congress is considering bills that could expand registration requirements, such as the automatic registration of 18-year-old males and including women in the draft. If passed, these changes would significantly increase the workload for local boards. “If mandated, it’ll be an interesting reaction,” Kalberg said. “We’re not worried about it, but we do need to get the numbers on the paper, get [board members] trained, and get them ready.” As geopolitical pressures mount and military recruiting struggles to meet its quotas, the importance of the Selective Service System has been identified as a backstop for national defense. Dr. Kathleen Hicks, Deputy Secretary of Defense, recently stated, “I don’t want people to think the all-volunteer force is sort of alone when the United States must make major decisions. They do not stand alone.” The Oregon National Guard and Selective Service System are actively seeking volunteers to serve on local boards, particularly in rural areas. Interested citizens can apply online at sss.gov/volunteers to “Get Involved.” Eligible individuals must be U.S. citizens, at least 18 years old, and willing to undergo training and dedicate time to this crucial role in national preparedness. “We’re looking for dedicated individuals who want to serve their community and country in this important capacity,” Earhart said. “It’s a unique opportunity to play a vital role in our national defense structure.”

MOBILIZATIONS

Middle East Mobilization Ceremony
Continued from Front Page

After completing their training the service members will be assigned to Iraq and Syria in support of OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE, whose mission is to advise, assist, and enable partner forces to secure lasting defeat of terrorist elements across the Central Command Area of Responsibility.

For those soldiers, family members and friends in attendance, Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon National Guard, outlined the operation the unit will conduct on their mission.

“The 218th Field Artillery has an exceptionally rich unit history and lineage in which you now are part of. You will now be task organized as Task Force Defender, for the deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. Remember the heavy responsibilities that rest upon your shoulders,” he said.

Speaking of the “long journey so far,” Gronewold also reminded them of the hard work and dedication they have already achieved.

“Redleg Battalion... you’ve spent the better part of the last two years preparing yourself and your families for this mobilization. You trained at Camp Roberts [California] last summer sharpening your skills, and you just returned from the crucible of all crucibles – the Joint Readiness Training Center in Louisiana.”

As part of Task Force DEFENDER, the Oregon Citizen-Soldiers will be conducting rocket, artillery, mortar and unmanned drone defense operations in the Middle East. This mission is important to protect stability in the region while supporting the overall U.S. national security.

“The Oregon National Guard continues its legacy of simultaneously serving Oregonians with domestic operations here at home while also answering the call for federal mobilizations supporting the United States,” Gronewold said. “Our duty as soldiers is not only to defend our nation but to stand as a beacon of hope for those who yearn for freedom in the face of repression and this is what makes the Oregon National Guard the military service of choice for Oregonians.”



Oregon Army National Soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment render a hand salute during their mobilization ceremony held in their honor at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon on August 9, 2024.

Doug Grafe, Wildlife and Military Policy Advisor for the State of Oregon, read prepared remarks from Oregon Governor Tina Kotek.

“I am deeply humbled by the sense of service and sacrifice to your country, your state and your community that every person in this room displays every day,” said Grafe, in the letter to the service members. “Thank you for taking this mission. We live in a time of unrest and uncertainty around the globe. But the tireless commitment of Oregon’s Citizens-Soldiers keeps the United States keeps the United States and Oregon safe and secure and we are

“There are a lot of things in the air that are threats, our job will be to take out those threats,” said Lt. Col. Manuel Robledo, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment, now preparing for his forth overseas deployment.

“This will be a different mission and rotation than a lot of us have experienced before as we will be separate and spread out over a wide geographical region and have to rely on leaders at the lowest levels,” Robledo said, describing the added challenges. “My job is to help provide support to those young soldiers and others who haven’t deployed before, but they have a ton of support if they reach out for it.”

Preceding the ceremony, the soldiers and their families were treated to a special send-off event, designed as a showing of support and appreciation for the deploying service members. Organized by the Oregon National Family Readiness Team and the Military and Veterans Student Outreach office, the event included live music, activities and a barbeque luncheon on the Pacific University campus.

Deploying for her first overseas mission, Capt. Beth Biggs said she’s mindful of the challenge but feels that all the advance training will pay off.

“I am a little nervous but the more I’ve gotten to work with the people I am going with, the more confident I am,” she said, speaking to local reporters prior to the ceremony. “I am really confident that we’re going to go over there, learn a lot before we go, and gain a lot of skills over there during the deployment.”



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, addresses the soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment along with their families and co-workers during the mobilization ceremony held in their honor at Pacific University.

more capable of taking on today’s and tomorrow’s challenges.”

The 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment has a long and proven record of answering the State and nation’s call to service. The unit was first organized on February 3, 1866 as the Portland Light Artillery. Notable federal service action has comprised with tours in France during World War I, both the Europe and the Pacific theaters during World War II, and numerous missions in the post-9/11 era in the Middle East supporting Operations ENDURING FREEDOM, IRAQI FREEDOM, and SPARTAN SHIELD.



Oregon Army National Guard members assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment attend a deployment send-off event for their families prior to their mobilization ceremony at Pacific University, Forest Grove, Oregon on August 9, 2024.

Governor Kotek hosts demobilization ceremony for returning Soldiers

Story and photos by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. — Governor Tina Kotek and Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon hosted a formal demobilization ceremony in Salem, Oregon for the unit members of the Oregon National Guard’s A (-) 641st Aviation on September 9, 2024.

During their mobilization they provided fixed-wing air capabilities in support of the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa and AFRICOM from Djibouti and throughout the AFRICOM Theater of operations.



Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek presents the framed unit flag to Capt. Christopher Hall for the Oregon National Guard’s A (-) 641st Aviation during the demobilization ceremony.

“Just over a year ago we gathered to see off an exceptional group of aviators as they embarked on a critical mission to the Horn of Africa,” said Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold to the returning Soldiers during the demobilization ceremony. “Today we come together once again – not to say goodbye but to celebrate your safe return and extraordinary service.”

Gov. Kotek welcomed the member’s home and praised their dedication to the yearlong deployment with family and co-workers in attendance. “It was last July that you first mobilized here, and I reminded you to come home safe from your mobilization, and as this was my first mobilization ceremony as Governor and your guidon was in my office while you were gone.”

“With your dedication to duty, I am truly humbled by your commitment to serve. I want to welcome you back, and hopefully, you can now catch up on some of the activities you missed while you were away,” said Governor Kotek.



Gov. Tina Kotek (center) and Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold (far left), pause for a group photo with members of the Oregon National Guard’s A (-) 641st Aviation at the conclusion of their demobilization ceremony, Sept. 9, 2024.

MOBILIZATIONS

Ceremony held for ORARNG Soldiers ahead of Balkan deployment

Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Cory Grogan,
Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. – The mobilization ceremony for Soldiers from the Oregon Army National Guard’s 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team was held on Aug. 16, 2024 at the Salem Armory Auditorium. This event marked the start of their upcoming deployment with the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) for a year-long mission.

During the ceremony, members of the 41st IBCT were honored as they prepared for their deployment, which is part of KFOR’s 34th rotation. Established to end the Kosovo War, KFOR was authorized to deploy an international peacekeeping force to Kosovo, a mission crucial for maintaining regional security and stability.

Oregon Governor Tina Kotek addressed the attendees, emphasizing the importance of their mission.



Gen. Daniel Hokanson, the former Chief of the National Guard Bureau, addresses the audience at the Oregon Army National Guard’s 41st IBCT mobilization ceremony that took place today at the Salem Armory Auditorium, Oregon, on August 16, 2024.

“It is these times that show us how important our freedom and safety are, whether you serve overseas or here at home,” Kotek said.

KFOR’s mission continues to focus on maintaining security, supporting civil authorities, and ensuring freedom of movement across the region, which is vital for fostering peace in Kosovo amidst ongoing political negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia.

Col. Peter Helzer, Commander of the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, spoke about the deployment’s significance before the ceremony.

“The 41st IBCT brings a robust set of capabilities to support the people of Kosovo. From security to medical and logistical support, Oregonians will contribute to the stability and security of the region as part of the NATO effort,” he said.

To prepare for their deployment, the 41st IBCT will first undergo pre-mobilization training at Fort Cavazos, Texas, followed by additional training in Germany.

Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General of Oregon, expressed gratitude for the sacrifices made by the soldiers and their families.

“I want to thank you for the sacrifices you and your families have made to serve the state and nation,” he said.

Gen. Daniel Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also attended the ceremony. As the former 41st IBCT Commander during the Brigade’s 2009-10 deployment to Iraq and former Adjutant General of the Oregon National Guard, Hokanson praised the soldiers for their service and highlighted that they are among the less than 1% of Americans who serve in this capacity.



Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team stand in formation during their mobilization ceremony that took place at the Salem Armory Auditorium in Salem, Oregon, on August 16, 2024.



Oregon Governor Tina Kotek pauses for a photo at the Oregon Army National Guard’s 41st IBCT mobilization ceremony at the Salem Armory Auditorium in Salem, Oregon on August, 16, 2024.

173rd Fighter Wing deployers celebrated with mobilization ceremony

Story by Staff Sgt. Emily Copeland and
Photos by Tech. Sgt. Daniel Reed,
173rd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. – Members of the 173rd Fighter Wing were formally recognized with a mobilization ceremony September 7, 2024, at Kingsley Field in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Approximately 50 members from every group on base are deploying this year to support missions and American interests across the globe.

Deployments for the “No Slack” Airmen are a central part of the role that Guardsman take on when they make the decision to serve in the United States military and Oregon Air National Guard. Oregon’s military has a proud heritage of answering the call to active service since 1848, which has been composed of missions within the state and abroad.

“This iteration marks the third time the 173rd has participated in this four-year cycle, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to the defense of our nation,” said Brigadier General Alan Gronewold, the Adjutant General of the Oregon National Guard. “You represent the best of our wing and the best of our nation.”

While the service members were celebrated for their selfless actions, service and sacrifice to their nation, the families were also recognized as the

silent heroes who bear the burden of their service member’s absence.

“I want to personally thank our families,” said Gronewold. “We can’t do what we do without you, and I want to ensure that you avail yourselves of the family programs and resources that are available to you while your loved one is deployed.”

The Air National Guard participates in Reserve Component Period tasking which normally occurs every four years, with individual members deploying to multiple locations that have a specific need for the Airman’s Air Force Specialty Code, or job.

“I would like to remind you that as you are going out to support our deployment period, that your identity carries with you,” said Brig. Gen. David Unruh, Oregon Air National Guard commander.



Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, speaks with Tech. Sgt. Peter McNally, 173rd Logistics Readiness Squadron, after the mobilization ceremony at Kingsley Field, Klamath Falls, Ore., Sept. 7, 2024.

“We have military traditions, such as this ceremony, that reminds us of who you are, but I want you to remember that your identity goes with you and to take that with you to your locale, as an American and a member of our guard.”

When a national guard unit deploys, it is an

Oregon tradition to leave a guidon or an emblem on display in the Oregon state capitol, which symbolizes the deployed Airman’s connection to Oregon and their community. In return, the Governor sends the unit with an Oregon state flag to take with them while deployed. Once the Airmen have returned, the Governor and commander return the flag and emblem, welcoming the unit back home to Oregon.

“I want you to know that I am proud of you,” said Col. Lee Bouma, 173rd Fighter Wing commander. “It takes a lot of courage to simply raise your hand and join the military. Up until today all of the training you do is theoretical, but deployment is not theoretical. It is the application of America’s military might and make no doubt, you are the tip of the 173rd Fighter Wing spear. Be proud of yourselves and your service. You are trained, you are equipped. Leave with that confidence and bear well the name of Kingsley wherever it is your boot shall walk.”



Col. Lee R. Bouma, 173rd Fighter Wing commander, addresses deploying members and their families during a mobilization ceremony at Kingsley Field, Klamath Falls, Ore., Sept. 7, 2024.



173rd Fighter Wing deploying members stand in formation during the mobilization ceremony on Sept. 7, 2024. Wing members are deploying all throughout the world in various roles as part of their commitment to U.S. national security.

TRAINING: Joint Readiness Training Center

Story by 1st Lt. Kayla Fleshman and
Spc. Frank Ritchey,
115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORT JOHNSON, La. – “From low, darkening clouds the drops spattered on the State’s good highways, on its hundreds of marshy roads, on its pine forests, and on its deep swamps full of quicksand... In rain and darkness hungry and tired, they had fought continuously and well for days at a time.” (LIFE Magazine, October 6, 1941).

Fast forward over 80 years later, in the same marshy roads and thick, green pine forests, the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team once again returned to the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Johnson, Louisiana. Just like the men and women who trained to fight the Red Army before entering into World War II in 1941, the 41st IBCT now trains for Large-Scale Combat Operations against a peer force, instead of the Counter-Insurgency operations used in the last twenty years.

Historically, the Joint Readiness Training Center has prepared Soldiers for a number of battlefield situations, with the intention for soldiers to learn difficult lessons here, rather than in combat when it counts the most. The first battalion, 509th – otherwise known as “Geronimo” – is the active-duty unit that oversees all rotations at JRTC. Part of Geronimo’s duties are to operate as Observer Controller/Trainers (OC/Ts) and the opposing forces (OPFOR) that fight against units going through the rotation, ensuring the training is challenging and useful. 1st Lt. Alex Andrade, one of the leaders with Geronimo, explained, “If we can help save a life, that’s what matters.”



Photo by Sgt. Jason Morgan, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

An M-1 Abrams tank crew from 3rd Squadron, 116th Cavalry, Oregon Army National Guard stands by as their fighting position is reinforced while at the JRTC rotation 24-09 at Fort Johnson, La., July 26, 2024.

Every lesson that a Soldier learns at JRTC could potentially save their life when they are in a real combat situation. “It makes us a better Army as a whole,” he added, pointing out that if they are able to provide simulated, real-world combat experiences for these units, it can have a positive effect on how the Army operates.

In addition to the 41st IBCT, 25 other states and two territories participated in this rotation, which resulted in 4,900 trained Soldiers. Although the 41st has trained at Camp Roberts, California for eXportable Combat Training Capabilities (XCTC), this is the first time in 26 years that the brigade has stepped foot on Fort Johnson, Louisiana, for a JRTC rotation.

Even though the main portion of the exercise is only 14 days, the planning process started almost a year ago, in Aug. 2023. Leaders and key players in planning also took a trip down to Louisiana in February of this year to meet with JRTC staff and review mission expectations. They did a site reconnaissance and started the planning process with the historical guidance of past JRTC rotations.

Further into the planning process, units were identified for participation in the exercise and

Jungleers and Geronimo: A Rematch 26 Years in the Making



Photo by Sgt. Jason Morgan, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

A convoy consisting of the 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery, Oregon Army National Guard moves to a new firing location while at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) during JRTC rotation 24-09 at Fort Johnson, La., July 26, 2024.

travel preparations were made. Throughout June and the beginning of July, necessary supplies were loaded into Conex Boxes to be shipped, while larger equipment like trucks and tanks were shipped by rail. “We had to think about needs vs. wants,” said Sgt. 1st Class James Ruks, from Joint Force Headquarters S3.

As JRTC is located nearly 2,776 miles from Oregon, it was important to know exactly what was necessary, and what could be left behind. If equipment or supplies were needed once soldiers arrived in Louisiana, there were no other options for timely fulfillment. Sgt. 1st Class Heatherlee Hunking, the Transportation Non-commissioned officer from Oregon Training Command noted, “We hadn’t done such a big movement in a long time, and it took a lot of planning.” Without these essential logistical pieces, the rotation could not have been successfully implemented.

After months of planning, the advanced party arrived on July 4th, sacrificing time with their families to start setting up for the main element. The following days focused on in-processing every Soldier that arrived. “We had interactions with every single Soldier,” said Sgt. Nicholas Wolchesky, from the Oregon Army National Guard personnel office (G1), which is responsible for developing, implementing, and sustaining policies and programs to build personnel readiness. Overall, Soldiers had about a week before they were scheduled to go into the “box” (a.k.a the training area). The focus was on packing and getting everything they needed for the upcoming weeks.

Administrative tasks weren’t the only challenges members of the 41st faced, as Staff Sgt. Le said, “The military moves on its belly. Without food, the Army does not move.” Teams of cooks worked long days to ensure everyone had food. “For the first seven days, we fed over 4,000 people a day,” said Spc. Horton from the 141st Brigade Support Battalion (BSB) detailed, explaining that they would sleep for a few hours, then rotate back into the kitchen. Finally, after seven days of feeding 4,000 Soldiers, over 3,000 transitioned into the box.

While in the training area, no cell phones are allowed, simulating a realistic operational environment that units may face during deployment. In an age of immediately available communication to anywhere in the world, soldiers had to say “see you in a couple weeks” to their family and loved ones.

During real-world emergencies, the G1 section is in charge of getting Red Cross messages from families out to Soldiers. In this exercise, they acknowledged that it was definitely an adjustment to not be able to

communicate easily with the units in the field. “It was hard to track down any one individual at a time. We had to adapt our plans,” Wolchesky said.

The G1 section was critical to ensuring that Soldiers were being tracked as they moved in and out of the box, especially as family emergencies and injuries occurred throughout the rotation. “It has been rewarding to get soldiers back home,” said Wolchesky, further explaining that by doing this we’re showing that Soldiers and their families are their top priority.

From the soldiers’ perspective training in the box was grueling. However, most felt that the important lessons they will take back with them will be imperative to future deployments and combat operations. “We miss our spouses, our families, our friends back home but together out here, we are learning so much. We’re bonding as our group is getting ready for future missions. At the end of this, we know we’re going to come out better trained, [and] to serve not only our community back at home, but the world abroad,” Lt. Col. Christopher Markesino said.

For the first week of the rotation, most of the units conducted live fire training, while others worked on Mission Essential Task Lists specific to their type of units. The second week of the rotation kicked off with force-on-force training, where units conducted combat operations with the OPFOR, simulating real world LSCO operations.

Lt. Col. Derek Hotchkiss, 2-218th FA Acting Commander mentions that “Training value has been excellent. Our OC/Ts out here that are assigned to each battery, are active-duty soldiers that are experts in their profession, so, we’re learning from the best. We’re learning a lot about ourselves.”

While at JRTC the 41st IBCT was broken down into various task force elements. Each task force was composed of units from different organic battalions and sometimes even from different states. This approach simulates a possible real-life situation when National Guard units are deployed and attached to other Guard or active-duty units in support of large-scale operations.

“It’s been more of a challenge than I think anyone expected or that anyone’s experienced unless they’ve gone through a similar rotation, but Task Force Guardian Soldiers are reacting very professionally,” Lt. Col. Joshua Rapp, the Task Force Guardian Commander stated. He added that everyone has shown great resilience and was impressed with the effort that was put forth by the soldiers.

As the rotation comes to end, the 41st IBCT will go home and prepare for their upcoming deployments with many lessons learned. Master Sgt. Joshua Martin, 741st Brigade Engineer Battalion Operations NCO, said, “Everyone misses their families, everybody misses home, but we’re here together. Daily we remind each other of that, that with each other we can get through this,” adding that this experience will be remembered for a long time to come.

In an organization built upon challenging and unique situations, current members of 41st IBCT now join the ranks of countless Soldiers who trained at JRTC before them; they will remember the emotions, lessons, and grit it took to survive something only 3%, of the 1%, who serve in the United States military have ever had the opportunity to experience.

TRAINING: Joint Readiness Training Center

Oregon Army Guard hones skills for Large-Scale Combat Operations

Story by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

FORT JOHNSON, La. – The Oregon Army National Guard’s 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team conducted an extended annual training at Fort Johnson, Louisiana’s Joint Readiness Training Center.

This intensive training rotation marked a significant shift in focus toward large-scale combat operations while preparing for upcoming peacekeeping deployments.

The 41st IBCT joined 4,900 Soldiers from 25 states and territories in July for a grueling two-week exercise to simulate the challenges of peer-to-peer warfare. This training aligns with the Army’s cornerstone doctrinal publication, Field Manual 3-0, Operations. FM 3-0 provides the Army’s vision for multi-domain operations and the Army’s role in joint operations, emphasizing LSCO against peer threats as the most dangerous form of external threat.

A key aspect of this shift is the move from brigade-centric operations to division-level fights. During the JRTC rotation, the 41st IBCT simulated operating as part of the 40th Infantry Division, practicing the complexities of large-scale combat operations.



Photo by Sgt. Jason Morgan, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
A UH-60 Blackhawk with 1st Battalion, 137th Aviation Regiment, Oregon Army National Guard begins transportation of troops and equipment into the field while at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) during JRTC rotation 24-09 at Fort Johnson, La., July 20, 2024.

The 40th Infantry Division, headquartered in California, is a diverse formation that includes three infantry brigade combat teams, a combat aviation brigade, and supporting units from California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, New Mexico, Alaska, and Hawaii.



Photo by Maj. Chris Clyne, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs
Lt. Col. Joshua Rapp, commander of Task Force Guardian, conducts an after-action review with his staff on July 21, 2024, at Tactical Assembly Area Jungler, Fort Johnson, La. The review follows Task Force Guardian’s first night of engagement with opposition forces during the Joint Readiness Training Center rotation, preparing the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team for upcoming overseas missions.

This shift toward preparing for LSCO while still fulfilling peacekeeping missions represents a significant change in focus for the National Guard. As noted in “Large-Scale Combat Operations: The Division Fight,” edited by Dennis S. Burket: “The Army’s focus on counterinsurgency operations for the last 15 years has atrophied the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct



Photo by 1st Lt. Kayla Fleshman, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
Florida Army National Guard soldiers from 3-265th, Charlie Battery, Air Defense Artillery participating in a Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotation simulate shooting an Avenger Air Defense weapon system on July 19th, 2024 at Fort Johnson, Louisiana. While at JRTC, the soldiers from 3rd 265th, Charlie Battery, support the 741st Brigade Engineer Battalion with air defense capabilities.

division-level operations in large-scale combat operations against a peer threat.”

The 41st IBCT’s training at JRTC addressed this concern head-on, ensuring that while the brigade can fulfill its peacekeeping obligations, it’s also prepared for large-scale combat.

“We talk a lot about shoot, move and communicate,” said Col. Peter Helzer, commander of the 41st IBCT. “But the reality is we need to flip that completely on its head. We have to be able to communicate and move in order to effectively shoot.”

Helzer emphasized the importance of focusing on low-density military occupational specialties — the support personnel crucial for maintaining the warfighters.

“Spending our limited training time on the ‘cool guy stuff’ only gets you so far,” he explained. “It’s easy to focus on squad and platoon infantry lanes and live fires, but all the low-density specialties that adequately support those operations are equally critical. We don’t always exercise these or we take shortcuts. Instead, we need to invest training time to ensure that support training is the best it can be.”

Lt. Col. Christopher Markesino, commander, 141st Brigade Support Battalion, emphasized the importance of logistics in LSCO.

“One of the key takeaways is to never underestimate the value of sustainment rehearsals,” Markesino said. “If you only have 100 minutes to rehearse everything, dedicate time to maneuver, sustainment and medical rehearsals.”

The training comes at a critical time for the Oregon National Guard. Elements of the 41st IBCT are preparing for deployments to the Horn of Africa, the Multinational Force and Observers mission in the Sinai Peninsula, and Kosovo Force. Additionally, the 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment has just mobilized for deployment to Iraq and Syria to support Operation Inherent Resolve.

Brig. Gen. Eric Riley, the Oregon Army National Guard land component commander, noted the shift from low-

intensity conflict to high-intensity LSCO scenarios.

“Out here, we’ve learned to be comfortable with the uncomfortable,” Riley said.

The lessons learned during this training, particularly the emphasis on logistics and support, will be crucial as these Soldiers deploy to maintain peace and security in some of the world’s most volatile regions.



Photo by Sgt. Emily Simonson, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jonathan Osborne from the Task Force Guardian rotation led by 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team with the Oregon National Guard assaults the objective in a force on force exercise during a training exercise on July 23, 2024.



Photo by 1st Sgt. Zachary Holden, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
Oregon Army National Guard Soldier’s with Task Force Guardian led by the 41st IBCT plan the next phase of their operation during the unit’s rotation on July 21, 2024.



Photo by Sgt. Jason Morgan, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
U.S. Army Sgt. Danielle Hubbard stands guard while her unit awaits transportation at Fort Johnson, on July 23, 2024.

TRAINING

Strykers Smoke Up Biak: Cavalry Unit Enhances Combat Readiness

Story and photos by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

REDMOND, Ore. — Soldiers from the Oregon Army National Guard’s 1st Squadron, 82nd Cavalry Regiment, conducted Stryker vehicle smoke discharge training on Saturday, June 22, 2024, at Biak Training Center, marking a significant milestone in their readiness preparations. This exercise, part of their annual training, allowed soldiers to deploy smoke grenades from their Stryker armored vehicles for the first time in eight years. The squadron received Strykers in 2016 but could not conduct smoke training due to various obstacles, including ammunition availability and fire danger concerns.

Sgt. 1st Class Troy Koski, the squadron’s master gunner, emphasized the importance of the exercise. “It gives soldiers a realistic understanding of obscuration and how long it actually lasts,” Koski said. “Movies and TV aren’t realistic. Seeing how 16 smoke grenades can provide cover for at least 45 seconds helps them understand how to apply this in real scenarios.”

1st Sgt. Phillip Smith spearheaded the training, who had been advocating for



A Troop M1127 Reconnaissance Vehicle (RV) Strykers simultaneously launch smoke grenades during a training exercise at Biak Training Center in Redmond, Oregon on June 22, 2024. This coordinated smoke discharge demonstration, part of the Oregon Army National Guard’s 1st Squadron, 82nd Cavalry Regiment annual training, showcased the unit’s tactical obscuration capabilities and marked their first such exercise with Strykers in eight years.

the exercise since the unit acquired the Strykers. Smith currently serves as the squadron’s operations NCO.

Sergeant Koski praised the professionalism of the soldiers involved.

“When it comes time to get on a trigger, these guys are professionals, and they do a good job,” he said. “It’s really good to work with them.”

This two-week annual training is part of Guard members’ military duty, including one weekend a month. Guard members serve their federal mission and stand ready to assist with state disasters in their local communities. Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Adjutant General of the Oregon National Guard, says, “This dual role makes the Oregon National Guard the service of choice for Oregonians.”

The successful completion of this training significantly bolsters the unit’s combat readiness and provides invaluable experience in tactical smoke deployment, furthering the Guard’s ability to serve both state and nation.



An Alpha Troop M1127 Reconnaissance Vehicle (RV) Stryker crew searches for the opposing force during a movement-to-contact exercise at Biak Training Center in Redmond, Ore., Friday, June 21, 2024.



Sgt. Steven South (left) and Sgt. Tyler Hanish of A Troop, 1st Squadron, 82nd Cavalry, load smoke grenades onto an M1127 Reconnaissance Vehicle Stryker during training on June 22, 2024.

173rd Security Forces Squadron members deployment qualify in Hawaii

Story by Senior Master Sgt. Jennifer Shirar,
173rd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

OAHU, Hawaii – Is spending two weeks in Hawai’i shooting machine guns on a military range on anyone’s bucket list? Twenty-eight 173rd Security Forces Squadron defenders did just that in early May for their annual training.

Oregon Air National Guard Maj. Ryan Fisher, the 173rd SFS commander, said that qualifying on light and medium machine guns is an annual requirement for security forces defenders.

“The Kingsley Field range is not rated to support these weapons systems, which force us to travel to other ranges to meet this requirement,” he said. “Additionally, with the upcoming deployments, we needed to train on specific combat focused topics to ensure that our defenders are as prepared as possible.”

The training started with three days of classroom instruction and hands-on weapons classes while still at Kingsley Field, in Oregon, and then the group flew on a C-130J from the 123rd Airlift Wing to Oahu.

“Based on our experience at other ranges and facilities, Hawai’i quickly rose to the top of the list as a viable option for great training facilities at a low cost,” said Fisher. The 173rd SFS Combat Arms Team coordinated directly with the

Marine Corps Air Station at Kaneohe Bay and secured a training area exclusively for their use complete with “pop-up” targets rated for the weapons systems.

Fisher laughed saying this wasn’t your typical Air Force Hawai’i TDY. “The defenders were sleeping in ten person tents in an Army training area on Schofield Barracks and meals were coordinated through the Army and Marines’ dining facilities,” said Fisher. “And the ranges were some of the most picturesque I have been on.”



Airmen from the 173rd Security Forces Squadron from Kingsley Field, Oregon gather for a group photo, during their annual training exercise May 4, 2024 at Marine Corps Air Station at Kaneohe Bay in Oahu, Hawaii.

One of the biggest benefits of this training was the exposure to a joint environment, said Fisher.

“Many of Security Forces deployments are in a joint service environment with the Army and Marines,” he said. “While

we didn’t have any official training with the other services, we were shoulder to shoulder with them on their bases, DFACs, and had the opportunity to observe a live fire of some of the Army’s 105mm Howitzers.”

The squadron also took the opportunity to work on team building during this training--living and working closely in a very small space for multiple days.

“Exposing some of the younger members to different aspects of the military outside of Kingsley Field was huge; it was the first time for many that they had flown on a military aircraft,” said Fisher.

The group also completed a hike to the top of Koko Head, 0.8 miles each direction, with 900+ feet of elevation gain for a physical challenge. “Koko Head is a physical challenge for everyone! Walking up such a steep hill is a tangible metaphor demonstrating the value of doing something challenging to gain a new perspective, like being able to see half the island,” he added.

Fisher says this training event would not have been possible without the assistance and support of multiple Team Kingsley members from Finance, Plans, Logistics, the 270th Air Traffic Control Squadron, and everything in between. “Finally, thanks to all the defenders and security forces staff that put in so many hours planning this exercise,” he added.

TRAINING

Oregon Guard trains in Montana alongside regional partners, first responders

Story and photos by Maj. Leslie Reed,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

BOZEMAN, Mont. – Oregon's 102nd Civil Support Team loaded up and hit the road, joining other members from the National Guard Bureau's Region 6 for a Joint Training Exercise (JTX), dubbed "Yellowstone" in the Bozeman, Montana vicinity, over April 22-26, 2024. Thirteen members of the Oregon team participated, with a small contingent staying back in the rear (in Oregon), in the event of a real-world call-out.

"I think we were all pretty excited about this one. We haven't had a lot of time to train together over the last year, we've been split up doing other individual things, so we were really looking forward to the exercise here," says 1st Sgt. Robert McCree, "our guys are excited to come out and show their skills."

The National Guard's Region 6 includes Alaska, Idaho, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, and Wyoming. "We're a tight knit community," said Sgt. 1st Class Derek Harding, Reconnaissance Non-Commissioned Officer with Montana's 83rd Civil Support Team, "and we decided we wanted to extend the invite to other teams if they were able to make it. So, like Mississippi, we have a great working relationship with them, so we extended the offer." In addition to the Mississippi National Guard's 47th Civil Support Team, the Nebraska National Guard's 72nd Civil Support Team was also in attendance, though neither was assigned to Region 6.



Oregon National Guard Spc. Maximus Reischke (left), a survey team member and Capt. Anthony Bernabo (right), nuclear medical science officer, both with the 102nd CTS take imagery and measurements of a suspicious material during a scenario-based training exercise at the federal building in Bozeman, Mont., on April 23, 2024.

After hosting the annual regional Civil Support Team for Region 6 last year, the Oregon team had an appreciation for how much work goes into creating and supporting event, "We had five connexes (cargo containers) stuffed with labs, notional chemical agents and radiation, it was a tough, tough challenge for the teams there," said McCree.

This year, it was no different for Montana's 83rd Civil Support Team in the lead. "Getting all the lanes together, along with the liaison officers, site safeties, coordinating everybody – our incident commanders, our venues, making sure we have permission to utilize the resources we need, we've been at this for quite a long time," recalled Harding. As the event start date drew closer, "we came down to Bozeman (from Helena) once every two weeks just to double check and recheck and make sure everything would go as smoothly as possible, that these guys have a really good training opportunity."

Participating Soldiers and Airmen worked in conjunction with local first responders, who acted as incident commanders, in line with the National Incident Response Framework, ensuring a common operating picture. Incident commanders are responsible for the management of the overall emergency response.



Billings Fire Capt. Jason Schilling (center-right), the National Incident Commander speaks with leadership from the North Dakota National Guard's 83rd Civil Support Team and the Oregon National Guard's 102nd CTS setting the scene for their training mission at the federal building in downtown Bozeman, Mont., on April 23, 2024.

Montana's first responders also played a critical connection when it came to selecting training site locations. "While we were choosing the sites, we were also thinking about the logistical aspect, so there's a lot of opportunity in the Bozeman area, however, our teams take up a very large footprint, so parking accommodations were a consideration, said Harding, "We spoke with our local responders, and they gave us great contacts and were very helpful with choosing the sites."

A Civil Support Team footprint at full-strength consists of eight vehicles and up to four trailers, though depending on the situation and what capabilities may be needed, it is typically smaller.

Going out to Montana, the Oregon Civil Support Team's 1st Sgt. Robert McCree knew they were "going to be partnered with a team, that was part of our objective, to do a joint mission and a relief in place (RIP), we just didn't know who it was." Once on the ground, Oregon was partnered with the North Dakota National Guard's 81st Civil Support Team, together with Bozeman Firefighter Colter Dimas and Billings Fire Capt. Travis Schilling.

Together, both teams tackled two different training scenarios, the first responding to an upcoming political event where they conducted a joint hazard assessment of the venue. And later, a call out to respond to a suspicious chemical smell from inside a building. Part of the second scenario included conducting a relief in place, sometimes referred to as a RIP, where one team subs-in, taking the mission over from another. Oregon had initially responded to the call, but after completing their recon and site characterization handed the mission over to North Dakota to complete.

The most valuable part for McCree was "interfacing with the other teams, the quick planning, adjusting our tactics and procedures to meet the needs, it's challenging because there's always varied communication, how our team does things and how other teams do things."

McCree, who has served with the CST for more than 17-years describes "the amount of interactions you have with first responders, the scope of the things we get to do, it's bananas, there is no other job where you can do these things" highlighting further that "we have two positions that will be available in the next year – one as the communication chief, and one as a combat medic."

Two of the team's newest members, Sgt. Juan Avila and Spc. Maximus Reischke, both survey team members with the 102nd, can't say enough good things about their first two years with the team.

Working with another team (North Dakota) "was different for sure, especially with a team you've never met, it takes a couple reps to get integrated with one another. There was maybe a bit of confusion initially, but we figured it out, going back to our survey team basics. We all have the same baseline knowledge," said Sgt. Avila.

Spc. Reischke remembers while serving in the 1186th Military Police Company, a good friend telling him about a position that was opening up. He attended an informational briefing, and "I couldn't thank him more for it," Reischke says, "this has been a wonderful experience, I love what I do, I love that I can do this every day and there is always something to learn."

Avila, a former chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) specialist with 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery, thought he would try to join the active guard reserve (AGR) world, "I applied to a couple jobs in the new hire pool. I got rejected the first time. Then on my second attempt, I got three different offers, two in the AGR pool and the one here (with the Civil Support Team), it was an easy choice. Now I'm here, and very grateful. It's such a blessing, I learn something new every day, it keeps your mind working constantly. My brain has probably grown twice the size since I got here," he laughs.

"It looks intimidating at first," recalls Reischke, "I didn't have any experience with anything CBRN related. I was like what did I get myself into?" but he says, "They give you everything you need. If you apply for it and you get it, you're going to love it."

"There aren't a lot of online resources if you're interested," says Avila, "but if you know where your CST is, go talk to them. Find out what they do. Ask if you can go in person to ask questions."



Oregon Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Mohamed Musa, decontamination non-commissioned officer, 102nd Civil Support team discusses the step-by-step decontamination process with his 102nd Civil Support Team survey team members, observers and safety officers from the Montana National Guard's 83rd Civil Support Team, and the national incident command team made up of Bozeman Fire personnel in Bozeman, Mont., on April 25, 2024.

NEWS

Story by Maj. Leslie Reed
Oregon Military Department
Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. — For nearly 60-days, the Oregon National Guard has worked to support wildland fire crews in multiple capacities across the state. Whether assisting with medical evacuation capabilities, water buckets or hand crews, more than 200 Soldiers and Airmen answered the call to state active duty.

Under Oregon Governor Tina Kotek’s emergency declaration, executive order 24-13, on July 12, 2024, together with the state’s Operations Plan (OPLAN) Smokey, the Oregon Department of Forestry requested the Guard to support regional fire suppression efforts beginning July 17, 2024.

Guard members were placed in a State Active Duty status for the duration of each of the Oregon Emergency Response System missions and were utilized in what’s known as a “last in, first out” basis supporting the Oregon Department of Forestry, U.S. Forest Service and other wildland fire teams.

For Oregon Army National Guard Spc. John Canche, with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Squadron, this summer was his first wildland fire support experience.

Recalling what he learned the first week on the Telephone Fire, near Burns, Canche spent his days “chipping, hot spot gridding, and taking classes from the medics,” soaking up information that later “helped us for the next week on the Diamond Complex,” near Chemult.

Oregon Nat’l Guard called to support wildland firefighting across the state



Photo provided by Oregon Army National Guard Sgt. Maj. Becker
Oregon National Guard service members and other frontline volunteers that make up three hand crews teams: 5, 6 and 7, gather for a group photo while supporting the Diamond Complex Fire, near Chemult.

Canche recalled, “The day we found out we were moving, they were like ‘we know there are rumors of us going home early,’ but we just got called up to go on another fire and we’re going to do it.”

Despite the move from the Telephone Fire to the Diamond Complex, “we wanted to do more,” Canche said, “we were excited. We wanted to have a bigger impact. Crew Six was really gung-ho even though the days were long, chipping for hours on end, but everyone did the work and we gave it our best effort.”

Oregon Air National Guard Senior Airman Adriana Scott, with the 173rd Fighter Wing, who was in the Italian Alps camping and was told, “I needed to be back in a few days, might as well make some money” she says laughing. “I did a one-way ticket out, but I would rather be here (fighting

fire), and putting more money in her pocket to travel later.”

In her third year of supporting wildland fire, Scott says “it’s probably my favorite time of the year, I enjoy it a lot.” Her fire team in late August was composed of both Airmen and Soldiers who were “individuals who decided and volunteered to stay on after their initial 14-day period.”

Scott explains that after three years of working on wildland fires, as a member of the Oregon Guard, you know what to expect and you have to be flexible because things can change every day. “That’s why Guard Members are fairly good at doing this job.”

One thing, Canche wasn’t expecting was waking up to a light snow dusting one morning, but he was prepared and had enough gear to stay warm.

Scott echoes this sentiment, “Bring warm clothes. It’s

important to get sleep. Shifts are physical and long” she said.

Not dissuaded, Canche said he’ll be back. “Oh yeah, in a heartbeat. I’m going to do it next year, if they call me up, I will say yes, and definitely bring a lot of socks,” he laughs.

ORARNG aviators, who were initially the first Oregon Guard asset called up, were also busy dropping more than 275,000 gallons of water in support of wildland firefighting efforts across the state and simultaneously providing critical medical evacuation

(MEDEVAC) support. Stationed forward from their usual homes in Pendleton and Salem, both CH-47 Chinooks and HH-60M Black Hawks jumped from John Day to Redmond, and Roseburg.

While Oregon Guard handcrew teams and aviation crews supporting water bucket missions were released in waves starting in mid to late August, one remaining HH-60M Black Hawk MEDEVAC crew remained on duty through September 3rd in Redmond.

Black Hawk crews also supported a number of non-fire related medical evacuations during the wildland fire season helping injured hikers, bikers and climbers in coordination with the Deschutes and Linn county sheriff offices.

As of September 8, 2024, more than 128 active fires dotted the state with more than 1.3 million acres burned across Oregon.

ESGR plays crucial role as ORARNG Brigade Soldiers deploy overseas

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Cory Grogan,
Joint Force Headquarters
Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. — As Oregon’s 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team prepares to deploy hundreds of soldiers in the coming months, the support from employers will play an important role in the success of those serving. They will leave behind more than just everyday lives – they part from families, friends, and jobs, all of which play a vital role in a support system.

One of the deploying Soldiers with the 41st is Staff Sgt. Bryan Simpson, with the Rogue Valley Transportation District (RVTD) who also serves in the Oregon’s 1-186 Infantry Regiment. RVTD has shown steadfast support for Simpson and other employees who serve in the National Guard, earning them multiple accolades from the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR). Paige West of RVTD is Simpson’s supervisor who has received a past award called the Patriot Award for her extraordinary support of Simpson’s military service.

“All of the RVTD supervisors have been nothing but supportive of my military service from the

time I started working here,” said Simpson. “It means I can focus on my mission, knowing my family is taken care of and my job will be waiting for me when I get back.”

RVTD’s commitment to supporting Guard and Reserve employees has also earned them the above and Beyond Award, Seven Seals and the Pro Patria Awards. These awards highlight employers who go beyond the basic requirements of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), demonstrating outstanding support for their military employees.

The Pro Patria Award is the highest award given to an employer by a State ESGR committee an employer can receive for support.

The support from employers like RVTD will be crucial to our success, said 41st ICBT Commander Pete Helzer.

“Knowing that our soldiers have strong backing at home allows them to focus on their mission and return to their civilian lives without worry.”

Organizations like ESGR and laws such as USERRA play a key role in this support system.

ESGR works to promote cooperation and understanding between Reserve Component service members and their civilian employers, offering education, consultation, and, if needed, mediation. Their mission is to develop and promote supportive work environments for service members in the National Guard and Reserve through outreach, recognition, and educational opportunities.

“We strive to ensure that our service members can perform their duties without worrying about their civilian employment,” said Cecil Owens, the Oregon ESGR Military Outreach Director. “Our goal is to foster a culture where employers see the value in supporting their Guard and Reserve employees, not just as a legal obligation, but as a commitment to our nation’s security.”

USERRA protects the job rights of individuals who voluntarily or involuntarily leave employment positions to undertake military service. It ensures that service members are reemployed in their civilian jobs upon return and are not disadvantaged in their careers due to their service.

“Supporting service members is not just a matter of compliance, it’s an act of patriotism,” said Andrew Philpott, the Volunteer Support Technician with Oregon ESGR. “USERRA rights are crucial for maintaining the balance between military and civilian life, and employers play a significant role in this process.”

The ability of National Guard members to fulfill their duties relies heavily on the support they receive from their families and employers. This support ensures service members can focus on their missions without added stress of job insecurity or concern for their families’ well-being.

“Employer support is essential not only for the well-being of our Soldiers but also for the overall success of our mission,” Helzer said. “Employers who stand by their employees during deployments contribute directly to national security.”

As the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team prepares to deploy, the role of employers like RVTD will be pivotal. The support they provide highlights the vital role employer’s play ensuring that those who serve can do so with the confidence that their civilian lives will be waiting for them when they return.

NEWS

The ultimate comeback: Oregon Airman accepted into Air Force Academy

Story and photo by
Senior Airman Yuki Klein,
142nd Wing Public Affairs

PORTLAND, Ore. – From uncertainty, to a life-altering car accident, to acceptance into the Air Force Academy, Senior Airman Noah Mariotti, a command and control battle management operations specialist assigned to the 116th Air Control Squadron, has experienced a whirlwind over the past two years.

Mariotti joined the Oregon Air National Guard in February of 2021 with the intention of becoming an officer later on in his career. However, this dream slowly faded away as he began to drift through various interests. Ultimately, he was unable to pinpoint a clear path for his life.

Then, two years later, Mariotti found himself in a tragic car accident in December of 2022 which left him hospitalized for three weeks, changing the course of his life.

While returning home from a Christmas party with a friend, Mariotti's car was involved in a collision.

"We got into the initial accident and we got out of the car, which was a bad idea... everyone was in the far right lane and the left lane was open," explained Mariotti. "There was another car that wasn't stopping at everyone's signals. So they ended up barreling down and... then we just ended up flying. My buddy and [a] bystander both flew over the railing to the other side of oncoming traffic and I flew forwards. However, we ended up surviving."

When Mariotti was hit by the reckless driver, the right side of his body was badly injured while his friend was left with a broken femur among other injuries.

Mariotti's time in the hospital was spent on bed rest, leaving him with just his thoughts.



ORANG Senior Airman Noah Mariotti, a command and control battle management operations specialist assigned to the 116th Air Control Squadron, mans a workstation in the Air Control Squadron detachment located at Portland Air National Guard Base, Oregon on April 6, 2024.

This provided the opportunity to reflect and find his passion for life again. The unwavering support he received from his family and military community during this period brought the realization of the value of their encouragement and the importance of making his friends and family proud.

"I was uncertain before the accident due to me not remembering my main goal in my life," said Mariotti. "I simply was letting myself get pushed around and not really doing anything with my life."

While recovering, Mariotti's mother informed the 142nd

Wing Commander at the time, Colonel Todd Hofford, about his long-standing, albeit wavering, ambition to join the Air Force Academy.

This discussion set in motion a chain of support from his commanders, including Col. Hofford, Brig. Gen. (ret.) Donna Prigmore, former Oregon Air National Guard Commander, and Colonel Lantagne, former 142nd Wing Vice Commander and currently serving as the Director of Staff for the Oregon Air National Guard.

By March 2023, Mariotti had made a remarkable six month recovery, defying the initial projection of a year-long healing process. With a new purpose, he began preparing rigorously for the Academy.

He hired tutors for English, Math, and Science, and dedicated himself to improving his test scores. Mariotti even traveled to Idaho and Medford, Oregon to take multiple SAT and ACT exams, eventually achieving a respectable score of 1350.

Despite a brief scare in March 2024, when he received a rejection letter due to a medical waiver mix-up, Mariotti's determination never wavered.

"That first five seconds I was incredibly scared. I was like, 'what the heck,' but then I took over like, no, that can't be. So I called them up and said 'hey, why did I get a rejection letter' and they ended up finding out it was a mistake."

In late March after clearing up the mistake, he received the long-awaited acceptance call from Lt. Col. Casey Robbins, 116th Air Control Squadron commander.

"So he tells me, 'hey, congratulations! I just heard,'" said Mariotti. "I'm like 'what are you talking about, Sir?' and he's like, 'you got accepted into the academy.' I was amazed and I told him 'thank you, Sir. I'm probably going to go scream now,' and so I ended up screaming and just felt really happy to know that all that hard work paid off."

In addition to his personal preparations to get accepted into the Air Force Academy, he also had support and a letter of recommendation from Prigmore.

"What I absolutely positively love about Noah is he has the best attitude of anyone I've met in a really, really long time," said Prigmore. "[this] gives me the utmost confidence that he is really going to do well."

Looking forward, Mariotti plans to study aeronautical engineering at the academy with the goal of becoming a pilot. His dream is to serve as an officer, a goal he has held since high school.

Mariotti's journey from uncertainty to a clear vision of becoming a pilot has been marked by resilience, determination, and the unwavering support of those around him.

As he prepares to enter the Air Force Academy in June 2024, Mariotti reflects on his experiences, knowing that the journey has only just begun. He looks forward to a future in aeronautical engineering and, ultimately, achieving his goal of becoming a fighter pilot.

116th Air Control Squadron mobilized



News release by 142nd Wing Public Affairs

WARRENTON, Ore. - The 142nd Wing Honor Guard presents the colors during a mobilization ceremony for the 116th Air Control Squadron at Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center, Warrenton, Oregon on September 8, 2024.

The 116th ACS, a geographically separated unit of the 142nd Wing, will deploy to the 727th Expeditionary Air Control Squadron's stateside and overseas locations for six months in support of U.S. Central Command air and space operations.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Nichole Sanchez, 142nd Wing Public Affairs

Counter Drug Analyst recognized



News release by Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. - Oregon Air National Guardsman Master Sgt. Brent Tompkins, an analyst assisting the Oregon State Police in their Counter Drug Enforcement section, was recognized by The Oregon Adjutant General, Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold for his efforts in helping interdict large numbers of illegal drugs for 2024.

The total numbers so far are; 898,744 fentanyl pills, 99.8 pounds of fentanyl powder, 13.4 pounds of heroin, 45.3 pounds of cocaine, and 40 drug endangered children.

FEATURES

A Legacy of Service: Oregon's CSM Conley joins Ranger Hall of Fame

Story and photos by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

FORT MOORE, Ga. – Command Sgt. Maj. Brunk W. Conley, a distinguished veteran of the Oregon Army National Guard, was inducted into the prestigious Ranger Hall of Fame on June 26, 2024, at Fort Moore, Georgia, honoring a career that exemplifies the dual-nature of National Guard service.

Conley, who served over 35 years in uniform, including serving as the 10th Command Sergeant Major of the Army National Guard, was recognized for his exceptional leadership and dedication to both the Ranger community and the National Guard. His career uniquely bridges the active-duty and reserve components, demonstrating the versatility and high standards maintained across the U.S. Army's various elements. Conley's induction into the Ranger Hall of Fame marks a significant milestone, as he is the first Ranger to serve as Command Sergeant Major of the Army National Guard, representing over 300,000 enlisted soldiers in that role.

The induction ceremony highlighted Conley's remarkable career, which began in 1982 with the 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment. He later transitioned to the Oregon Army National Guard, where he held various leadership positions and deployed twice to combat with the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team to Iraq and Afghanistan.

A unique aspect of Conley's induction was the presence of seven of his fellow Rangers from the 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment. These men, who have maintained a strong bond for over four decades, were there to support their brother-in-arms.

"We've been friends for 42 years. We meet every two years. They're my brothers. I love them and would take bullets for every single one," Conley said, emphasizing the enduring camaraderie forged in the Ranger community.



Col. Christopher Hammonds and Command Sgt. Maj. Pedro Chavez, command team of the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade (ARTB), present Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Brunk W. Conley with the Ranger Hall of Fame award at Fort Moore, Ga., June 26, 2024.

Conley's military awards include the Bronze Star Medal with oak leaf cluster, the Combat Infantryman's Badge, and the Ranger Tab. Conley's career exemplifies the unique blend of civilian and military service that characterizes the National Guard. While Conley's military accomplishments are impressive, his commitment to service extended beyond the battlefield and into the classroom. He taught high school physics and chemistry for many years while coaching athletes, embodying the "Citizen-Soldier" ideal.

"I hold the term citizen soldier above all else," Conley stated, emphasizing the importance of this dual service. "There's something noble, honorable about it. They should write poems and odes and songs about citizen soldiers."

His experience during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, where he served as a Brigade Command Sergeant Major, further demonstrated the National Guard's crucial role in domestic emergencies. This mission and his deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan showcased the versatility and importance of Guard members in national defense and homeland security operations.

The Ranger Hall of Fame, established in 1992, honors extraordinary Rangers and preserves their contributions to American military history. Inductees are carefully selected from all eras of Ranger history, with only the most exceptional Rangers chosen for this honor.

Conley's induction is a testament to the National Guard's commitment to excellence and its unique opportunities for professional growth and service to both state and nation.

"The National Guard allowed me to serve my community, state, and country while pursuing a civilian career," Conley noted. "It's a path that offers unparalleled experiences and leadership opportunities."

He further emphasized the importance of understanding the dual nature of Guard service: "We need to teach young Soldiers that in the Guard, you serve both the military and your community. Once they grasp this dual role, they'll want to stay. It's a unique opportunity no other military service offers."

During the ceremony, Conley was presented with the Ranger Hall of Fame medallion, symbolizing his selfless service and remarkable accomplishments in defense of the nation. The medal, a specially cast bronze medallion suspended from a red, white, and blue ribbon, signifies selfless service, excellence, and remarkable accomplishment in defense of the nation and the highest ideals of service.

Conley's journey from active duty Ranger to National Guard leader to Ranger Hall of Fame inductee, illustrates the diverse and rewarding career paths available in the National Guard.



Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Brunk Conley delivers his acceptance speech during the 2024 Ranger Hall of Fame induction ceremony at Fort Moore, Ga., June 26, 2024.



Command Sergeant Major (ret.) Brunk W. Conley, a former Oregon National Guard leader and the 10th Command Sergeant Major of the Army National Guard gathers for a photo during his introduction to the Army Ranger Hall of Fame.

The Guard offers both the opportunity to serve one's community and the possibility of achieving the highest levels of military distinction.

In a stirring finale, recipients and Ranger-qualified attendees stood together to recite the Ranger Creed, their voices united in reciting the creed that has guided generations of Rangers. The ceremony closed with a resounding "Rangers Lead the Way!" echoing through the hall, a fitting tribute to the recipients' exemplary careers and the enduring spirit of the Ranger community.



Command Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Brunk Conley stands proudly alongside his former Ranger Platoon Sergeant, Command Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Gerald "Gerry" Klein, moments after Conley's induction into the Ranger Hall of Fame at Fort Moore, Ga., on June 26, 2024. The ceremony honored Conley's distinguished career and highlighted the enduring bonds forged in Ranger service.



Nat'l Guard file photo by Master Sgt. John Hughel, OMD Public Affairs
Oregon Army National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Foesch (left), Command Senior Enlisted Leader for the Oregon National Guard, congratulates Oregon Army National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Brunk Conley (right) during the "Order of the Minuteman" ceremony held in his honor on April 21, 2018, in Eugene, Oregon.

FEATURES

TBI policy update clears way for ORARNG Lt. Col. Paul Dyer Purple Heart

Story and photos by Maj. Chris Clyne,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. – Oregon Army National Guard Lt. Col. Paul Dyer was awarded the Purple Heart on April 7, 2024, for wounds he sustained in combat 16 years ago during an intense ambush while deployed to Afghanistan’s Helmand Province in 2008.

Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, the Adjutant General of Oregon, presented Dyer with the medal in recognition of his “incredible courage and perseverance during one of the fiercest fighting periods” in the war.

On July 27, 2008, Dyer was a captain serving with a 16-member Embedded Training Team advising an Afghan counter-drug Special Operations Kandak battalion in the Helmand River valley. His small team operated out of a company-sized forward operating base called PB Attal along the river.

Dyer’s team, along with the Afghan Army personnel assigned to them, came under a complex ambush involving mortars, RPGs, machine guns, and a 23mm anti-aircraft gun from Taliban forces that day.

“They had a pretty complicated ambush for us,” Dyer recalled. “Everything they had was prepositioned and targeted where we would be...They knew exactly what they were doing.”

During the hours-long firefight, Dyer was knocked unconscious

when a mortar round exploded nearby, causing a concussive head trauma.

Despite his injuries, Dyer refused medical evacuation as the senior officer was present. “As long as I was functional, I wasn’t going to leave anyone,” he said.

Dyer continued coordinating his troops’ movements as they fought to break contact and withdrew the 400 meters back to their patrol base under sustained enemy fire.

“It was just 400 meters of full kit dismount,” he said. “You’re almost walking after 200 meters because you can’t run anymore.”



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, the Adjutant General of Oregon (right), and Lt. Col. Paul Dyer holds Dyer's newly awarded Purple Heart medal after the ceremony on April 7, 2024.

puzzle pieces together and then submit it,” Dyer said. “I want to recognize and be thankful that the DoD recognizes this stuff because there are after-effects.”

Despite the lingering impacts from the 2008 ambush, Dyer’s award finally highlights the evolving understanding of battlefield brain trauma. It ensures his selfless service and sacrifices did not go unrecognized, even over a decade later.

“It sounds make-believe, some of the missions we went on,” Dyer said of that fateful deployment

advising the elite Afghan counter-drug forces – “but we were there doing it.”

Dyer encouraged others with similar stories to come forward. “I just encourage anyone with a similar story or experiences to come forward and put a packet together and get it submitted to Army Human Resources Command for evaluation,” he said. It’s an award that I’ve learned is not recommended—either you qualify or you don’t. If you feel you meet the criteria, I highly recommend you submit a packet.”

For Dyer, receiving the Purple Heart years later provided “an element of closure” and a chance to reunite with the team that went through the harrowing 2008 deployment together. “It was an awesome opportunity to recognize some of those folks that were so critical,” he said. The story of Dyer’s team’s experience in Helmand Province, was told in the 2010 documentary film “Shepherds of Helmand,” by filmmaker Gary Mortensen.



Lt. Col. Paul Dyer holds a guidon from his Afghanistan deployment with all his Embedded Training Team members' names in his office in Salem, Oregon on April 7, 2024 after being awarded the Purple Heart medal.

Unbreakable bond of Bravo Co. 2-162 Infantry remains strong after 20 years

Story and photo by Sgt. 1st Class Cory Grogan,
Joint Force Headquarters
Public Affairs

WARRENTON, Ore. – On July 27, 2024, flags fluttered gently in the breeze at Camp Rilea as former members of Oregon’s historic 2nd Battalion, 2-162 Infantry Regiment, and their families gathered to honor their fallen comrade, Spc. Ken “Kenny” Leisten. The event marked the 20th anniversary of Leisten’s death and included a highway dedication and a visit to Willamette National Cemetery.

The dedication at Camp Rilea and the cemetery visit underscored the strong bonds that have defined the battalion since their deployment to Iraq in 2004. The memory of Leisten remains a powerful symbol of unity and strength for the unit.

Leisten’s father, Ken Leisten Sr., has been a dedicated presence at annual memorial events, indicating the deep connections formed during the unit’s service. Each year, members of the battalion come together to honor Leisten, with this year’s ceremony featuring flags lining the streets and the post flag at half-mast while Leisten was saluted.

Camp Rilea’s Training Site Manager presented coins at the event and State Senator Suzanne Weber was also present for the occasion to hand deliver Oregon Senate Concurrent Resolution 213, which celebrated Leisten’s life and service.

“It was important to deliver the resolution in person,” Weber said. “Leisten and Bravo Company 2-162 are heroes, and their connection to each other should never be forgotten.”

The bond within the battalion and Bravo Company is evident in the way members support one another, Sean Davis, a former squad leader in the battalion, said.

“It’s amazing to see how far everyone has come,” Davis said. “The guys who were on my team have achieved incredible things. It’s a testament to this group’s resilience and strength.”

Davis himself has become a prolific artist and writer, channeling his experiences into creative work. His story, like many others, highlights the transformative power of their shared experiences.

Retired Sgt. Maj. Vinnie Jacques, a rifle platoon sergeant in Iraq, emphasized the unit’s ongoing commitment to one another.



Former members of Bravo Company, 2-162 Infantry gathered for a group photograph at the highway memorial sign dedicated to Ken “Kenny” Leisten, on July 27, 2024 that is located along highway 101 near Warrenton, Oregon.

“We took care of each other in combat 20 years ago, and we still do today,” Jacques said. “Every person in this unit is willing to step up for one another.”

Jacques was in the same vehicle as Leisten, and mentioned another member of the unit who attended the gathering, Shawn Jenkins, who heroically provided machine gun cover while Jacques and others were being medically evacuated.

Jenkins said, “It’s an honor being part of this group. During my time with Bravo

Company, I took on various roles. These guys would go out of their way to make sure you are okay any day of the week. As we mark the 20th anniversary of the passing of a friend and soldier who was willing to give everything without asking for anything, it’s a powerful reminder of the unbreakable bond we share.”

The annual gatherings and close relationships within Bravo Company demonstrate a strong sense of community. For Ken Leisten Sr., this connection has been a source of personal healing.

“Being part of this group, staying in touch, and seeing the support—it’s like medicine,” he said. “It keeps me going, and I feel proud to be part of this big family.”

Despite the tragedy of losing Kenny Leisten, 2-162 Infantry members have thrived in various fields, becoming police officers, firefighters, teachers, artists, and military leaders. Their achievements showcase the strength and resilience cultivated through their shared experiences.

Bravo is one of the Oregon National Guard’s most historic units being awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. A documentary was made about the 2-162 Infantry by filmmaker Gary Mortensen’s, called “This is War Memories of Iraq,” it captures the bravery and sacrifice of the Battalion, further highlighting their journey. Mike Francis, a former Oregonian reporter who has covered the unit extensively, says their bond has deeply moved him.

“I was impressed by the bond they all have and feel honored to be included,” Francis said after being invited to the 20-year event.

Bravo Company 2-162 Infantry’s annual tribute to Kenny Leisten is more than a memorial; it celebrates the unbreakable bond formed in combat and sustained through mutual support and respect.

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FALLEN WORLD WAR II AIRMAN HONORED AFTER BEING MISSING IN ACTION 81 YEARS

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Oregon & Military History

Story by John Hughel,
Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

CLACKAMAS, Ore. — With full military honors, as family and military members gathered for attendance, the remains of U.S. Army Air Forces Staff Sergeant George E. Davies was returned home to Portland, allowing for closure with his burial at Willamette National Cemetery on June 24, 2024.

Sergeant Davies was assigned to the 345th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy), 98th Bombardment Group (Heavy), Ninth Air Force when he was killed during Operation Tidal Wave on August 1, 1943. The Portland native was a crew member, holding several jobs while flying aboard a B-24 Liberator bomber when it was struck by enemy anti-aircraft fire during the daring low altitude raid on Nazi-held oil refineries near Ploiesti, Romania.

In total, 178 planes took part in the mission that was launched from Benghazi, Libya. Davies B-24, nicknamed "Aire Lobo" was one of the 54 Liberators that did not return from the heavily defended target, where nearly 500 air crewmen were lost (310 killed, 186 captured). He had just turned 27 years old two days before the mission. According to a 1999 Air War College report, the Ploiesti bombing campaign was considered "one of the bloodiest and most historic missions of all time."

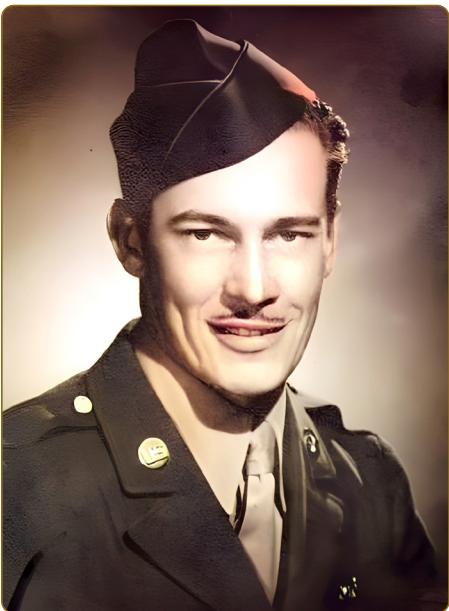


Achieved photo courtesy of the American Military Museum
The B-24 Liberator "Aero Lobo" aircraft crew gather for a group photograph prior to being lost on Aug. 1, 1943 during Operation Tidal Wave. Staff Sgt. George Davies is pictured far left on the back row.

"He flew twenty-seven missions as an assistant engineer and gunner," said Chaplain (Col.) Jacob Scott, State Chaplain for the Oregon National Guard, who officiated the memorial service and recounted the heroic aerial conditions the Airmen faced during the raid. "The sky was filled with flak, smoke, and flames, said several witnesses who survived the mission...recalling that day as the most daunting they had ever experienced."

The mission was designed to catch the enemy off-guard with a bold low-level attack with heavy bombers, flying as low as 100 feet above the ground. By the summer of 1943, Romania was generating more than half of the crude oil needed for the Nazi war machine. The refineries surrounding Ploiesti near the capital of Bucharest were the most productive with an estimated 25 to 35 percent of its refined or synthetic oil supplies.

Like many Airmen lost on the mission, Davies remained unaccounted



Courtesy photo provided by George Davies Family
U.S. Army Air Force Staff Sgt. George E. Davies, assigned to the 345th Bombardment Squadron, 98th Bombardment Group, Ninth Air Force, who was lost during Operation Tidal Wave on Aug. 1, 1943 over Ploiesti, Romania.

for as his remains were initially buried in Bolovan, Romania. Just after the war ended, more than 80 other unidentified American soldiers from Operation Tidal Wave were laid to rest at the Ardennes American and Henri-Chapelle American cemeteries in Belgium. According to a press release from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, it was not until Sept. 9, 2022, that his remains could be identified by the agency after being exhumed in 2017.

"It's wonderful for our family that they did find him and will be resting in the same cemetery with my father as he's finally home," said Francee Davies Hillyer, George Davies' niece, who accepted the American Flag for the entire remaining family. "He's getting the credit he deserves."

She was joined by her younger sister Kathy Davies Leonard who acknowledged the significance of finding her missing uncle.

"It feels like he's come back home and given the respect that he deserved that we can finally give him and let people know about it so they can find their loved ones," said Leonard, following the emotional memorial service on a warm summer's day, now eight decades later.

Their father Alan, who was George's brother, also served in WWII and survived after losing a leg. Their mother, Betty Davies was also a veteran of the war. Now all three will finally be laid to rest together at Willamette National Cemetery.

George Davies was born on July 29, 1916, in Winnipeg, Canada, to John and Amelia Davies. The family, which also included his sister Dorothy Davies Wirostek, relocated to Portland when he was 14. After graduating from Gresham High School, he worked for a furniture manufacturing company for several years before enlisting in the military.

The Past Conflict Repatriations Branch, located at the U.S. Army Human Resources Command, Fort Knox, Kentucky, plays an integral role in the process of locating surviving family members of missing service members from wars fought of the last century to include: WWII, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

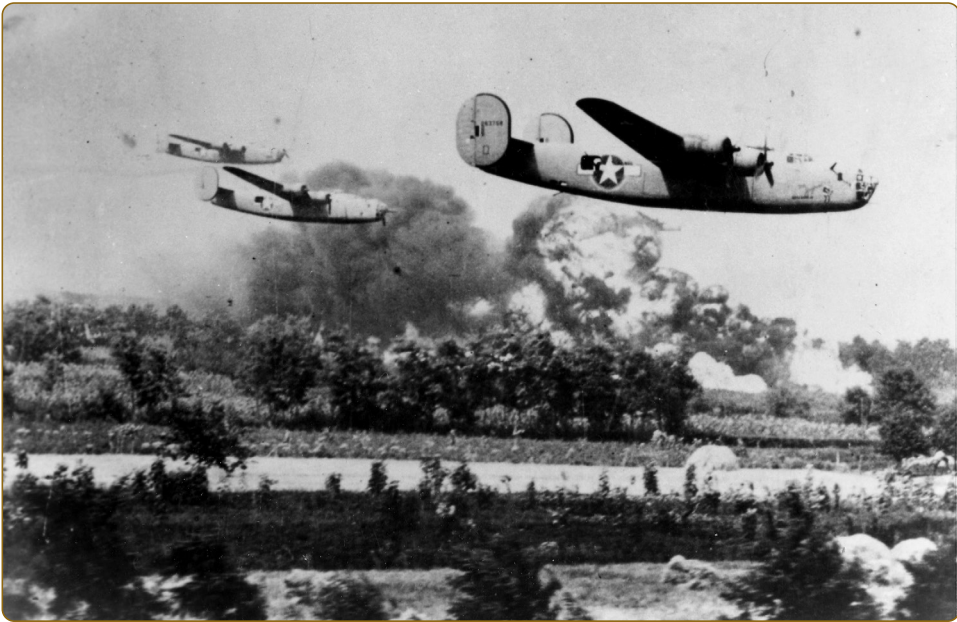


Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the United States Air Force
On August 1, 1943, the United States Army Air Forces staged Operation Tidal Wave—a daring, surprise low-level raid flying B-24 Liberator heavy bombers against the Axis' critical source of fuel, the oil fields in Ploesti, Romania. Nearly 500 Airmen were lost during the mission.

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"It's wonderful for our family that they



Photo by John Hughel, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs
Chaplain (Col.) Jacob Scott, Oregon Army National Guard State Chaplain, offers remarks as he officiates the memorial service for USAAF Staff Sgt. George Davis, at Willamette National Cemetery, Clackamas, Ore., on June 24, 2024.

The lengthy process begins with locating a living family member most closely related to the missing soldier, followed by a request for family reference samples or DNA, which are used as the main source in identifying the service member remains.



Photo by John Hughel, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs
A member of the Oregon Army National Guard Funeral Honors presents the American Flag to Francee Davis Hillyer, niece of Staff Sgt. George Davies during a memorial service held in his honor on June 24, 2024.

After a Soldier has been identified, the Past Conflict Repatriations Branch notifies and briefs the family members about the results obtained through DNA, forensic and historical reports. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has now identified more than half of the 80 previously unknown service members that were connected with Operation Tidal Wave.

For many years, Sergeant Davies' name was listed on the Tablets of the Missing at Florence American Cemetery in Impruneta, Italy, according to DPAA. Now, a rosette will adorn his name, finally confirming he has been accounted for after being declared missing during action in Operation Tidal Wave.

"It gives hope to people who have family members who are MIA or POWs," Hillyer said. "It's wonderful for our family that they did find him."

For his actions during his service, Staff Sgt. Davies was awarded The Distinguished Flying Cross, The Purple Heart, Air Medal [with Oak Leaf Cluster], Good Conduct Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal and the Presidential Unit Citation [with Oak Leaf Cluster] and the Honorable Service Lapel Button WWII.