



OREGON SENTINEL

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATIONAL GUARD

SPECIAL REPORT: Oregon Guardsmen and Aviation Crews battle blazes, protect communities across the State

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

PENDLETON, Ore. — Two Oregon Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopters and two HH-60M Black Hawk helicopters began water bucket operations July 29, 2026, in support of wildland firefighting efforts on the Hagen Fire in Umatilla County, part of a broader Oregon National Guard response to the state’s 2026 wildfire season.

As of July 29, the Hagen Fire had burned approximately 33,504 acres and was only 3% contained, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry. Aircrews completed 44 water-bucket drops that day, delivering approximately 50,070 gallons of water on the fire.

The aircraft are flying out of Army Aviation Support Facility #2 in Pendleton, home to the Oregon Army National Guard’s CH-47 fleet, after the unit received its State Active Duty activation order and completed Joint Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration July 28, 2026.

“Currently, we’re activated on state active duty for forest fires, and we just got the activation yesterday,” said Maj. Taylor Fry, operations officer for Army Aviation Support Facility #2. “We have two CH-47s and crews



ORARNG Staff Sgt. Kyle Sanders, a crew chief with Golf Company, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation, looks out over the Hagen Fire’s burn scar in Umatilla County, Ore., as an HH-60M Black Hawk helicopter returns to AASF #2 in Pendleton, Aug. 10, 2026.

that are out fighting these fires, along with two Black Hawks ... conducting those water bucket drops for those forest fire activities to support our local community, to save land, to save livestock and to save homes.”

Fry said coordination with the Oregon Department of Forestry and partner agencies has been close, aided this year by fire management support from California.

“We work very well with them and have for many years,” Fry said. “We have a couple of representatives from Cal Fire up here this year, helping us out with our helicopter management and coordination with them ... We get our missions from them. We get our guidance from them, and they use us as best they can to support their mission.”

Behind every aircraft in the air is a maintenance team working to keep it there. Staff Sgt. Amanda Hickman, an aircraft systems supervisor at Army Aviation Support Facility #2, oversees the ground crew responsible for keeping the Chinooks flight-ready, including the water buckets themselves.

“There’s a lot that goes into making sure that our buckets are operational,” Hickman said. “The mechanics spend a lot of time making sure that all of our faults are minimized the best that we can. I do a little bit of production control, so a lot goes into verifying how much time I have available on each aircraft, and then setting priorities for which aircraft can fly and how many hours each aircraft can fly.”

Story continued on page 8



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, shakes hands with Giovanni Carranza, a California smokejumper serving as a crew boss for one of the Oregon Nat’l Guard’s hand crews, as fellow crew boss Daniel Schroth looks on at the Grasshopper Fire camp on Aug. 17, 2026.

Additional wildfire firefighting news coverage found on pages 7 to 10

Committed to Future Growth: Construction Upgrades to our armories and new projects



The Oregon Army National Guard held two ribbon-cutting ceremonies, first on August 20th to celebrate completed upgrades to the Corvallis Armory, and then on August 25th at the Ashland Armory.

See Story on Page 5



The Oregon National Guard and the U.S. Navy broke ground on a new Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range at the Naval Weapons Systems Training Facility in Boardman, Oregon, on September 9th.

See Story on Page 6

Oregon National Guard commemorates 25th Anniversary of September 11th



ORNG leaders, service members, veterans, and community members gathered across the state for 9/11 remembrance events on Sept. 11, 2026. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Cory Grogan)

September 11th stories continued on pages 14 and 15



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COMMAND

People, partnerships, and readiness: Leveraging our lines of effort amid intense wildfire season

As fall begins and smoke clears across Oregon, our Airmen completed their Grasshopper Fire assignment on August 20. Last week, our Army aircrews flew their final water-bucket missions, and our search and rescue team demobilized as well, marking the end of one of the most challenging wildfire seasons in recent memory. Before discussing the months ahead, I want to reflect on what this summer revealed about our organization.

Since July 20, our aircrews have responded with dedication. What began as a single Black Hawk on MEDEVAC standby expanded into a statewide operation from Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Pendleton, including an HH-60M on search and rescue standby, two HH-60M Black Hawks, and two CH-47 Chinooks conducting water bucket missions on the Hagen Fire in Umatilla County. By the end of operations on the Hagen Fire, our aircrews had completed 1,405 water bucket drops and delivered more than 1.5 million gallons of water, often in challenging, smoke-filled canyons.

In August, 44 Airmen from the 142nd Wing and 173rd Fighter Wing formed two hand crews and deployed to the Mount Hood National Forest for the Grasshopper Fire. This marked the first time our Air Guard hand crews were activated before our Army hand crews. These teams began by wrapping homes, bridges, and signage in fire-resistant material, then shifted to cutting and mopping up containment lines with hand tools alongside experienced wildland crews. As these operations continued, members of the 173rd were activated under Immediate Response Authority to support local authorities with evacuation and wildfire prevention efforts in response to the Wrights Spring Fire.

Also in August, while traveling back to Camp Rilea from another assignment, our Oregon Military Department wildland firefighters responded directly to the Wolf Creek Fire under a mutual aid agreement to assist the incident commander, guiding both air and ground assistance to effectively contain the blaze.

This is true readiness—not just discussed in briefings but demonstrated when we are called on for support, Oregonians. It reflects strong partnerships, working closely with ODF, Cal Fire liaisons, and other agency crews, relying on mutual trust between all elements of our organization to protect lives and property.

And it is People and Culture, too. I stood with our Airmen in Salem as they went through JRSOI just before they boarded buses bound for a fire camp near Warm Springs, watching young men and women who had trained for one mission step forward without hesitation for another. Ten days later, I flew to their fire camp near Tygh Valley aboard one of our own Black Hawks, alongside Brig. Gen. Jenifer Pardy, Command Chief Warrant Officer 5 Lenora Landwehr, Chaplain (Col.) Jacob Scott, and Chief Master Sgt. Brent Cavanias, to thank those same Airmen in person for what they were doing out there. Seeing Guardsmen do exactly what we train for, protecting Oregonians and their property, is what this organization is built for. That willingness to adapt, to go where the state needs them without waiting to be told exactly how, is disciplined initiative in its purest form. It is exactly what I asked of our leaders at the Joint Senior Leader Workshop this past winter, and our formations delivered it this summer under real pressure.

I am proud of every Citizen-Soldier, Airman, and Civilian who spent this summer keeping up with assigned responsibilities while



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

maintaining their training and preparedness to be ready when needed. This last month, we broke ground for a new multi-purpose machine gun range, which has taken more than 20 years to come to fruition. The ceremony in Boardman reflected our commitment to our community partners and to training our Oregon Guard members well into the future. This is just one more example of how each generation, working within the communities, continues to ensure our success in the future. This is what it means to be Oregon's Service of Choice: an organization Oregonians and people of the United States can rely on, regardless of the mission.

For now, our personnel have returned home to their families and regular units, but the work continues. Annual Training transitions into drill weekends, deployment preparations proceed for overseas missions, and our air crews and hand crews remain ready to respond if needed. I ask every leader to bring the same intensity to garrison operations that our teams demonstrated on the fire line. Know your task, uphold your standards, and take care of your people.

Thank you for everything you have given this state this year. Be Connected. Be Competent. Be Committed.

Always Ready, Always There!

Governor Tina Kotek visits Oregon Guard aviation crews

Story and photo by Maj. Leslie Reed,
OMD Public Affairs

PENDLETON, Ore. — The Oregon Army National Guard's Detachment 1, Bravo Company, 1-168th General Support Aviation Battalion, hosted Governor Tina Kotek for a state multi agency wildland fire update at Army Aviation Support Facility #2 in Pendleton, Oregon, on August 27, 2026. Attendees included Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Oregon's Adjutant General; Doug Grafe, Wildfire Programs Director; Mariana Ruiz-Temple, Oregon State Fire Marshal; and KC Kacey, Director of the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Representatives from both the Oregon Army National Guard and the Oregon Department of Forestry briefed Governor Kotek on aerial

firefighting efforts for the Hagen and Paradise Fires in Umatilla County.



Governor Kotek also received an update from the Oregon Army National Guard on the maintenance of aircraft and water buckets used to support wildland firefighting efforts.

Oregon Army aviation crews were activated in late July under Operation

Plan (OPLAN) Smokey, the formal agreement between the Oregon Military Department and the Oregon Department of Forestry. This agreement outlines the Oregon National Guard's support for wildland firefighting operations statewide.

Under standard OPLAN Smokey conditions, the Oregon Army National Guard provides one CH-47 Chinook and two HH-60M helicopters. This summer, crews have operated at surge capacity since July 28, deploying three HH-60M Black Hawk helicopters and two CH-47 Chinooks.

As of August 27, Oregon Guard helicopters had dropped 1,398 water buckets, totaling approximately 1.4 million gallons of water during this wildfire season.

COMMAND

OREGON NATIONAL GUARD'S Command Senior Enlisted Leader Retires after 33-years of service

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

HAPPY VALLEY, Ore. – U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Lee G. Smith, Command Senior Enlisted Leader for the Oregon National Guard, formally retired from military service after 33 years of commitment to the nation in a ceremony held in his honor at Camp Withycombe in Happy Valley, Oregon, on July 11, 2026. He served as the principal advisor to the Adjutant General, responsible for providing the State of Oregon and the United States with a ready force of more than 7,000 Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen.



ORARNG Command Sgt. Maj. Lee G. Smith spoke to his family, friends, and coworkers during his retirement ceremony at Camp Withycombe in Happy Valley, Oregon, on July 11, 2026.

Command Sgt. Maj. Smith joined the Army National Guard in 1993, with his first assignment to Alpha Battery, 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery, as a Cannon Crewmember. The presiding officer at his ceremony was Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon.

“From his first moments in senior enlisted leadership, he knew his job. Not to be the loudest voice in the room but the most representative,” Gronewold said, describing Smith’s leadership. “Three years ago, when we introduced our organizational values - Being Connected, Being Competent, Being Committed-Sergeant Major Smith turned them into a framework for how we mentor senior enlisted leaders.”

Gronewold also credited Smith’s leadership and vision with helping retain and recruit new service members to the Oregon National Guard.

“This past year, the Oregon Air National Guard had its strongest recruiting year since the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Oregon Army National Guard was recognized and awarded for the best retention among all 20 medium-sized states in the nation.”

In remarks to those in attendance, Smith credited past leaders and fellow soldiers for his development, his position as the Command Senior Enlisted Leader over the past three years, and his years of service in the Oregon National Guard.

“When people talk about leadership, they often think it’s about making decisions, giving directions, and telling people what to do,” Smith said, explaining his career in military leadership. “Those things matter, but I learned that some of the most important leadership modes are simpler than that. Some leadership is just sitting down with someone and finding

out who they are...If you want your organization to be better, ask yourself the simple question. Do you really know your people? Do they really know you?”

During his career, Smith advanced through the ranks of field artillery. In 2001, he changed his military occupational specialty to Infantry, attended school in Puerto Rico, and subsequently earned the coveted Expert Infantry Badge. Eventually, he returned to his field artillery roots and, by 2007, was assigned as the First Sergeant for Bravo Battery.

His final two military awards were presented by Brig. Gen. Gronewold and included The Legion of Merit and the Oregon Distinguished Service Medal.

During the ceremony, Smith thanked his mentors and expressed gratitude for the camaraderie throughout his years of service. This included his family and, most notably, his wife, Nicole.

“My adventure buddy, my rock, my number one, my best friend and amazing human being,” he said as a bouquet of flowers was presented to her by a military attaché. “You have supported

this army life. You taught me not to just plan for the future but to live in the moment... ‘Go to concerts, do the small things and seek out the small adventures along the way.’”



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, presented The Legion of Merit Medal to Army National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. Lee G. Smith during his formal retirement after 33 years of military service on July 11, 2026

In 2010, as his career progressed, Smith served as the Operations Sergeant and later First Sergeant for the 821st Troop Command Battalion in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. He was promoted to Command Sgt. Maj. of the 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery in 2015, and three years later was selected to serve as the 82nd Brigade Command Sergeant Major.

When describing his perspective on leadership in action, Smith said that too often, many in the military “struggle or just mess it up” because they lose focus or let personal agendas cloud their judgment.

“Make it about the Soldiers, treat people fairly, and make sound decisions for the right reasons. If they do those things

consistently, recognition will take care of itself,” he said, reflecting on his career developing leaders and effective teams. “The best leaders I’ve known are easy to spot. They eat last. They know people’s names, their families, and their stories. They are not afraid to address problems; they are honest with people and tell them what they need to fix themselves.”

As with many retirement ceremonies, Smith received special gifts and farewell messages from coworkers, who also shared memories and funny stories.



Retired members of the 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery present a retirement gift to Command Sgt. Maj. Lee G. Smith (center) during his retirement ceremony held at Camp Withycombe in Happy Valley, Oregon.

**“If you want
your organization
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**- Command Sgt. Maj. Lee Smith,
Command Senior Enlisted Leader**

The new Command Senior Enlisted Leader, Command Chief Master Sgt. Brent Cavanias, gave a gift from the Oregon Air Guard Joint Force Headquarters staff. He said, “I know I am filling some really big shoes, so don’t be surprised when I reach out to you for advice and guidance.”

“I will say, this job has caused me to reflect more than anything I have done in my life. It has challenged me and humbled me,” Smith said, summarizing the lasting impact of serving as the Oregon National Guard Command Senior Enlisted Leader. “It has made me think deeply about people and human nature. It’s also taught me that life is fragile and should never be taken for granted.”



Command Sgt. Maj. Lee G. Smith pauses for a photo with his wife, Nicole, as she is presented with the Certificate of Appreciation from the United States Army during his retirement ceremony on July 11, 2026.

LEADERSHIP

The 41st IBCT Leadership Summit prepares next generation of Oregon Guard leaders

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

HAPPY VALLEY, Ore. — The Oregon Army National Guard's 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team brought together emerging leaders from across the brigade on July 31, 2026 for its annual Leadership Summit, investing in the next generation of officers and noncommissioned officers through a day focused on leadership, history and selfless service.

Now in its second year, the summit was created to equip emerging leaders with practical tools they can take back to their units while reinforcing the values and traditions that have defined the brigade for more than a century. The event included a physical fitness challenge, leadership development sessions, emotional intelligence training, a 41st-centric historical scavenger hunt at the Oregon Military Museum, and the presentation of the Bud Lewis Award.

"We want to create an environment where we bring in some of our up-and-coming leaders and start giving them tools," said Col. Paul Dyer, commander of the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team. "The first step is learning where we come from and being proud. Then it's asking, 'How can I help you achieve your goals? How can I make you better? How can I make you feel part of this thing we have?'"

A Transformational Moral Leadership session focused on emotional intelligence and moral empathy. The Transformational Moral Leadership Training program is an approved curriculum through Building Strong and Ready Teams and the National Guard CARES program. The training is designed to foster empathy and understanding within teams while helping leaders recognize how emotions affect their decisions, relationships, and stress responses.

One of the summit's featured speakers was retired Command Sgt. Maj. Brunk W. Conley, the former Command Sergeant

Major of the Army National Guard and the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team. Drawing on more than 35 years of military service, Conley encouraged participants to embrace the unique responsibility of serving as citizen-Soldiers.

Reflecting on moments such as Oregon wildfire response and the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, Conley described how the National Guard transformed both his understanding of leadership and his sense of purpose.

"The organization changed me from a selfish servant to a selfless servant," Conley said. "Don't wait to understand what being a citizen-Soldier means. There's no organization like this in the world."

Conley challenged the brigade's emerging leaders to carry those lessons back to their units by investing in their Soldiers, supporting their communities and strengthening the organization for future generations.

Building on that message, Command Sgt. Maj. Tyson Bumgardner led Soldiers through the history of the 41st Infantry Brigade, tracing its lineage from World War I through the Pacific campaigns of World War II, Cold War service and modern-day deployments. Soldiers also participated in a 41st-centric historical scavenger hunt at the Oregon Military Museum, focusing on the brigade's legacy. Bumgardner reminded attendees that they are part of a legacy built by generations of Oregon citizen-Soldiers.

"I want you to know that you're part of a very special unit," Bumgardner said. "You're part of a story that's been in progress for a long time."

Conley said understanding that history helps strengthen the brigade's identity.

"The team mentality is what carries over from this event," he said. "Being connected, knowing who our organization is, what it's made up of, and rallying around that Sunset patch makes us stronger as a brigade."

The day also included a physically demanding fitness event designed to reinforce one of the Army's core leadership principles: leading from the front.

"We do hard things in our organization, and that's what sets us apart," Conley said. "We should be proud of that. We're fortunate



Col. Paul Dyer, commander of the ORARNG's 41st IBCT, speaks to emerging leaders during the brigade's annual Leadership Summit at Camp Withycombe, Ore., on July 31, 2026.

to be part of a team that gets to do those hard things."

The summit concluded with the presentation of the Bud Lewis Award to Staff Sgt. Jason Mahnesmith.

Established by the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the award honors the legacy of Bud Lewis, a decorated World War II combat veteran who served with K Company, 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment during the Battle of Biak before returning home to continue a lifetime of service as a respected Portland police officer, mentor and community volunteer. The award recognizes Soldiers who exemplify Lewis' quiet professionalism, tactical excellence and unwavering commitment to both Soldiers and their communities.

Dyer said Lewis' influence extended far beyond his military service. After spending several hours with him, Dyer came away inspired not only by Lewis' wartime experiences but by the humility and compassion that defined his life.

"It was his attitude more than anything," Dyer said. "He invested in the people around him and was simply a good person."

Dyer said Lewis continued to serve others throughout his life, volunteering in the community and mentoring those around him. The brigade created the award to preserve that legacy and inspire future leaders to serve both in uniform and in their communities.

According to the award citation, Mahnesmith was recognized for exceptionally meritorious service while positively impacting Soldiers and the community, embodying the qualities of duty, honor, country, and tactical proficiency that defined Lewis' life. A plaque bearing Mahnesmith's name will be permanently displayed within the brigade headquarters to recognize his lasting contribution to the 41st IBCT's legacy.

For many participants, the summit reinforced that leadership is measured not only by mission accomplishment but also by the investment leaders make in their Soldiers and communities.



Leaders from the Oregon Army National Guard's 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team gather for a group photo at the Oregon Military Museum during the brigade's annual Leadership Summit at Camp Withycombe, Happy Valley, Oregon, on July 31, 2026.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, organized the summit in coordination with the brigade staff and command team, with Company Commander Capt. Andrew Shute served as the lead planner and helped coordinate and finalize the event.

"The goal was established over a year ago to invest in our junior leaders throughout the brigade and try to impart leadership abilities they can take out to the remote units," said Lt. Col. Nicholas Conley, brigade operations officer for the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team. "Investing in our junior leaders is the best thing we can do to pass along our experiences and our knowledge."

Throughout the day, brigade leaders emphasized that effective leadership extends beyond technical proficiency. Sessions focused on communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, and developing Soldiers while creating a stronger sense of connection across the brigade.

During the emotional intelligence module, participants examined self-awareness and how recognizing their reactions to stressful situations can help them manage stress earlier, make better choices, and build stronger relationships with the Soldiers they lead.

Chaplain (Col.) Jacob A. Scott, Oregon National Guard state chaplain, said the training directly supports the Oregon National Guard's vision of developing strong leaders. The Moral Empathy module, the second of four modules in the full curriculum, focuses on emotional intelligence to help Soldiers better understand themselves, their reactions, and the people they lead. Scott said building those skills can help Soldiers become more thoughtful and effective leaders.

During lunch, Soldiers also had an opportunity to connect with representatives from more than 10 organizations supporting the event. Resources included financial counseling, family and readiness support, education benefits, employment assistance, and other programs available to service members and their families.

LEADERSHIP

Celebratory ribbon-cuttings unveil the transformation of the Corvallis and Ashland Oregon Army National Guard armories

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

SALEM, Ore. — Recent renovations at the Oregon Army National Guard armories in Corvallis and Ashland were celebrated with ribbon-cutting and rededication ceremonies, stressing the ongoing pledge to meet the needs of Oregon’s Citizen-Soldiers.

On August 20, First Lady of Oregon, Aimee Kotek Wilson, stood alongside Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General of Oregon, to usher in a fresh chapter for the Corvallis Armory. Just five days later, on August 25, Gronewold gathered with military and community leaders in Ashland to celebrate the transformation of the Southern Oregon armory.



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General of Oregon; Lt. Col. Ryon Skiles, 2-162nd Battalion Commander; and Aimee Kotek Wilson, the First Lady of Oregon, cut the ribbon at the Corvallis Army Nat'l. Guard Armory on Aug. 20, 2026.

Serving as the presiding officer at both events, Gronewold stressed that these facilities matter deeply—not just to the state and nation, but faithfully to the local communities that call them home.

“For over 130 years, the Oregon National Guard has been part of Corvallis. Long before this building at 1100 N.W. Kings Boulevard existed, Citizen-Soldiers from this community were already answering the call to serve,” said Gronewold during the morning ceremony on August 20. “When the state and federal government invested in this site in the 1950s, they weren’t simply putting up a building. They were making a promise that Corvallis would always have a place to train, gather, and serve.”

In the 1950s, state and federal authorities recognized Corvallis’s strategic importance to Oregon’s security by investing in the armory. To reaffirm this commitment, state and federal partners have allocated over \$8.8 million to upgrade the facility. These improvements include seismic strengthening, energy-efficiency enhancements, and expanded training spaces to support the 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry Regiment, and the community over the next quarter-century.

“Throughout my career, I’ve tried to ensure that people affected by decisions have a voice—whether that meant bringing students to the Capitol or listening to social workers about what would actually help their patients,” Kotek Wilson said. “Today, that same principle matters here. This armory was rebuilt because the community and the Battalion spoke up about their needs, and Oregon responded.”

The modernization of the Corvallis Armory is anchored by a 5,250-square-foot expansion that adds new latrines and

showers, larger classrooms, and improved administrative and recruiting areas. The original building was also updated with new finishes, energy-efficient lighting, renovated restrooms, and a fire safety system. With seismic upgrades, a better electrical grid, and a backup generator, the facility is now ready to serve as a reliable energy structure and emergency staging center for the community.

Following the ceremonies, Gronewold and Kotek Wilson toured the renovated armory, viewed the upgrades, and met with Oregon Military Department personnel and civilian contractors involved in the project.

On a warm summer afternoon at the second ribbon-cutting ceremony in Ashland on August 25, Gronewold and Lt. Col. Joshua Rapp, Battalion Commander of the 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, had the honor of celebrating the next phase for the current armory.

In a historic 1911 special election, Ashland residents voted overwhelmingly (427 to 73) to tax themselves to help build the original armory, designed by William C. Knighton, Oregon’s first State Architect. The current Oregon Army National Guard Ashland Armory at 1420 E. Main Street, a 22,620-square-foot building, was built in 1988 and serves full-time and part-time traditional National Guardsmen from the 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry.

“Long before the state and federal government stepped in, this community decided that the Oregon National Guard belonged here in Ashland,” Gronewold said, after welcoming current and past serving members of the Army National Guard. “We honor the same spirit of local support from 1911, ensuring that the National Guard will have a home here in Ashland for at least another twenty-five years.”

The updates to the armory include modernizing the building finishes, such as interior and exterior paint, exterior wood accents, main entry foyer wood accents, new carpet, polished floors, and stainless-steel kitchen counters, as well as replacing failing pavement and curbing in the parking lot. These upgrades not only enhance the armory’s daily functionality but also confirm that it remains a durable



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General of Oregon, Lt. Col. Joshua Rapp, Battalion Commander of the 1-186th Infantry Regiment, and other members of the Ashland community came together to cut the ribbon at the rededication ceremony on Aug. 25, 2026, in Ashland, Oregon.



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, delivers formal remarks during the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Corvallis Army National Guard Armory on Aug. 20, 2026, in Corvallis, Oregon.

and effective facility for ongoing training and mission preparedness.

“Long after today’s ribbon is cut, this armory will continue to do what it has done since the people of Ashland first voted to build here. Standing watch, securing continued readiness and remaining part of the community,” Gronewold said.

The 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, has a distinguished lineage dating back to the Ashland Mountain Rangers and the Southern Oregon Volunteers in the 1860s.



Oregon Army National Guard Lt. Col. Joshua Rapp, Battalion Commander of the 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, talks with Mayor Tonya Graham of the City of Ashland, Oregon, and Oregon Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 5 Lenora Landwehr after the ribbon-cutting ceremony on Aug. 25, 2026.

Officially constituted in 1921, the regiment earned battle honors in the Pacific Theater during World War II, including in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. In recent decades, the Battalion has supported global operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa. It has also provided critical domestic disaster relief after Hurricane Katrina and security support for the United States Capitol during the 59th Presidential inauguration in 2021.

“Countless young men and women walk through these doors, taking their first steps as soldiers, and within these walls, thousands of experienced leaders have helped prepare the next generation to carry our mission forward,” said Lt. Col. Rapp, touching on the long history of the unit in Southern Oregon. “As we celebrate this occasion today, let us remember that while buildings may be renovated, it is the people who leave legacies.”

The two armories are part of the Armory Service Life Extension Program (ASLEP) and the Regional Emergency Enhancement Program project, which received approval and funding to move forward in 2023.

LEADERSHIP



Oregon National Guard, U.S. Navy Break Ground on \$12 Million Machine Gun Range in Boardman

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



BOARDMAN, Ore. — The Oregon National Guard and U.S. Navy broke ground Sept. 9, 2026 on a new Multi-Purpose Machine Gun (MPMG) Range at the Naval Weapons Systems Training Facility, marking the start of construction on a project more than two decades in the making.

The \$12 million range will become the first and only Army Standard crew-served weapons range in Oregon, allowing soldiers to qualify on the M240, M2, and MK19 in-state rather than traveling to facilities in Yakima, Washington, or Boise, Idaho.

“That travel costs time, costs money, and it pulls our soldiers away from being available here at home when the state needs them most,” said Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, The Adjutant General, Oregon. “This range changes that.”

The project traces back to a license agreement signed in August 2004 between the Departments of the Army, Navy, and the Oregon Military Department. Since then, it has appeared repeatedly on the military’s Future Years Development Plan in 2007, 2015, 2025, and 2026, before finally reaching ground breaking. The effort required a six-and-a-half-year environmental impact statement spanning more than 1,400 pages and coordination across U.S. Pacific Fleet, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, the National Guard Bureau and the Oregon Military Department.

“Twenty-two years ago, someone signed a piece of paper that made a promise, a promise that Oregon soldiers would someday train on their own ground for their own state,” Gronewold said. “Today, we break ground on keeping that promise, and when this range opens, it won’t just serve

the soldiers standing here today; it will serve the generations of Oregon’s citizen-soldiers who come after them.”



From left; CW5 Lenora L. Landwehr, Command Chief Warrant Officer for the Oregon National Guard; Maj. Gen. (ret.) Raymond F. Rees; Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, The Adjutant General, Oregon; Cmdr. Joshua Overn, Executive Officer of Naval Air Station Whidbey Island and the Northwest Training Range Complex; CMSgt Brent W. Cavanias, Command Senior Enlisted Leader; and Brandon Hammond, Boardman City Manager, break ground on the Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range at the Naval Weapons Systems Training Facility in Boardman, Oregon.

Gronewold tied the project to the Guard’s leadership framework, telling attendees the range reflects the standard he asks of every member of the organization: to be connected, competent and committed. He noted the facility also positions the Guard for the Army’s Next Generation Squad Weapon and its 6.8 mm round, which soldiers will need to qualify on in coming years.

Cmdr. Joshua Overn, Executive Officer of Naval Air Station Whidbey Island and the Northwest Training Range Complex, delivered remarks on behalf of Capt. Nathan Gammache, the

air station’s commanding officer, who was traveling and unable to attend.

“Today, we aren’t just turning dirt; we are laying the foundation for the future of our tactical readiness,” Overn said, calling proficiency with crew-served weapons “a cornerstone of ground combat.” He said the range will help ensure that when Oregon forces deploy, “they are fully qualified, confident and lethal in the field.”

Overn said the partnership between the Navy and the Oregon Military Department has helped advocate for and protect military interests across the Northwest while balancing compatible land and air use in the region. He added that a ribbon-cutting ceremony is expected within the coming year as construction wraps up.

Maj. Gen. (ret.) Raymond F. Rees, a former Adjutant General of Oregon, attended the ceremony. Also on hand were Boardman City Manager Brandon Hammond, Morrow and Umatilla County commissioners, local fire and police representatives, and field representatives for Oregon’s U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley.



CW5 Lenora L. Landwehr, Command Chief Warrant Officer, and CMSgt Brent W. Cavanias, Command Senior Enlisted Leader, Oregon National Guard, render honors alongside community leaders and dignitaries during the national anthem at the ground breaking ceremony for the Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range on Sept. 9, 2026.

Army Chaplain who inspired CTEC podcast returns as its guest

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

SALEM, Ore. — Chaplain (Col.) Jacob Scott, the Oregon National Guard state chaplain, joined Career Technical Education Center Assistant Principal James Webber on Aug. 19, 2026, to record an episode of “CTEC On Air,” the school’s student-led podcast.

The visit closed a loop that began in February 2025, when Scott spoke with CTEC’s student leadership group about leadership development and digital media skills, drawing on his experience hosting four seasons of “Hope in the Trenches,” the Oregon National Guard’s podcast. The school launched “CTEC On Air” on YouTube in February 2026.

Webber opened by thanking the Guard for its consistent presence across CTEC’s 10 career and technical programs.

“Our students across all 10 of our programs are involved with the Guard,” Webber said. “You come in here and you provide us educational opportunities, leadership opportunities, experiences.”

Much of the conversation centered on

shared philosophy. Webber described CTEC’s mission as preparing students to leave with what the school calls a competitive advantage, built on professionalism, safety, collaboration, and communication alongside technical skill.



Chaplain (Col.) Jacob Scott, left, the Oregon National Guard state chaplain, speaks with Career Technical Education Center Assistant Principal James Webber during a recording session for “CTEC On Air,” the school’s student-led podcast, in Salem, Oregon, on August 19, 2026.

“If we could push students to that uncomfortable nature of flexing those professional muscles when they’re young, I truly believe that when they leave, they’re going to be more successful individuals in whatever field they choose,” Webber said.

Scott drew the parallel to how the Oregon National Guard develops its own Soldiers.

“When we bring in a citizen off the street and form them to be a Soldier, that’s the same thing,” Scott said. “We want them to be professional, safe, and skilled at what they do.”

The podcast visit is the latest chapter in an expanding partnership. In April 2025, the Oregon Army National Guard brought an HH-60M Black Hawk and a UH-72 Lakota to the CTEC Aviation facility for juniors and seniors to look at, followed by a Q&A with pilots, flight medics, and aviation mechanics. In April 2026, CTEC autobody and manufacturing students visited the Oregon Army National Guard’s Field Maintenance Shop #4 in Salem for a tour and hands-on maintenance competition. Two months later, the two organizations hosted the second annual “Chopped Challenge,” where Oregon Army National Guard cooks mentored CTEC culinary arts students inside two Army Containerized Kitchens.

“CTEC On Air” is available at: youtube.com/@CTEConair.

LEADERSHIP

ORARNG Public Affairs Soldiers mobilized for overseas assignment

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

HAPPY VALLEY, Ore. – The Oregon Army National Guard’s 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment was recognized during a deployment ceremony held on August 26, 2026, at Camp Withycombe in Happy Valley, Oregon. The event was attended by family members, fellow Guard soldiers, and dignitaries, including Oregon Secretary of State Tobias Read and District 39 House Representative April Dobson.

Brigadier General Alan R. Gronewold, Oregon’s Adjutant General, served as the presiding officer. During the ceremony, seven Oregon Citizen-Soldiers were mobilized to support joint operations in Europe, as they will be part of the Operation European Assure, Deter and Reinforce mission after completing pre-deployment training at Fort Hood, Texas.

“The 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, known as MPAD, is a small group, but its ability to reach and influence audiences around the world is undeniable,” Gronewold said, highlighting their unique skills. “These service members work directly distributing photo and video content to social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X. They truly fulfill the Department of War obligation to keep the American people informed.”

The 115th MPAD carries forward a proud legacy of telling the Oregon National Guard’s

story across the globe, from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan to multinational exercises in Europe and missions at home in Oregon. Through their lenses and pens, they capture history as it unfolds, ensuring the voices and moments of the U.S. military are preserved for generations.



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon (right), and Lt. Col. Rocky Kumlin, 821st Troop Command Battalion Commander (center), along with members of the 115th MPAD, stand at attention for the playing of the National Anthem during the unit’s mobilization ceremony held at Camp Withycombe on Aug. 26, 2026.

“For some, this will be their first deployment, a culmination of nearly a year’s worth of training at the Defense Information School just outside of Washington, D.C. [at Fort George Meade, Maryland],” Gronewold noted, emphasizing the team’s diverse backgrounds. “Other soldiers in the unit possess multiple military occupational specialties – meaning they have spent time as combat medics, cannon crew members, signal specialists, radio equipment maintainers, and engineers before selecting the public affairs career field.”

Military Public Affairs Specialists do far more than create content. They orchestrate strategic communication, manage crises, coordinate events, and serve as the vital link between the military, government leaders, and the broader community. Their expertise shapes public understanding and builds lasting connections.

“It is both a privilege and an honor to stand here today, and for only the second time as battalion commander, to send citizen-soldiers forward to support federal missions,” stated Oregon Army National Guard Lieutenant Colonel Rocky

Kumlin, 821st Troop Command Battalion Commander. “I appreciate all you have done to prepare and what you are about to embark upon for us.”

Kumlin reinforced Gronewold’s praise, underscoring the invaluable support Public Affairs specialists offer commanders, whether on foreign soil or at home.

“Occupational code ‘46 Sierra,’ or mass communication studies, is not exclusive to the Army but is conducted in a joint training environment with Airmen, Sailors, Guardians, Coast Guard personnel, and Marines,” Kumlin explained. “This experience will be similar to the joint environment they will support over the next year in Germany, working with a wide variety of partners.”

Before this mobilization, members of the MPAD supported operations in Iraq from 2007 to 2008 and in Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012. They participated in multiple joint exercises, including Exercise Tiger Balm in Singapore in 2011 and Saber Guardian in July 2016 at the Romanian Land Forces Combat Training Center in Cincu, Romania. They also supported the Presidential Inaugurations in 2009, 2017, and 2021 in Washington, D.C.



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General for the Oregon National Guard (left), Oregon Secretary of State Tobias Read (center), and District 39 House Representative April Dobson (right), greet soldiers assigned to the 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment during the conclusion of their mobilization ceremony on Aug. 26, 2026.

“Thank you for your continued dedication to telling the story, whether at home or overseas,” Kumlin concluded. “I also know that your families, loved ones, and friends across the state are truly proud.”



The unit Guidon for the 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment is presented to those in attendance at the unit’s formal mobilization ceremony on August 26, 2026, at Camp Withycombe in Happy Valley, Oregon.

Oregon Guard senior leaders visit Airmen fighting Grasshopper Fire

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

TYGH VALLEY, Ore. – Oregon National Guard senior leaders flew from Salem to the Grasshopper Fire camp aboard an HH-60M Black Hawk helicopter with Golf Company, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation, Aug. 17, 2026, to visit Air National Guard members supporting wildland firefighting operations, thanking the airmen for volunteering to fight one of the state’s largest active wildfires.

Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Oregon’s adjutant general, led the visit alongside Brig. Gen. Jenifer E. Pardy, director of the Joint Staff; Chief Warrant Officer 5 Lenora Landwehr, command chief warrant officer; Chaplain (Col.) Jacob Scott, the state chaplain; and Chief Master Sgt. Brent Cavanias, command senior enlisted leader. Jonna Papaefthimiou, resilience officer for Gov. Tina Kotek’s office, also joined the visit to meet with the airmen on the governor’s behalf.

“This is a big deal for Oregonians, big deal for the Guard, to go out and see National Guardsmen out fighting fire, doing what we’re trained to do,” Gronewold told the group. “What we’re here to



Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, addresses Oregon Air National Guard Airmen supporting wildland firefighting operations at the Grasshopper Fire camp near Tygh Valley, Oregon, on Aug. 17, 2026.

do is protect Oregonians and their property, and you guys are doing that.”

The Grasshopper Fire had burned more than 90,000 acres and was 47% contained as of Aug. 17. The fire camp supporting the response has grown to approximately 1,800 personnel, with about 1,550 directly engaged in firefighting operations.

Among the airmen Gronewold and the other leaders met with were Senior Airman Colby Shoals and Senior Airman Connor Carlson, both assigned to the 270th Air Traffic Control

Squadron, nicknamed “Chaos,” out of the 173rd Fighter Wing. Shoals said the physically demanding work of wildland firefighting fits naturally with the team’s usual training.

“It’s right up our alley,” Shoals said. “What we do day to day at the base, we’re already working together out in the field, so it’s pretty much another day on the job for us.”

Carlson said the team has taken on some of the more physically demanding tasks on the fire line, including carrying water on their backs to perform wet mop-up work.

“We’ve been able to pick up a lot of those heavier tasks, like carrying a bladder pack on us, so we can do that wet mop-up where it’s easier rather than doing dry mop-up,” Carlson said.

Shoals said the mission mirrors the teamwork and mutual accountability the airmen already rely on in their day-to-day work.

“Everybody’s like a big family there, so everybody has each other’s backs. If somebody looks like they’re not doing so well or getting a little tired, everybody’s checking on each other.”

SPECIAL REPORT: Oregon Guardsmen and Aviation Crews Battle Blazes Across the State

Army aviation crews battle wildfire blazes, from Front Page

Hickman, who has served in the Oregon Army National Guard for 20 years, said aircraft turnaround time depends heavily on parts availability, and keeping it fast is one of the least visible but most demanding parts of the mission. “I like that the National Guard is being used for something to help our community, and so if I can play a part in helping the community, that’s what I want to do,” she said.

Once a Chinook is airborne, its crew chief takes on responsibility for the bucket itself. Sgt. Isaiah Torres, a Chinook crew chief, said the process starts well before the aircraft ever reaches a fire.

“It’s almost the same as for any other flight, except you have to get the bucket ready,” Torres said. “We get our bucket staged ... inspect the bucket, make sure valves are good. We do an op check before we actually take the bucket to the target site.”

In flight, Torres said two crew members work in the back of the aircraft to guide the pilots over the fire and monitor the load.

“Once that bucket’s over that fire, I release the trigger on a handle. Water dumps, water’s away,” Torres said. “We go back to the dip site. We get more water. Simple as that.”

Torres, who has served as a crew chief for two years, said the mission carries a sense of purpose that training flights don’t.



An Oregon Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter releases water from its aerial bucket onto the Hagen Fire near Pendleton, Oregon, on July 29, 2026. Oregon National Guard aircrews conducted water-bucket missions throughout the day to support Oregon’s wildland firefighting response operations.

“It’s better than just training flights. I think we’re actually doing our job, which I enjoy,” Torres said. “I’ve never been in a helicopter before the Army, so it’s a pretty cool experience.”

Fry said the biggest challenge of sustaining the mission isn’t equipment or coordination, but people — Oregon Army National Guard members balancing the activation with civilian jobs and families during peak summer months.

“It takes our citizen Soldiers away from their full-time jobs and their families,” Fry said. “But the best part about this organization is that everybody is willing to do that, and

everybody is willing to give up their summers and their time to come and support this mission to support the state.”

Fry added that the Guard members flying and maintaining the aircraft are, in many cases, the same people Oregonians see every day.

“These people are your neighbors. They’re your friends,” Fry said. “They’re out here supporting you, supporting the state, and supporting our interests to keep the state safe and beautiful.”

Gina Miner, Assistant Area Director for the Oregon Department of Forestry’s Eastern Oregon Area, said aircraft are expected to continue supporting firefighting efforts as long as needed, based on the conditions on the ground.



Gina Miner, Oregon Department of Forestry assistant area director for the Eastern Oregon Area, briefs Oregon Army National Guard aircrews on daily fire operations at Army Aviation Support Facility #2 in Pendleton, Oregon, on July 29, 2026. Guard aircrews are flying CH-47 Chinook and HH-60M Black Hawk helicopters in support of wildland firefighting efforts on the Hagen Fire in Umatilla County.



Oregon Airmen from the 142nd Wing and 173rd FW arrive by charter bus at Anderson Readiness Center in Salem on Aug. 7, 2026. (Photo by Maj. W. Chris Clyne, OMD Public Affairs)

Story by Master Sgt. Daniel Reed,
173rd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. — When wildfire threatens the community surrounding Kingsley Field, the mission extends beyond the runway.

In total, 73 Airmen from the 173rd Fighter Wing have been activated to support the Klamath County Sheriff’s Office with evacuation and wildfire prevention efforts in response to the Wrights Spring Fire.

The activation, authorized Aug. 10, 2026, by Col. Adam Gaudinski, commander of the 173rd Fighter Wing, utilizes Active Guard Reserve members under Immediate Response Authority to provide immediate assistance to local authorities.

The response reflects the Oregon National Guard’s commitment to protecting and supporting communities across the state when emergencies threaten Oregonians’ lives and property.

“The Oregon National Guard has a responsibility to be there for Oregonians when they need us most,” said Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon. “Our state mission is about more than responding to emergencies. It is about being a trusted partner to the communities we serve and providing the people and capabilities needed to help protect lives, property and the places Oregonians call home.”

173rd Fighter Wing Airmen Answer the call to Support Klamath County Wildfire Evacuations

The Oregon National Guard maintains forces capable of responding to emergencies statewide while working alongside local and state authorities. In Klamath County, that response has brought Airmen from Kingsley Field into a mission many of them view as deeply personal.

“Standing by when our community truly needs help is never an option,” Gaudinski said. “The men and women of the 173rd Fighter Wing are elite Airmen serving our nation and our state. We are also members of the communities our families, friends, and neighbors call home. When our communities need help, we are going to be there.”

The Airmen activated to support the response are assisting the Klamath County Sheriff’s Office with evacuation efforts associated with the Wrights Spring Fire, providing additional workforce to local authorities working to protect residents and property.

Gronewold said the response shows the importance of maintaining a ready, capable force that can transition quickly from its federal mission to supporting Oregon communities.

“Our Soldiers and Airmen are trained to respond,” Gronewold said. “They are ready to serve, and they understand the responsibilities that go with these assignments.”

For Kingsley Field, that support is especially meaningful because the Airmen serving alongside local authorities are also members of the community they help protect.

“We have a duty to protect and serve our

nation, but that responsibility does not stop at the gate,” Gaudinski said. “Inside the gates of Kingsley Field Air National Guard Base, we are Team Kingsley. Outside the gates, we are part of an even bigger team and a place we are honored to call home. When our community needs us, we will proudly stand beside them- whenever, wherever, and however we can. Our community provides us with immeasurable acts of support and kindness. We are forever in their debt, and we hope this can be a sign of our true love and admiration for this community.”

The response highlights the Oregon National Guard’s dual role: maintaining a force ready to defend the nation while remaining prepared to respond when Oregonians need help at home.

“Our federal mission requires us to remain ready to defend our nation,” Gronewold said. “Our state mission requires us to remain ready to serve

Oregon. Both missions demand the same thing -- ready, disciplined and committed Soldiers and Airmen who are willing to answer the call when their fellow citizens need them.”

At the 173rd Fighter Wing, that commitment is reflected in the Airmen who have stepped away from their normal duties to support their neighbors during an uncertain and potentially dangerous situation.

“We train every day to be ready for the mission our nation gives us,” Gaudinski said. “But readiness also means being ready to help when something happens in our own backyard. This is home for our Airmen, and when our community needs us, Kingsley Field will answer.”



Airmen from the 173rd Fighter Wing receive their initial briefing before departing to the evacuation zones in Klamath Falls, Oregon, on Aug. 10, 2026. (Photo by Master Sgt. Daniel Reed, 173rd Fighter Wing Public Affairs)

SPECIAL REPORT: Oregon Guardsmen and Aviation Crews Battle Blazes Across the State

Oregon Air National Guard hand crews battle Grasshopper Fire

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

TYGH VALLEY, Ore. — Oregon Air National Guard hand crews moved into their second day of wildland firefighting operations Aug. 9, 2026, shifting from structure protection to mop-up, monitoring and patrol of existing containment lines on the Grasshopper Fire.

Chief Master Sgt. Brian Brown, 173rd Fighter Wing, is on his fourth major wildfire deployment in his approximately 26 years of service. He said the mission reflects why he became a Guardsman in the first place. “We can, in a military capacity, support our state and see the effects that we have to assist the state,” Brown said. “That community connection and the commitment that we have to our state is really what it’s about to be a Guardsman.”

The Guard crews are working closely with the Oregon Department of Forestry’s liaison to the National Guard and with contracted crew bosses assigned to oversee day-to-day fireline work.

Brown said the Grasshopper Fire’s proximity to a metropolitan area sets this deployment apart from past fires he’s supported.

“We’re not out in the middle of nowhere where people don’t care,” Brown said. “We’re closer to the communities, so just seeing that, it’s different.”

On the crews’ first day, airmen worked structure protection, wrapping buildings, signage, bathrooms and even bridges with fire-resistant material to help them withstand the fire if it reached them. Sean Hunt, a crew boss with the Coos Forest Protection

Association based in Coos Bay, said the work is guided closely by fire resource advisors who identify which structures and sites are worth protecting.

“We’re working real closely with the resource advisors, so they’re the ones that are kind of pinpointing these values at risk,” Hunt said. “Yesterday there were multiple structures, signage, bathrooms. We even did a couple bridges that they wanted to keep.”

Daniel Schroth, a crew boss with California’s smokejumper program who traveled to Oregon to support the mission when fire activity slowed in California, said crew bosses like himself and fellow smokejumper Giovanni Carranza are brought in to help lead crews like the Guard’s hand teams during high-demand periods.

“If it’s slow in California and there’s

no lightning or anything like that, we’ll single resource out,” Schroth said. “We’ll go out and help as a crew boss or a task force or a division on fire.”



Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, fist-bumps an Oregon Air Guardsman while visiting hand crews supporting wildland firefighting operations at the Grasshopper Fire camp near Tygh Valley, Oregon, on Aug. 17, 2026.



Chief Master Sgt. Brian Brown, 173rd Fighter Wing, briefs Brig. Gen. Alan Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, on hand crew employment using an operations map at the Grasshopper Fire camp near Tygh Valley, Oregon, on Aug. 17, 2026.



Oregon Air National Guard hand crew members prepare to load before deploying to the fire line to support structure protection efforts on the Grasshopper Fire near Tygh Valley, Oregon, on Aug. 8, 2026.

For many of the airmen, this is their first experience on a wildfire. Tech Sgt. Slade McCord, an avionics technician with the 173rd Fighter Wing, said the first day gave him a new appreciation for the work.

“It was quite the experience just to see kind of the logistical things that go into it, the things that you don’t think of, and just the extent to which we’re ready to protect as much as we can,” McCord said. “We’re definitely doing the best we can to keep Oregon’s parks nice and safe.”

McCord, who volunteered for the mission, said his family was initially anxious but supportive.

“They were definitely stressed when I told them, and of course they’re worried about me, but they know that we’re in good hands,” McCord said. “It’s great to get back to the community, to experience something that not a lot of people get to see.”

Future Soldiers get hands-on training as 1-186 Infantry preps for E2B

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

WHITE CITY, Ore. — Soldiers with 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, Oregon Army National Guard, spent four days at the Salt Creek Training Area here, July 30 to Aug. 2, 2026, training toward next year’s E2B event, while local firefighters from the Oregon Military Department’s Wildland Fire Program stood by to keep the training safe.

The battalion ran land navigation July 30, before moving to weapon stations and a movement-under-direct-fire lane using blank ammunition July 31 and Aug. 1, working toward the Expert Infantry Badge

and Expert Soldier Badge, two skill badges the Army combines into a single testing event known as E2B. The training will serve as the battalion’s main objective heading into next year’s Annual Training.

Jeremy Carver, OMD’s deputy director of installations, learned the battalion was training at Salt Creek and coordinated with 1st Sgt. Jeremy Warren to bring in wildland firefighters from Camp Rilea.

“Since Salt Creek is a Closed In Training Area (CITA) we have responsibility to provide fire coverage,” Carver said. “I called first sergeant Warren to get the details and coordinated our fire coverage to prevent a wildfire from starting.”

The firefighters arrived Friday morning, July 31, as blank-fire training began, and remained on-site through the training’s conclusion Aug. 1.

The battalion’s training culminated Aug. 1 with a well-attended Guard for a Day event, giving local recruiters, Recruit Sustainment Program members and interested young adults a hands-on look at the same training Soldiers

had been running all week, including exposure to the M249, M240 and M2 machine guns and a chance to fire blank ammunition on the weapons systems.

“This event was a great opportunity for future Soldiers to get hands-on training from Soldiers they will serve alongside in the future,” said Sgt. 1st Class Erik Andreason, an

Oregon Army National Guard recruiter based in Medford. “Some of the NCOs running the lanes were my enlistees over the last few years, some even graduated from the same high schools as the Soldiers enlisting now. They’ve grown into NCOs and officers, and now the Soldiers I enlisted are going to be responsible for raising the next generation of local troops.”

“This was the kind of coordination that makes the Oregon National Guard work, one team looking out for another,” said Lt. Col. Joshua Rapp, commander, 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment. “Having the wildland fire team on-site let us run realistic training and give our Guard for a Day guests a great look at what we do, without added risk.”



(From left) Jordan Chandler, Matthew Kaye, and Cotton Twonames, wildland firefighters with the Oregon Military Department, hold hand tools used to construct firelines at the Salt Creek Training Area near White City on Aug. 1, 2026.



ORARNG Staff Sgt. Mychal Taylor, 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, instructs OMD wildland firefighters as they fire M249 Squad Automatic Weapons for familiarization at the Salt Creek Training Area on July 31, 2026.

SPECIAL REPORT: Oregon Guardsmen and Aviation Crews Battle Blazes Across the State

ORARNG HH-60 crew drops water on Hagen Fire helping save homes

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

PENDLETON, Ore. — Inside the cabin of an HH-60M Black Hawk, Staff Sgt. Kyle Sanders leans out over the open door, eyes locked on a water bucket swinging 100 feet below the aircraft. The pilots up front can't see it, since their view is forward, not down, so they rely entirely on Sanders and a Cal Fire liaison in the cabin for situational awareness of exactly where that bucket is and when to let it go.

With the release in hand, Sanders times the drop as smoke curls up into the cabin. The aircraft he's flying in was built for something else entirely: pulling Soldiers off a battlefield within the "golden hour" that gives the wounded their best chance of survival. On Aug. 10, 2026, its mission was different but no less urgent, saving homes instead of Soldiers, fighting the Hagen Fire in Umatilla County.

Sanders, a crew chief with Golf Company, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation, has spent 26 years in the Oregon Army National Guard. Until two days before this flight, he'd never actually dropped water on a fire.

"I've been training for 20 years to do this," Sanders said. "Every fire season, I always end up on a search and rescue medevac standby crew, or the two or three seasons where I was actually on a bucket crew, we showed up at the tail end of the fire and just never got launched."

Sanders said the moment he finally saw water leave the bucket for the first time stuck with him.

"I had a smile on my face. I was like, dude, this is freaking awesome," Sanders said. "I texted my buddy, my mom, my dad and my wife."

One of the day's more demanding moments came when the crew was called in on a spot fire discovered by their Cal Fire liaison, well outside the fire's established perimeter.



(L to R) Chief Warrant Officer 4 Nathaniel Carter, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Noelan Smith, Staff Sgt. Kyle Sanders and Joe Carstensen, a Cal Fire military helicopter manager, stand with an HH-60M Black Hawk helicopter at Army Aviation Support Facility #2 in Pendleton on Aug. 10, 2026.

"We had a small dip site that was about six feet deep of muddy water, and it was a confined area that was difficult to get in and out of, and it was super smoky with lots of wind pushing the smoke in our direction," Sanders said. "Our Cal Fire representative saw a spot fire that was well into the green, and their ground crew said, 'Yeah, that's a priority.'"

The crew attempted what's known as a spot drop, bringing the aircraft to a near-hover to place water precisely on the flames.

"Our rotor wash was actually blowing the fire up, and the bucket was swinging, so I couldn't get the water to go directly where I wanted it," Sanders said. "But we got two or

three drops that were pretty much dead-on the flaming tree, and we called it in again."

For most of the day, the crew rotated in and out of Langdon Lake alongside a heavy-lift helicopter and two CH-47 Chinooks, forming what pilots described as a steady racetrack pattern overhead the lake.



ORARNG Staff Sgt. Kyle Sanders, a crew chief with Golf Company, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation, communicates with pilots aboard an HH-60M Black Hawk helicopter while returning to a dip site after a water drop on the Hagen Fire in Umatilla County, Oregon, on Aug. 10, 2026.

"That rotation worked out really well," Sanders said. "Langdon Lake is a huge, beautiful, deep lake, so it was really easy to pick up water fast and get back down there and drop it off."

Not everything went smoothly. On one pass, the crew's bucket tumbled underwater during a fill and came up tangled, flying slightly crooked and short of full capacity for the rest of the flight.

"I was monitoring it throughout the flight, and the valve was operating correctly, and it didn't seem like there was uneven pressure on one of the cables, so we just kept operating it the way it was flying," Sanders said. Ground crews later found no damage once the aircraft landed, just a minor malfunction that a second Guard crew experienced as well.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Nathaniel Carter, seated in the left seat as pilot in command, said no two dip sites fly the same.

"You go into the fire and they tell you where they want you to go, and sometimes it's more challenging than others," Carter said. "A lot of it depends on the dip site. Dipping out of a lake is way easier than dipping out of a little pond."

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Noelan Smith, also on the flight, said the pilots depend heavily on their crew in the back of the aircraft to safely place the bucket.

"Communication made it a lot easier," Smith said. "I'm unable to see anything based on how this aircraft's laid out, so I have to trust the guys in the back to get it done."

Bridging the gap between the aircrew and firefighters on the ground was Joe Carstensen, a Cal Fire military helicopter manager working his first mission with the Oregon National Guard.

"My job is to be the subject matter expert for the firefighter side, helping bridge that gap of what the firefighters are saying on the ground and translating that to the military aviators," Carstensen said. "It was a great opportunity for us to come up, get some experience with you guys,

see how you run the program, and hopefully leave a little bit of knowledge with the guys along the way."

As of Aug. 10, the Hagen Fire had burned 51,061 acres and was 11% contained, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry. Firefighters lined and held all spot fires that had crossed Highway 204 near Spout Springs, aided by drone-mounted infrared cameras that let fire managers pinpoint hot spots for more targeted helicopter water drops rather than broader retardant application, given the fire's terrain and fuel conditions. Night crews held those gains and continued mop-up work, while daytime operations shifted toward defensive firing in small sections to build a buffer between the fire and structures at risk, particularly in the fire's southern reaches. Crews also continued hand-digging fire line on a spot fire in steep terrain south of Bingham.

Weather has made this fire season especially difficult, with high winds, low humidity and high temperatures straining available air resources across the region. Gina Miner, Oregon Department of Forestry Eastern Oregon Area assistant area director, said the Guard's aircraft have helped fill that gap.



ORARNG Spc. Barick Hill, Spc. Aaron Anderson, and Sgt. Scott Newman use the Aircraft Notebook system to track required maintenance on an HH-60M Black Hawk helicopter at Army Aviation Support Facility #2 in Pendleton, Oregon, on Aug. 10, 2026, ahead of wildland firefighting support missions on the Hagen Fire in Umatilla County.

"The HH-60 pilots and crews' work on the Hagen Fire has helped ground crews gain access in rough terrain and slow the spread of increased fire behavior," Miner said. "The aerial water bucket support is an integral part of the complete firefighting system, working together with ground resources, other air resources and heavy equipment. The activation of the National Guard has relieved some of this burden, and we are very thankful for their hard work."

Statewide, the Oregon National Guard had approximately 140 personnel activated in support of wildfire operations as of Aug. 13, supporting two CH-47 Chinook and two HH-60M Black Hawk helicopters flying water bucket missions, along with one HH-60M helicopter supporting search and rescue. Guard aircrews have completed 632 water bucket drops so far this season, delivering approximately 676,290 gallons of water, more water than is held in an Olympic-size swimming pool, with operations continuing.



ORARNG Spc. Barick Hill, Sgt. Scott Newman, and Spc. Aaron Anderson prepare a water bucket for use on an HH-60M Black Hawk helicopter at Army Aviation Support Facility #2 in Pendleton, Ore., Aug. 9, 2026.

TRAINING

The Oregon National Guard, U.S. Coast Guard, and Astoria Fire Conduct Joint Training to prepare for hazardous emergencies

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

ASTORIA, Ore. - Soldiers with the Oregon National Guard's 102nd Civil Support Team wore fully enclosed hazardous materials suits while searching a mock village for a hidden radiological source during joint training at Camp Rilea, near Warrenton, Oregon.

The training brought together the Oregon National Guard, U.S. Coast Guard, and Astoria Fire Department to strengthen partnerships ahead of a real emergency involving hazardous materials or a potential weapons of mass destruction incident.

On the first day of field training at Camp Rilea, Soldiers and firefighters entered the Military Operations in Urban Terrain site wearing Level A hazardous materials suits. Using radiation detection equipment, they searched an abandoned housing complex for a simulated radioactive source. The scenario gave responders the opportunity to practice locating the hazard, sharing information, and working together during a complex emergency.

"This type of training is very important because this is part of our job," said Maj. Anthony Bernabo, nuclear medical science officer with the Oregon National Guard's 102nd Civil Support Team. "We have to be able to detect weapons of mass destruction, including radiological sources that could be used as weapons."

The four-day training event, conducted from Aug. 3-6, included classroom instruction, hands-on exercises and maritime operations. Participants learned about chemical, biological and radiological threats and then applied those skills in realistic scenarios.

"We're cross-training with the Civil Support Team and the state's hazardous materials response team," said Nolan Mathews, an

engineer with the Astoria Fire Department. "If something big happens, we've already worked together."

Mathews said realistic training helps agencies prepare before an emergency occurs.

"You'd rather train for the worst-case scenario now than have something happen and try to figure it out," he said. "It's nice to have an idea of what you need to do and what resources are available."

He said working with military partners helps build trust before responding to a real emergency.

"It's awesome," Mathews said. "We've always had a great relationship with the National Guard and the Coast Guard. It's really cool to do civilian-military cross-training."

The training also moved to the Columbia River, where members of the Oregon National Guard's 102nd Civil Support Team joined U.S. Coast Guard boarding teams aboard the Coast Guard Cutter David Duren. Working together, they searched the vessel for a simulated radiological source while practicing radiation detection, shipboard search procedures, communications, and coordinated response in a maritime environment.

The exercise allowed both organizations to practice radiation detection, shipboard search procedures, communications, and coordinated response in a maritime environment.

"We're working with the Army's Civil Support Team to strengthen our partnership in chemical, biological, and weapons of mass destruction response," said Chief Warrant Officer Nick



A U.S. Coast Guard boarding team member and an Oregon Air Nat'l Guard member assigned to the ORNG 102nd Civil Support Team use specialized equipment to search for a simulated radiological source aboard the Coast Guard Cutter David Duren during joint training in Astoria on Aug. 5, 2026.

Gaines, supervisor of the U.S. Coast Guard Sector Columbia River Boarding Team. "As we strengthen our programs, it gives us more options to help protect the ports. If there's ever a threat to the Port of the Columbia River or anywhere else in our area of responsibility, we'll be better prepared to respond together."

Gaines said training with the Oregon National Guard gives both organizations a chance to improve how they work together before a real incident happens.

"It's been an amazing opportunity to see the experience the Army Civil Support Team brings," Gaines said. "We're able to work through communications challenges and continue striving for excellence as we operate in the maritime domain."

The training helped each agency better understand the others' equipment, skills and responsibilities. It also strengthened the relationships that are critical during emergencies.

"I want to thank our partner agencies and the other branches of service for these opportunities," Gaines said. "Working together helps us meet the mission and maintain the readiness we all strive for."

By training together in realistic scenarios on land and at sea, the Oregon National Guard, U.S. Coast Guard, and Astoria Fire Department strengthened their ability to respond to hazardous materials or radiological incidents that threaten Oregon's communities.

142nd Civil Engineers boost readiness with cross-train in Portugal

Story and photo by Senior Airman Eduardo Figueroa Varela, 142nd Wing Public Affairs

LAJES FIELD, PORTUGAL — The 142nd Civil Engineer Squadron recently completed a Deployment for Training (DFT) at Lajes Field, Portugal, to boost upgrade training and team readiness.

A DFT is a critical readiness strategy designed to provide Airmen with immersive, hands-on experience that mirrors real-world operational conditions. Whether conducted within the continental United States (CONUS) or overseas, these exercises validate mobilization procedures, strengthen team cohesion, and sharpen the squadron's ability to adapt under resource constraints, ensuring personnel remain mission-ready for global tasks.

While this mission was originally designed as a multi-shop building demolition project, shifting priorities and budget constraints required the unit to adapt its scope on the ground. Nevertheless, the initial planning phase proved invaluable. Navigating the logistics of movement, documentation, and clearances gave the team vital operational familiarity with deployment protocols. Even as they pivoted to integrate with Lajes Field's existing operations, reverse-engineering solutions with limited assets underscored the strength and flexibility of their initial planning foundation.

Beyond execution of trade skills, the broader strategic benefit of the mission was validating the operational processes that precede troops



ORANG Tech. Sgt. Sergio Ochoa, 142nd CES opens a case containing a dynamic cone penetrometer kit during the DFT exercise conducted at Lajes Air Base, Portugal on June 23, 2026.

hitting the ground.

"The deployment for training enabled our unit to go through the motions of doing deployment activities and deployment planning," said Capt. Steven Tjoelker, a civil engineering officer with the squadron. "That was a huge factor setting us up for success in the future, being able to mobilize our Airmen, get them ready, and make sure we have all of the required training, certifications, and clearances."

A major focus of the trip was blending the squadron's different operations shops. Instead of working in isolation, Airmen from structures, electrical, power production, and engineering assistant (EA) shops teamed up. Traditional trades gained hands-on experience training on heavy equipment, while the Water and Fuel Systems Maintenance (WFSM) shop worked with EAs to learn how to map utility lines and build infrastructure plans; essential

data sets for engineering software that support airfield planning, asset allocation, and emergency management layouts.

"Together we are accomplishing the mission as one unit," said Master Sgt. Jacob Cravino, operations superintendent for the squadron. "We have younger Airmen that are going through upgrade training to get experience on other tools and use tools in a different way to solve these problems."

Beyond the technical skills, the remote setting forced the Guardsmen to build deep team bonds.

"The deployment for training is a very unique opportunity that a civil engineering squadron gets to experience, specifically in the National Guard," Tjoelker said. "It has enabled our unit to come together closer and also be able to work on difficult projects and difficult tasks with potentially limited resources and limited time."

Operating outside of their home station environment forced the Airmen to bridge the gap between their professional roles and personal dynamics. Working, eating, and living together, the team gained a deeper understanding of each member's unique strengths, allowing them to rely on one another more effectively. Unit leaders noted that cultivating this level of trust and familiarity is essential, as it ensures that when the squadron eventually faces a real-world deployment, the communication and operational cohesion are already firmly in place.

TRAINING

Oregon Army Guard Engineers breach wire obstacle with drone-delivered Bangalore

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

ORCHARD COMBAT TRAINING CENTER, Idaho — A heavy-lift drone climbed into 25-mile-per-hour gusts above the high desert here June 22, 2026, carrying a live Bangalore torpedo toward a wire obstacle.

In combat, breaching that obstacle on foot would, on average, cost half the Soldiers ordered to do it. Army doctrine plans for it: a 50 percent casualty planning factor for the deliberate breach.

Oregon engineers breach a wire obstacle with a drone-delivered Bangalore. The drone released the charge. Shock tube unspooled cleanly behind it. Soldiers from Bravo Company, 741st Brigade Engineer Battalion, 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, took cover. The Bangalore detonated, opening a lane through the wire, a lane that, in this iteration, no Soldier had to sprint across to deliver.

The proof-of-concept on Range 22 marked the close of a months-long innovation effort by the 741st BEB's drone working group, established by battalion commander Lt. Col. Eric Zimmerman with a directive to defeat a wire obstacle using a commercial off-the-shelf or similar drone during the battalion's annual training. The working group's research found no precedent for the tactic in the U.S. Army.

"Mostly Ukraine," Zimmerman said when asked what drove the concept. "Watching what was going on in Ukraine, and how innovative they are, it inspires you to get better and think bigger." The doctrinal cost of the breach was the blunter argument.

"The most casualty-producing thing that Army engineers do is the breach," said 1st Lt. Andrew Lucas, who co-led the working group from the battalion S-3 section. "Expect 50 percent casualties. If you can deliver something to clear the breach with a \$40,000 drone, instead of putting soldiers in harm's way, that's worth experimenting with."

Innovation surrounded by doctrine Zimmerman said his intent was to apply emerging technology to a problem engineers already know how to solve. "I want us to

talk about drones around something we already do really well, which is defeating obstacles," he said. "So let's do this non-doctrinal thing, but surround it with doctrine."

The working group, led by Lucas and Capt. Samuel Cushing, the battalion's plans officer, with input from senior noncommissioned officers, including 1st Sgt. Joshua Martin first studied commercially available drones priced from \$2,000 to \$40,000. After funding for a commercial purchase did not come through, the team turned to the Oregon Army National Guard's 249th Regional Training Institute, whose existing drone-build program could not produce an airframe with the lift capacity the mission required. Lt. Col. Mark Timmons, the 249th RTI commander, told the working group his program could not meet the requirement in the available time line.

Rather than abandoning the effort, the battalion's operations section continued pursuing alternatives. Working from the specifications developed by the drone working group, Maj. Harvey, the battalion S-3, and 1st Sgt. Martin, the battalion operations noncommissioned officer,

vetted industry partners before determining that Lorica Technologies could meet the requirement.

When Lucas arrived for annual training, he believed the search had come up short.

"We'd been told no, it's not going to happen, we're not going to get a drone," he said. "And that's when Maj. Harvey said, 'Oh, we actually got a drone.' So, full speed ahead."

The Mule 28 Lorica's contribution was the Mule 28, a heavy-lift, multi-mission unmanned aerial system designed and built in-house at the company's Ashland facility.

The airframe weighs roughly 45 pounds, lifts approximately 200 pounds, and is powered by eight motors turning eight 28-inch bi-bladed propellers. It carries 128 trillion operations per second of onboard artificial intelligence processing, software-defined radios capable of listening and radio direction-finding across the 0-to-11-gigahertz spectrum, and a sensor package that supports facial, vehicle, and weapons recognition. The drone can derive coordinates from its camera using trigonometry and focal length, enabling it to mark drop points on objects it identifies.

Lorica founder and CEO Christopher Dye said the company's software, including a swarm-control system the company calls Hive, is what makes the platform distinct.

"It doesn't matter what the vehicle is, as long as we understand the capabilities and the parameters of the vehicle," Dye said. "We can task the swarm based on what the job needs to get done. Right now, we're working on natural language control, so that you can just talk to the bird and tell it, 'Hey, I want a reconnaissance around this building. I need to know how big that ditch is before we get there, how many steps, how high the windows are.'" Lorica currently fields three Mule 28 prototypes. The company had roughly six weeks to develop

the airframe for the Oregon project.

Cushing said that going through a domestic manufacturer to build to specification rather than buying a commercial drone with Chinese components was a deliberate choice that protected the project from electronic warfare and supply-chain vulnerabilities.

"It's been helpful to have contractors that can meet every specification we're asking for and produce a drone that also meets the Army's intent for any sort of technology that we integrate," he said.

Building the safety case The team built safety into the project by stepping up the live-explosive risk in stages. The drone first carried an inert training aid identical in size and weight to the M1A3 Bangalore. Once the platform could reliably deliver an inert charge on target, the team flew an inert Bangalore with only a blasting cap installed, then a blasting cap with a wrap of detonating cord, and finally a live, two-section M1A3 Bangalore torpedo.

Every iteration involving live explosives, including the blasting-cap-only flights, was initiated using a shock tube spooled from the

drone to the obstacle. The team deliberately avoided an electronic trigger that could be jammed or prematurely activated.

"Ideally, you would love to be able to remote-detonate this without having to have a spool of shock tube," Lucas said. "But in the LSCO environment, we've seen so many other systems jammed that if you have the ability to, it's not a detriment that we're doing it this way."



A Lorica Technologies Inc. Mule 28 unmanned aerial system carries a live, primed M1A3 Bangalore torpedo toward a concertina wire obstacle moments before release on June 22, 2026.

The M1A3 Bangalore torpedo demolition kit consists of 10 tube sections, each 2.5 feet long and containing a five-pound Composition B4 main charge. Doctrine permits up to four sections joined together for a single shot. The working group used two-section assemblies on June

22 and added one small departure from the field manual: extra tape around the blasting cap junction to prevent it from pulling loose in flight.

"We're trying to introduce a new TTP here anyway," Cushing said. "We want to see if we can deliver a Bangalore remotely and defeat a wire obstacle. Everything beyond that is something we'll take into consideration as the project evolves."

Mobility and counter-mobility Both working group officers said the broader value of the project lies in giving engineers a tool tailored to their core mission rather than borrowing from the infantry-led drone applications that have dominated the field so far. "Mobility, counter-mobility is the bread and butter of the engineers, so we should focus on leaning into that versus infantry tasks," Lucas said.

Cushing sees the Bangalore breach as a foundation. "The platform they've built, if we got an entire annual training with plenty of explosives, range time, and the ability to make modifications as we go, I think we could be defeating 10, 20 times more obstacles than we're talking about today."

Lucas said the next conceptual step is autonomy. "We're not that far technologically from a drone that has an AI processor on it that could identify where concertina wire is. And you could put in a rough coordinate of, 'Hey, I know the obstacle's there,' and you could send it to autonomously deploy the Bangalore on the wire with near-perfect precision, where there's no possibility of it being jammed, because it's all running off of internal direction."

Dye said the next iteration of the Mule 28 will refine flight controls, dropping mechanisms, and safety systems, with the goal of integrating AI-driven obstacle recognition that could allow the drone to identify a wire obstacle, position itself, and release the charge autonomously. Lorica plans to return to additional inert drops in the coming weeks and is preparing for follow-on demonstrations.

Zimmerman said the successful demonstration reflected more than a new capability; it showcased collaboration across the battalion.

"I'm really proud. We have a true group project that highlights innovation across everything we do is possible," he said. "The Soldiers of Bravo Company took an idea from the battalion staff and applied their expertise to make that idea functional and effective."

For Dye, watching the live Bangalore release and detonate as planned was, in a word, "relief." "It's been very nerve-wracking the last few days," he said.

The 741st BEB plans to capture lessons learned in a battalion white paper and forward the concept to the Engineer Community.



(L-R) Capt. Samuel Cushing, 741st BEB, Austin Hansen, director of manufacturing for Lorica Technologies Inc., and 1st Lt. Andrew Lucas, of the battalion's S-3 section, attach a live M1A3 Bangalore torpedo to a Lorica Mule 28 unmanned aerial system.

TRAINING

173rd CES secures critical early-warning radar site in remote Alaska

Story by Master Sgt. Daniel Reed,
173rd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

HUGHES, Alaska — A detachment of 10 Airmen from the 173rd Civil Engineer Squadron completed a high-stakes, 13-day deployment to the Alaskan interior, repairing critical utility infrastructure at a remote early-warning radar site while saving the Air Force more than \$1.6 million.

Executed as Operation 26-02 Indian Mountain, the mission secured the vital water and fuel systems supporting the installation's Upgraded Early Warning Radar. The radar provides continuous aerospace surveillance data to the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) Region Air Operations Center at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, making the site an indispensable homeland defense asset.

Situated approximately 16 miles east of the village of Hughes, the site is completely cut off from road networks, the facility is accessible only via a steep 4,100-foot gravel runway. The site's extreme sub-arctic isolation required meticulous, front-loaded logistics, including pre-palletizing all materials at Kingsley Field, Oregon, and deploying a specialized advance team to stage equipment.

"If you wanted an opportunity to be self-sufficient and practice executing work in a remote location with no follow-on support, this is it," said 2nd Lt. David Case, 611th Civil Engineering Squadron,

Engineer Officer. Although the map says Hughes is 16 miles as the crow fly, the village is not accessible from Indian Mountain. There are no roads and if there was a dog sled trail at one time, it has long been grown over and lost."

Partnering with the 611th and 354th Civil Engineer Squadrons, U.S. Army Aviation, and the U.S. Marine Corps, the 173rd Civil Engineering Squadron executed three major infrastructure overhauls. The most critical project involved replacing a failing wooden bridge that supported the installation's sole water line, which provides the only means of fire suppression and sanitation for the facility.

To safely bypass the hazardous river crossing below, a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter from the 52nd Aviation Regiment, rigged by a Marine Corps Helicopter Support Team, executed a precision sling-load operation to fly the new aluminum bridge structure across the river, and placed next to the bride footings to be repaired by the 173rd CES.

The team repaired a 4,300-foot above-ground fuel pipeline heavily damaged by frost heaves. The pipeline repair restores a gravity-flow fuel delivery system essential for the site's off-grid diesel generators. Without it, the



Airmen from the 173rd Fighter Wing's Civil Engineering Squadron repaired the sole water line during Operation 26-02 Indian Mountain at Indian Mountain Long Range Radar Station in Alaska on July 9, 2026. Fixing the bridge ensured proper sanitation and fire suppression for the nearby facility. (Courtesy photo, 173rd CES)

early-warning radar would suffer a catastrophic power failure.

Additionally, Airmen completed extensive riverbank stabilization which included hand-packing heavy rock-filled gabion baskets to prevent seasonal washouts near the facility's critical wellhouse. Completing the primary projects ahead of schedule allowed the team to conduct a crucial tower survey to site a new atmospheric sampling and communications antenna.

By utilizing military troop labor rather than commercial defense contractors, the multi-capable team completed the projects for approximately \$75,000 in total expenses. Initial commercial bids for the three projects totaled \$1.74 million, resulting in net savings of \$1,665,000 for the Air Force.

"Saving money is always great, but the real victory here was proving that even an ANG lean Prime BEEF (Base Engineer Emergency Force) unit can pull off what is seemingly impossible," said Master Sgt. Michael Snodgrass, 173rd Civil Engineering Squadron, Engineer Assistant. Kind of satisfying that everything went right, especially when everyone keeps saying you can't do that. It seems that preparation, leadership, and team cohesion really shined through."

Operating under strict safety protocols due to extreme medical isolation and high-risk work environments, the deployment concluded with zero safety mishaps or injuries.

"No one is surprised as I am," said Staff Sgt. Derek Sjogren, 173rd Fighter Wing, Emergency

Management. As a seasoned EMT and Fire Fighter I have responded to my fair share of construction site accidents and rendered lifesaving aid to workers in much more supported and safer projects than this one. To come out of this without any incidents is amazing."

The success of Operation 26-02 Indian Mountain directly aligns with the 2026 National Defense Strategy's mandates to defend the U.S. homeland, increase joint-force burden-sharing, and supercharge the defense industrial base by relying on highly trained, organic military sustainment.

"This deployment was a huge success for the 173rd CES, being a step along the way to a culmination of a deliberate training plan and a culture shift to push the unit well outside comfort zones and not just survive but thrive in the unknown and prove that we can run with scissors and get the job done," said Maj. Joe Young, 173rd Civil Engineering Squadron commander. This aligns well as the 173rd FW and Kingsley Field ANGB begin transitioning from AETC to ACC, requiring an entire change in mindset and a higher level of lethality and readiness. As mission change and bedding down new aircraft drive us into the unknown, Engineers lead the way."



The rebuilt bridge completed by 173rd CES members at at Indian Mountain Long Range Radar Station, in Alaska. (Courtesy photo, 173rd FW CES)

Kingsley Field Airmen hone their expertise during Arctic Wrench Exercise

Story and photo by Airman Zach Cook
173rd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

EIELSON AFB, Alaska - More than 70 airmen from the 173rd Fighter Wing Maintenance Group (MXG) and Mission Support Group (MSG) participated in an annual training event, Arctic Wrench, at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, Aug. 8, 2026.

Kingsley Field airmen were provided an opportunity to train with members of the 168th Fighter Wing, 354th Operations Support Squadron, 355th Fighter Squadron and 356th Fighter Squadron, to become more capable as "Mission Ready Airmen".

"The MXG gained direct, hands-on exposure on how the "Mission Ready Airman" concept fits into the 5th generation fighter platform," said Master Sgt. Zachary Vaughn, 173rd Maintenance Group, Quality

Assurance Inspector. "All MXG AFSCs were able to see how their specific work center fits into the greater role of producing the next aircraft sorties."

Airmen of the 173rd FW were able to gain hands-on experience with the F-35, clear a two-year Vehicle Maintenance Limited Technical Inspections and disposition preparation backlog, and accomplish heavy weapons qualifications, all while embracing challenges that came from field conditions and limited resources.

Senior Master Sgt. James Childs, 173rd MSG Vehicle Management Superintendent and Fleet Manager added, "The whole experience gave our mechanics an opportunity to see and understand how vehicles that operate at -50 degrees must be prepared and maintained to



ORANG Tech. Sgt. Jared Lauderdale, an 173rd LRS Mechanic, inspects the engine of a vehicle from the 168th Logistics Readiness Squadron at Eielson Air Force Base, July 14, 2026.

meet the mission under such harsh weather conditions."

Exercise Arctic Wrench was a part of the Wing's first Annual Training Readiness and Lethality event, with Eielson AFB as one of nine geographically separated training locations. This gave airmen the opportunity to train, adapt and overcome challenges and conditions in a variety of environments.

"We returned more ready and lethal, as well as challenged and better educated, with a greater sense of unity and cohesiveness," said Chief Master Sgt. Barbara Bennett, 173rd LRS, First Sergeant. "I'm proud of each of our airmen, who committed themselves to taking this exercise seriously and representing Kingsley Field well."

Col. Adam Gaudinski, 173rd Fighter Wing, commander, tasked airmen at the start of the Wing Annual Training event to "learn something new, sharpen your skills, and embrace every opportunity to become better than you were yesterday."

"Readiness is never an accident. This event made us earn it through preparation and our willingness to embrace difficult conditions before they become real-world requirements," he said. "When America needs combat-ready Airmen, we'll be ready to respond."

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11: A NATION PAUSES TO REMEMBER



SALEM, Ore. – Oregon National Guard members joined ceremonies across the state on Sept. 11, 2026, to mark the 25th anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center in New York City, at the Pentagon, and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Events were held at the Major General George A. White Building in Salem, the 9/11 Honor and Remember Gold Star Families' Memorial at Microchip Technologies in Gresham, and the 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb at Autzen Stadium in Eugene.

On September 11, 2001, a total of 2,977 individuals lost their lives, including all 246 passengers and crew members, as well as the 19 hijackers, aboard the four aircraft involved in the attacks. In remembrance of the 25th anniversary, Oregon Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen came together to honor those who died in the immediate aftermath and during subsequent military operations.

Oregon National Guardsmen Gather in Salem

At the Salem ceremony, Chaplain (Col.) Jacob Scott, Oregon National Guard state chaplain, delivered the invocation. He asked for comfort, shelter, and protection while remembering the shock and sorrow Americans experienced 25 years ago.

Brig. Gen. David N. Unruh, Air Component Commander, Oregon National Guard, spoke about the importance of remembering September 11th and the perspective it provides today.

"We couldn't just let today go by unmarked like any other," Unruh said. "Remembrance helps us make meaning of our own lives."

Unruh reflected on the lives lost in New York City, at the Pentagon and in rural Pennsylvania, where

Oregon National Guard marks the 25th Anniversary of the September 11th Terrorist Attacks

Story by John Hughel and Sgt. 1st Class Cory Grogan, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

passengers aboard Flight 93 fought back against the hijackers.

"The loss of life that day and in the wars that followed is heartbreaking," Unruh said. "Yet equally as profound are the stories of heroism, from the first responders to ordinary Americans who simply pitched in to help where they could."

In addition, Oregon Army National Guard Assistant Adjutant General Russell Gibson delivered remarks during the ceremony.

Scott encouraged those gathered to carry forward the example of the first responders and others who moved toward danger to help people in need.

"Put one foot in front of another and take the next step," Scott said. "Climb the stairs. Do what it takes to serve those in need."

Scott then connected their example to opportunities to serve others today.

"Take the next step. We do what's right," Scott said. "If we do that, we'll honor those who died on 9/11 and those heroes who went before us."

The ceremony included a moment of silence for those killed in the attacks. The Oregon Army National Guard's 234th Army Band performed "God Bless America," followed by the sounding of "TAPS."



ORARNG Chaplain (Col.) Jacob Scott, along with other Oregon National Guard leaders, service members, and community members, gathered in Salem, Oregon, for a 9/11 remembrance ceremony on Sept. 11, 2026.



Oregon National Guard attendees face the American and Oregon flags as "Taps" is played at the 9/11 remembrance ceremony in Salem, Oregon, on September 11, 2026. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Cory Grogan, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs)

Honor and Remember Flags memorializes September 11th Gold Star Families

During the 9/11 Honor and Remember Gold Star Families' Memorial ceremony in Gresham, Oregon, Army National Guard Sgt. Scott Steele performed "TAPS" at a commemorative display of 300



Oregon Army National Guard Sgt. Scott Steele renders a hand salute after playing TAPS at the 9/11 Honor and Remember Gold Star Families' Memorial ceremony at Microchip Technologies in Gresham, Oregon, on September 11, 2026 (Photo by John Hughel, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs).

"Honor and Remember Flags" at Microchip Technologies, followed by Chaplain (Capt.) Wes Moldogo, who provided the opening prayer, saying that 9/11 changed our nation forever and impacted countless military families in the years to follow.

"Especially for our Gold Star families: the parents, spouses, children, siblings, and loved ones who carry both the profound pride and the enduring sorrow," Moldogo said.

Gold Star Families are the loved ones of those who gave their lives while serving in the U.S. military. The practice dates back to World War I. Back then, families of those serving would display a blue star. If that service member died, a gold star was emblazoned on top.

The display and ceremony honored local Oregonians and Washingtonians who died after 9/11 during the U.S.-led global counterterrorism campaign. Organized by Kelly Broomall, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, the tribute featured 300 flags, each honoring a specific service member and displaying their name with a yellow ribbon.

"There were people like Kelly who had an idea a few years after 9/11, and this is what it became," said Greg Matthews, a retired Gresham Fire Department Chief, a former Oregon House Representative (District 50), and volunteer staff member at Camp Rosenbaum.

As master of ceremonies, Greg Matthews introduced Oregon Air National Guard Col. Ryan Barton, deputy commander of the Oregon Joint Domestic Operations Command.

"Colonel Barton manages the day-to-day administration, planning, and execution of all processes and programs that

prepare the Oregon National Guard for continued operations during federal or state emergencies, including mandates and natural disasters."

Speaking about the events of twenty-five years ago, Barton said, "With many people trying to escape the danger that morning, it was firefighters, police officers, paramedics, and other first responders who were already moving toward the danger.

Throughout my career, I have always felt a strong connection between the military and those who serve our communities. September 11th showed the very best of that shared commitment and the courage in the face of uncertainty."

George Lutz, a Gold Star father who lost his son, Corporal Tony Lutz, in Iraq on December 29, 2005, created the Honor and Remember Flag, which is now on display. The Flag was unveiled in 2008. Oregon is the only West Coast state to have officially adopted it. Inspired by the events of September 11, Corporal Lutz joined the U.S. Army in 2004.



Oregon Air National Guard Col. Ryan Barton, deputy commander of the Oregon Joint Domestic Operations Command, delivers commemorative remarks at the 9/11 Honor and Remember Gold Star Families' Memorial ceremony at Microchip Technologies in Gresham, Oregon, on Sept. 11, 2026. (Photo by John Hughel, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs)

"I was worried when he joined the military, but he told me, 'Dad, I think I can make a difference,'" Lutz said. "What I have heard from hundreds of Gold Star families across the country — they don't want their loved ones to be forgotten."

Following Lutz's remarks, family members remembered Army Sergeant Brennan Gibson, who was killed when an IED exploded near the Humvee in Baghdad, Iraq.

"In a single moment, the future we had imagined was gone," said Linda Gibson, Brennan's mother. "Even now twenty years later, there are still moments when we feel like we did when we first received that call."

Story continued on Page 15

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11: A NATION PAUSES TO REMEMBER

Securing the Portland Air National Guard Base on September 11th

Story by Steven Conklin,
142nd Wing Public Affairs

PORTLAND, Ore. – Twenty-five years ago Master Sergeant James Lowery was an Airman fresh out of basic training and technical school, working at the Portland Air National Guard Base full-time. On the morning of September 11, 2001, he had just gone to sleep after a night shift. Then his mom woke him up.

“She’s like, ‘hey, you got to see the TV,’” Lowery recalled. “I was watching the TV, and I knew it...I’m going to get a phone call any minute. I swear, it was not 20 minutes later, and I got a phone call that everyone was to report to base.”

Lowery reported to base, and Force Protection Condition (FPCON) Delta was implemented.

“I was pretty fresh (out of training) and it was extremely surreal. Okay, well, like, what do we do now? Why are we in Delta over here on the west coast?”

FPCON Delta is the highest protection level and is the designation for actions required after an attack has just occurred or is imminent, which restricts military installations to mission required personnel only.

For Airmen like Lowery, life had changed quite quickly with that implementation.

“I don’t even remember how many days we worked before we got

a day off. I remember sitting out on the flight-line. It was that very next night with our full (mobility) bag on us, flack jacket, helmet, gas mask, night vision goggles inside your bag, walking the line.”



Security Forces Airmen stand post on the ramp at the Portland Air National Guard Base in Nov. 2001 after the events of September 11th. Security on base was increased for months after the attacks, including extra protection for the F-15 Eagles operating out of Portland. (U.S. Air Force photo by Lance Cheung)

Security Forces Airmen on PANG were not only in charge of securing the base, they were also charged with protecting a unique mission out of Portland: Operation Noble Eagle. Much like a fire station, the base was operating an “alert” mission, where pilots and aircraft maintenance crew members were ready on base at a moment’s notice to launch fighter aircraft with live missiles loaded to patrol the Pacific Northwest.

“I remember them firing up. They loaded all the aircraft up with live missiles,” Lowery explained, describing how the wing began performing combat air patrols. “So, every two hours there were planes in the air, circling Oregon, they’d come down and two more would go up.”

For the other mission essential Airmen on base, this was a whole new experience for them as well. Senior Master Sgt. Jeff Reynolds, Weapons Safety manager for the 142nd Wing, says that day opened his eyes.

“It was unprecedented to see such an increase in our security posture. I was already accustomed to working in controlled areas and following strict security procedures, but after 9/11 those procedures, and the people that enforce them, took on a whole new meaning and level of importance.”

As different and uncomfortable as the experience was, Lowery felt a sense of calm and purpose that day and in the weeks that came.

“I was in Iraq in 2009. Going on deployment, you know what to expect. You train for it. [For] 9/11, there wasn’t training, you didn’t get that notice. You got the phone call: ‘this happened. America is being attacked’. You come into work, and your only priority is these aircraft because

we don’t know what’s going to happen over here.”

While security forces manning increased, and the number of full time staff on base decreased, a bond and sense of purpose was built for the Airmen who still reported during the high Delta and Charlie protection level times that followed the attacks.

“That was a long time ago. The type of camaraderie that brought within our unit is probably bigger than I’ve ever seen, though... when 9/11 happened, we were one gigantic team. It wasn’t just us. It was the wing.”

While the shock of what was happening to the nation did occur to Lowery, the significance of his new role for that day and the coming months did not shake him.

“You just know you have a job to do and a duty to do,” Lowery said. “It’s almost like you’re numb. You just don’t think about it.”

Now, Twenty years later, Lowery still serves at the Portland Air National Guard Base as a security forces Airman, and some things have never changed since that day. Security internationally had evolved, for civilians and military alike.

“Before 9/11, we were in force protection condition normal...but we knew we would never go back and see it, and we never have.”



Master Sgt. James Lowery of official Air Force photo. Lowery served at the Portland Air National Guard Base after joining in 2000 and was on duty on the day of September 11th, 2001.

Remembering 9/11
story continued
from Page 14

Sgt. Gibson was assigned to the 509th Infantry (Airborne), 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, and deployed on October 5, 2006, just after his son was born. He had only been deployed for 69 days when he died on December 10. Like so many others, watching the horrific terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, spurred Gibson to action and to join after graduating from Oregon State University in 2003.

“This year marks twenty years since we lost Brendan. As I reflect on this milestone, I do so with tears and thoughts of all the moments Brendan never had. His son was born two days before his deployment. He never had the chance to see the wonderful young man he has become. He looks remarkably like his father, even the same gestures and mannerisms. Beautifully, God has a sense of humor.”



Linda Gibson, a Gold Star Mother of Army Sgt. Brennan Gibson, delivers commemorative remarks at the 9/11 Honor and Remember Gold Star Families’ Memorial ceremony at Microchip Technologies in Gresham, Oregon, on Sept. 11, 2026. (Photo by John Hughel, Oregon Military Department Public Affairs)

9/11 Memorial Stair Climb at
Autzen Stadium

As a growing tradition among Oregon National Guardsmen, nearly 40 Citizen-Soldiers and family members took part in the Stair Climb Memorial, held at Autzen Stadium at the University of Oregon. For the second year in a row, Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Oregon’s Adjutant General, also took part in the memorial event.

The stair-climbing event wasn’t timed, but many participants were firefighters in full protective gear or soldiers carrying heavy backpacks, pushing themselves to face the day’s tough challenges. The groups moved up and down the stairway aisles, cheering each other on.

The highest floor reached by first responders on the morning of September 11, 2001, was the 78th floor, and when the climbers reached that number, they each took turns ringing a fire bell as a fitting tribute while they continued around the football stadium. In total, participants climbed the same height as 110 stories, matching the fallen Twin

Towers, where many FDNY firefighters tried to climb to rescue people trapped in the two burning skyscrapers.

Twenty-five years later, the Oregon National Guard continues to remember those who were lost and to honor the courage and service shown on September 11th and in its aftermath by those answering the call to service.



Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General of the Oregon National Guard, along with Command Chief Master Sgt. Brent W. Cavanias, are joined by nearly 40 other Oregon National Guard service members and family members after taking part in the 9/11 Stair Climb at Autzen Stadium on Sept. 11, 2026. (Photo by ORARNG Capt. John Weisenberger)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL EVENTS



An Oregon Army National Guard Soldier assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment carries the unit guidon while leading participants during the annual Community Ruck March and Food Drive at the Forest Grove Armory in Forest Grove, Oregon , on July 11, 2026. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Cory Grogan, Joint Forces Headquarters Public Affairs)

FOREST GROVE, Ore. — Soldiers, veterans and community members laced up their boots for more than just exercise during the 2-218th Field Artillery Community Ruck March and Food Drive on July 11, 2026, in Forest Grove.

The annual event brought together Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers, local veterans organizations, community partners and residents for a morning focused on service, fitness and community. Participants completed a ruck march while donating food to support the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry in Forest Grove.

Designed to bring Soldiers and the community together, the event featured a one-mile family walk, a five-mile ruck march and a competitive seven-mile race. Participants of all ages and fitness levels were invited to take part while helping collect food for local families. Organizers estimated this year's event would collect more than 1100 pounds of food.

For the Soldiers of the Oregon Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment, the event was about more than completing miles.



Soldiers assigned to the ORARNG's 21-218th Field Artillery Regiment joined veterans, community partners and local residents during the annual Community Ruck March and Food Drive in Forest Grove, Oregon. (Photo by Sgt. Jeremiah Tanael)

"It's an opportunity to show the community who we are," said Sgt. 1st Class Tony Charles, readiness noncommissioned officer for Bravo Battery, 2nd Battalion, 218th Field Artillery Regiment. "We want civilians to come out, meet Soldiers and see that we're approachable. The food drive gives everyone a chance to work together for a good cause."

Charles said organizing an event of this size requires months of planning by Soldiers throughout the battalion. He credited Headquarters and Headquarters Battery Soldier Capt. Kyle Ponder with coordinating the event, including developing the route and working with community partners.

Events like this help strengthen the relationship between the Oregon Army National Guard and the communities we serve. Bringing Soldiers, families, veterans and local organizations together around a common purpose builds trust, strengthens partnerships and reminds people that we're part of this community every day, not just during emergencies."

That focus on community partnership began during planning. Lt. Col. Ana Robledo encouraged planners to make the event "forward-facing" by engaging directly with the Forest Grove community and giving the event a clear purpose. That purpose became supporting the local food pantry.

The mission also resonated with local veterans.

Members of Forest Grove American Legion Post 2 volunteered to support participants throughout the event.

"We don't have an active-duty military base here," said Dale Thaler, commander of Legion Post 2 and a 12-year Air Force veteran. "The Oregon National Guard is our military here, and these are our Soldiers. We want them to know we appreciate what they do."

Flynn Phillips, a former Navy corpsman who served 20 years and a past commander of the post, said events like this also help veterans stay connected after military service.

"These Soldiers are the future of the American Legion," Phillips said. "It's important for veterans to stay connected, recruit the next generation and help keep the community connected to the military."

He said today's Soldiers will eventually become tomorrow's retired veterans, making those relationships even more important.

"We're out here supporting these young men and women because someday they'll retire too," Phillips said. "We want to help them with what's next."

The event also strengthened relationships with organizations serving the community.

Dave Wuertz, president of the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry in Forest Grove, said the all-volunteer organization depends on donations from businesses, churches and community groups to serve local families.

The pantry, staffed by 40 to 50 volunteers, is open four days each week.

"This kind of food drive is excellent," Wuertz said. "It's really cool to have the Army here interacting with the community. I've lived here and knew the Guard was here, but I'd never really interacted with them before."

The partnership began last year when volunteer Nina Kaufmann coordinated with the Oregon National Guard.

Wuertz said the collaboration demonstrates how military service and community service often go hand in hand. Capt. Ian Rogers, commander of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, crossed the finish line first in the competitive seven-mile event.

"It feels great to compete and support the community," Rogers said.

As participants crossed the finish line carrying rucksacks, the event highlighted that service extends beyond military missions. For the Oregon Army National Guard, local veterans, and community volunteers, the annual event demonstrated that supporting neighbors is an important part of finding purpose in support of their community.



Capt. Ian Rogers, commander of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, pauses for a photo with his children after winning the competitive seven-mile race. (Photo by Sgt. Jeremiah Tanael)



Volunteers collect canned food from one of the Oregon Army National Guard soldiers after he has completed the 2-218th Field Artillery Regiment Ruck March, helping support St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry in Forest Grove, Oregon , on July 11, 2026. (Photo by Sgt. Jeremiah Tanael)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL EVENTS

Oregon Guard Soldiers lend a hand at Salvation Army Hope House

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

MEDFORD, Ore. – Seventeen Soldiers assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, traded their weapons systems for shovels, stain brushes and weed eaters during a community service project at the Salvation Army Hope House in Medford, on July 11, 2026.

around 250 people a year, offering case management and supportive services in a structured environment. “People who have been homeless that are really ready to get a fresh start in life can come and stay here,” said Maj. Randy Mulch, who oversees the Salvation Army’s work in Jackson County with his wife. “They meet with their counselor weekly, make life goals, learn life skills, pay off bad debts, get a job, save up money, get

a former member of the battalion’s Alpha Company who deployed with the unit to Iraq from 2009 to 2010 and to Afghanistan from 2014 to 2015. “I’m just a local businessman that saw a program that I liked, and I wanted to do something to help it,” Robertson said. “When I was walking through, I saw some things that just needed labor and maintenance, and I thought, what better way to get that done than calling the Guard?” Robertson reached out to 1st Sgt. Jeremy Warren, the first sergeant for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, who has served with the battalion for nearly his entire career, including time in Alpha Company. Warren told him the unit had been looking for service opportunities, and the two settled on a date. For at least one Soldier, the work was familiar territory. Sgt. Donovan Pavloff, a mortarman with the battalion, owns a landscaping company in Days Creek, Oregon, that services Roseburg and Douglas County. On Saturday, he put his civilian trade to work for the community, installing irrigation valves and helping guide the landscaping effort. Brig. Gen. Alan R. Gronewold, Adjutant General, Oregon, has emphasized that projects like this reflect why the Oregon National Guard is the military service of choice for Oregonians. “Our strength comes from being connected to each other and to our communities,” Gronewold said. “When our Citizen-Soldiers volunteer their time and skills to serve their neighbors, they demonstrate exactly what it means to be Connected, Competent and Committed.”



Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, 41st IBC, gather with community volunteers and Salvation Army staff in front of seven newly completed studio apartments during a community service project in Medford on July 11, 2026.

Working alongside volunteers from a local business, the Soldiers dug trenches for sprinkler lines, spread bark, planted trees and shrubs with guidance from a local arborist, built walking paths, cleared weeds along the roadside and stained new benches for placement throughout the property. “They are an organization that is helping to rehabilitate and stabilize families experiencing homelessness, and so we got the privilege of coming out here and serving them along with the team of their volunteers,” said Chaplain (Capt.) Aaron McAndrews, the battalion chaplain. “It’s really been a cool transformation to see it all unfold.” Since 1996, Hope House has helped people experiencing homelessness in Jackson County get back on their feet. The drug- and alcohol-free transitional living facility serves

connected with our community and get back into life.” The average stay at Hope House is about 10 months, Mulch said, though residents making progress can stay up to two years. The timing of the project carried extra weight. Hope House recently completed construction of its Hope Lofts expansion, seven new fully furnished studio apartments, and the volunteer effort helped ready the campus for the building’s dedication and grand opening, scheduled for July 17, 2026. “It’s been great timing, and helped us even more than we thought we could to get ready,” Mulch said. The connection between the Guard and Hope House came through Chris Robertson, owner of Invictus Protection Agency, a local security company, and



Sgt. Bradley Daniels, left, a member of the sniper section, and Sgt. Donovan Pavloff, a mortarman, both assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, kneel beside a newly installed irrigation valve at the Salvation Army Hope House in Medford, Ore., July 11, 2026.

Guardian Dragons at the World Beat Dragon Boat Race

Photos by W. Chris Clyne, OMD Public Affairs

SALEM, Ore. – On June 27, 2026, the Oregon National Guard’s “Guardian Dragons”

dragon boat team competed in the annual World Beat Dragon Boat Race at Riverfront Park in Salem, held on the Willamette River. The Guardian Dragons bring together the entire Oregon National Guard community. Their team includes Oregon Army National Guard Soldiers, Oregon Air National Guard Airmen, civilian employees from the Oregon Military Department, and National Guard family members, all paddling as one team. Lt. Col. (ret.) Carmen Barteling helped organize the team’s participation but could not paddle this year because of an injury. She was still there to support the crew. The race course is about 350 meters long, running along the Willamette River



from the south side of the Center Street bridge to just south of the Riverfront Park dock. This sprint requires every paddler to work together with power, precision, and perfect timing. The World Beat Dragon Boat Club, based in Salem, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and a member of the International Dragon Boat Federation and the Pacific Dragon Boat Association, hosts the race every year on the last Saturday of June.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL EVENTS

Forever young: Camp Rosenbaum thrives with the spirited support of its retired military members



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

WARRENTON, Ore. – You can hear the music booming from outside the building as packs of kids race inside, shouting as they begin to dance around the room, weaving lines across the floor. The adults? They are not just fine with the chaos – they are the ringleaders, cranking up the sound system inside “The Clubhouse,” and trading high-fives with every passing dancer. This is Camp Rosenbaum, where enthusiasm knows no bounds.

Nearly every summer for more than fifty-seven years, Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center near Warrenton, Oregon, sheds its military persona for one week and becomes a wondrous summer camp for children from low-income families. The clamor of obstacle courses and the echoes of weapons ranges give way to laughter, fishing poles, campfire songs, and horseback rides, filling this historic and diverse Oregon Coast military facility with the spirit of adventure.

This year, more than 140 kids ages 9-12 are taking part in a traditional week long overnight camp, with busloads of boys and girls arriving on Sunday, July 26. Between epic Dodgeball matches at the gym and sandcastle-building on the Pacific coastline beach, campers dive into daily themes that spark communication, teamwork, sportsmanship, and leadership. Guiding them are volunteer counselors whose identities remain a secret: first responders, police officers, National Guardsmen, and community leaders all step into new roles for the week.



Oregon Chief Master Sgt. (ret.) Elaine-Loan Nguyen, camp name ‘Duchess,’ pauses for a photograph at the Camp Rosenbaum Clubhouse on July 28, 2026, as part of Camp Rosenbaum, a youth citizenship camp held each year at Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center.

The true spirit of the Camp lives on in the staff, with over 200 returning each year, eager to support the campers. Some circle the dates on their calendars months in advance, and even after retiring from military service, many National Guardsmen still find their way back to Camp.

“To put it simply – Camp is family,” said Don Claremont, who goes by the camp name ‘Hiker.’ “It’s an actual reunion because some folks that I’ve worked with in the [National] Guard, I see come back here year after year – as I say, it’s a roll call.”

During his military career, he was a jet engine maintainer and quality assurance chief for the F-15 Eagle fleet at the Portland Air National Guard Base. The retired master sergeant has been part of Camp Rosenbaum for 23 years and has served as a counselor for most of that time. Now, as group leader, he’s



Campers, counselors, and other volunteer staff at Camp Rosenbaum enjoy the activities in the ‘Club House’ atmosphere at Camp Rosenbaum, a Youth Citizenship Camp, held at the Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center, near Warrenton, Oregon, on July 28, 2026.

supporting other counselors as the organized daily schedule of pandemonium keeps the staff on their toes.

“Group leaders here at camp rally approximately 12 counselors and up to 48 campers each year. If there are any issues with the campers, we escalate them as they arise and help resolve them with each of the counselors,” Claremont said, describing some of the layers built into the support for the staff that has been successful year after year. “There is so much going on. We’re taking some kids to the beach for the very first time, then out to the campsite to ride horses and experience the natural environment here, which includes knowing about TAPS and how quietly respectful we need to be when it is being played.”

Camp Rosenbaum began as a spark of inspiration from Brigadier General (Ret.) Fred M. Rosenbaum, who served in both the Oregon Army and Air National Guard. Driven by his belief that children in low-income housing deserved opportunities to thrive and dream big, he envisioned a youth citizenship camp that could change the direction of their lives. What began as an idea to use the military training grounds at Camp Rilea for one week each year as a summer camp has blossomed into a cherished annual tradition for more than five decades.

This passion was rooted in Fred’s childhood. As a Holocaust survivor in Austria, he escaped to England as a child on the Kindertransport—a rescue program that brought children from Nazi-controlled territories to safety.

He spent two years in England as a foster child before reuniting with his parents. In 1941, they moved together to the United States. In America, Fred’s hard work and emphasis on furthering his education eventually led to him becoming a brigadier general in the Oregon Air National Guard, chairman of the Housing Authority of Portland, and a respected businessman in Portland.

Claremont, who spent part of each summer with Fred until his passing in 2010, said the Camp’s life force still resonates with its goals. “We’re bringing all these different kinds of volunteers together and getting them on the same page for a week,” while the staff works on the long-held themes: ‘Good Citizens work together, are fair, share, are loyal, care, and are everywhere.’

Camp Rosenbaum flourishes thanks to a behind-the-scenes team that runs like clockwork. From cooks and bus drivers to administrators, each expert ensures campers are fed, transported, and cared for. For 24 years, retired chief master sergeant Elaine-Loan Nguyen, known at Camp as ‘Duchess,’ has quietly supported the staff, making sure everything runs smoothly.

“I spent the first four years as a counselor and slowly transitioned into the military camp coordinator position, doing admin stuff, which I actually love,” she said. “I love the staff, obviously, and love seeing the kids come back every year, but I really love this camp – that’s what keeps me coming back.”

During her military career, Loan-Nguyen worked a majority of her career in the 142nd



“Tipper” (right) one of the camp counselors at Camp Rosenbaum, works with kids in the Arts and Crafts classroom at Camp Rosenbaum, on July 28, 2026. Camp Rosenbaum, a Youth Citizenship Camp, is held at the Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center, near Warrenton, Oregon each summer.

Wing’s Mission Support Squadron after serving four years of active duty at McChord Air Force Base, now known as Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. Eventually, she transferred to the Oregon National Guard Joint Force Headquarters in Salem, where she managed the human resources program, including hires, control rates, pilot and aviation bonuses, and training. At Camp, many of those organizational skills are still put to use.

“One of the things we changed in the past few years is to present the five-year military award for camp participation during commander’s call, so it gets the recognition it deserves, and others learn how to become

Story continued on Page 19

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL EVENTS

Camp Rosenbaum Story continued from Page 18



Oregon's First Spouse, Aimee Koteck Wilson (right), along with other "Very Important Guests," takes a tour of Camp Rosenbaum, a Youth Citizenship Camp held each summer at the Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center near Warrenton, Oregon, on July 28, 2026.

involved with the program," she said, relating how National Guard military members earn The Oregon State Commendation Medal by volunteering at Camp Rosenbaum for five years. "Because obviously, as the camp staff gets older, we move on and we need someone to replace us."

For many Air Guard members who volunteer at Camp, it becomes a unique chance to connect with people they might never cross paths with, each from different corners of the Portland Air National Guard Base. Loan-Nguyen, like many others, sees this as a win-win for everyone working at Camp.

"A perfect example is Ryan Rosso (camp name 'Curb'); he is one of our bus drivers that I've worked with here, but when I was back on base, he was in a different part of the unit, and I might not have ever met him without our involvement here at Camp."

This sense of connectedness not only strengthens the resilience of military members but also creates a pathway to mentorship, personal growth, and fresh professional insights. Retired chief master sergeant Shelly Davison, affectionately known as 'Camera Bag' at Camp, has seen these transformations unfold from a front-row seat for nearly three decades. Throughout the week, her team of photographers and video specialists captures the special moments of the campers' journey. As the week draws to

a close, all the campers and the entire staff gather back at the Club House one last time, sharing laughter and tears as they watch a moving video montage before the campers board the buses home.

"The mission we have and the way we can support these kids, I don't think you can find anywhere else. Just the amazing people out here. My daughter Sydney (camp name Tipper) started as a youth volunteer at 14 and keeps coming back because she is super passionate about it," Davison said, placing an even higher value on what the camp 'Family' entails.

Throughout her long National Guard career, Davison took on a variety of roles, moving from the multimedia department to communication custodian, then to public affairs, services, and ultimately leading as superintendent in the Communications Squadron. Her journey mirrors the evolution of photography itself, as she transitioned from capturing moments on film in the analog era to mastering digital photography, both in the military and as technology transformed the camp experience.

"It's been an interesting journey. When I started in 1996, we were talking slides, running film to the local Fred Meyer...then we evolved to videotape, and not to long after it's all digital...which is both a blessing and a curse...because we're going through over 4,000 images in a day that we need to sort through," she said, describing the challenge to capture all the elements of Camp.

These images become treasured keepsakes for families, help showcase

the full experience of the Camp, and culminate in the much-anticipated 'End of Camp Rosenbaum Video' presentation, skillfully crafted by Tech. Sgt. Alexander Frank, known at Camp as 'High Rise.' The



Don Claremont, who goes by the camp name 'Hiker,' enjoys the activities in the 'Club House' atmosphere at Camp Rosenbaum, a Youth Citizenship Camp, held at the Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center, near Warrenton, Oregon, on July 28, 2026. Camp Rosenbaum is a joint partnership between the Oregon Air National Guard, Home Forward, the Portland Police Department, and other area first responders.

two worked together at the wing's public affairs office, and the week of Camp allows them to team up again with a staff of three others.

"It is incredible to see everybody, but I feel like the group is getting smaller and smaller," she said, reflecting on her years of experience at Camp. "But...this really gives you a chance to do some mentorship. Technology changes all the time. New blood is good, and we need that, right?"



Oregon Chief Master Sgt. (ret.) Shelly Davison, camp name 'Camera Bag' (left), Tech. Sgt. Alexander Frank, camp name 'High Rise' (right), take a break from taking photographs of campers during the Sandcastle Building Contest on July 28, 2026, as part of Camp Rosenbaum, a youth citizenship camp held each year at Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center.

This emphasizes one of the salient points of Camp: prioritizing the long-term well-being of marginalized people and children seeking guidance in an ever-increasing, fast-paced world. The summer camp experience gives everyone a chance to thrive and live in the moment – feeling valued and continuing to reach out to make lasting changes in the community.

Photo Left: Horses from the Camp Rosenbaum Campsite arrive at the Sandcastle building contest as part of Camp Rosenbaum, a Youth Citizenship Camp held each summer at the Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center near Warrenton, Oregon, on July 28, 2026. Camp Rosenbaum is a joint partnership between the Oregon Air National Guard, Home Forward, the Portland Police Department, and other area first responders.



FEATURES

The Rees Training Center continues its efforts To preserve Western Burrowing Owl colonies

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

HERMISTON, Ore. – Etched into the landscape and spaced in a strategic grid across miles of sagebrush steppe, 1,001 concrete “igloos” rise above the arid high-desert plains. Built in 1941, in the lead-up to WWII, they were used to store munitions until the end of the Cold War. Their presence still leaves a permanent mark on the geography and history of this region of Eastern Oregon.

Nestled among these long-forgotten fortified bunkers lies another kind of refuge: hidden underground shelters built to safeguard and revive the vulnerable Western Burrowing Owl populations that call this land home.



Rows of 'igloos' at the former Umatilla Chemical Depot once stored military ordnance and chemical weapons while the site was active. At its peak, the depot held about 12 percent of the U.S. chemical weapons stockpile. These bunkers are 80 feet long and 30 feet wide, fitted with a 5-foot-by-10-foot steel doors.

The former Umatilla Chemical Depot, officially closed in 2012 as part of the Department of Defense Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC process, still has more than 200 miles of roads, many of the original military post buildings, machine shops, and warehouses, and 40 miles of unused railroad tracks. Recently, new training facilities and military accommodations have been constructed. These updates are now part of the Rees Training Center (RTC), which uses 7,500 acres of the original 16,000-acre site.

On a warm, windy afternoon on June 10, Rhande Shaw leads a group of volunteers and military service members as they hike to a small hilltop after driving several miles along a series of roads from the operations hub at RTC, which still extends to the former depot boundaries where numerous igloos still stand. There, anticipation quickly gives way to discovery as they locate one of the 29 ingenious artificial burrow sets, constructed from recycled juice barrels, corrugated pipe, and buckets. The juxtaposition of these durable shelters against the open landscape stands out as the group scans the horizon, eager for a glimpse of an adult owl taking flight.

Shaw is a Natural Resources Program Manager for the Oregon Military Department. Her team manages the Oregon Army National Guard's military training lands statewide, caring for forests, grasslands, high-desert plains, rivers, estuaries, and wildlife-rich wetlands. She is now focused on helping the Burrowing Owls that migrate through this land by explaining how they travel, hunt, and build their homes in burrows. This area also has a long history of people moving through it. Just north of where the group stands, Lewis and Clark led the Corps

of Discovery along the Columbia River in 1805-1806, and Oregon Trail settlers followed during the great migration era from 1843 to 1860.

“On the land that is now part of the Rees Training Center, we maintain 29 artificial burrows, and we have already been here in May to conduct the first check on these burrows,” she said as the group inspected the first stop of the day. “The males return early to secure the best burrows to attract a mate; often that’s in February or March. This is important because the population of coupled owls has grown to over a hundred just a couple of years ago.”

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla (Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla), which traded with the Lewis and Clark expedition more than 220 years ago, are now using 4,000 acres set aside from the former depot lands to support conservation and maintain the remaining 55 artificial burrows. The Columbia Development Authority has taken over the remaining area and plans to redevelop it.

“All of this has been an ongoing recovery process since 2008, before the depot was officially closed and the land divided, when the Army’s wildlife manager could identify only four pairs of nesting owls,” Shaw said. “As the number of owl pairs continues to rise, so does the number of owlets each year.”

The recovery of the owl population began with assistance from the Global Owl Project, established by David “DJ” Johnson in response to a 2007 request from Don Gillis, then OMD’s natural resources manager, who sought to understand the causes of the owl population’s decline, which was on the brink of collapse. The natural burrows had begun to disappear over time as badger burrows were lost after decades of military development and fence construction. Having used wooden crates to create artificial burrows, “DJ” turned to recycled containers from Tree Top, a Washington-based applesauce and juice company.



Environmental Natural Resource staff members Rhande Shaw and Jon Bloom helps chart their age, as Oregon Guardsmen and civilian employees took the opportunity to learn more about the Western Burrowing Owl at the Rees Training Center on June 10, 2026.



Makenna Shaw gently cradles a young Western Burrowing Owl, assisting her older sister Rhande Shaw, the Natural Resources Program Manager for the Oregon Military Department, as they peer into the artificial burrows to observe the owls’ growth and well-being at the Rees Training Center near Hermiston on June 10, 2026.

Johnson’s team constructed four sites, each with two burrows. Female owls selected one burrow to lay eggs, while males used the other to store prey such as mice, insects, and small snakes. The initial expectation was to attract four owl pairs, one per site. However, researchers observed nine nesting pairs in the first year, and the number rose to 32 the following year.

“The system in place now is designed to last 10 to 15 years and can be relocated if military training areas change or if we see that the burrows are no longer attracting owls to their current locations,” Shaw said. “These are some of the advantages of artificial burrows. Their design allows us to study the owls with minimal disturbance to their shelter.”

Each juice barrel is equipped with a small pail attached to the top, which researchers lift to access the underground chamber. The entrance tubes for the owls are positioned just above ground, measuring 10 to 12 feet in length and nearly 6 inches in diameter, and lead to the nesting and food storage area. The female typically lays seven to twelve eggs and incubates them for about four weeks. During this time, the male provides food for the female. After the eggs hatch, both parents feed the offspring until they reach approximately three months of age.

Shaw and the volunteers examined three shelters, each offering insight into the burrow’s developmental progress. At the first location, they found two eggs, both nonviable. The second shelter contained two nestling owls, estimated to be 23 days old. Shaw and Jon Bloom, a Natural Resource Specialist with the Oregon Military Department, referenced a laminated booklet featuring photographs depicting various growth stages to estimate the owls’ ages. Based on this assessment, they concluded that the owls were just over halfway to maturity, as Western Burrowing Owls require 42 days to reach adulthood.

Story continued on Page 23

FEATURES

Owls Story continued from Page 22

“Over time, the data we have collected has helped track the growth of the owls here at Rees Training Center,” Bloom said, noting that the owls are no longer being banded. “Many of the owls still have the bands, and we record them, but the emphasis continues to focus on the overall habitat and the conditions of the burrows.”



Oregon Army National Guardsmen hold some of the young burrowing owls as they and civilian employees took the opportunity to learn more about the Western Burrowing Owl at the Rees Training Center, near Hermiston, Oregon, on June 11, 2026.

This week, many of the volunteers are Oregon National Guard Soldiers conducting their annual training at RTC. Each has signed up to help out and get to know the training lands they share with the owls. The soldiers are excited to shovel sandy soil around the burrows and to learn more about these birds of prey.

“What a great opportunity to introduce our Soldiers to the owls while they are here for annual training. This is a chance for them to understand all aspects of the training area here at Rees (Training Center),” said Janet Johnson [no relation to DJ Johnson], a Natural Resources Manager for the Oregon Military Department.

On June 11, Johnson was leading a mixed group of soldiers and civilian volunteers on a morning excursion to check several burrows. As the group arrived, one of the adult owls was perched near the burrow’s entrance on a small hill. It took flight as the group left their vehicles, circling the area before disappearing into the distance. Pointing out the entrance, Johnson described the rock pile buildup there as a way to keep predators out.

“Inside the nest chamber, we have also put in a steel mesh so predators cannot enter through the bottom,” Johnson said as she began to remove several baby owls from the open chamber. “The number one thing we want to accomplish with these artificial burrows is to grow the population.”

When the owls are placed in a separate bucket, they emit a long, rattling hiss. Johnson said the sound mimics a rattlesnake’s warning rasp, signaling to predators that a dangerous snake could be nearby. After a while, the owls grow calm, allowing the volunteers to gently hold and observe them. In the chamber, staff inspect the remains of their meals: fragments of insects, bits of a lizard, and tiny bones of mice and other small rodents reveal what has been sustaining these birds.

“On average, these birds can live from six to eight years,” she said. “In 2024, we had a bumper crop of babies, 102 pairs. So this has been a huge success, and this is the most successful nesting colony for growing owls of its kind in the United States.”

The group gently passes the small birds from hand to hand, their bright yellow eyes noticing every movement, and their intricate, beautiful, speckled brown-and-white plumage providing effective camouflage among the brown sagebrush and other vegetation of the native habitat. Their camouflage patterns and colors, in many ways, resemble the soldiers holding them.

Just a few weeks earlier, soldiers assigned to the 442nd Engineer Utilities Detachment were conducting pre-deployment training for a yearlong deployment to the Horn of Africa. They were on the dry riverbed portion of the training range, outside the maintained burrowing area, when a heavy machine operator spotted an owl perched near a potential natural nest burrow. They halted operations in the area, notified range control to report the owls, and immediately roped off the site.

“The soldiers knew exactly what to do when they saw the activity and called in to range control,” Johnson said. “This was not a good area for owls, so we needed to check whether the nest had eggs.”

Until they lay eggs, they are not protected under the Migratory Bird Act, so it was important to see whether the nest now contained eggs. Shaw and Bloom set up a game camera outside the area, then used a burrow camera to see whether anything was in the chamber. With no signs of nesting, they collapsed the chamber to have the owls move out of the area.



Janet Johnson, Natural Resources Manager for the Oregon Military Department, holds a young burrowing owl as she works with a group of Oregon National Guardsmen and civilian employees on June 11, 2026.

“The state of Washington has listed them as a threatened species, but Oregon has not, and for now they are not on the federal species list. That’s where the DoD wants to keep them,” Johnson said, explaining why it’s important to keep the species common. “We need to keep our training lands free of restrictions, which means more paperwork, consultations, and restrictions. My number one job is to make sure that training can continue into perpetuity and without restrictions.”

With the summer nesting period coming to a close, the OMD Environmental team was busy checking on the remaining active nests, even as severe wildland fire throughout the state and region threatened the habitat and strained food supplies for the owls.

“We had 99 fledglings on the OMD property this year. This is a slight decline in survivorship compared with 2024, but we know survivorship ebbs and flows,” Shaw said after reviewing the data in late August. “Fires did not affect the owls on the depot, and it is always something we worry about.”

When reviewing the numbers, Shaw noted that the 99 fledglings from the 29 maintained OMD/RTC side had an 81.25 percent success rate. This was calculated as the total number of nests that fledged at least one chick, divided by the total number of nesting attempts, giving a productivity rate of 3.4 fledglings per breeding pair.



Jon Bloom, a Natural Resources Specialist with the Oregon Military Department, holds a Burrowing Owl as Oregon National Guardsmen and civilian employees took the opportunity to learn more about the Environmental Natural Resource Team’s work on June 10, 2026.

“There are a few theories that could account for this, from warmer winter temperatures to a lower prey base during peak hatching times, but these are just educated guesses, Shaw said, taking into account the drier and warmer weather in the first part of 2026. “I think the biggest impact was the warm and dry winter going into spring in the region.”

The tireless efforts to protect burrowing owls continue. When natural nesting spots are scarce, these artificial burrows have offered these remarkable birds a lifeline. With careful placement and ongoing care, these man-made homes have boosted nesting success, increased occupancy, and helped secure the future of the burrowing owl population in the western United States.



Several small burrowing owls rest in a bucket as Oregon National Guardsmen and civilian employees took the opportunity to learn more about the Environmental Natural Resource Team’s work, part of the Oregon Military Department, during their recent work with the Western Burrowing Owl at the Rees Training Center from June 8-11, 2026.

FEATURES

Oregon Military Department and Oregon State University Partnership turns training site into archaeology classroom

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

NAJAF TRAINING CENTER, Ore. — The elk found it first. Bedding down beneath the hazel trees on a wooded hillside here, the animals churned up ground that had rested undisturbed for generations, and when Oregon State University archaeologists walked the site, stone flakes left by Indigenous toolmakers were lying exposed in the elk beds.

The property, which is federal land managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and licensed to the Oregon Military Department for military training, was first surveyed in the 1990s, when archaeologists identified 10 sites across the wooded hillside. The area holds what Carney described as a multi-component site, containing both pre-contact Indigenous materials and the historic homestead of Greenberry Smith, an early settler who claimed land there. In the field school's first month, students have recovered roughly a dozen projectile points along with ground stone tools, stone flakes, and historic-era glass and ceramics.

The work directly supports the Oregon Military Department's obligations under federal historic preservation law. The department needs to thin the forest and clear invasive vegetation to make the terrain more usable for Soldier training. Before that can happen, it must determine whether the archaeological sites are significant and how they might be affected.

"Part of our federal responsibility is to determine: are these sites important, and if they are, are our actions going to impact them? And if they are going to be impacted, how do we mitigate that effect?" said Matt Diederich, environmental branch chief for the Oregon Military Department. "It all stems from forest management. That's the goal, to better manage the forest here."

Joshua Henderson, cultural resources manager for the Oregon Military Department, said the findings will eventually be evaluated for eligibility to the National Register of

Historic Places, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office and the appropriate Tribes.

That consultation runs throughout the project. The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, along with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, maintain ancestral connections to the Willamette Valley. Grand Ronde representatives have visited the field school weekly to share their perspective with students, including their preference for the term "belongings" rather than "artifacts" when describing recovered items.

"This isn't just a data point," said Michael Lewis, senior archaeologist for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. "This is a place on a cultural landscape with memory, continuing practice on the landscape, and a connection to the past."

For Carney, that spirit of partnership defines the field school. During a recent week of geophysical survey training, she looked around at lunch and saw agency archaeologists, private-sector archaeologists, Tribal

specialists and academics all working side by side.

"That's really what the field school is all about," she said. "It's about collaboration, about moving into the future while also thinking about the past, and training folks to explore different career opportunities related to cultural resource management or heritage more broadly."

For at least one student, the setting carries a personal connection. Nathan McCaslin, an undergraduate archaeology student, previously served in the Oregon Army National Guard, where he supported training operations across the state. His interest in the field was sparked in part by the cultural resources at Biak Training Center in Central Oregon, where remnants of World War II-era training still lie on the surface of the high-desert landscape. He used military education benefits to pursue his degree.

"I think there's a lot of work out there to maintain the memory of those things," McCaslin said, "because we might not have them in the future."

The field school continues through the summer, with additional seasons planned in different portions of the hillside over the next two years. Wherever the students dig next, the ground beneath Najaf Training Center seems ready to keep offering up its history — with or without the elk's help.



OSU Archaeology Field School students document a test unit as Andrew Pauly, standing, a graduate teaching assistant, photographs the excavation at Najaf Training Center, Ore., July 14, 2026. Students initially discovered the site while conducting a pedestrian survey of the area, spotting dozens of stone flakes exposed in nearby elk bedding areas.

"We knew that there had been sites recorded from the '90s, but nothing was recorded down in here," said Andrew Pauly, a second-year master's student in archaeology at Oregon State University helping teach the field school. "We got here, and there's a rodent burrow with a flake in it. We found dozens of flakes in the elk beds. They really did us a favor."

That chance discovery is now one of the focal points of a new archaeology field school underway at Najaf Training Center, a roughly 527-acre military training area about 10 miles north of Corvallis, Oregon. The four-week intensive course, offered through a three-year intergovernmental agreement between the Oregon Military Department and Oregon State University, brings undergraduate and graduate students onto the land to learn professional archaeological methods while helping the department meet its federal cultural resources responsibilities.

On July 14, 2026, students spread across the hillside were excavating test units, screening soil and documenting artifacts on ground that has proven far richer than anyone anticipated.

"We're finding cultural materials in places that aren't sites, and as we're trying to further expand the site boundaries, it just keeps going," said Dr. Molly Carney, an assistant professor of anthropology at Oregon State University and the field school's instructor. "We can't really find the ends. The entire hillside is probably a cultural place."



Oregon State University archaeology student Nathan McCaslin, a former Oregon Army National Guard Soldier, screens excavated soil for cultural materials during the OSU Archaeology Field School at Najaf Training Center, Ore., July 14, 2026. Students use wood-framed screens to sift soil from test units, recovering stone flakes, tools and historic-era items too small to spot during excavation



Oregon State University archaeology student Rebecca Chastain, left, brushes soil from a test unit as fellow student Caden Gonzales records field notes during the Oregon State University Archaeology Field School at Najaf Training Center, Oregon, on July 14, 2026.

FEATURES

Army PaYS Program: Supports Soldiers and Employers

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

HAPPY VALLEY, Ore. - The U.S. Army Partnership for Your Success (PaYS) Program is strengthening connections in Oregon by engaging employers, Oregon National Guard leaders, and Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) representatives to help Soldiers build successful civilian careers while continuing their military service.

Retired Sgt. 1st Class Roy Kidwell, the Army PaYS West marketing analyst, recently visited Oregon to meet with Oregon National Guard leaders and brief Soldiers and recruits participating in the Oregon Army National Guard's Recruit Sustainment Program (RSP), while exploring opportunities for collaboration with ESGR about the military-friendly employers throughout the state.

The Army PaYS Program is a strategic partnership between the U.S. Army and hundreds of public- and private-sector employers nationwide. Participating employers guarantee eligible Soldiers a job interview and offer a pathway to civilian employment after military service. The program is available to active-duty Soldiers, National Guard and Reserve Soldiers, and ROTC participants.

Kidwell visited Soldiers during a monthly RSP drill at Camp Withycombe in Happy Valley, Oregon. The Recruit Sustainment Program prepares newly enlisted Soldiers for Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training through monthly training that introduces military customs and courtesies, physical fitness, Army values, rank structure, and other foundational military skills before they ship to initial entry training.

Kidwell said engaging Soldiers early in their military careers is important because many National Guard members balance military service with civilian careers.

"Service members who serve and work are an important part of what we do," Kidwell said. "The PaYS Program helps connect them with employers who understand the value of military service and want to hire talented Soldiers."

Kidwell said that building relationships with state National Guard leadership and ESGR representatives is a natural fit because all three organizations share a commitment to supporting service members, both in and out of uniform.

"My experience with the Oregon National Guard has been fantastic," Kidwell said. "Everyone, including the RSP cadre, has been great about coordinating the visit and ensuring Soldiers had the opportunity to learn about the program."

During his visit, Kidwell also met with Oregon National Guard leadership and Oregon ESGR State Chair Cecil Owens to discuss ways to strengthen connections among Soldiers, employers, and military-supportive organizations statewide.

"We both want the same thing, helping Soldiers find good jobs," Kidwell said. "Both programs connect Soldiers with employers who recognize the value they bring to the workforce."

Owens said the partnership between Army PaYS and ESGR aligns closely with both organizations' missions to support service members and strengthen relationships with employers.

"The Army PaYS Program and ESGR share a common goal: helping service members succeed both in uniform and in their civilian careers," Owens said. "Oregon employers consistently tell us they value the leadership, discipline, reliability, consistency, and problem-solving skills that Guard members bring to the workforce. Programs like PaYS help create those connections early, ensuring Soldiers understand the opportunities available to them while helping employers find individuals who are ready to contribute from day one."

ESGR partners with employers to support National Guard and Reserve service members and

to promote understanding of military service in the workplace. Leaders from both organizations said that closer coordination could expand employment opportunities for Soldiers and strengthen Oregon's network of military-friendly employers.

Stephen Bomar, Oregon Military Department state public affairs officer, said employers play a critical role in the success of Oregon service members and their families.

"Our employers are part of the military family," Bomar said. "National Guard and Reserve service depends on strong support from employers who understand the value of military service and the sacrifices made by our Soldiers, Airmen, and their families. Building relationships with organizations like Oregon ESGR and programs like Army PaYS is a priority because it helps ensure our service members have opportunities to succeed in both their military and civilian careers."

The PaYS Program has helped Soldiers prepare for civilian careers for more than 25 years and continues to grow its network of employer partners nationwide. For Kidwell, the mission is personal.

"I'm a 28-year Army veteran," he said. "This allows me to continue doing that even after retirement. Anything I can do to help Soldiers make their lives better, I'm all for it."



Army Sgt. 1st Class (ret.) Roy Kidwell, from Army PaYS West marketing analyst, stands beside an ESGR banner during a visit to Oregon and Camp Withycombe in Happy Valley, on June 7, 2026.

Historic first bomb drop reinforces 142nd Wing's mission capabilities

Story by Master Sgt. Steph Sawyer,
142nd Wing Public Affairs

MOUNTAIN HOME AIR FORCE BASE, IDAHO - Pilots and maintainers, including munitions and weapons Airmen from the 142nd Wing traveled to Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, in early May, where they accomplished a pivotal first step in the process of enhancing the capability of the wing's fleet of F-15EX Eagle II aircraft.

During their time at Mountain Home, the crew handled 500-pound BDU-50s and 2,000-pound BDU-56s. At first glance, these units closely resemble real munitions, but instead of containing explosives, they are filled with concrete. These "bombs" were loaded onto the F-15 EXs and dropped in the Mountain Home firing range complex.

This operation was the first of its kind for the 142nd Wing. While the EX has been tested in this capacity under the 85th Test and Evaluation Squadron at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, this is the first time an operational EX unit has loaded and dropped bombs.

Although the F-15 EX looks very similar to the wing's C-model aircraft, it offers greater combat versatility. The EX is considered a multi-role fighter aircraft because, in addition to its air-to-air capabilities, which it shares with the C-models, it also has air-to-ground capability. However, demonstrating that took considerable preparation from all team members.

Maj. Jesse Loya is one of three pilots assigned to the 142nd Wing with former experience and

expertise in air-to-ground operations. Loya and the two other pilots have attended a 9-month training course to understand the science behind dropping bombs and the tactics involved. They were tasked with creating a program to train the rest of the wing's pilots on the basics so they could take the first steps toward dropping munitions.



A BDU-56 "bomb" is loaded onto an F-15 EX Eagle II aircraft assigned to the 142nd Wing during a training mission at Mountain Home Air Force Base, in May 2026.

Loya explained that this training at Mountain Home was a stepping-stone approach to training pilots to employ ordnance safely. This training was done on a much shorter time line than the traditional 9-month course. "I think it's a testament to the pilots themselves and the skills that they've developed over the years to be able to do that in such a short amount of time."

Weapons loaders also trained to prepare for this mission. Tech. Sgt. Tyler Phelps is one of a small number of weapons loaders assigned to the wing who have prior experience loading bombs onto aircraft.

Earlier this year, Phelps, along with a few other weapons loaders, traveled to Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, where they worked with F-15 E-models assigned to the 59th Test and Evaluation Squadron to become certified on loading bombs.

After returning to Portland Air National Guard Base, Phelps and the other certified Airmen trained the weapons loaders slated to go to Mountain Home. For many involved, seeing the bombs finally loaded onto the EXs was deeply impactful because it marked the culmination of everyone's combined effort and dedication to accomplish a significant first for the unit. 142nd Operations Group Commander Col. Joshua Hovanas reflected on the moment's significance and what the team accomplished on this training mission.

"The speed at which this wing established a completely new capability is a testament to our Airmen," Hovanas said. "That rapid progress was powered by the drive and seamless collaboration of the entire team, from the flight line to the cockpit. It speaks volumes about the caliber of our people."

The crew dropped 24 BDU-50s and 12 BDU-56s over 10 missions with zero safety incidents and satisfactory scores.

"The team as a whole outperformed any expectations that we held and went above and beyond, and I think the results ended up speaking for themselves," Loya said. "It was a privilege...just to be able to kind of usher in this new generation of multi-role fighters for us."

The next step to becoming air-to-ground mission-capable is loading and dropping live bombs, which the crew will do at the end of August at Nellis Air Force Base. Hovanas emphasized this training as a foundational moment in the wing's evolution.

"What we've demonstrated is our ability to deliver ordnance to a predetermined target. This is the first milestone on our path to becoming a premier multi-role fighter squadron," he said. "It's about building a dynamic and versatile organization, and we are just getting started."

FEATURES

F-4 Phantom II makes a final landing at the Oregon Military Museum

Story and Photos by John Hughel,
Military Department Public Affairs

HAPPY VALLEY, Ore. – Oftentimes, the last leg of any homecoming feels the furthest. At long last, after years marked by hope and anticipation, a cherished companion has made its way back to Oregon, taking its place among the treasured artifacts and equipment at the Oregon Military Museum at Camp Withycombe.

In late August 2025, the F-4C Phantom II supersonic fighter-bomber, number 777, made its long-awaited homecoming to Oregon, rolling into Camp Withycombe atop two flatbed tractor-trailers from Texas, after spending more than 35 years away from its post at the Portland Air National Guard Base. For the next nine months, the jet underwent meticulous reassembly, restoration, and repair at the museum’s maintenance storage area, each step bringing it closer to its new place of honor by the museum entrance.



An F-4 Phantom II jet moves along the front of the Oregon Military Museum towards its new resting place next to the entrance as a team of volunteers and staff work together to install the airplane for display at Camp Withycombe, in Happy Valley, Oregon, on June 2, 2026.

On the morning of June 2, of 2026, “Triple 7” was ready for move, and so was an eager group of retired military volunteers helping in the effort as the camouflaged-painted jet was wheeled nearly three-quarters of a mile west to the Museum, moving along the perimeter roadway on the Camp’s southern fence line. At the wheel of the aircraft tug, retired Chief Master Sgt. Dennis Budworth guiding the plane to the museum, reconnected to the very aircraft he once cared for as crew chief with the 142nd Fighter Intercept Wing (now designated as the 142nd Wing) in Portland in the 1980s.

“I’ve flown this airplane and stayed with the F-4 from 1982 until they went away in late 1989,” said Maj. Gen. (ret.) Daniel O’Hollaren, describing his experience flying the Phantom II aircraft with the 142nd in Portland. “I actually have a photograph of me on the ladder getting ready to go fly. So we were pretty excited to be able to get this airplane.”

Before joining the Oregon Air National Guard, Maj. Gen. O’Hollaren flew a different version of the Phantom II during his active duty period from 1974 to 1979. Still, instead of missiles and guns, it was equipped with cameras and sensors that were used for reconnaissance in the Far East and in Central Europe during the height of the Cold War.

“I quit flying after the transition from the F-4 to the F-15 Eagle (in 1990) and joined the Medical Squadron. I became



An airplane tug pulls the F-4 Phantom II jet “Triple 7,” along the roadway from the maintenance area with the assistance of retired military volunteers and OMM staff to be displayed at the Oregon Military Museum at Camp Withycombe in Happy Valley, Oregon, on June 2, 2026.

the commander there, and later moved up to state headquarters,” O’Hollaren said, talking about his later career. “After that, I served as commander of the Oregon Air Guard before taking my final role as assistant to the commander of Air Force Materiel Command at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.”

After several years working as a volunteer and later the president of the Oregon Military Museum, O’Hollaren had been actively looking for an F-4 Phantom for the museum collection.

“I got affiliated with the Oregon Military Museum in 2013, and about four years later, I got a brainchild about why we don’t have an F-4, an airplane that is near and dear to my heart,” he recalled.



A U.S. Air Force F-4 Phantom II fighter jet moves from the front of the Oregon Military Museum towards its new resting place next to the entrance as a team of volunteers and staff work together to install the airplane at Camp Withycombe.

“We flew it in the Oregon Air Guard. So I have applied to the Museum of the United States Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio.”

At first, O’Hollaren explained, the museum was ranked seventeenth on the waiting list, so he would check in with them every so often over the next few years. As the months and years passed and Oregon remained far from the top, his hope for bringing the F-4 back home to Oregon began to fade.

“About a year and a half ago, I got the phone call - and they said two things. ‘We have some good news and some really good news. The good news is I found an F-4C airplane for you. The really good news is it’s an airplane that the Oregon

Air Guard used to fly.’ So we were pretty excited about that,” he said, still jubilant about securing “Triple 7.”

It was previously displayed at the Cavanaugh Air Museum in Addison, Texas, which is now permanently closed due to airport expansion there.

“This airplane had been taken out of the boneyard after it left us at Tucson, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, and then went to the museum in Texas. They repainted it, restored the cockpits into Vietnam-era colors,” O’Hollaren said. “This airplane has the distinction of actually having a MiG kill about six months after a surface-to-air missile in Vietnam nearly shot it down.”



Oregon Air National Guard Chief Master Sgt. (ret.) Dennis Budworth gives the ‘Thumbs Up’ as the team of volunteers makes progress moving an F-4 Phantom II jet from the museum maintenance work area as they work to install the jet at the entrance of the Oregon Military Museum.

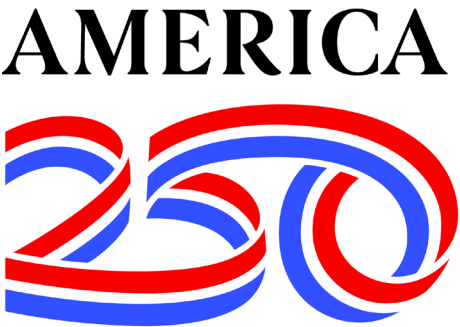
Over the course of the morning, O’Hollaren and other enthusiasts watched the airplane being maneuvered along the front of the museum; one of the tires became stuck in the soft grass. Budworth and other volunteers worked carefully to elevate the airplane, which added about two hours to the process. Eventually it was rotated and parked on three positioned concrete pads, facing the museum at an angle to show off its profile to visitors.

“Our intent is to get it repainted back into the camouflaged (U.S. Air Force) gray air defense colors with the ‘Redhawk’ on the tail. Our painter became ill, so for now, we’ll roll with it and have it on display with the camouflaged green and tan colors,” O’Hollaren said, describing the significance of having this airplane finally set in place. “Oregonians have come and gone, and we must maintain this piece of aviation history... and going forward, we’re pretty excited.”



After the F-4 Phantom II fighter jet was finally installed next to the Oregon Military Museum entrance, volunteers and staff gathered for a group photo in the late afternoon at Camp Withycombe in Happy Valley, Oregon, on June 2, 2026.

FEATURES



WASHINGTON, D.C. – This year, the nation celebrates its 250th birthday, marked by the approval of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

Music has a way of uniting people and generations, and the American Revolutionary War was no different, as it was often used to boost morale for both the Continental Army and British troops.

Many of that era’s most popular patriotic songs were originally religious hymns adapted for the war effort or original sacred compositions that took on a military character. As America celebrates 250 years of freedom, here is a look back at a few of the many songs that inspired the birth of a nation.

“Yankee Doodle”

Perhaps the most well-known song still sung today is “Yankee Doodle.” It was originally sung by British military officers to mock the American service members they served with during the French and Indian War.

Written by British Army surgeon Richard Shuckburgh while campaigning in New York, circa 1755, the song was embraced by American troops, who added verses to it that mocked the British and hailed their commander, Continental Army Gen. George Washington. By 1781, “Yankee Doodle” had become a song of national pride among Americans.

The song begins with/Yankee Doodle went to town/A-riding on a pony/Stuck a feather in his cap/And called it macaroni.

The term macaroni was used to describe a fashionable man who dressed and spoke in an outlandishly affected and effeminate manner.

Songs Inspired Patriotism During The American Revolutionary War

Story by David Vergun, Pentagon News Service

The American version was written in 1776 by Edward Bangs, a Minuteman, and was played during the British surrender following the Battle of Saratoga, Oct. 17, 1777, in New York.

“Yankee Doodle” was revived by George M. Cohan to create the patriotic song, “The Yankee Doodle Boy” for his 1904 Broadway musical “Little Johnny Jones.” In 1942, the movie “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” about the life of Cohan, starred James Cagney, for which he won an Oscar.

The song “Yankee Doodle” was adopted as Connecticut’s official state anthem in 1978.

“Chester”

The unofficial anthem of the American cause, William Billings’ “Chester,” was immensely popular during the war. It encouraged the patriots to be strong, because God was standing on their side against the British tyrants, which is heard in these lyrics:

When God inspir’d us for the fight/ Their ranks were broke, their lines were forc’d/ Their ships were shatter’d in our sight/ Or swiftly driven from our coast.

Billings, a Boston native, was America’s first choral composer. Chester is an old Latin word for military camp. The song was the first truly patriotic song with both the tune and lyrics written by an American in the American colonies.

“Liberty Song”

The “Liberty Song” was an early American patriotic ballad composed by John Dickinson, a founding father. It is often attributed as the origin of the phrase: “United We Stand, Divided We Fall.”

The song was one of the first to circulate within the 13 colonies

and is thought to have fostered a sense of shared identity and resistance among the colonists. It includes the following lyrics:

Then join hand in hand, brave Americans all/ By uniting we stand, by dividing we fall/ In so righteous a cause let us hope to succeed/ For heaven approves of each generous deed.



An illustration of the “Hip, Hip Hooray for the U.S.A.” song-book, published in 1918. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

The 1969 song, “United We Stand” by Brotherhood of Men, was a romantic ballad that took some inspiration from “Liberty Song” with the lyric, “united we stand, divided we fall.” Despite the romantic connotations, the song became a rallying cry for the Vietnam War based on these lyrics:

For united we stand, divided we fall/ And if our backs should ever be against the wall/ We’ll be together, together, you and I.

“Free America”

Joseph Warren, a member of the Sons of Liberty, wrote “Free America” to the tune of “The British Grenadiers,” inspiring many colonists to volunteer

for the cause of freedom during the Revolutionary War with the following words:

Torn from a world of tyrants/ Beneath this western sky/ We formed a new dominion/ A land of liberty/ The world shall own we’re freemen here/ And such will ever be/ Huzza, huzza, huzza/ For love and liberty.

“The World Turned Upside Down”

The song “The World Turned Upside Down” is a 17th-century British ballad written to protest the Puritan banning of traditional Christmas celebrations. It is thought to have been played by the British Army band when they surrendered after the Siege of Yorktown in 1781, though there is no historical evidence that it actually happened. The lyrics include the following:

Listen to me and you shall hear, news hath not been this thousand year/ Since Herod, Caesar, and many more, you never heard the like before/ Holy-dayes are despis’d, new fashions are devis’d/ Old Christmas is kickt out of Town/ Yet let’s be content, and the times lament, you see the world turn’d upside down.

If the song title seems familiar, it is because the words gained new popularity

more than 300 years after they were first written, when Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote his 2015 Broadway musical, Hamilton.

Near the end of the first act, “Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)” recaps the historic Battle of Yorktown:

We negotiate the terms of surrender/ I see George Washington smile/ We escort their men out of Yorktown/ They stagger home single file/ Tens of thousands of people flood the streets/ There are screams and church bells ringing/ And as our fallen foes retreat/ I hear the drinking song they’re singing/ The world turned upside down.

Blue Angels electrify the skies at the Oregon International Air Show

Photos by Tech. Sgt. Alexander Frank, 142nd Wing Public Affairs

MCMINNVILLE, Ore.—The U.S. Navy flying team, the “Blue Angels”, took part in the Oregon International Air Show, in McMinnville, Oregon, on August 16, 2026. The Blue Angels perform for audiences around the world to show the pride, skill, and professionalism that the United States Military represents. The team includes 158 active-duty Sailors and Marines, including pilots, flight crew, mechanics, and other support staff. The Blue Angels started their 80th season, which began in March, touring across the country during the nation’s 250th anniversary.



AZUWUR

“ACCOUNTED FOR”- THE 82-YEAR JOURNEY TO BRING A LOST WWII PILOT HOME

AZUWUR

*Oregon & Military History**Feature story by Tech. Sgt. Alexander Frank,
142nd Wing Public Affairs*

PORTLAND, Ore. — Nearly eighty-two years ago, 1st Lt. Franklin H. McKinney took off in his F-5E Lightning over northern Thailand on November 5, 1944. Assigned to “G” Flight of the 35th Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron during the twilight of World War II, his mission was to conduct aerial photography operations behind enemy lines.

He never returned.

For over eight decades, McKinney was listed as missing in action. Recently, that long silence finally broke. On May 15, 2026, when the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) officially updated his status to “Accounted for,” it marked the culmination of decades of grassroots dedication to not let the past fade into obscurity, and to bring McKinney home.

While military paperwork declared McKinney officially dead in 1946, the circumstances around his disappearance remained a mystery for decades. Little did anyone know at the time that the key to unlocking the mystery sat in a museum in Ban Mae Gua, Thailand, just waiting to be discovered.

“The primary breakthrough was the discovery after a flood at the Thai Air Force Museum in Bangkok—the discovery of a document going back to the second World War, a Thai police report,” said Lt. Col. (Ret.) Terry Popravak Jr., 142nd Wing volunteer historian.



A plaque commemorating USAAF 1st Lt. Franklin McKinney, 35th Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron, rests outside the McKinney Conference Room at the Portland Air National Guard Base, Portland, Oregon, on Aug. 2, 2026. McKinney disappeared eighty-two years ago, during a reconnaissance flight over Thailand during World War II. The 1/48 scale model of McKinney's aircraft includes fragments of his F-5E Lightning recovered by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency in Thailand. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alexander Frank, 142nd Wing Public Affairs)

The police report from the Thai Royal Air Force, was dated November 5, 1944; the very day of McKinney's last flight. It detailed how residents of the village saw a twin-engine plane flying through a vicious storm. According to the report, the plane was struck by lightning, caught fire, and crashed into the island. It further detailed the crash site, noting that the plane was a P-38 with the tail number “811”, and that a skull was found at the crash site. It was the break everyone was waiting for.

“He just kind of disappeared to the skies,” Popravak said. “This gave actionable information, and provided the basis by which DPAA was able to send teams... to investigate and determine whether or not



USAAF 1st Lt. Franklin McKinney was an F-5E pilot assigned to the 35th Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron. He went missing on a mission on Nov. 5, 1944. On May 15, 2026, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency identified the remains. (Courtesy photo from Maj. Daniel Jackson)

they could actually find artifacts [or] remains of Franklin McKinney.”

While the report was created near the time of the incident, its existence wasn't discovered until 2012. Upon discovery of the report, there was doubt the aircraft was McKinney's. McKinney did not fly a traditional P-38, but a F-5E Recon. The two aircraft are very similar and could easily be confused, as the F-5E was essentially a standard P-38 with photo equipment in place of weaponry. What was impossible to ignore however, was the fact that the time and dates in the report aligned perfectly with McKinney's final flight path. The coincidence was too much to ignore, but it would take a coordinated, cross agency collaboration to unearth the truth.

In the years that followed, an unlikely ensemble of researchers, aviation enthusiasts, local Thai villagers, and members of the 142nd Wing, worked with the DPAA to confirm the validity of the lost report.

“That sharing of information between private individuals and the government was essential,” Popravak noted. “Thanks to experts living in Thailand who have aviation interest, and their connections to others in the aviation history community... [it] proved vital to getting the information to the right people to be evaluated and acted upon.”

DPAA conducted the initial site survey and excavation in 2022, where fragments of the lost F-5E and McKinney's bone fragments were discovered. The finding was the culmination of the persistence of strangers to not let our lost heroes be forgotten.

After the initial discovery, the Oregon National Guard's 142nd Wing, McKinney's home unit, held a ceremony naming the Wing Headquarters main conference room in his honor. Mounted beside the room sits a 1/48 scale model of an F-5E recon aircraft, containing actual metal fragments recovered from the crash site.

Col. Brad Young, 142nd Mission Support Group commander and fighter pilot within the 142nd Wing is grateful to DPAA for their efforts.

“Witnessing firsthand the lengths to which our nation is willing to go in order to find and account for all of our aviators brings comfort to all of our men and women who are willing to put their lives in harm's way to defend this great nation,” remarked Young. “Being able to add Lt. McKinney to the list of ‘accounted for’ and bring our Wing's Missing in Action members from eight to seven is a great moment for us to reflect on the sacrifice of those who have come before us.”

The initial bone fragments collected in 2022 were deemed inconclusive, due to a lack of Family Reference Sample DNA, and the aircraft fragments being circumstantial. Still, the DPAA and everyone involved persisted. This past May, additional bone fragments were collected and the agency was able to positively identify McKinney, and officially change his status from “Missing in Action”, to “Accounted for”.

“It's become an American tradition that we try not to leave anyone behind in a battlefield,” Popravak said. “If we can't

get you out right away, then we will make every effort to account for our fallen on the field of battle, wherever in the world they may be. I think it helps within the military to add to our morale... and it's something for the unit to know that we take care of our own.”

This year, McKinney's remains were honored at a

ceremony in Bangkok, before being repatriated to the United States. On August 28, 2026, he was laid to rest next to his mother and father in Wakefield, Rhode Island.

Nearly eighty-two years after McKinney's fateful flight, the World War II hero was finally coming home; all due to the dedication of strangers working together, determined to not let those that have vanished in service to our nation be forgotten.



American military service members escort the remains of U.S. Army Air Force 1st Lt. Franklin McKinney, whose aircraft crashed in northern Thailand during a 1944 reconnaissance mission, were honored in a ceremony at the United States Embassy in Bangkok before being repatriated to the United States. (Courtesy photo from the U.S. Embassy Bangkok)