

# MINNESOTA NATIONAL GUARD

2025 ANNUAL REPORT | 2026 OBJECTIVES





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Dear fellow Minnesotans,

The Minnesota National Guard is ‘*Forged in the North*’ with nearly 13,000 Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen proudly serving our state and nation. This year’s annual report highlights the future faces of the force- the new and emerging members across our formations whose commitment ensures the long-term strength of our organization. Their resilience and determination reflect the values Minnesotans expect from their National Guard.

Our people are the cornerstone of our success. Investment in Soldiers, Airmen, and civilian employees is essential for tackling the challenges our state and nation face. The 14th annual Military Appreciation Day at the State Fair, the 22nd annual Armed Forces Appreciation Day with the Minnesota Twins, and the hundreds of other joint community events enhanced the strong and ever-growing connections we have with the communities we serve.

This year, our international partnerships continued to deepen. Numerous training events and key leader engagements occurred with our State Partnership nations, Croatia and Norway, allowing our teams to learn from each other, generate readiness, and celebrate each other’s culture.

In Minnesota we proved once again we are ‘*Always Ready, Always There.*’ Our Army aviators helped with wildfire relief, and our cyber team was called upon for the first time to support civil authorities during a large-scale cyberattack.

Modernization remained a priority as we advanced equipment, facilities, and training. Units began fielding new vehicles and weapons systems. Infrastructure improvements continued statewide, including new and upgraded readiness centers and enhancements to facilities at Camp Ripley. The 133rd Airlift Wing also progressed in its transition to the C-130J Super Hercules, with crucial developments in hangar funding.

2026 will see some of our forces return home from deployments, and others embark on them, with all members sharpening their skills as Soldiers and Airmen. As we invest in our future, we do so with a clear purpose: to maintain a force that is prepared for any challenges that may lie ahead. Our modernization efforts support it, our partnerships sharpen it, and our people embody it- and together, they keep your Minnesota National Guard ‘*Always Ready, Always There.*’

*Shawn Manke*

Shawn P. Manke  
Major General, Minnesota National Guard  
The Adjutant General







In the Minnesota National Guard, we live here, we work here, and we serve here. Becoming a member of the Minnesota National Guard is an opportunity to join a team of skilled professionals who are committed to serving a greater purpose in local communities, nationally, and abroad. With career and leadership opportunities, healthcare and education benefits, and the freedom to choose how you serve, you can ‘be all that you can be’ in the Minnesota National Guard.

**EDUCATION BENEFITS**

The National Guard offers benefits to help pay for your education and expenses while you serve and beyond. We offer many programs for students attending high school, college, or working toward a vocational certification.

**PAY BENEFITS**

Gain competitive skills while earning competitive pay. You will be paid for every day you serve, whether in training, weekend drills, annual training, or deployment. Rank, responsibility, and pay can all increase the longer you serve.

**RETIREMENT BENEFITS**

Whether you plan to serve in the Minnesota National Guard for a few years or until you reach retirement age, there are financial planning options available to get you closer to your goals. Additionally, after 20 years of service, you’ll be eligible for a pension which offers the rare opportunity to earn a paycheck for the rest of your life, even after your service ends.

**INCENTIVES**

The Guard offers an exciting future and enormous benefits, including an enlistment bonus of up to \$20,000 for recruits who meet education and contract requirements. Members may also be eligible for re-enlistment, job-skill retraining, and other bonuses.

**HEALTHCARE & LIFE INSURANCE**

Airmen, Soldiers, Veterans, and their families have access to inexpensive healthcare through the TRICARE system and low-cost life insurance.

Take care of your health, your family, and your future.

**CAREER TRAINING**

Members can find career training for hundreds of unique jobs across various fields. The skills and knowledge gained from military training can seamlessly transfer to various similar civilian career paths as a paramedic, aerospace engineer, truck driver, machinist, cyber information technology expert, and more.

**LIVE HERE - WORK HERE - SERVE HERE**





MEDICAL CORPS

The Medical Corps is composed of physicians, physician assistants, dentists, and other medical professionals who bring their civilian training and experience to military service. These officers provide advanced medical care and clinical guidance for our service members. Interested medical personnel who hold appropriate degrees and licensures, or are in the process of obtaining them, conduct military training to join the ranks as military medical staff.

The State Surgeon is Army Col. Conrad Ross, and the full-time Medical Detachment officer-in-charge is Army Maj. Diana Rommelfanger-Konkol.

CHAPLAIN CORPS

Chaplains play an integral role throughout the force. The Minnesota National Guard's Chaplain team has individuals from multiple religions and denominations, where they support the force through religious and spiritual guidance, confidential counseling, advising senior leaders, and the hosting of morale events across the formation. Chaplains must be ordained clergy, endorsed by their faith group, and complete training upon selection into uniformed service.

The State Chaplain is Army Lt. Col. Timothy Usset, and the full-time Support Chaplain is Army Maj. Justin Lansdowne.

JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL'S CORPS

The Judge Advocate General's Corps provides trusted legal counsel to commanders and service members. These attorneys and paralegals handle a wide range of issues- from military justice and administrative law to operational guidance and service member counsel. Those interested in service complete law school, pass the bar, and then apply to serve in the Minnesota National Guard.

The State Senior Judge Advocates are Army Col. Jennifer Beck-Brown and Air Force Col. David Blomgren.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Public Affairs tells the organization's story through media relations, information products, and community engagement to build understanding and trust with the public. These Airmen and Soldiers capture photos and video, write and highlight stories, coordinate with the press, and advise commanders on communication strategies. Those interested typically have backgrounds in communication, journalism, or public relations.

The State Director of Strategic Communication is Army Col. Kristen Augé, and the State Public Affairs Officer is Army Maj. Andrea Tsuchiya.







**Worthington Students Participate in Signing Day**

*By Air Force Maj. Nathan Wallin & Army 1st Lt. Austin Stibbe*

In the spring, 11 students from Worthington High School committed to the Minnesota National Guard during a public ceremony at the school auditorium, where they were cheered on by their classmates and community.

“These young men and women have committed themselves to service,” said Army Staff Sgt. Gabrielle Bullerman, a recruiting and retention noncommissioned officer, “And in return they’ll be eligible for college benefits, low-cost healthcare, and the ability to begin investing for retirement.”

While signing days are most often associated with commitment to collegiate athletics- in this case, Military Signing Day is designed to support students who commit to service for their state and nation. For Worthington, a town of fewer than 14,000 residents, having 11 students commit during the same signing window is exceptional.

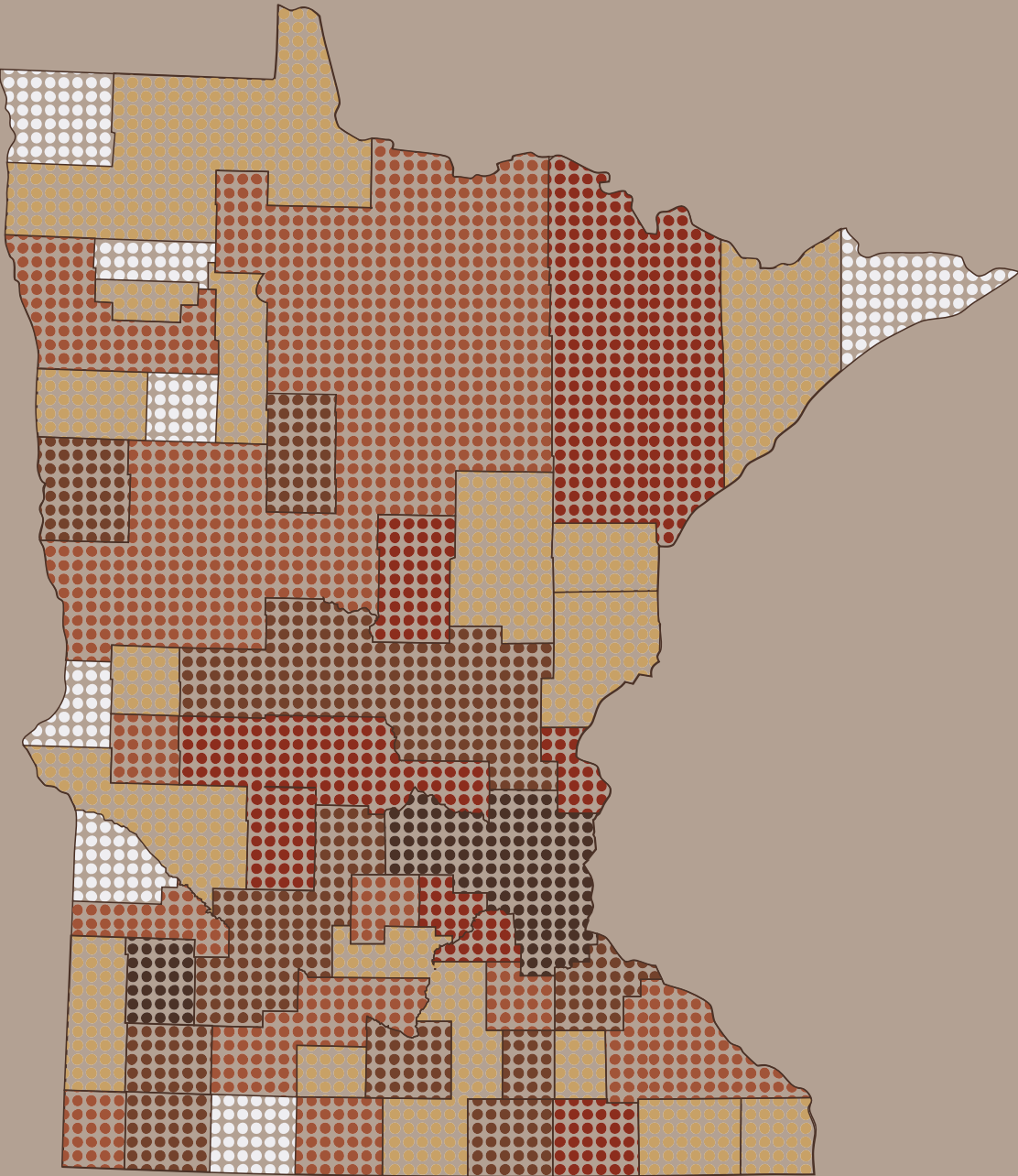
Minnesota National Guard senior leadership was also impressed. Army Brig. Gen. Joseph Sharkey, the new commanding general of the 34th Infantry Division, flew to Worthington on a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter to provide remarks and give the students a visible display of support. Army Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke, adjutant general of the Minnesota National Guard, also made supporting comments about the students when he learned about the large enlistment.

“Eleven students from one school committing themselves to the National Guard is very uncommon, and it speaks to the character of (the) students at Worthington High School,” Bullerman added, “These young men and women are about to become part of something bigger than themselves.”

Banded first by being Worthington High School Trojans, and made teammates by joining the Minnesota National Guard together, the students went on different paths in their journeys to become Soldiers, leaving for basic combat training at varying times, and enlisting into different specialty jobs within the Army. But after completing their training, the new Soldiers arrive at their Minnesota National Guard units fully ready to join the teams that are ‘Always Ready, Always There,’ to serve their state and nation- knowing their leadership and community have their backs.

**FY25 recruiting  
by county**

- 67-163 recruits
- 26-66 recruits
- 12-25 recruits
- 6-11 recruits
- 1-5 recruits
- 0 recruits



**Recruiting Heatmap**



# PEOPLE

MILITARY MEDICS  
LYDIA MARSOLAIS  
AIDAN MCGILL  
URIEL ROSARIO  
EDWARD CHMIEL  
SHINE KWABAFFOUR  
PATRICK KOOIKER  
EBENEZER OLAGUNJU  
DIEU-HUYEN JOHNSON  
STEVEN COX  
TEACHWORTH FAMILY  
MINNESOTA'S BEST

“Our people are the cornerstone of our success. Investment in Soldiers, Airmen, and civilian employees is essential for tackling the challenges our state and nation face,” said Maj. Gen. Manke This priority highlights the importance of recruiting, retaining, and developing personnel to ensure readiness, resilience, and a culture of service excellence.



## New Program Guides Military Medics into Medical School

By Army 1st Lt. Austin Stibbe

A new one-of-a-kind program at the University of Minnesota Medical School is providing military medics with an opportunity designed to take their experience and start a career as a physician. For medics such as New Prague native Army Spc. Lauren Kitner who was one of the first to use the program, this has been a way to jump start a career.

The Military Medic to Medical School Program (MM2MS) guides medics through the necessary prerequisites for acceptance to medical school, provides individualized support, and assists students with preparation for the Medical College Admission Test.

Open to medics from all military branches, the program was born out of interest from the university, where they sought new pathways for attracting medical school students.

Accepted students are eligible for specialized incentives if they continue to serve as members of the Minnesota National Guard upon becoming doctors. The Guard's state tuition reimbursement program has a special chapter dedicated to medical students, offering 100% tuition reimbursement at the University of Minnesota's rate. Additionally, there is a federal incentive called the Health Professions Scholarship program provides a \$2,270 stipend per month to cover living expenses.

“The MM2MS program is truly a program like no other,” Kitner said. “I am honored to be part of a program that not only recognizes but truly values the skills and experiences I have gained as a combat medic. The opportunity to seamlessly transition from military service into medical school, while continuing to serve my community, is both humbling and exhilarating.”

Kitner joined the Minnesota National Guard as a medic during the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic after graduating from New Prague High School. After completing Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training, she began her time as a part-time Soldier with the Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Battalion, 94th Cavalry in Duluth.

In addition to her service, she pursued her undergraduate degree at the University of Minnesota in health & wellbeing sciences, while working as a scribe in the emergency room, and engaged in research and volunteer opportunities at Hennepin County Medical Center and Masonic Children's Hospital.







**Future Faces of the Force: Lydia Marsolais’ Path to Service**

*By Army Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamooneh*

Airman 1st Class Lydia Marsolais, 21, never imagined serving in the military. Unfamiliar with it beyond movies or history books, she was inspired by her adoptive mother’s dedication as a pediatric nurse and her own passion for aviation as a private pilot. She discovered the Air Force and is serving as an operations intelligence specialist with the Minnesota National Guard’s Duluth-based 148th Fighter Wing.

Initially unaware of the extent of military opportunities, Marsolais wanted a way to serve like her mother. Previous work as a camp counselor and personal care attendant wasn’t enough; she wanted to go further.

Marsolais researched and spoke with service members, realizing the Minnesota Air National Guard offered the ideal balance of community service, continued flying, and civilian career flexibility. Scoring an 87 on the ASVAB, she chose intelligence, drawn to the challenge and the opportunity to learn.

Meeting with intelligence team members at the Wing, her decision to pursue a career in intelligence was reinforced. Their patience, willingness to answer her questions and welcoming attitudes created a positive impression. Marsolais wanted to be a part of that environment, where curiosity, adaptability and teamwork are important.

Marsolais has big goals for her military career. She hopes to deploy, volunteer as much as possible, commission as an officer and make a positive impact on others.

**Future Faces of the Force: Aidan McGill, a Rising Leader**

*By Army Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamooneh*

Army Spc. Aidan McGill, 22, is a military police officer assigned to the Stillwater-based 34th Military Police Company enlisted in June 2022 after a year in college. McGill wanted the structure and camaraderie of his high school experience at St. Thomas Academy.

McGill’s dedication quickly distinguished him. Selected as his company’s guidon-bearer in 2024, an honor typically reserved for Soldiers with top fitness test scores, he earned the opportunity to participate in the 52nd Norwegian Reciprocal Troop Exchange. This two-week training exercise in Norway pushed his limits, focusing on winter survival skills in challenging terrain.

“It was the coolest Army experience I’ve ever had,” McGill stated, highlighting the advanced training and invaluable lessons learned about cold-weather operations. The experience fostered lasting relationships with Norwegian service members, connections he continues to encounter within the military community.

After completing a business operations and supply chain management degree at the University of St. Thomas, McGill started an 18-month leadership program with a financial company while continuing his National Guard service. He attributes his success to discipline, consistency, and the mentorship from his noncommissioned officers.

“To me, the ‘Future Faces of the Force’ are those leaders, at any rank, who others look up to,” McGill said.

**Future Faces of the Force: Scouting the Path to Excellence**

*By Army Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamooneh*

Enlisting in Oct. 2023, Army Spc. Uriel Rosario, a cavalry scout with 1st Squadron, 94th Cavalry Regiment completed a demanding 22-week training cycle at Fort Benning, Georgia.

“Even if it meant sleeping on the dirt... it was a great feeling to be around my battle buddies,” he said.

Inspired by his mother’s work ethic and a background in competitive sports, Rosario wanted a new challenge. The National Guard offered a path to serve while remaining close to family and friends. He chose the cavalry scout role, drawn to its focus on reconnaissance and stealth.

Rosario excelled during training, earning the Excellence in Armor award which recognizes Soldiers who exceed standards and demonstrate leadership potential. He achieved a near-perfect score on his final fitness test and qualified as a sharpshooter on the M4 carbine.

“My drill sergeants made it clear: what you learn here is what keeps you alive,” Rosario stated.

Looking ahead, Rosario hopes to attend officer candidate school and commission as an officer, but for now, he’s focused on learning from his unit’s noncommissioned officers and preparing for gunnery qualification.

“I made a choice that would challenge me in life, and it did just that,” he added.

**Future Faces of the Force: Following Chmiel’s Flight Path**

*By Army Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamooneh*

Airman 1st Class Edward Chmiel has turned his love for flying into a military and civilian career. He recently joined the 148th Fighter Wing as a crew chief, maintaining fighter jets with aspirations of piloting an F-16 in the future. In his civilian role, he is a commercial airline pilot.

Chmiel’s fascination with aviation began in childhood, growing up near Chicago O’Hare International Airport. He joined the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) in high school and then earned a pilot’s license.

Despite a temporary medical disqualification preventing initial Air Force service, Chmiel relentlessly pursued his aviation goals. When he learned the Air Force later reclassified his medical condition as waiverable, Chmiel joined the Minnesota National Guard in 2024.

Chmiel is dedicated to teaching the next generation of aviators, volunteering with CAP to train cadets and mentor aspiring pilots. He recently graduated basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, as an honor graduate, showcasing excellence in all areas.

His interest in the maintenance side of aircraft isn’t just about improving his skills as a pilot; it’s part of his broader goal to understand every aspect of aviation. Chmiel hopes to commission and become a pilot with the 148th Fighter Wing. He is also looking forward to leadership opportunities with the National Guard.

“For now, I’m focused on the next step, which is becoming the best crew chief I can be,” said Chmiel.





**Future Faces of the Force: Airman Finds Community**

*By Army Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamooneh*

Growing up in a close-knit community in the Oti region of Ghana, Airman 1st Class Shine Kwabaffour found a new sense of belonging after joining the Minnesota National Guard.

Moving to the U.S. in 2023, he initially struggled with the culture, missing the community spirit of his home country. This changed during his first drill weekend with the 210th Engineering Installation Squadron.

“When I went to the drill the first time our commander was giving his statement and made it clear that in the Air Force or the military, we do not have colleagues,” he said prior to attending basic training. “Rather, we have brothers and sisters.”

Kwabaffour, who holds a degree in political administration, joined the Guard to seek a structured path to support his family after facing employment challenges. Despite a color blindness diagnosis during medical screening, which initially threatened his career wishes, he was able to get a waiver.

He views military service as more than a job, but a purpose-driven commitment to bettering the world for future generations. Beyond technical skills, Kwabaffour hopes to use his background in government and leadership to make a meaningful impact.

“In civilian jobs, you are just striving to take care of your bills,” he said. “When you come to the military, there’s a sense of serving with purpose.”

**Future Faces of the Force: Kooiker returns**

*By Army Capt. Kristin Ohrt*

At 43, Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Patrick Kooiker, a network operations warrant officer, re-enlisted in 2021 after a decade-long break in service. He first served from 1995 to 2010, with two years in the Army Reserves and 13 years with the Minnesota National Guard’s St. Paul-based 133rd Airlift Wing.

“I joined [initially] because all my friends did it,” said Kooiker. “This time I did it for the TRICARE [healthcare] and GI-bill [education] benefits.”

Kooiker, a Bayport, Minn. native, has become a well-known source of knowledge and expertise both in the formation and in his community.

“Patrick demonstrated maturity and depth of knowledge comparable to our senior signal warrant officers,” Minnesota National Guard’s Command Chief Warrant Officer Erik Homme stated.

Kooiker is now bridging gaps between civilians and military applications as it pertains to cyber security and mentoring future leaders within the cyber team. His goal is to provide mentorship and training to those who will one day take over his position. Beyond the drill floor, he volunteers his time by helping youth and coaching a softball team for young people with special needs.

Kooiker has this advice for other service members: “do as much as you can, as you never have enough time or money, so start doing what you love now.”

**Future Faces of the Force: Ebenezer Olagunju**

*By Sgt. 1st Class Sirrina Martinez*

Born and raised in Nigeria, Army Sgt. Ebenezer Olagunju, 34, moved to the U.S. and later enlisted in the Minnesota National Guard in 2022 as an automated logistical specialist.

“I wanted to serve the country that gave me new opportunities to grow,” he said. “The Guard allows me to serve my state and nation. The balance between service and professional growth is what truly inspired me.”

Using state tuition reimbursement, Olagunju has also had the opportunity to complete a master’s degree in data analytics.

“The Guard gave me financial support and the discipline to manage school, service, and a civilian career simultaneously, he said. “Those same habits have shaped my success as an engineer.”

Throughout his career so far, the mentorship he has received from other leaders in the Minnesota National Guard has impacted him in many ways.

“They taught me that true leadership is built on respect, empathy, and consistency,” he said. “Their example inspires me to lead with integrity and support my soldiers while ensuring the mission gets done [correctly].”

His support system goes beyond his service. A close friend inspired Olagunju through his commitment to his work both in and out of uniform. Most importantly, his family provides the support and encouragement he needs as a citizen soldier.

**Future Faces of the Force: Tech Sgt. Dieu-Huyen Johnson**

*By Air Force Airman Kaci Brannan*

Air Force Tech Sgt. Dieu-Huyen (Daisy) Johnson, a services specialist at the 133rd Force Support Squadron, enlisted at the age of 38.

As a daughter of a South Vietnamese soldier who fought alongside U.S. forces during the Vietnam War, her path to the military was shaped by family sacrifice and heritage. Her father’s connections with Americans helped her family immigrate to the country after the war. Growing up in St. Paul, she cherished a photo of him in uniform, one of the few remnants of his service.

“[My father] looked so dang cool in his uniform,” Johnson said. “I wanted one of my own. I wanted to serve like my dad did. He doesn’t talk much about the [Vietnam] war. When I asked him about it while in school, all he’d say was, ‘I was in it,’ that’s it.”

When her youngest child started school, Johnson said she realized it was time to stop waiting. What had been on the back burner needed to become a priority.

“I couldn’t shake it, it’s always been in the back of my mind,” Johnson said.

She now serves for her father, country, and community- but above all, her children. The Air National Guard proved to be the perfect fit for Johnson, and despite being older than most trainees at basic training, she brought something invaluable- life experience.





## Soldier Competes on the All-Army Softball Team

By Army Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamoonneh

As a Veteran with nearly two decades of service, Army 1st Sgt. Steven Cox has had plenty of experience, but his latest achievement took him to a different kind of field – a softball field. Cox, the first sergeant assigned to the Faribault-based 224th Transportation Company, recently competed on the 2024 All-Army Softball Team.

Enlisting in 2008, Cox deployed to Kuwait and Iraq with 1st Battalion, 151st Field Artillery Regiment. During his career, he participated in the 2011 Norwegian Exchange Program, domestic response efforts during a 2019 winter storm and 2021 civil unrest. Yet, throughout his service, being selected for the All-Army Softball Team stands out to him.

“Softball has become a huge part of my life,” he said. “It’s a team sport, but more than that, it’s a family. My team, coaches, our sponsor, we all put in work together, on and off the field.”

Cox first heard about the All-Army team from fellow Soldiers and initially thought it sounded too good to be true. After moving into a new role in 2023, he received support from his chain of command to finally go for it.

“With his blessing, my commander Capt. Dehn and the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Sarah Witt,” said Cox. “I was able to put in an application and be selected for the event.”

The application required a sponsor from a previous team member and a detailed athletic resume. Cox also focused on maintaining his physical readiness and working on softball fundamentals. He relied on his wife and three daughters.

“This took my entire family’s support,” added Cox. “My wife, Kelly, would hit me grounders, and my three girls, Brooklyn, Lauren, and Aubrey, would help me collect balls from my tee work. We counted one day...120 softballs in our wagon; I’d hit all of them twice.”

Cox said the proudest moment was hearing his name during the opening ceremony. As the tournament ended and the experience settled in, Cox found himself carrying those lessons back into his life.

“Learn the basics and keep trying to perfect them,” said Cox. “A great leader starts by being a good follower.”

## Minnesota Twins Recognize Father and Son for Their Service at the 148th Fighter Wing

By Air Force 2nd Lt. Logan Grayson

Service has long been a family affair for the Teachworths, and that tradition was on full display on Sept. 14, as Senior Master Sgt. Wayne Teachworth and his son, Airman 1st Class Jack Teachworth, were recognized together at a Minnesota Twins Armed Forces Appreciation game.

Both father and son serve side by side in the 148th Fighter Wing’s Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, a unit deeply woven into their family’s history. Wayne followed in his own father’s footsteps by joining the 148th, and now Jack is continuing that legacy as the third generation to wear the uniform.

“It’s hard to put into words how much this means to me,” said Wayne. “Serving my country has always been an honor and having the chance to do it alongside my son makes it even more meaningful. Together we wear the uniform, share the mission, and carry the legacy.”

The Teachworth family story extends beyond father and son. Wayne’s wife, Dawn, also served in the same unit before retiring. Her service helped shape the environment Jack grew up in, where wearing the uniform was simply part of family life.

That upbringing is part of what inspired him to raise his right hand.

“I grew up watching my parents serve and seeing how much they cared about their jobs and the people around them,” said Jack. “I joined because I want to be part of something bigger than myself and continue the legacy they started.”

While serving, Jack is continuing his studies at Anoka-Ramsey Community College, where he is also playing third base for the baseball team.

As the Minnesota National Guard looks ahead to the future, members like Jack Teachworth represent the next generation ready to carry that work forward. His decision to serve builds on the foundation laid by his family, demonstrating how legacy and commitment translate into continued readiness for the mission at hand.







# Minnesota National Guard Honors Top Airmen and Soldiers

By Air Force Maj. Nathan Wallin

In May, the Minnesota National Guard honored their Airmen of the Year and Soldiers deemed the “Best Warriors” during a ceremony at the Veterans Service Building in St. Paul.

“These Guard members represent the best of our organization,” said Command Chief Master Sgt. Lisa Erikson, command senior enlisted leader of the Minnesota National Guard. “These Airmen and Soldiers, each excelling in their careers, are the future of our organization.

The two Soldiers, Staff Sgt. Mason Gumbiner of Minnetonka and Spc. Dan Whited of Moose Lake, were the winners of the Best Warrior Competition held at Camp Ripley in April. They tested on 18 different tasks ranging from weapon proficiency to night operations and leadership.

“The Best Warrior Competition highlights the skills and proficiencies that make all Soldiers functionally lethal- the ability to shoot, move, and communicate,” said Army Command Sgt. Major Jason Rost, the Army senior enlisted advisor for the Minnesota National Guard. “Our competitors dove headfirst into it. They were all challenged in unexpected ways, and their attitudes and character carried them through to the end.”



The five Airmen were chosen for the award based on conduct, job performance, physical fitness, self-development, community service, and adherence to the Air Force core values.

The selected Airmen were Senior Airman Hayden Holmberg of Cannon Falls, Tech. Sgt. Krishia B. Baltazar of Duluth, Master Sgt. Whitney M. Olson of St. Paul, Senior Master Sgt. Kelly R. Jones of Green Bay, Wisconsin and 2nd Lt. Nicolete Weis of Oakdale.

“It’s great to see these Airmen selected from varied squadrons,” said Air Force Col. Nate Aysta, 148th Fighter Wing commander. “Our mission doesn’t get accomplished without [Airmen] who ensure our people are taken care of, and ready to fly fight and win.”

The five Minnesota Airmen advanced to compete in the Air National Guard’s regional competition. Duluth’s Tech Sgt. Krishia B. Baltazar was selected to represent Region 4 at the national competition.





# MODERNIZATION

JOINT MILITARY MEDICAL SUMMIT  
CYBER  
ROSEMOUNT ARMORY  
CONTINGENCY RESPONSE FLIGHT  
CAMP RIPLEY MODERNIZATION  
SAGE EAGLE  
DIVISION ALIGNMENT



Ensuring we possess the right forces, infrastructure, and systems is critical to combating evolving threats and maintaining operational readiness. Modernization efforts focus on advancing our infrastructure, equipment, training, and policies to ensure we remain ready to support the Joint Force across all domains—land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace.

## 2025 Joint Military Medical Summit

By Army Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamoooneh

Nearly 100 Minnesota National Guard medical professionals gathered in February at the 133rd Airlift Wing in St. Paul for the 2025 Joint Military Medical Summit.

“The main objective of the [summit] is to strengthen relationships, enhance medical readiness, and support the evolving missions of military medical operations,” said Army Lt. Col. Jolene Carlson, deputy commander of administration for the Minnesota Medical Detachment.

The biennial event provides a platform for Minnesota National Guard medical personnel to collaborate, share best practices, and enhance readiness for future missions. Leaders also hope to expand joint medical training opportunities to further strengthen partnerships between the components.

“Another big part of this is to mingle and share ideas and experiences,” said the Minnesota National Guard’s State Air Surgeon, Col. David Nelson. “We have a lot of potential here to conduct real-world training if we mix Army and Air.”

The two-day event highlighted critical military medicine topics such as biological weapons, mental health, and responding to unexpected situations. This year’s summit marked several milestones, as both the first time the Air National Guard hosted and the first time State Partnership Program members from Croatia attended.

As military medicine continues to evolve, events like the Joint Military Medical Summit ensures that Minnesota National Guard medical personnel stay abreast with the newest advancements in the field. The knowledge gained will be returned to units across the state, strengthening the Guard’s ability to respond to state and federal missions.

“It’s about developing better standards of care and working together to provide better treatment to our Soldiers and Airmen,” said Sgt. 1st Class Shane Kaplan, a treatment platoon sergeant assigned to Charlie Company, 134th Brigade Support Battalion. “Units should prioritize this [summit]. If they have any medical assets in their formations, get them here to see what it’s about from the lowest level to the highest level.”







## Minnesota Guard Cyber Supports State in 2025 and into the Future

By Sgt. 1st Class Ben Houtkooper

Cyber professionals from the Minnesota National Guard led an unprecedentedly eventful year in 2025, including 34 cyber professionals successfully responding to the City of St. Paul’s call for support during an August citywide cyberattack that brought essential city services to a halt.

“We were ready; we had planned for this,” said Army Lt. Col. Brian Morgan, director of the Minnesota National Guard’s Cyber Coordination Cell. “We had relationships with all the key stakeholders, and when the time came to go, we went and were able to do so because we had detailed how this would look, met with everybody, and made sure everyone knew their roles. And it worked exactly how we thought it would, and we provided significant value to the city.”

In 2026, the team plans to focus their efforts on people, partnerships, and modernization. Prioritizing people means recruiting, training, and retaining talent in the cyber field.

“If people are interested in computers, networks, information technology, cybersecurity, or programming and they want to help give back to their community and country, they should consider joining us in the signal or cyber branches,” said Morgan. “If you want to do something meaningful with your life, the military is a great way to fulfill that inner desire.”

The team will also continue to build upon important partnerships in cyber beyond their work with Minnesota’s partner nations Croatia and Norway, deeper into communities throughout the state to include stakeholders operating critical infrastructure. The modernization of cyber resources will continue play an important role in the nation’s defense.

“We have a tendency to fight the ‘last war’ again, and I think we’re not going to do that now,” said Morgan. “We’re looking at drones, autonomous, mounted, and portable [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems]. We’re looking at electronic warfare and cyber in a more maneuver-focused way and how they can fundamentally alter the battlefield.”

## Renovated Rosemount Armory Ready for Action

By Army 1st Lt. Austin Stibbe

In November, the Minnesota National Guard and state partners toured the renovated Rosemount Training and Community Center to see the facility modernization and learn about the increased capabilities provided to the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division and the community.

“Modernization is one of the Minnesota National Guard’s top priorities, and the Rosemount Armory remodel ensures our service members have the facilities they need to train to the highest standard,” said Scott Rohweder, executive director of the Minnesota Department of Military Affairs. “We are deeply grateful for the state bonding support provided by our legislative partners and for the continued partnership of the City of Rosemount.”

The facility, built in 1994, was designed to serve a capacity of 350 mostly male Soldiers, but due to military modernization and force structure changes, the building needed to support more than 500 personnel with increased gender accommodations. Some of the upgrades were safety or structural enhancements to the building, but others will directly enhance the unit’s capabilities, with new floor plan layouts, locker rooms, and a modernized motor pool for vehicle storage. The brigade, which has subordinate battalions across seven Minnesota communities, temporarily housed its headquarters element in Arden Hills during construction.

“Being able to come back to Rosemount feels like returning home,” said Army Lt. Col. Robert Grutsch, full-time officer in charge of brigade headquarters. “We love our Rosemount community and are all excited to bring our brigade colors back to the town. Our Soldiers are all grateful for the new amenities.”

Both the full-time and traditional members of the unit will complete their return to Rosemount in January. Representatives from Minnesota Management and Budget, Minnesota National Guard Facilities Management Office, State Sen. Zach Duckworth, State Rep. John Huot, and District 4 Dakota County Commissioner Bill Droste attended the event.







## 133rd Airmen Certify in Contingency Response Operations

By Air Force Master Sgt. Amy Lovgren

In April, Airmen of the 133rd Contingency Response Flight, or CRF, alongside four C-130 Hercules aircraft, completed a critical exercise in Ceiba, Puerto Rico. They showcased their ability to open, operate, and close a remote airbase to train and demonstrate their deployability.

“The CRF is unique because we are like a self-sufficient mini airbase in a box,” said Air Force Master Sgt. Cody Hallas, team chief, 133rd CRF. “We can rapidly deploy within hours to remote or austere locations where capabilities don’t currently exist. We are a mix of 14 different Air Force [career fields] where everyone is cross-trained to work outside their primary roles if needed, giving us flexibility unmatched to traditional units.”

As part of being a self-sustaining unit, the flight can provide command and control, logistics, security, and drop zone support to the airfield at which they operate.

The four C-130 cargo aircraft and their crews had important roles in the exercise. Their scenarios included personnel transport, load operations, medical evacuations, and relaying information about enemy forces.

“The [exercise] was to show our ability to rapidly open and operate a remote airbase,” said Hallas. “In the [contingency response] world you have to be adaptable. We go into missions with a limited amount of knowledge of what we can expect. We have to adapt on the ground in real-time. We deploy as a fully enlisted team and have to make decisions at the lowest level possible which also makes us unique and ahead of the curve to the rest of the force.”

The goal of the exercise was to certify the CRF in these operations. After spending three days in the field, the flight accomplished what they set out to do. They deployed with 28 personnel and 28 short-tons of cargo, trained on mission planning and aircraft communications, and airbase operations. By the end of the exercise, the CRF was certified and had an innovative training experience in Puerto Rico.

## Camp Ripley Modernization

By Army 1st Lt. Colton Rossow

In 2025, Camp Ripley Training Center continued its modernization efforts to enhance its ability to support a diverse range of training and personnel needs. Recent infrastructure improvements demonstrate commitment to providing a premier training environment for military, interagency, and international partners.

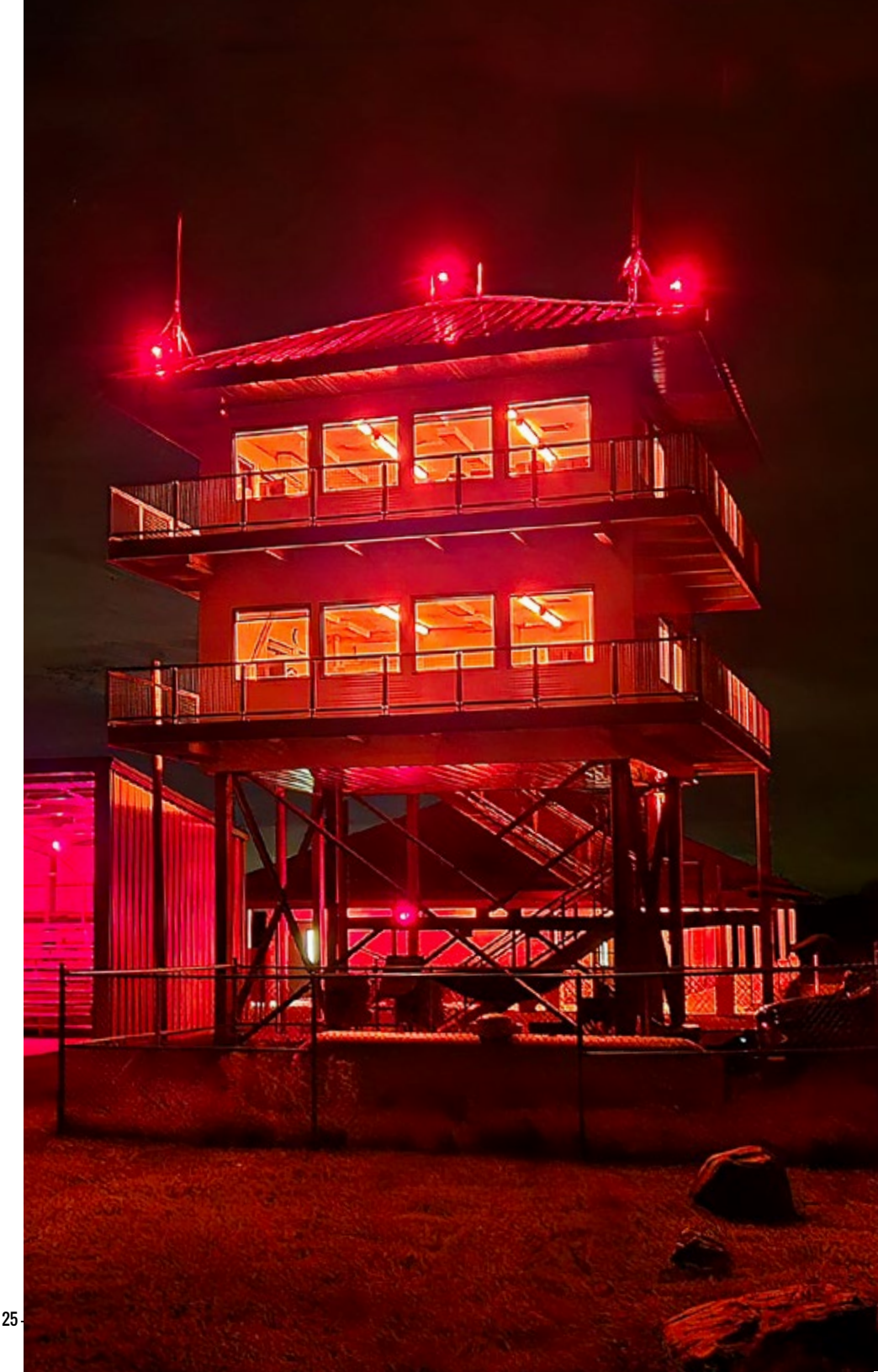
Weapon ranges were enhanced to include upgrades to the bleachers at small arms ranges and West Range’s zeroing facility, and the conversion of B-2, a 25-meter zeroing range, to a combat pistol qualification course. The completion of the fiber optic loop, pending site connection, will improve network connectivity across the installation.

The Recreation Center underwent civil work, a parking lot expansion and drainage improvements. Supply and Services and Consolidated Maintenance Activities-North buildings received several critical mechanical upgrades. Transient billeting buildings began a phased upgrade program for billeting barracks. Concrete steps were added to the east side of the long houses, and troop project areas saw improvements with new roofs installed in multiple cantonment training areas.

Recent modernization of rail infrastructure enhanced mobilization capabilities. Seven miles of rail, accommodating nearly 500 rail cars, will increase the installation’s capacity for equipment transportation. Six dedicated rail spurs were added to optimize load and unload operations for wheeled and tracked vehicles. These enhancements improve logistical efficiency and reinforce the Minnesota National Guard’s readiness posture.

Several key projects are in progress, including the renovations of the Warrior’s Hall and U.S. Property and Fiscal Office buildings.

See page 66 for a complete breakdown of Camp Ripley’s training amenities.







### Minnesota Security Forces Train with Army Green Berets

By Air Force Maj. Nathan Wallin

Ten Minnesota National Guard security forces Airmen trained for two weeks with Army Green Berets during exercise Sage Eagle, held at both Fort Knox and Fort Campbell, Kentucky. It prepared the Guard members for the shift from fighting insurgencies to potential large-scale combat operations.

“Compared to the climate and tactics of the previous 20 years in the [Middle East], the training at Sage Eagle broadens our perspective,” said Chief Master Sgt. Mike Nelson, the security forces senior enlisted leader with the 133rd Airlift Wing. “Sage Eagle gets them better prepared for the unfamiliar and uncomfortable possibilities in the Pacific.”

During the exercise, the security forces Airmen, known as defenders, from both the St. Paul-based 133rd Airlift Wing and the Duluth-based 148th Fighter Wing prepared for up to 72-hour-long operations in the field, with tasks ranging from small unit tactics, direct action, special reconnaissance, and leader engagements.

“We executed night raids and pilot rescue missions; it was definitely a learning experience,” said Air Force Staff Sgt. Mackenzie Miller, a security forces squad leader at the 133rd Airlift Wing. “I learned how much I could push myself. I told myself that ‘I can do it, and I will do it.’”

She spoke of the value not only of the joint exercise, but of the training received from skilled combat Soldiers such as the Green Berets.

“We picked up a lot from them – little things like how they wore their gear, to how they plan and map everything out,” said Miller. “They were on top of their game at every instant. They worked together so well as a team.”

The Airmen pushed through challenging terrain, at times without running water, and lived off the packaged meals, ready to eat. Sage Eagle has grown since the inaugural exercise in 2022, gaining prominence within the National Guard defender community.

### 34th Red Bulls Infantry Division Looks Forward to 2026

By Sgt. 1st Class Sirrina Martinez

In March, the 34th Infantry Division held its Operational Division Alignment Conference, or ODAC, at the Gen. John W. Vessey Readiness Center in Arden Hills, to create an opportunity for geographically dispersed elements that fall under the division to meet and collaborate.

“The 2025 conference highlighted the appetite across aligned brigades to collaborate with a division headquarters and peer brigades to find training opportunities and resources that make the division and its aligned units better and more ready for state and federal missions,” said Army Col. Ryan Rossman, the division chief of staff.

With elements spread across 25 states, attendees included members from 12 units in eight states: Minnesota, Iowa, Idaho, South Dakota, North Carolina, Illinois, Missouri, and Virginia.

Minnesota National Guard personnel are currently attached to the U.S. Army Europe and Africa, in Germany; 1st Army Division out of Camp Atterbury, Indiana; and Minnesota-based contractors with the Mission Command Training Support Program.

In 2026, the division will continue its multi-year modernization efforts, known as the U.S. Army Transformation Initiative, to reorganize the force to meet future threats.

“The division is optimistic about the future [initiatives] and what that means,” he said. “We expect to remain the Army National Guard’s armored division. As we look forward to the division Warfighter in 2029, the majority of our aligned brigades are eager to align with [us].”

Warfighter exercises allow divisions to test military doctrine, knowledge, and proficiency in warfighting functions in high-stress environments that would be expected during a deployment. The 2029 exercise is expected to be held at Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

“As the Army continues to evolve and implement the Army Transformation Initiative, the 34th is focused on being a reliable and competent division HQ to aligned units,” he said. “In the near term, our goal is to support units that require training in preparation for their federal missions.”

The division will host its next ODAC in early 2026, and it will be the first conference under the command of Army Brig. Gen. Joseph Sharkey, the current commanding general of the 34th Infantry Division.





# PARTNERSHIP

- WILDFIRE RESPONSE EFFORTS
- CROATIA
- NORWAY
- MAY FLY AWAY
- MINNESOTA MILITARY MUSEUM
- MAKE-A-WISH
- ARMED FORCES APPRECIATION DAY
- MINNESOTA MILITARY RADIO
- COMMUNITY RELATIONS
- BEYOND THE YELLOW RIBBON

Partnerships are integral to our local, national, and global success. They include collaboration with countries, communities, businesses, organizations, and individuals. These relationships support our success with federal, state, and community missions.



His Royal Highness Crown Prince Haakon of Norway met with Minnesota National Guard leaders in St. Paul, on Oct. 7, 2025.

Photographer: Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown

## Wildfire Support

By Army 1st Lt. Austin Stibbe

In April, Minnesota National Guard helicopter crews joined wildfire experts from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, or DNR, and the Camp Ripley Environmental Team for a joint training event hosted at Camp Ripley.

“The occasion to work with our state partners and train for realistic emergency situations is key,” said Tim Notch, a training area coordinator with the Camp Ripley. “Communication and standard operations may differ between departments; this type of training reduces confusion,”

The joint training was centered on simulated fire attack scenarios using aerial firefighting buckets. Made of fire-resistant fiberglass and metal, these buckets carry between 660 and 2,000 gallons of water suspended beneath the helicopter. According to Army Capt. Sydney Boe, the Minnesota National Guard’s Army aviation operations officer, these are their best countermeasure to large fires.

Camp Ripley’s training amenities proved to be the perfect home for the cross-organization exercises, where select air crews were trained and certified on best practices for wildfire relief missions.

The following month, their training was put to the test.

In May, Gov. Walz activated 20 members of the 34th Combat Aviation Brigade to assist the DNR in countering wildfires that forced hundreds of people in the northeastern part of the state to evacuate their homes.

“It’s been long days,” said Boe in the middle of the activation, “It’s very mentally and physically taxing just controlling the aircraft with all the winds and trying to get it in the right spot for the drops that the DNR wants, as well as just looking out for other aircraft, having that positive crew communication the entire time. So, it is taxing, but we’re honored to be here.”

In all, the Minnesota National Guard assisted the firefighting efforts for seven days, dumping 321 water buckets on a collective group of wildfires known as the ‘Brimson Complex.’ The coordinated response corroborated the efficacy of the joint training that had just occurred, while validating how crucial partnerships with local and state agencies can be.







## State Partnership Program: Croatia

*By Army 1st Lt. Austin Stibbe*

In 2025, the Minnesota National Guard and the Croatian Armed Forces continued to strengthen their longstanding cooperative efforts through a series of State Partnership Program engagements both here and abroad.

“We were able to accomplish a lot of things that embody what the State Partnership Program is about,” said Army Capt. Carla Christenson, the State Partnership Program coordinator for Croatia.

The cooperation between Croatia and the Minnesota National Guard dates back nearly 30 years, when the two were tied together by the State Partnership Program. In the past, they have deployed together – each year, joint and cross-training takes place here in Minnesota, and abroad.

In April, personnel from the Armed Forces of Croatia participated in the Best Warrior Competition at Camp Ripley. In July, Minnesota National Guard members were invited to participate in a multinational military parade in Zagreb.

President Milanović’s fall visit to Minnesota served as another landmark in the strengthening of the relationship. Discussions during the visit emphasized continued cooperation in defense, and seeking new opportunities to train together.

In addition to President Milanović, the Minnesota National Guard hosted Orsat Miljenic, head of the office of the president, H.E. Pjer Simunovic, ambassador of the Republic of Croatia, Bartol Simunic, head of the cabinet, and other senior Croatian leaders.

“We are very thankful for our partnership,” said Army Maj. Tommy Miller, State Partnership Program director for the Minnesota National Guard. “It’s a testament to our long partnership that the highest-levels of the Croatian Government decided to take a trip to Minnesota to discuss the various ways we can help each other.”

Across each engagement in 2025, the Minnesota-Croatia partnership demonstrated sustained international collaboration, cultural exchange, and opportunities to bolster strategic national defense.

## Minnesota National Guard Joins Croatian Celebration

*By Army Staff Sgt. Austyn Aagaard*

In July, Minnesota National Guard service members joined a multinational military parade in Zagreb, Croatia, to mark the 30th anniversary of Croatia’s Operation Storm and to commemorate Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day, as well as the Day of Croatian Defenders.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Jack Engle, a crew chief with the Minnesota National Guard’s 148th Fighter Wing, called the experience unforgettable.

“It was surreal to hear the crowd chanting for the different countries,” Engle said. “The amount of support for us in the U.S. was kind of a surprise because there was just so much appreciation.”

The parade featured more than 3,500 international participants, 500 military vehicles, 40 aircraft, and numerous drones from allied nations. Held once every 10 years, the event draws international participation and highlights partnerships across the globe.

Army Sgt. Jackson Berry, a fire support specialist assigned to the Anoka-based, Detachment 1, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion of the 125th Field Artillery Regiment, said the event demonstrated strong multinational cohesion.

“We have a great group of individuals from our [NATO] allied nations that have a great opportunity to integrate in a positive way,” Berry said.

The Croatian armed forces launched Operation Storm in August 1995. It was, at the time, the largest land battle Europe had seen since World War II- and ended up being the final major battle of their war for independence.

The parade marked a substantial anniversary, and it remains deeply meaningful for Croatia and for the partnership.







## 52nd Troop Exchange Strengthens Ties

By Army Staff Sgt. Ashlee J. L. Sherrill & Army 1st Lt. Austin Stibbe

In February, the Minnesota National Guard and the Heimevernet, the Norwegian Home Guard, joined forces for the 52nd Annual Norwegian Reciprocal Troop Exchange, or NOREX, continuing a long-standing tradition of military cooperation and cultural exchange.

“It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see how another country runs their military,” said Tech Sgt. Krishia Baltazar of the 148th Fighter Wing. “How we are different, how we are similar, especially since we both deal with snow.”

More than one hundred Minnesota National Guard members flew from Minneapolis to Værnes Air Station in Norway. The same aircraft then transported an equal number of Norwegian troops to train in Minnesota for the two week exchange.

Upon arrival, Minnesotans were issued Norwegian uniforms and equipment needed to survive the harsh, cold environment. Over the next two weeks, Guard members were taught how and why certain equipment is used to prevent cold-related injuries.

Participants were then transported to Haltdalen, a small training base in the mountains of the South Trøndelag region, where the Minnesotans were issued skis and practiced cross-country movement through the forest.

For many participants, such as Army 1st Lt. Trevor Dufault, executive officer for Albert Lea-based, D Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment, the experience was a career-defining moment.

“One interesting aspect for me has been the fact that our team grew cohesively in such a short amount of time,” said Dufault. “We had only a few hours of face time prior to leaving for Norway. It’s amazing that we were able to accomplish all that we did.”

While the Minnesotans were in Europe, Norwegian Soldiers trained with Minnesota National Guard members at Camp Ripley, mirroring the winter operations focus. NOREX remains one of the longest-running military exchanges between the United States and a foreign nation, dating back to 1973. The collaboration reinforces the commitment both nations have toward joint readiness and security.

## State Partnership Program: Norway

By Army 1st Lt. Austin Stibbe

2025 saw another year of collaboration and diplomatic exchanges between the Minnesota National Guard and the Kingdom of Norway.

“The relationship we have with Norway is special,” said Army Capt. Christopher Bakeman, the State Partnership Program coordinator for Norway, “it allows us to get better at our craft while growing closer as partners.”

The partnership between Norway and the Minnesota National Guard originated in the work Norwegian-speaking Minnesota National Guard members conducted with the Office of Strategic Services in Norway during World War II. Since 1974, the parties have held annual troop exchanges, allowing both sides to learn new tactics and train in different environments.

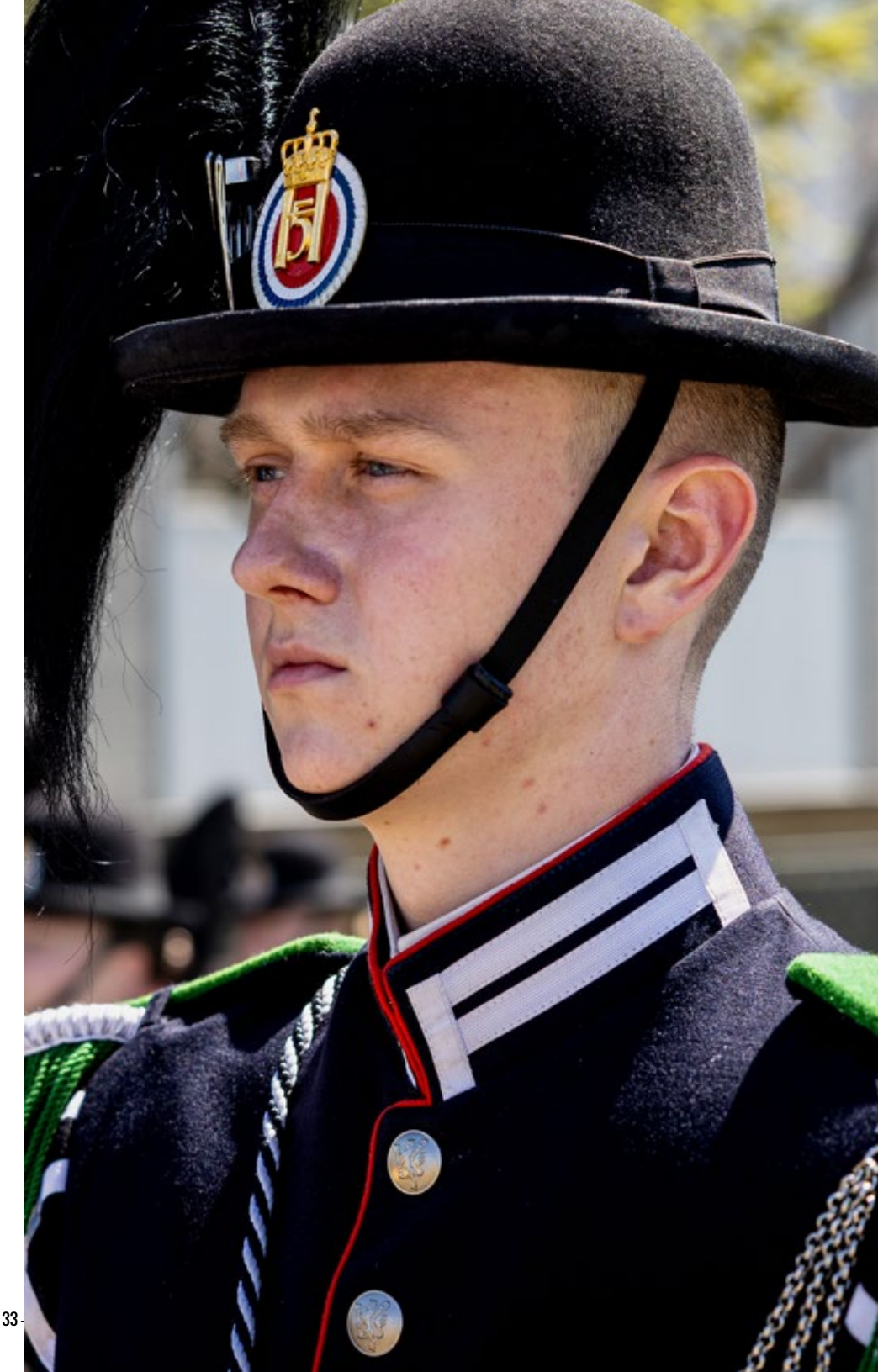
A few months after the annual reciprocal troop exchange, His Majesty the King’s Guard Band and Drill Team visited Minnesota, marching from the St. Paul Armory to the State Capitol building. On behalf of the King of Norway, the unit’s commander, Norwegian Army Capt. Mats Bakken, rendered a salute to Army Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke at the capitol steps.

In the summer, Minnesota National Guard members flew to Norway and competed in a multi-day marksmanship contest after learning new weapon systems. Called Landsskytterstevnet, it is one of the largest sporting events in Norway, with over 5,000 participants.

In October, Crown Prince Haakon of Norway, and their Minister of Foreign Affairs, Espen Barth Eide, visited the Minnesota State Capitol to discuss the partnership, covering topics from upcoming joint training opportunities to ongoing force modernization efforts.

“Welcoming Prince Haakon, Minister Espen Eide, and the entirety of the Norwegian delegation highlighted the friendship and trust that form the foundation of our partnership,” said Manke. “This partnership has a rich history, with all of us committed to enhancing our ties and finding new opportunities to collaborate.”

After more than 50 years of working together, Norway officially became a Minnesota strategic partner through the State Partnership Program in 2023, growing the decades-old relationship.







### May Fly Away

*By Air Force Master Sgt. Erin Barry*

The 210th Engineering Installation Squadron, Minnesota National Guard, and 205th Engineering Installation Squadron, Oklahoma National Guard, recently came together at Camp Ripley Training Center for the May Fly Away joint training exercise which focused on strengthening mission readiness and building unit cohesion.

The multi-day field training event provided hands-on scenarios in critical areas including chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive response, and confined space entry, geospatial survey, fiber optic cable installation, and vehicle operations. These scenarios simulated deployed environments and sharpened skills critical to real-world missions.

“Training with the Oklahoma unit was a great experience,” said Tech. Sgt. Victor Stark of the 210th. “The engineering section was very positive and offered valuable insight into the review process.”

In addition to the mission-focused training, the exercise featured an ‘Engineering Installation Olympics’ competition. The competition brought out the best in both squadrons and fostered camaraderie and healthy rivalry through a spirited challenge that tested speed, problem-solving, and teamwork across a series of events.

“The energy during the [Engineering Installation] Olympics was electric,” said Airman 1st Class Charlie Stenzel of the 210th. “It was a fun, competitive environment that really brought everyone together. It helped us build a stronger connection with another squadron in the [engineering installation] community.”

When the dust settled, the 205th emerged as the winner, earning bragging rights until next year’s match. The May Fly Away not only enhanced operational proficiency but also reinforced the importance of collaboration. Experiences like this ensure both squadrons remain mission ready and connected.

“I was impressed by how well each unit collaborated,” said Air Force Master Sgt. Alan Huntington of the 210th. “Everyone had a great attitude, and we really operated as one team. I’m looking forward to seeing what the 205th comes up with when they host the next Fly Away.”

### Partnerships Powering the Minnesota Military Museum Expansion

*By Army 1st Lt. Colton Rossow*

The opening of the new Minnesota Military Museum in the late summer of 2026 represents the creation of a vital community hub and a renewed commitment to honoring Minnesota’s military legacy. While the Minnesota Department of Military Affairs is leading the construction and operation of this 40,000-square-foot facility, located just outside Camp Ripley, the project’s momentum is fueled by a network of collaborative partnerships.

Partnerships with veteran organizations are integral to this ongoing project. These groups contribute invaluable historical expertise, contribute artifacts from their personal collections, and volunteer support to ensure the museum accurately and respectfully portrays the experiences of those who have served.

Additionally, the museum is actively developing collaborations with local educational institutions. These partnerships will lead to the development of historical curriculum, providing students and researchers unique opportunities to engage with military history.

Located in the heart of Minnesota, with easy access for travelers, the museum is a natural destination for families, school groups, and history enthusiasts. It will serve as a significant resource for communities across Minnesota, offering educational opportunities, historical insights, and a space for remembrance.

The museum also holds particular importance for the Minnesota National Guard as a repository for the organization’s history. The expanded facility will preserve and showcase training, deployments, and contributions of generations of service members. The museum will be a place where current and former service members can connect with their community and share their experiences.

For more information, visit [MnVetMuseum.org](https://MnVetMuseum.org)







**‘Jets Day’- Making Ten Wishes Come True**

*By Army Capt. Kristin Ohrt*

In September, the Minnesota National Guard and Air Force Reserve partnered with Minnesota Vikings community relations to host a ‘Jets Day’ Make-A-Wish event, granting the wishes of 10 children, ages 5-18, and their families.

The children wished to meet Vikings superstar wide receiver Justin ‘Jets’ Jefferson – a wish granted during the coordinated event, continuing the long-standing partnership between the Vikings and the Minnesota National Guard.

The event transformed the Air Force Reserve’s 934th Air Wing’s maintenance hangar into an aviation showcase. The Minnesota National Guard’s 34th Combat Aviation Brigade provided a UH-60M Black Hawk and a CH-47 Chinook helicopters for display. An F-16 Fighting Falcon from the 148th Fighter Wing, a C-130 Hercules and a Joint Light Tactical Vehicle from the 934th Airlift Wing were also staged nearby the helicopters.

Corporate sponsors provided gifts for the children, including sunglasses, shoes, Vikings apparel, and custom jewelry. As buses arrived, Jefferson, wearing a military flight suit and bomber jacket, surprised the children by emerging from behind the F-16 while they listened to a greeting from Maria Taylor of Sunday Night Football. The children, like Jefferson, wore military bomber jackets.

The event brought moments of joy, including a ‘griddy’ dance between Jefferson and 5-year-old Gabe Downey, in remission from cancer. Downey’s mother, Riley Tolbert, said the day offered a respite from his treatment.

“This event meant the world to us because we got to see him being himself,” she said.

The event held added significance as Downey’s stepfather serves in the Minnesota National Guard, and Tolbert is an Army Reserve veteran.

Over three hours, families toured the aircraft, received gifts, took photos, and spoke with Jefferson and service members. The event culminated with the families watching the Army helicopters take off at sunset, and ‘Jets Day’ demonstrated the power of collaboration and community outreach.

**Armed Forces Appreciation Day**

*By Army 1st Lt. Austin Stibbe*

In September, the Minnesota National Guard and Minnesota Twins partnered to honor all of our nation’s service members and veterans in the 22nd annual Armed Forces Appreciation Day, or AFAD, at Target Field.

“We are grateful that the Twins are so committed to this relationship,” said Army Maj. Jodine Eells, the Minnesota National Guard’s lead organizer for AFAD. “They are incredibly accommodating through and through, and we are always looking for ways to expand the partnership.”

Fans were welcomed by retired Army Command Sgt. Maj. Doug Wortham as he emceed the event, guiding the pregame program through highlights including service member grants from the Minnesotans’ Military Appreciation Fund, on-field recognition of new members from each military branch, and the honoring of the 250th birthdays of the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps.

The 34th Infantry Division “Red Bull” Band’s ‘Boots N’ Brass’ ensemble performed songs such as ‘Take it to the House,’ ‘Thrift Shop,’ and ‘God Bless the USA.’

The most somber part of the program was the recognition of Gold Star families. Each year, the Twins organize donations of suites for AFAD, offering Gold Star families an opportunity to come together. The entire stadium rose to honor these families for the sacrifices their loved ones gave and the hardships they carry with them.

“AFAD means so much to the families of the fallen,” said Kylee McArdle, a survivor outreach services specialist with the Minnesota National Guard. “It is both humbling and an honor to speak with them throughout the game and learn more about their family member.”

During the national anthem, Target Field shook from a low-altitude flyover by helicopters from the 34th Combat Aviation Brigade in a display that generated roars from the crowd. In 2026, the Twins are planning to expand military and veteran appreciation over an entire weekend, allowing for even greater depth in the team’s appreciation of the Armed Forces.







## Minnesota Military Radio

By Army 1st Lt. Austin Stibbe

In 2025, Minnesota Military Radio, or MMR, continued doing what it does best – connecting people with stories about service, policy, and programs. The show showcased its partnerships with the Minnesota National Guard, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, or MDVA, the Minneapolis VA, and Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, or BTYR, helping listeners understand what’s out there, what’s changing, and why it matters for Minnesota’s service-connected community.

Year 15 on-air featured retired Army Command Sgt. Maj. Doug Wortham leading his first full year as the show’s host after taking the reins from founder Tom Lyons. Some highlights included on-location episodes at the Minnesota Wild headquarters, the VA National Veterans Wheelchair Games, the Minnesota State Fair, and the Memorial Day live special featuring Gov. Tim Walz, Sen. Amy Klobuchar, and Rep. Tom Emmer.

2025 also saw a transformation through a content refresh, modernizing the show format to enhance the depth of messaging. The change moved away from the segmented model where each weekly broadcast featured two defined halves, with guests from separate partner entities, and transitioned to a unified, single-organization weekly format.

Wortham’s first full-year as host paved the way for growth opportunities. He looked into what could be enhanced, while maintaining continuity and maximizing messaging cohesion, allowing coordinated and consistent content that resonates with listeners.

As always, MMR would like to extend a special thanks to iHeart Radio for supporting the program through time and resources so our military communities can be heard. Throughout the year, you can tune in weekly on one of 67 radio stations across Minnesota, nationally on Wreaths Across America radio network, or at any time on major audio streaming platforms. Visit [minnesotamilitaryradio.com](http://minnesotamilitaryradio.com) to learn more.

### 2026 Monthly Episode Guide

Week 1: Military

Week 2: Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

Week 3: Veterans Affairs

Week 4: Beyond the Yellow Ribbon or military

Week 5 (applicable months): Commander’s Task Force

## Minnesota National Guard Community Relations

By Army Maj. Andrea Tsuchiya

Members of the Minnesota National Guard live, work, and serve in communities throughout the state. The Minnesota National Guard prioritizes outreach efforts to provide our neighbors with opportunities to engage with their local military members. These initiatives are vital for building and maintaining strong relationships, fostering trust and confidence in our organization, members, and capabilities. The continued support of Minnesota’s communities is crucial to our success.

In 2025, the Minnesota National Guard participated in 416 outreach events statewide. These events included: speaking engagements, support for local parades, touch-a-truck events, military appreciation nights at professional sporting events, leadership roundtables with local industries, cybersecurity summits with public and private professionals, air shows, and facility tours. Our presence in 59 Minnesota cities enabled us to support events across the state.

A new outreach initiative was launched in 2025 to encourage our units to build new relationships within their communities. Units were tasked with reaching out to local leaders in both the public and private sectors to inform them that the National Guard is part of their city. This effort aimed to educate Minnesotans about the types of units based in their towns and provide information on engaging with the National Guard. Community members received copies of the Minnesota National Guard Annual Report and a list of potential community outreach events.

In 2026, the Minnesota National Guard aims to actively seek new community outreach opportunities. This includes offering classes to Minnesota high schools, where our Soldiers and Airmen can share their military experiences and the skills they have gained. Organizations or communities interested in Minnesota National Guard community outreach can learn more at [MinnesotaNationalGuard.ng.mil](http://MinnesotaNationalGuard.ng.mil).







McGough, a Beyond the Yellow Ribbon company, along with local partners, hosted a Family Day event for military families at the Minnesota Vikings' training center in Eagan, Minnesota, June 30.

Photographer: Cristina Oxta

Beyond the Yellow Ribbon

By Cristina Oxta

With 50 community networks and 89 corporate partners, Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, or BTYR, helps meet the needs of Minnesota’s veterans and service members of all branches and their families. In 2024, BTYR supported 1,245 events, mailed 4,379 packages to deployed service members, and more to families of deployed service members. Total provided support and services were valued at \$3,861,292. Support continued to grow in 2025.

In 2025, Starkey and Walser Automotive Group joined the BTYR corporate network. The efforts of BTYR companies and organizations are an ongoing commitment to supporting military employees and communities, building a stronger, more compassionate, and welcoming workplace. By becoming part of the BTYR network, key areas within companies and organizations can collaborate to honor and embrace those who have served or are currently serving in the military. This support can enable a successful transition into the workplace for service members and creates support systems for military service employees and their families. To learn more, visit: [mnbyr.501site.com](http://mnbyr.501site.com)

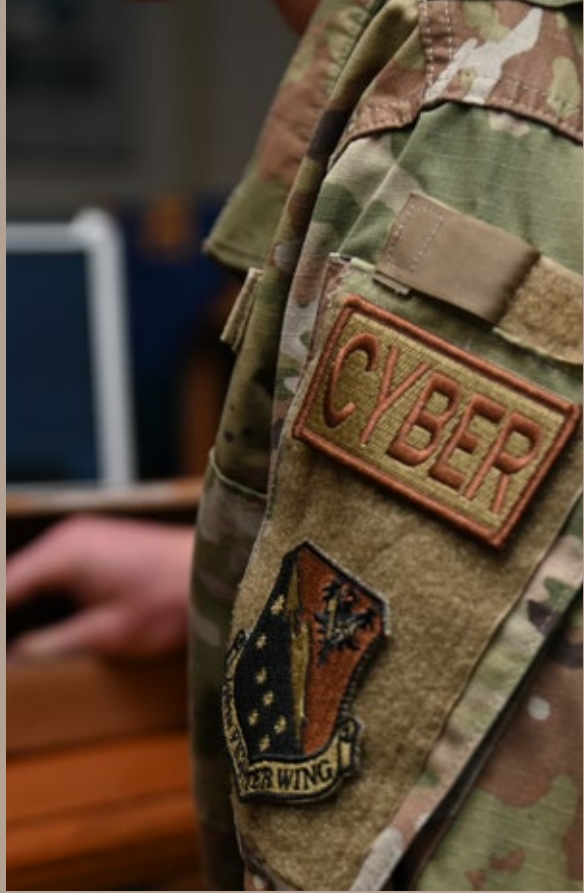
Community

- From January to October 2025, community networks supported 215 events, sent 873 more packages, performed 12,063 volunteer hours, and contributed \$706,697 to help veterans, service members, and their families.
- The Mississippi River Valley network received the Cottage Grove Chamber of Commerce Non-Profit Organization of the Year award.
- The Hiawatha Valley network was nominated for an award for its impact in Red Wing.
- The Northeast Metro network raised \$3,800 at a plunge and pledge event.
- The Hugo network provided support and donations toward food and beverages for service members during annual training, as well as a special cold-weather training event.
- The Rosemount network hosted a ‘Patriots in the Park’ event which featured entertainment, food, and military vehicles.
- The Farmington network served monthly dinners for Veterans and installed a wheelchair ramp at a local Veteran’s home.
- Many networks honored high school students who joined the military and awarded scholarships to military youth. Through BTYR’s Hero Meals initiative, networks delivered hundreds of bags of groceries for military community members in need.

Corporate

- From January to October 2025, corporate partners supported 166 events, sent 83 packages, performed 4,528 volunteer hours, and contributed \$604,175 in monetary assistance to military community members and \$398,900 value of in-kind donations.
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota, Cargill, Fairview Health, General Mills, Medica, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and Starkey received Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve awards.
- The Minnesota Building & Construction Trades’ Ribfest raised \$111,634 for its support efforts.
- Ryan Companies and Slalom donated baby essentials to military families.
- McGough hosted a military family day at the Vikings Performance Center.
- The Minnesota Twins held a military youth baseball clinic at Camp Ripley.
- The Minnesota Wild hosted Military Appreciation Night.
- The YMCA of the North hosted a military family retreat.
- Grand Casino Mille Lacs held a veterans’ resource fair.
- Wells Fargo and Apple Autos donated a vehicle to a Veteran during Military Appreciation Day at the Minnesota State Fair. Other corporate partners volunteered at the Fair and at family reintegration events.





NOW

St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter declared a state of local emergency on July 22, 2025 following a days-long cyberattack on the city's Internet-based computer networks. The city called in the FBI, and Gov. Tim Walz enlisted the aid of the Minnesota National Guard's cybersecurity experts to help restore vital services and the safety and security of St. Paul residents. This was the first time the 177th Cyber Protection Team was activated within Minnesota.



5 YEARS AGO

On March 13, 2020 Gov. Tim Walz issued an Executive Order declaring a peacetime emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic that threatened the lives of Minnesotans. Throughout the pandemic, 739 Soldiers and Airmen were activated to perform operations at long-term care facilities, transitional care units, and COVID-19 test sites across the State of Minnesota. In collaboration with Minnesota Department of Health and Minnesota State Colleges, 475 Guard member were trained as certified nursing assistants.



10 YEARS AGO

More than 150 Soldiers from the 682nd Engineer Battalion deployed in October 2015 in support of Operation Spartan Shield. The unit conducted premobilization training at Fort Bliss, Texas and departed for Kuwait in November. While deployed, they were responsible for managing engineer sustainment operations across the Middle East. The unit chose to call themselves Task Force Wild.



15 YEARS AGO

On February 2, 2010 the 34th Red Bull Infantry Division transferred control of Multi-National Division-South to the 1st Infantry Division. During their deployment, the Red Bulls led all U.S. forces across southern Iraq, strengthening Iraq security forces. They also focused on the civil mission, including legal operations.



20 YEARS AGO

In September 2005 the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division "Red Bulls" mobilized for six months of predeployment training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. The unit's activation for this period lasted 22 months in total, with approximately 16 months deployed to Iraq, making it one of the longest continuous combat deployments for a U.S. National Guard unit during Operation Iraqi Freedom.



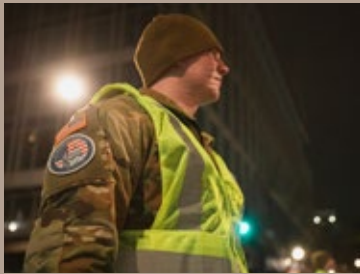
25 YEARS AGO

Forty Soldiers with Battery E of the 151st Field Artillery Regiment returned June 21, 2000 from a seven-month deployment to Kosovo. Company G, 147th Air Traffic Services returned from a nine-month deployment to Kuwait. Nearly 800 Airmen also performed missions in Puerto Rico, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Spain, Canada, Macedonia, Croatia, Korea, and Germany.

# History - Looking Back on Recent Years



# state Activations

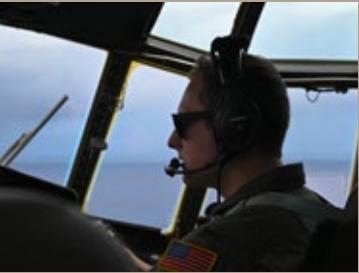


- January**  
Presidential Inauguration  
216 Members
- February**  
Wadena County Sheltering Operations  
4 Members
- March**  
Winter Storm Response  
3 Members
- May**  
Wildfire Support  
25 Members
- August**  
Cyber Support  
45 Members
- December**  
Winter Storm Response  
4 Members

- JAN
- FEB
- MAR
- APR
- MAY
- JUN
- JUL
- AUG
- SEP
- OCT
- NOV
- DEC

- March**  
247th Theater Finance Company Returns  
25 Members
- April**  
133rd Airlift Wing deploys  
96 Members
- June**  
204 Medical Company Area Support Returns  
64 Members
- September**  
148th Fighter Wing Deploys  
150 Members
- October**  
133rd Air Wing Returns  
96 Members
- 109th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron Returns  
35 Members
- 1904 Contract Detachment Returns  
5 Members
- 1-151 Field Artillery Deploys  
70 Members
- 133rd Air Wing Deploys  
16 Members

# Federal Activations





# MAJOR COMMANDS

JOINT FORCE HEADQUARTERS  
34TH INFANTRY DIVISION “RED BULLS”  
34TH DIVISION ARTILLERY  
34TH COMBAT AVIATION BRIGADE  
1ST ARMORED BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM  
347TH REGIONAL SUPPORT GROUP  
84TH TROOP COMMAND  
175TH REGIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTE  
CAMP RIPLEY TRAINING CENTER  
133RD AIRLIFT WING  
148TH FIGHTER WING  
MINNESOTA MEDICAL DETACHMENT



The men and women who serve in the Minnesota National Guard do so under 12 major commands, covering all corners of the state with a physical presence in 59 communities. The Minnesota National Guard supports both state and federal missions with more than 13,000 Airmen and Soldiers from across the state. When directed by the president, the Minnesota National Guard deploys mission-trained Soldiers, Airmen, and units to support overseas missions. The resources of the Minnesota National Guard are also available to the governor to support domestic response missions in communities throughout the state.







Army Command Sgt. Maj. Jason Rost, the Minnesota National Guard's command senior enlisted leader, addresses service members from the Minnesota National Guard support staff during the 2025 Minnesota Best Warrior Competition, April 26, 2025, at Camp Ripley.

Photographer: Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamooneh

# JOINT FORCE HEADQUARTERS

Est'd  
1856



The Adjutant General  
Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke

Hometown  
Cambridge, Minnesota



Command Senior Enlisted Leader  
Command Sgt. Maj. Jason Rost

Hometown  
Rosemount, Minnesota



Headquarters  
St. Paul, MN

Strength  
HQ - 943  
Subordinate - 12,718

**2025 Accomplishments** | Joint Force Headquarters, or JFHQ, remains committed to modernization, as demonstrated by the fielding of new equipment like the M250 next generation squad weapon, the updated M1A2 Abrams tank, and the new armored multi-purpose vehicles, or AMPVs. The organization also opened a new armory in New Ulm and completed renovations and upgrades to the Rosemount Armory.

The JFHQ staff continued to strengthen relationships with State Partnership Program countries Croatia and Norway, as well as other NATO partners. Croatian President Zoran Milanović visited Minnesota and toured Camp Ripley to view facilities and equipment and to discuss future training opportunities with the Minnesota National Guard. His Majesty the King's Guard, a battalion of the Norwegian Army, performed at venues in Minnesota, including the State Capitol and Target Field. Norwegian Crown Prince Haakon visited to underscore the countries' cultural and historical ties and to promote cooperation in business, education, and culture.

JFHQ also participated in a homeland defense exercise in coordination with state and federal agencies. This exercise involved coordinated

planning and resource assessment to enhance readiness and response capabilities. The exercise aimed to strengthen interagency communication and operational effectiveness in addressing potential threats to local and national security.

**2026 Objectives** | The JFHQ staff will continue to implement modernization efforts for the state by preparing to field the new MK22 sniper rifle and the quick reaction capability radar TPQ-53, and by continuing to field the joint light tactical vehicle and next generation squad weapons.

The staff will continue planning future domestic operations by reviewing and refining state response plans for natural disasters and civil disturbances.

JFHQ will continue to strengthen its relationships with interagency partners including the FBI and Minnesota's Bureau of Criminal Apprehension through annual counterintelligence sharing and the counter-drug program.

The patch is blue and white, like the colors of the Minnesota State Flag. The white appears as a border around a sky-blue shield and a star in the upper half of the shield. There are rays emanating from the star, with a wavy bar across the lower half of the shield. The star symbolizes the North Star, as Minnesota is widely known as the North Star State. The white wavy bar symbolizes water, as Minnesota is known as the Land of 10,000 Lakes, and the name Minnesota is said to be derived from the Dakota language to mean sky-tinted or cloudy water.

18  
56

The Minnesota National Guard's lineage can be traced to 1856, when the first uniformed volunteer militia company, first known as the Pioneer Guard, was formed in St. Paul. James J. Hill, who is considered the 'Father of the Great Northern' railroad, served in the Pioneer Guard.





Army Staff Sgt. William Essman, assigned to Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 133rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division “Red Bulls”, Iowa National Guard, provides security within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, Oct. 9, 2025..

Photographer: Army Sgt. Zachary Ta

# 34TH INFANTRY DIVISION

Est'd  
1917



**Commander**  
Brig. Gen. Joseph Sharkey

**Hometown**  
Elko, Minnesota



**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Marc Dempsey

**Hometown**  
Ham Lake, Minnesota



**Headquarters**  
Arden Hills, MN

**Strength**  
HQ - 655  
Subordinate - 9,146

**2025 Accomplishments** | In early 2025, Soldiers of the division headquarters participated in the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program events upon returning from their deployment to the Middle East in support of Operation Spartan Shield. These events helped connect Soldiers and their families with resources on healthcare, education, employment, financial, and legal benefits post-deployment.

In June, the unit participated in the first annual training to fully incorporate out-of-state aligned units. The division headquarters provided mission command for a command post exercise for the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade from the South Dakota National Guard at Camp Ripley. Division staff helped facilitate realistic training scenarios for the 153rd Engineer Battalion’s wet gap crossing over the Mississippi River, and the 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery Regiment’s operations and live fire exercise. Division Soldiers focused on building individual readiness and Soldier tasks including weapons qualification, combatives training, mounted and dismounted land navigation, rappel tower operations, and a field training exercise.

In August, select staff deployed to Taiwan to advise and assist the Taiwanese Army during the annual Red Blue command post exercise.

The Red Bull patch, designed by Marvin Cone of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, consists of a steer’s skull imposed on the shape of a Mexican water jar, an “olla”, paying homage to the Division’s establishment in 1917 at Camp Cody, New Mexico.

**2026 Objectives** | The 34th Infantry Division “Red Bulls” begins 2026 with a renewed focus on building lethal Soldiers and cohesive units capable of operating in multi-domain environments. Training will be designed to ensure our Soldiers are brilliant at the basics of shooting, moving, communicating, and performing their military occupational specialties.

The Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, or HHBN, will conduct its annual training at Camp Ripley, focusing on command post operations in a field environment, exercising standard operating procedures, and setting the conditions for future collective training events. Additionally, they will focus on ensuring Soldiers are qualified in their respective job fields and on enrolling qualified Soldiers into the state’s Officer Candidate School program. The HHBN will also work with our Norwegian Army partners to improve interoperability during the 2026 Cold Response Exercise in Norway and will take part in additional State Partnership Program engagements.

19  
42

WWII: The 34th had been chosen as the first division to be deployed overseas, and when British newspapers headlined that the first Yank had landed, they were talking about Army Pvt. Milburn H. Henke of Hutchinson, Minnesota. By the end of May 1942 the entire division was assembled for rigorous training in Ireland and Scotland. During this time, the elite 1st Ranger Battalion was formed under the command of one of the division’s officers, Army Capt. William Darby. Some 80 percent of the unit’s volunteers were drawn from the 34th, and they soon became known as “Darby’s Rangers.”





Alpha Battery, 1st Battalion, 151st Field Artillery Soldiers deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility participate in a patching and promotion ceremony, Sept. 16, 2025.

Photographer: Army Staff Sgt. Tanner Wagner

# 34TH DIVISION ARTILLERY

Est'd  
1942



Commander  
Col. Ryan Kelly

Hometown  
St. Paul, Minnesota



Senior Enlisted Leader  
Command Sgt. Maj. Chad Turner

Hometown  
Cushing, Minnesota



Headquarters  
Arden Hills, MN

Strength  
192

**2025 Accomplishments** | 2025 was a year of transition for the 34th Division Artillery Brigade, or DIVARTY. In December 2024, the brigade saw the return and reintegration of the 38 Soldiers who deployed with the 34th Infantry Division Headquarters in support of Operation Spartan Shield and Operation Inherent Resolve.

The annual Gopher Gunner's St. Barbara's Ball was held at Mayo Clinic Health Systems Event Center in Mankato in January, building esprit de corps throughout Minnesota's field artillery community.

In June, DIVARTY sent two Soldiers to Croatia in support of exercise Immediate Response 25 where they focused on building capabilities with our international partners in Fire Support Operations and the targeting process. The unit conducted annual training at Camp Ripley Training Center where they completed a staff exercise focusing on the targeting cycle and the building of competencies related to the brigade's role as a force field artillery headquarters.

In October, the 1st Battalion, 151st Field Artillery Regiment was realigned to DIVARTY from the 84th Troop Command.

**2026 Objectives** | The 34th Division Artillery will focus on operations as a brigade headquarters and looks to continue growth of the formation, building on development of core competencies throughout the training year.

The DIVARTY will also prioritize operations as a force field artillery headquarters with the command and control of subordinate artillery battalions. The brigade will support the reorganization of the 151st from the M777A2 towed 155 mm to the M109A6 Paladin self-propelled howitzer throughout the year. The brigade is slated to field the Q-53 radar during the second quarter, expanding on the capabilities of the organization.

As the field artillery community grows and transitions across the Army, the unit will look to continue the development of the branch and integration of the intelligence community through execution of the Fires Symposium in March 2026 with the 34th Infantry Division operational division alignment conference.

The Red Bull patch, designed by Marvin Cone of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, consists of a steer's skull imposed on the shape of a Mexican water jar, an "olla", paying homage to the Division's establishment in 1917 at Camp Cody, New Mexico.

19  
NOV  
1942

The first artillery round fired by American ground forces against German troops during WWII was leveled by Pfc. Joseph Pisch of B Battery, 175th Field Artillery Battalion of the 34th Infantry Division "Red Bulls", using a British 25-pounder on November 19, 1942, at Medjez-El-Bab, Tunisia.





A UH-60L Black Hawk helicopter assigned to Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 211th Aviation Regiment conducts a mass casualty training event, at Camp Ripley Training Center near Little Falls, Minnesota, June 12, 2025.

Photographer: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks

# 34TH COMBAT AVIATION BRIGADE



**Commander**  
Col. Kyle Liudahl

**Hometown**  
Minnetonka, Minnesota



**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Shawn Schmidt

**Hometown**  
Blaine, Minnesota



**Headquarters**  
Inver Grove Heights, MN

**Strength**  
HQ - 157  
Subordinate - 868

**2025 Accomplishments** | The 34th Combat Aviation Brigade maintained a strong readiness and enhanced mission command capabilities throughout the year. The brigade conducted validation, communication, and command post exercises, to train on mission command systems at brigade and battalion levels.

2nd Assault Helicopter Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment, or 2-147, executed demanding aviation operations and state missions. The battalion maintained readiness across seven companies, enhanced command post operations, and conducted numerous air assaults and multinational training with the Canadian Lake Superior Scottish Regiment. They also supported wildfire response missions, dropping 168,800 gallons of water across 41 flight hours. Chinook crews completed aerial resupply, wet-gap crossings, and disaster relief during Hurricane Helene, transporting essential supplies to isolated areas.

A Forward Support Medical Platoon deployed to Joint Readiness Training Center, at Fort Polk, Louisiana, providing medical evacuation support to 2nd Brigade, 34th Infantry Division. The Battalion was also responsible for air traffic controllers, achieving high marks on the Army Resource Management Survey and controlled 6,248 aircraft movements.

The Red Bull patch, designed by Marvin Cone of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, consists of a steer's skull imposed on the shape of a Mexican water jar, an "olla", paying homage to the Division's establishment in 1917 at Camp Cody, New Mexico.

834th Aviation Support Battalion supported federal and state missions while serving as Minnesota's National Guard Reaction Force - Reserve, and supported wildfire response missions. The Battalion fielded the Terrestrial Transmission Line of Sight Radio communications system to enhance tactical connectivity.

**2026 Objectives** | The 34th Combat Aviation Brigade remains focused on maintaining readiness, modernizing equipment, and strengthening interoperability. The brigade will deploy one platoon from A Co, 2-147 to participate in Cold Response 26, a multinational cold-weather training event designed to enhance Arctic operational capabilities and joint integration with NATO allies in Norway. The brigade will continue modernization efforts with the fielding of the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, and will maintain its role as the National Guard Reaction Force - Reserve, sustaining rapid-response readiness for domestic operations.

Finally, the brigade will conduct a field training exercise at Camp Ripley, integrating all subordinate units for the first time since 2022, including its medical evacuation elements from Iowa, to rehearse full mission command and synchronization across aviation and support elements.



The St. Cloud-based Company B, 2nd Battalion (General Support), 211th Aviation Regiment, deployed in November 2010 for Operation New Dawn in Iraq. Flying CH-47 Chinook helicopters, Company B provided aerial movement of troops, equipment and supplies for support of maneuver, combat and combat service support operations.





Soldiers with the Ohio National Guard's 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 145th Armor Regiment, a subordinate battalion to 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, conduct live fire training with the M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams Tank at Camp Ripley Training Center, near Little Falls, Minnesota, July 28, 2025

Photographer: Mr. Tony Housey

# 1ST ARMORED BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

Est'd  
1861



Commander  
Col. Mike Klaphake

Hometown  
Delano, Minnesota



Senior Enlisted Leader  
Command Sgt. Maj. Jim Perez

Hometown  
Prior Lake, Minnesota



Headquarters  
Rosemount, MN

Strength  
HQ - 123  
Subordinate - 4,647

**2025 Accomplishments** | Throughout 2025, the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division “Red Bulls” maintained a rigorous training schedule focused on human capital, equipment readiness, and lethality across all formations. The brigade continued to demonstrate its ability to execute large-scale combat operations while preparing for future federal and state missions.

Modernization remained a top priority across the formation. The brigade fielded new equipment and digital systems that enhanced communication, situational awareness, and interoperability. The unit received the Army’s newest M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams tanks, Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicles, the new M250 light machine gun, along with improvements to tactical network infrastructure. This enabled the brigade to remain one of the most technologically advanced formations in the National Guard.

A combined team from the 1st Battalion, 194th Armor Regiment and 1st Squadron of the 94th Cavalry Regiment earned 6th place out of 18 teams at the U.S. Army’s prestigious Gainey Cup competition, showcasing reconnaissance, surveillance, and tactical expertise among the Army’s

top cavalry scout units. The 194th Armor Regiment sent two Soldiers to compete in the Winston P. Wilson International Sniper Competition, where they placed 8th out of 36 teams from across the National Guard and active duty forces.

The brigade strengthened its cooperation with Croatia and Norway through the State Partnership Program. Engagements throughout the year enhanced interoperability, built mutual trust, and reaffirmed the enduring relationship between the Minnesota National Guard and its international counterparts.

**2026 Objectives** | In 2026, the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team will continue to focus on their people, equipment readiness, and lethality across all formations. Priorities include crew live fire on Abrams tanks, Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and Paladin howitzer, individual Soldier skills and weapons qualification. The brigade will conduct command post exercises and training on new communications and tactical network systems. This ensures the unit maintains forces that are both tactically and technically proficient, mentally and physically agile, and always prepared for the next mission.

The Red Bull patch, designed by Marvin Cone of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, consists of a steer’s skull imposed on the shape of a Mexican water jar, an “olla”, paying homage to the Division’s establishment in 1917 at Camp Cody, New Mexico.

18  
61

The 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry Division traces its lineage back to the Civil War with the 1st Minnesota Volunteers, organized in 1861. Then Minnesota Gov. Alexander Ramsey had committed the regiment to the Union while he was in Washington, D.C. on the day the Confederacy attacked Fort Sumter, making it the first regiment to be accepted on active status during the Civil War.



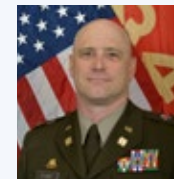


Army Capt. Danielle Heitkamp, the commander of 147th Human Resources Company, 347th Regional Support Group completes a confidence course at Camp Ripley, July 26, 2025.

Photographer: Sgt. 1st Class Bill Boecker

# 347TH REGIONAL SUPPORT GROUP

Est'd  
1959



**Commander**  
Col. Joel Stamp

**Hometown**  
Plymouth, Minnesota



**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Smith

**Hometown**  
Scandia, Minnesota



**Headquarters**  
Brooklyn Park, MN

**Strength**  
HQ - 79  
Subordinate - 1, 211

**2025 Accomplishments** | In 2025, the 347th Regional Support Group, or RSG, achieved significant milestones across a broad spectrum of training, operational activities, and community engagements.

The brigade demonstrated its commitment to mission readiness through successful execution of several key initiatives. In the first year of its Mobilization Support Force, or MSF, mission, the RSG established a foundational capability for large-scale mobilization operations, or LSMO, as demonstrated at the Mobilization Exercise I and Table Top Exercise, or TTX, at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, also known as CAIN.

The RSG redeployed three subordinate units from overseas mobilizations. Soldiers from 247th Theater Finance Company returned from Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq, and Soldiers from the 204th Medical Company Area Support redeployed from deployments in Iraq, Kuwait, and Syria. 1904th Contract Detachment also redeployed after supporting Operation Spartan Shield in Kuwait.

Finally, the RSG actively engaged with the local community. These engagements strengthened relationships with the community and

reinforced the RSG's commitment to supporting the citizens of Minnesota.

**2026 Objectives** | In 2026, the 347th Regional Support Group will prioritize enhancing readiness and expanding mission capabilities with a focus on the successful completion of its second year of the MSF mission. This effort will culminate in a comprehensive TTX at CAIN, designed to validate procedures and refine capabilities for LSMO.

The RSG will focus training and staff preparation on swift sustainment and administrative support to potential state and federal missions. The brigade will facilitate the deployment of seven Soldiers from the 107th Ordnance Detachment alongside their company headquarters from the Wisconsin National Guard. The unit will prioritize ensuring a smooth transition and successful integration of the detachment into their assigned mission.

The unit insignia features a compass rose as the focal image representing the unit's command and control functions. It is centered on a shield that is arced at the bottom and top and divided into six distinct areas. They represent the Group's primary mission areas: internal terrain, administrative functions, logistical support, base operations, movement control, and provision and management of security.

10  
YEARS  
SINCE

The RSG participated in the only Vigilant Guard that has been held in Minnesota. They were responsible for the joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration process, which was crucial for managing personnel and equipment in a joint task force. Vigilant Guard is a large-scale, joint military and civilian emergency response exercise designed to test and improve preparedness for natural disasters and other catastrophic events.





Soldiers and Airmen in the Minnesota National Guard's 55th CERF-P conduct team evaluations at Volk Field Air Force Base, Wisconsin, May 14, 2025. The unit was tested on logistics, communication, search and extraction, decontamination, and medical procedures.

Photographer: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks

# 84TH TROOP COMMAND

Est'd  
1917



**Commander**  
Col. John McRae

**Hometown**  
Woodbury, Minnesota



**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Christian Hudson

**Hometown**  
Andover, Minnesota



**Headquarters**  
Cambridge, MN

**Strength**  
HQ - 47  
Subordinate - 1,640

**2025 Accomplishments** | In 2025, the 84th Troop Command supported a wide range of federal and domestic missions. The 1st Battalion, 151st Field Artillery Regiment continued upgrades to their primary weapon system, the M109A6 Paladin howitzer. B Battery trained at the National Training Center, while A Battery trained at the Joint Training Readiness Center and deployed to the Middle East. The 682nd Engineer Battalion focused on their continued support to the 55th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and high-yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package, or CERF-P.

The 34th Military Police Company received their formal notification for mobilization to the Middle East. The 257th Military Police Company was assigned as the National Guard Reaction Force – Metro.

The 55th Civil Support Team, or CST, conducted nine field training exercises, working with interagency partners on chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear survey operations, decontamination, medical, communications, and command and control. New relationships were established federal partners including the United States Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency.

**2026 Objectives** | In 2026, the brigade will maintain a broad spectrum of capable units ready to deploy at home or abroad. The 682nd will focus on mission essential tasks, while supporting the 434th Chemical Company as they prepare for deployment to the Middle East. The 257th Military Police Company will continue their focus as the National Guard Reaction Force – Metro, while the 34th Military Police Company deploys to the Middle East.

The CST will strengthen partnerships with the United States Coast Guard and continue to refine training in support of port operations and the mitigation of radiation-contaminated cargo threats. The team will also continue to support local, county, state, and federal agencies across Minnesota to ensure the safety of millions attending large-scale events such as marathons, major sporting events, and the Minnesota State Fair. Additionally, the CST will provide joint hazard assessment team support to the 6th CST in Texas during the 2026 FIFA World Cup. This mission will take place in Arlington, Texas, as part of a nationwide security effort supporting an anticipated 6.5 million fans across 12 major U.S. cities.

The patch is blue and white, like the colors of the Minnesota State Flag. The white appears as a border around a sky-blue shield and a star in the upper half of the shield. There are rays emanating from the star, with a wavy bar across the lower half of the shield. The star symbolizes the North Star, as Minnesota is widely known as the North Star State. The white wavy bar symbolizes water, as Minnesota is known as the Land of 10,000 Lakes, and the name Minnesota is said to be derived from the Dakota language to mean sky-tinted or cloudy water.

70  
YEARS  
SINCE

In 1955, the 682nd Engineer Battalion, part of the 84th Troop Command, was training at Camp Ripley when a young boy had become lost in the woods 100 miles north of the base. The battalion quickly changed course as they left to join the search efforts within 30 minutes of being notified.





The Regional Training Site-Maintenance hosted a track vehicle recovery course for Soldiers, utilizing the M88 Hercules recovery vehicle to tow M1 Abrams Tanks, M109 Paladin howitzers, and more, Sept. 12, 2025, Camp Ripley, near Little Falls, Minnesota

Photographer: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks

# 175TH REGIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTE

Est'd  
1956



**Commander**  
Col. Brian Malecha

**Hometown**  
Medicine Lake, Minnesota



**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Schwichtenberg

**Hometown**  
Minnetonka, Minnesota



**Headquarters**  
Little Falls, MN

**Strength**  
HQ - 22  
Subordinate - 95

**2025 Accomplishments** | In 2025, the 175th Regional Training Institute welcomed 720 Soldiers from the National Guard, Reserve, and Active components to Camp Ripley to attend one of more than 30 courses. As part of the One Army School System, they completed the triennial accreditation inspection, scoring 98.6%, the highest in Regimental history.

The Regional Training Site-Maintenance, or RTS-M, trained 240 Soldiers during the fiscal year. RTS-M focuses on instructing the Tracked Mechanic Conversion course and Advanced Leader Course. Additional wheeled and tracked vehicle recovery courses are also offered.

1st Battalion, 175th Regiment led Officer Candidate School Phase I for a five-state area, graduating 33 officer candidates who advanced to Phase II in their respective states. 1st Battalion also graduated five candidates upon their completion of Phase III, with four commissioning into the Minnesota National Guard. 1st Battalion also facilitates the Minnesota National Guard's Warrant Officer Candidate School and graduated 10 warrant officer candidates, with nine commissioning into the Minnesota

National Guard. Additionally, 1st Battalion conducted the Training, Advising, and Coaching Qualification course, graduating 15 cadre members from across the region.

2nd Battalion, 175th Regiment trained 264 Soldiers from across the Army in critical combat leadership roles in their Advanced Leader Course and the Maneuver Senior Leader Course. In addition, 86 Soldiers were trained in five additional functional area courses.

**2026 Objectives** | In 2026, the regiment will strategically enhance the learning environment by integrating modern technologies into its classrooms. These innovations will elevate student comprehension, promote a safer and more secure educational setting, and foster a highly engaging and interactive learning experience.

The regiment aims to strengthen partnerships with Croatia and Norway, utilizing the latest Army leadership development techniques, and deliver realistic learning experiences through expert cadre to cultivate skilled and adaptive leaders.

Instantly recognizable on the patch is the silhouette of a Minuteman, our nation's original citizen-Soldiers who played an indispensable role in our fight for freedom and liberty in the Revolutionary War. Behind the figure are three colored bands: blue for infantry, yellow for cavalry/armor, and red for artillery.

68  
YEARS  
SINCE

The Minnesota Military Academy was founded in 1956 by Army Maj. Gen. Joseph E. Nelson, the adjutant general of the Minnesota National Guard from 1949 to 1960. The name of the Minnesota Military Academy was changed in the mid-2000s to the 175th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) with the same goal of training service members to become officers. Since its inception almost 70 years ago, the RTI has commissioned more than 2,200 second lieutenants.





Soldiers from the 106th Aviation Regiment, Illinois National Guard conduct sling-load training with UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, Aug. 11, 2025, at Camp Ripley near Little Falls, Minnesota

Photographer: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks

# CAMP RIPLEY

Est'd  
1931



Commander  
Col. Troy Fink

Hometown  
Gull Lake, Minnesota



Senior Enlisted Leader  
Command Sgt. Maj. Rian Hofstad

Hometown  
Royalton, Minnesota



Headquarters  
Little Falls, MN

Strength  
Employees - 830

**2025 Accomplishments** | Throughout 2025, Camp Ripley Training Center balanced year-round training for a variety of Department of War personnel, supporting 606,315 person-days of training for service members and civilian agencies, and continued support for interagency partners. These mission standards supported individual Guard member readiness, integrating overall wellbeing through the Holistic Health & Fitness Program. This collectively fostered successful education and operation of several new pieces of equipment adhering to the Army’s modernization plan.

The development of Camp Ripley’s infrastructure included additions to the Reconfigurable Virtual Collective Trainer capability at building 10-151, facilitating continued modernization efforts across the force.

Camp Ripley’s recreation and hunting opportunities improved through the iSportsman program. Additionally, the installation received the fiscal year 2025 Army National Guard Environmental Security Award for best natural resource conservation team and formalized a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a Veteran Conservation Corps member to conduct shared conservation objectives.

**2026 Objectives** | In 2026, Camp Ripley will sustain the focus of partnerships and cooperation locally, nationally, and globally. It will host international allies through the State Partnership Program. Camp Ripley will welcome distinguished visitors and officials from the state and federal government while nurturing existing relationships with the surrounding communities.

The installation will continue to advance it’s ongoing objectives of increasing customer base, developing infrastructure, and exploring a potential designation as a mobilization site.

Continued support of state and federal missions, including partnerships with NATO allies will remain a priority. As in previous years, Camp Ripley will emphasize the Minnesota National Guard’s priority of people first by improving the morale, welfare, and recreation.

The patch’s triangular shape is divided into three equal parts colored yellow, red, and blue, the official branch colors of the three basic combat arms units: Armor and Cavalry, Artillery, and Infantry. This threefold division also recalls the components that make up the “One Army” concept: Active, Reserve, and National Guard. A disc in the center of the insignia contains a rendering of the minuteman statue and thirteen stars, images associated with the founding of our nation through the sacrifice and courage of citizen-Soldiers from the original colonies.

19  
35

Between 1935 and 1939, the stone wall surrounding Camp Ripley was constructed by the Works Progress Administration, a federal program initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Using waste stones quarried in Freedhem, WPA employees built the three-by-two foot perimeter, spanning 3,400 feet. The architect, Army Maj. Philip Bettenburg, was inspired by the Army Corps of Engineers crest while designing the entrance which includes 40-foot towers and two 16-foot gateposts.





Hosting more than 600,000 people-days of training on average annually, Camp Ripley is a world-class training center for military and civilian personnel of all branches, international partners, and first responders worldwide. As the second busiest National Guard training site, Camp Ripley maintains its 2,000-acre cantonment area for year-round billeting, laundry, classroom, and motor pool space. Facilities across the base continue to be modernized, keeping pace with the latest training needs while supporting many morale, welfare, and recreation opportunities.

**46 live-fire ranges**

- Rifle, Pistol & Automatic weapon ranges
- Demolitions & Cratering Ranges
- Platoon-level Convoy live fire Ranges
- Automatic Rifle Qualification
- Reflexive Fire
- Grenade Launcher and Hand Grenade Qualification

**Simulations**

- 5 Engagement Skill Trainers
- Rifle, pistol, and automatic weapon systems in a controlled environment
- 4 Close Combat Tactical Trainer
- Realistic synthetic battlefield that allows service members to operate combat vehicles
- Virtual Convoy operations center
- UH-60 Black Hawk simulator
- CH-47 Chinook simulator
- Reconfigurable Virtual Collective Trainer

**Air travel - Miller Army Airfield**

- Supports parking for up to 7 C-130s
- 6,100’ x 100’ asphalt runway
- 4,000’ x 90’ gravel assault runway
- Two hammerhead turnarounds on gravel strip
- Night Vision Optics lighting with Infrared emitting lights
- Rotary wing pads
- 21 in cantonment
- 17 in the training area

**Lodging**

- 4,057 year-round housing capacity
- 385 total maid service rooms
- 17 two-six bedroom houses
- 140 T-buildings with 184 beds, orderly rooms, supply and kitchen
- 12 Longhouses - 1200 total beds
- 201 officer quarters
- 3,789 seasonal housing capacity

**Education Center**

- 48 individual rooms
- Nine classrooms capable of holding more than 425 students
- 200 person-stepped theater
- 400-person dining facility capable of feeding 1,400 people during a single mealtime period

**24 non-live-fire ranges**

- Rappel Tower
- Confidence Course
- Field Leadership Reaction Course
- Combined Arms Collective Training Facility (CACTF): with 23 buildings

**Medical Simulations**

- CPR recertification
- Combat lifesaver initial and refresher training
- Instructor-run simulation training lanes with realistic combat environments

**Camp Ripley-owned rail line**

- Seven miles of rail, Capable to hold nearly 500 rail cars on network of rail sidings
- Six rail spurs for wheeled and tracked vehicles

**Recreational Opportunities**

- Team & Individual Sports
- Backpacking
- Fishing
- Kayaking
- Indoor fitness centers
- Video games
- Viking Club





C-130H Hercules air craft from the 133rd Airlift Wing, Minnesota Air National Guard, a C-130 Hercules from the Royal Netherlands Air and Space Force, and a C-130J Super Hercules from the 403rd Wing, Keesler Air Force Base, fly in formation over central Norway, May 20, 2025.

Photographer: Air Force Lt. Col. Scot Wilcox

# 133RD AIRLIFT WING



**Commander**  
Col. Jesse Carlson

**Hometown**  
Cokato, Minnesota



**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Chief Master Sgt. Nicole Martland

**Hometown**  
LeSueur, Minnesota



**Headquarters**  
St. Paul, Minnesota

**Strength**  
Airmen - 1, 267

**2025 Accomplishments** | The 133rd Airlift Wing demonstrated its standard of excellence as a tactical airlift unit in 2025. The wing deployed 370 Airmen globally and flew nearly 2,300 hours, the most hours of any combat-coded C-130 unit in the National Guard.

To start the year, the biggest effort for the wing was to prepare and deploy nearly 100 wing members to nine different locations throughout Central Command’s area of operations. 133rd Airmen played a critical role supporting operations during a volatile period involving Operation Midnight Hammer and the Iranian attack on Al Udeid Airbase in response.

In May, 68 members departed for Norway to participate in exercise Swift Response. This multi-national exercise was part of a larger 12-nation Defender 25 exercise. The 133rd executed over 100 flying hours while airlifting and airdropping 150 personnel from 5 countries. They conducted interfly operations with foreign air forces and dissimilar aircraft. Five landings and take-offs were also conducted on a Swedish highway to demonstrate contingency operation capabilities.

July saw 70 wing members deployed around the Pacific theater as part of Exercise Mobility Guardian and Resolute Force Pacific. The exercise tested the implementation of a mission generating force element which reinforced the Department of Defense’s Indo-Pacific strategy and demonstrated collective deterrence in response to regional threats.

Finally, as autumn arrived, we saw the return of 100 deployed Airmen and departure of 16 more, continuing the cycle of providing unparalleled support to our nation. In the meantime, the first four pilots departed for training on the new C-130J Super Hercules aircraft signaling the start of greater things for the 133rd Airlift Wing.

**2026 Objectives** | The wing will complete its final deployment with the legacy C-130H3 Hercules aircraft and transition to the C-130J Super Hercules aircraft. Infrastructure projects are underway as is training for individuals in the new airframe. Two major Air Mobility Command inspections will take place, providing the opportunity for wing members to demonstrate why we are an elite unit in the National Guard.

The patch features Minnesota’s North Star and the big dipper, or Ursa Major, signifies the combined units of the wing. The diagonal wing is symbolic of purpose of the organization. In the lower left area of the emblem is the griffin is poised for the strike in case of attack. This signifies the union of strength and agility, and represents the strategic airlift mission. The Latin motto ‘Splendentes in Defensione’ means ‘Shining in Defense,’ which, combined with the stars on sky-blue background, adds greater significances in symbolizing the unit mission.



An AT-6 Texan aircraft piloted by Army Air Corps Lt. Col. John R. Dolny, the squadron commander of the 109th Airlift Squadron, dropped over 2,000 fire prevention leaflets over Minneapolis for the kickoff of fire prevention week. A model airplane was given to each child who brought one of the leaflets to a fire station. This event was in partnership with the Minneapolis Fire Department and the Junior Chamber of Commerce.





A maintenance technician from the 148th Fighter Wing Maintenance Group recovers a F-16 Fighting Falcon at the 148th Fighter Wing, Duluth, Minnesota, July 16, 2025.

Photographer: Air Force Staff Sgt. Tylin Rust

# 148TH FIGHTER WING

Est'd  
1960



**Commander**  
Col. Nathan Aysta

**Hometown**  
Duluth, Minnesota



**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Chief Master Sgt. Jozef Miketin

**Hometown**  
Esko, Minnesota



**Headquarters**  
Duluth, MN

**Strength**  
Airmen - 1,028

**2025 Accomplishments** | In 2025, the 148th Fighter Wing’s “Bulldogs” trained, deployed, and met its personnel recruiting and retention goals. Over 150 Airman of the wing deployed to the U.S. Central Command’s area of responsibility. They participated in two inter-service exercises involving multiple countries in the in the area. For the first time ever the 148th Fighter Wing sent F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft to Norway and conducted an agile combat employment exercise, integrating with the Royal Norwegian Air Force. The wing also conducted a one-week flying integration training event at home station with a contingent of Norwegian F-35 Lightning II aircraft.

In addition to those initiatives, the 148th continued to support NORAD’s 24/7 aerospace control alert mission, changing duty locations and integrating with the Air Force Reserve. Their security forces squadron planned and facilitated the National Guard’s Cold Weather Operations Course at Camp Ripley for 72 Airmen from 15 states and numerous career fields. Finally, the 148th maintained a 93% personnel retention rate and finished the fiscal year with over 102% end-strength.

**2026 Objectives** | In 2026, the 148th Fighter Wing will focus on preparing for an aviation tasking that will support national strategic initiatives. The wing will continue to modernize facilities, military operating airspace, and building crucial community partnerships. The unit will continue to be ready to succeed against current and future threats.

The emblem is in ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. Polaris at the zenith in the Ursa Minor constellation refers to Minnesota, “The North Star State,” where the unit was activated in 1960. The winged arrowhead represents the airborne might of the wing. The phoenix bearing a bomb and the lightning flashes with the cloud in pile depict the unit’s mission.

55  
YEARS  
SINCE

In 1970, the 179th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, assigned to the 148th Fighter Group, was selected by the National Guard Bureau and Air Defense Command as one of the top F-102A flying units to compete at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida. The 148th was also recognized with the aircrew award, aircraft maintenance award and as the winner of the weapons director award after scoring 11,832 points out of 14,800 possible points. Air Force Maj. Ray “Raycee” Sahlstrom was awarded the top pilot distinction for flying a perfect mission and scoring 2,000 of 2,200 possible points during the competition.





Army Maj. Michael Moore, a medical provider assigned to the Minnesota Medical Detachment discusses medical readiness with Army Staff Sgt. Thomas Fix during a periodic health assessment at the Cottage Grove Armory's medical clinic, Nov. 12, 2025.

Photographer: Army Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamooneh

# MEDICAL DETACHMENT

Est'd  
2022



**Commander**  
Col. Conrad Ross  
  
**Hometown**  
Moose Lake, Minnesota



**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
1st Sgt. Sarah Johnson  
  
**Hometown**  
Woodbury, Minnesota



**Headquarters**  
Cottage Grove, MN  
  
**Strength**  
HQ - 34  
Subordinate units - 122

**2025 Accomplishments** | The Minnesota Medical Detachment, or MED-DET, continued to operationalize and refine medical readiness processes established in 2024, delivering measurable improvements across the Minnesota National Guard. The detachment executed 791 periodic health assessments, 503 dental examinations, 417 laboratory blood draws, 928 audiograms, and 408 immunizations, directly improving Soldier readiness and deployability. MED-DET also conducted 210 accession and commissioning physicals in support of officer recruiting.

These efforts resulted in the Minnesota National Guard ranking first among large states nationwide for medical readiness compliance and earning national recognition at the 2025 National Guard Bureau Medical Team Conference, or MTC, for the second consecutive year. Given the state's medical readiness successes, MED-DET was asked to lead a medical readiness best practices breakout session at the MTC, sharing scalable and repeatable processes across National Guard Bureau.

The case management team processed 317 line of duty investigations, 63 disability evaluation system cases, and 46 incapacitation pay packets,

ensuring Soldiers received timely care, benefits, and administrative support. The behavioral health team supported more than 1,100 Soldiers and conducted 35 outreach events, reinforcing early intervention, stigma reduction, and sustained readiness.

**2026 Objectives.** | Looking ahead, MED-DET will transition from sustainment to optimization by focusing on measurable outcomes, process improvement, and modernization. Objectives include improving data-driven readiness tracking, further reducing processing timelines for medical actions, standardizing case management workflows, and expanding decentralized medical capabilities. MED-DET will continue to modernize and refine internal operations as well as enhance education and training opportunities to deliver a more efficient, responsive, and Soldier-centered medical enterprise in support of the Minnesota National Guard mission.

The patch is blue and white, like the colors of the Minnesota State Flag. The white appears as a border around a sky-blue shield and a star in the upper half of the shield. There are rays emanating from the star, with a wavy bar across the lower half of the shield. The star symbolizes the North Star, as Minnesota is widely known as the North Star State. The white wavy bar symbolizes water, as Minnesota is known as the Land of 10,000 Lakes, and the name Minnesota is said to be derived from the Dakota language to mean sky-tinted or cloudy water.

5  
YEARS  
SINCE

The Minnesota Medical Detachment (formerly the Office of the State Surgeon) served as a lead effort during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. In May of 2020, 45 MED-DET Soldiers were activated and trained over 370 Guard members to serve as nursing assistants at 17 Minnesota long-term care facilities.





The Department of Military Affairs hosted state representatives and staffers for an August 2025 visit to Camp Ripley. The visit helped inform Minnesota legislatures about the Minnesota National Guard's mission and priorities, with a focus on ongoing modernization efforts.

Photographer: Army Col. Kristen Auge

# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS

Est'd  
1856



Commissioner  
Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke

Hometown  
Cambridge, Minnesota



Executive Director  
Scott Rohweder

Hometown  
Lakeville, Minnesota



Headquarters  
St. Paul, MN

Strength  
State Employees - 380

**Strategies** | DMA integrates state resources to support the Adjutant General's priorities by engaging with the Legislature, state agencies, and local governments to garner support, provide resources, or take advantage of mutually beneficial programs.

When units of the National Guard are called into state active service, the agency provides logistical support to ensure the units have the resources necessary to support local authorities as directed by civil authorities.

#### Four Major Programs

- The Enlistment Incentives Program supports and manages enlistment and retention incentives and tuition reimbursement programs.
- The Maintenance of Military Training Facilities Program maintains the state's facilities used to train and house the members of the Minnesota National Guard and protect the state's investment in facilities.
- General Support provides the administrative, financial, accounting, budgeting, project management, strategic planning, and human resource support for the department.
- Emergency services fund the National Guard's emergency response activities at the order of the Governor.

**Accomplishments** | In 2025, the Minnesota National Guard responded to several state-level emergencies. In March, the Wadena Armory was opened to support the housing needs after an apartment complex was destroyed by a fire. In May, the Minnesota National Guard assisted wildfire suppression operations in northeast Minnesota with aviation support, and by establishing a communications retransmission site to expand communications capabilities for the first responders.

In the summer, the Minnesota National Guard responded to a cyberattack in St. Paul. The cyber team was able to leverage its relationships, resources, and knowledge to assist the State of Minnesota and the City of St. Paul with a cyber recovery plan.

Additionally, Military Affairs played a key role in modernizing facilities across the state, including multiple armories and the new Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum at Camp Ripley.

19  
20

Since 1920, Minnesota National Guard Service Members have served 287,650 days in a State Active Duty Status supporting the State of Minnesota.





The Minnesota National Guard hosts a grand opening, tour and ribbon cutting ceremony of the New Ulm armory, Dec. 22, 2025.

Photographer: Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamoonneh

Executive Branch		U.S. Senators		U.S. Representatives			
Governor	Tim Walz	Senator	Amy Klobuchar	District 1	Brad Finstad	District 5	Ilhan Omar
Lieutenant Governor	Peggy Flanagan	Senator	Tina Smith	District 2	Angie Craig	District 6	Tom Emmer
Secretary of State	Steve Simon			District 3	Kelly Morrison	District 7	Michelle Fischbach
State Auditor	Julie Blaha			District 4	Betty McCollum	District 8	Pete Stauber
Attorney General	Keith Ellison						

**2025 Accomplishments** | In 2025, the Minnesota National Guard received bipartisan support from our Congressional delegation to improve the quality of life and service of our Airmen and Soldiers; to modernize our facilities and equipment; and to expand partnerships at home and abroad.

Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith secured congressionally directed funding to design a fuel cell hangar for the 133rd Airlift Wing in St. Paul. The hangar will support the new C-130J Super Hercules aircraft which the wing will receive in 2027.

**2026 Objectives** | In 2026, the Minnesota National Guard will continue a 2025 effort to advocate for increased funding and policy reform for the dual status military technician program. Dual status military technicians are currently serving Guard members who work full-time to support our part-time force. They primarily support readiness-generating activities like equipment maintenance. We support National Guard Bureau’s efforts to fully fund payroll for these employees, who directly contribute to the nation-leading readiness that the Minnesota National Guard is known for, as well as personnel policy changes that will benefit our technician workforce.

In 2026, we will seek funding to design a new armory in Anoka, which will replace a 71-year-old facility that is no longer suitable to support a modern National Guard unit.

We will also continue to support modernization of the National Guard’s fleet of fighter jets, including those at our 148th Fighter Wing in Duluth. Congressman Pete Stauber, who represents Duluth, has been an advocate for the Fighter Preservation and Recapitalization Act of 2025, and of securing next-generation manned aircraft for the 148th. The bill aims to support force-wide modernization while ensuring that National Guard wings are modernized in parity with the active-duty Air Force.

Another key issue we pursued in 2025 is increased and more flexible funding for the State Partnership Program, which pairs the Minnesota National Guard with the Croatian and Norwegian Armed Forces for mutually beneficial training and interoperability exchanges. We will continue to advocate for funding that is proportional to the growth of the State Partnership Program nationwide.

Finally, we will advocate for military construction funding parity for the National Guard. The Army National Guard makes up about 30% of the Army’s infrastructure footprint but is slated to receive just 4% of military construction funding in 2026. The Minnesota National Guard has 70 training and maintenance facilities across the state, half of which are more than 50 years old. At current funding rates, only one facility can be replaced every 10 years. This lack of funding leads to costly maintenance and repairs in the aging and deteriorating facilities that need replacement.

20  
15

With help of civil leadership, in 2015 the Minnesota National Guard was selected (in the first round) to receive an Army National Guard Cyber Protection Team. To this day, Minnesota is one of only four states to have a complete Army National Guard Cyber Protection Team entirely within its borders, with most being split across multiple states.



# Economic Impact

**State Impact:** Services and purchases that are paid for using funds appropriated by the Minnesota's Legislature to the Department of Military Affairs in the State General Fund, including the state share of maintenance costs for facilities jointly supported by the federal and state governments.

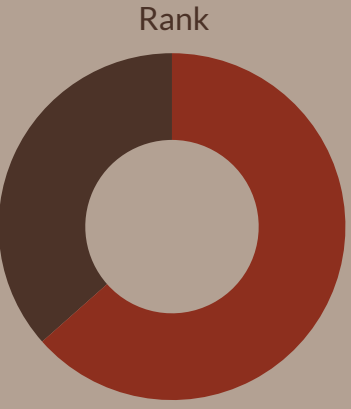
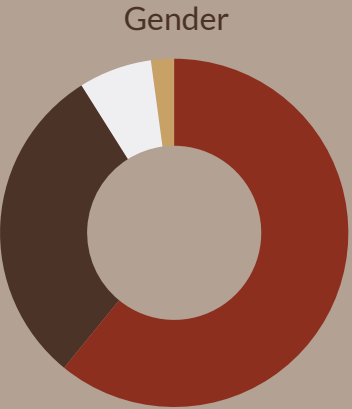
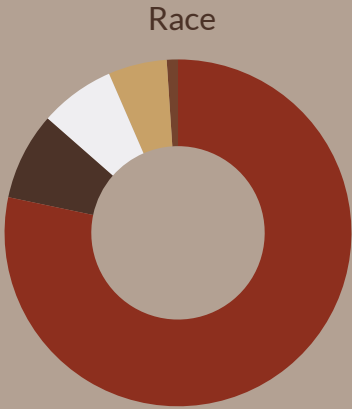
**Cooperative Agreement Awards:** Indirect federal funding that reimburses state expenses for services and goods paid for using state general funds in accordance with an agreement between the adjutant general and the chief of the National Guard Bureau. These funds are accounted for separately from the agency's budget.

**Federal Impact:** Government Direct federal funding of operations, maintenance, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, federal technician salaries, active guard and reserve salaries and pay to service members for military training. When individual lines of this chart are broken out by location, the total is inclusive of several other federal funding subcategories, such as federal education benefits used by members and federal dollars that are not location specific.

Financial figures are based on the state fiscal year ending June 30, 2025 and federal fiscal year ending September 30, 2025.

	Federal District	State District	Federal Impact	State Impact	Total Impact
Albert Lea	1	27A	\$2,404,884	\$186,566	\$2,591,451
Alexandria (Pending Divestiture)	7	08B	\$29,965	\$35,039	\$65,004
Anoka	6	35A	\$3,237,647	\$96,226	\$3,333,873
Appleton	7	20A	\$1,723,143	\$102,637	\$1,825,780
Arden Hills	4	42A	\$48,846,045	\$1,806,870	\$50,652,915
Austin	1	27B	\$2,397,122	\$130,486	\$2,527,608
Bemidji	7	05A	\$2,578,104	\$193,462	\$2,771,566
Bloomington	3	50B	\$16,235,072	\$2,304,521	\$18,539,594
Brainerd	8	10A	\$6,195,686	\$197,364	\$6,393,050
Brooklyn Park	3	36B	\$4,898,372	\$201,023	\$5,099,395
Cambridge	8	32A	\$7,362,548	\$334,007	\$7,696,555
Chisholm	8	06A	\$3,199,308	\$94,455	\$3,293,764
Cloquet	8	11A	\$2,513,059	\$132,366	\$2,645,425
Cottage Grove	2	54A	\$7,406,649	\$390,131	\$7,796,780
Crookston	7	01B	\$2,594,554	\$91,030	\$2,685,584
Detroit Lakes	7	04B	\$1,390,911	\$58,041	\$1,448,953
Duluth	8	03B	\$6,285,741	\$175,689	\$6,461,430
Duluth (Air Base)	8	03B	\$84,084,723	\$2,365,841	\$86,450,564
Fairmont	1	23A	\$2,563,937	\$182,387	\$2,746,324
Faribault	1	24B	\$6,272,076	\$302,602	\$6,574,678
Fergus Falls	7	08A	\$1,947,492	\$79,474	\$2,026,966
Grand Rapids	8	05B	\$1,682,506	\$64,547	\$1,747,053
Hastings	2	21A	\$2,856,205	\$154,500	\$3,010,706
Hibbing	8	06A	\$2,726,898	\$93,552	\$2,820,450
Hutchinson	7	18B	\$3,503,611	\$112,028	\$3,615,639
Inver Grove Heights	2	52B	\$5,494,697	\$633,190	\$6,127,887
Jackson	1	23A	\$2,798,382	\$78,822	\$2,877,205
Litchfield	7	18A	\$3,240,161	\$51,167	\$3,291,328
Little Falls (Camp Ripley)	8	09B	\$126,372,124	\$42,479,880	\$168,852,004
Luverne	1	22A	\$1,006,977	\$146,887	\$1,153,864
Madison	7	16A	\$2,373,521	\$73,585	\$2,447,106
Mankato	1	19B	\$7,947,585	\$472,398	\$8,419,983
Marshall	7	16A	\$2,742,073	\$166,924	\$2,908,997
Minneapolis	5	60A	\$9,283,348	\$137,498	\$9,420,846
Mpls/St Paul (Air Base)	5	63B	\$56,106,698	\$2,896,029	\$59,002,726
Montevideo	7	17A	\$5,195,574	\$194,673	\$5,390,247
Monticello	6	29B	\$3,521,926	\$93,960	\$3,615,886
Moorhead	7	04A	\$4,963,749	\$610,376	\$5,574,125
Morris	7	12A	\$2,316,252	\$101,720	\$2,417,972
New Ulm	1	16B	\$4,458,151	\$73,841	\$4,531,992
Olivia	7	17A	\$918,988	\$21,698	\$940,686
Ortonville	7	12A	\$2,539,831	\$146,691	\$2,686,522
Owatonna	1	24A	\$893,723	\$63,815	\$957,538
Pine City	8	11B	\$2,949,177	\$82,300	\$3,031,477
Pipestone	7	22A	\$1,296,457	\$30,511	\$1,326,968
Red Wing	2	21A	\$979,076	\$69,379	\$1,048,455
Redwood Falls	7	16B	\$2,441,065	\$151,949	\$2,593,014
Rochester	1	26A	\$3,949,201	\$86,835	\$4,036,036
Rosemount (Under Construction)	2	57B	\$15,993,736	\$215,625	\$16,209,360
St. Cloud	7	15B	\$12,279,883	\$220,918	\$12,500,801
St. James	1	23B	\$1,637,145	\$48,562	\$1,685,707
St. Paul	4	65B	\$49,518,023	\$10,017,212	\$59,535,235
St. Peter	1	19A	\$2,531,036	\$138,772	\$2,669,807
Sauk Centre	6	14B	\$1,946,935	\$93,758	\$2,040,693
Stillwater	6	39B	\$15,793,790	\$399,237	\$16,193,027
Thief River Falls	7	01A	\$1,550,156	\$70,513	\$1,620,669
Wadena	8	09A	\$2,047,773	\$64,519	\$2,112,291
West St Paul	2	52A	\$4,075,109	\$166,025	\$4,241,134
Willmar	7	17B	\$2,158,291	\$92,981	\$2,251,272
Winona	1	28A	\$3,311,382	\$113,192	\$3,424,574

## STATE TUITION REIMBURSEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS



Federal Funding	89.5% (\$591,568,255)
State Funding	10.5% (\$70,390,288)
Assigned Members	13,828*
Impact per Member	\$47,871
Total Impact	\$661,958,543

\* Soldiers: 11,550 | Airmen: 2,278

# 2025 Impact Totals





## FORGED IN THE NORTH

This design draws from Minnesota's own materials, red clay stone, granite, iron ore, and limestone, each chosen to represent a region of the state and the resources that define it. Granite reflects the strength of central Minnesota while red clay stone represents the rich soils and clay stone quarries of the west. Limestone honors the bluffs and valleys of the southeast and iron highlights the Iron Range and North Shore. These elements echo the resilient foundation on which the Minnesota National Guard stands. The plaid motif honors Minnesota's cultural identity and stories of loggers, Paul Bunyan lore, and everyday Minnesotans whose grit shaped the state. Together, these visuals ground the 2025 Annual Report in the place we serve, and the people we are committed to protecting.

*Always Ready, Always There.*



<b>Iron Red</b>	<b>Granite Gray</b>	<b>Quarry White</b>
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Designer: Staff Sgt. Mahsima Alkamooneh  
Project Manager: 1st Lt. Austin Stibbe

