

Dept. of Military Affairs: National Guard celebrates 385th birthday

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Today marks the 385th birthday for the National Guard, the oldest component of America's armed forces.

While much has changed since the Dec. 14, 1636, when militiamen from the Massachusetts Bay Colony gathered for the first muster, the National Guard has evolved into one of the most flexible and adaptable forces in the military's inventory ready to answer the call to support responses here at home and overseas in combat environments.

From those early days of securing colonial settlements, to fighting off the British during the War for Independence, and forming the backbone of the Army that ultimately preserved the Union in the Civil War, to two world wars, and combat operations since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the National Guard has answered the call as the nation's primary combat reserve.

It simultaneously has been there as the nation's first military responder when emergency strikes here at home. In the wake of floods, blizzards, tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, civil unrest, pandemics, and more, National Guard troops throughout history have rallied to serve in their own communities to keep them safe.

The Wisconsin National Guard is proud to be a part of this noble legacy of service to our states and nation, and today on the Guard's 385th birthday, Badger State troops continue their service both here in Wisconsin and overseas.

Today, approximately 500 Wisconsin National Guard troops are actively serving the state as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Those troops, many of

whom first mobilized to support the state in the spring of 2020, are actively assisting communities with COVID-19 testing, administering vaccines, and serving as temporary nursing assistants at several mental health facilities. Wisconsin National Guard troops have helped administer approximately 1.2 million COVID-19 tests and nearly 230,000 vaccines in Wisconsin since the pandemic began.

The 176th Cyber Protection Team recently completed a mobilization to Fort Meade, Maryland, where the unit supported U.S. Cyber Command, while others have helped secure the nation's southern border, and hundreds more are currently mobilized overseas

Hundreds of Airmen from the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, Wisconsin deployed to the Middle East this fall, and approximately 65 Soldiers from the Waukesha, Wisconsin-based 135th Medical Company remain deployed to Kuwait and Iraq. Another 150 Soldiers serving with the Sparta and Viroqua, Wisconsin-based 107th Maintenance Company are also deployed to Eastern Europe.

Since the National Guard's 384th birthday last year, troops from the 2nd Battalion, 104th Aviation returned from a deployment to the Middle East, and Airmen from the 128th Air Refueling Wing continued worldwide deployments. Hundreds of other Wisconsin National Guard troops helped secure the U.S. Capitol, deployed to California and Washington to battle wildfires, and helped ensure public safety in communities like Kenosha during periods of tension.

Like their brothers and sisters in arms across the 54 states and territories, the Citizen Soldiers and Airmen of the Wisconsin National Guard continue to answer the call when needed. As Guard members, most hold civilian jobs or attend school full-time, but they remain true to their motto, "Always Ready, Always There" to mobilize at a moment's notice when the state or nation needs them - just as those earliest minutemen did in 1636.