

Dept. of Military Affairs: National Guard's top enlisted soldier visits Wisconsin and reflects on "the year of the guard"

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MADISON, Wis. — The Army National Guard's senior enlisted advisor visited Wisconsin National Guard troops April 10 to discuss the Guard's unprecedented year of service in 2020 and discuss how the military is changing.

Command Sgt. Maj. John F. Sampa, Command Sergeant Major of the Army National Guard, visited troops in Mauston, Wisconsin and Madison April 10 and later attended the Wisconsin Army National Guard's change of responsibility ceremony for its senior enlisted advisor.

"Today's Guard is very different from the Guard I joined 34 years ago," said Sampa while commenting how the organization has changed over the past five years.

Even younger Soldiers, such as Spc. Colton Bauknecht, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with the 132nd Brigade Support Battalion, added that the National Guard is already different from the Guard he thought he was joining two years ago.

"I pictured going on state active duty for floods or deployment when I enlisted," said Bauknecht.

Instead of the traditional missions that he imagined, Bauknecht experienced what Sampa described as the "Year of the Guard" with over 100,000 Guardsmen activated nationwide for a variety of unprecedented missions such as election support and COVID-19 testing.

“Those are numbers we have not seen in the Guard since World War II,” stated Sampa.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Matthew Salm, an armament warrant officer with the 132nd Brigade Support Battalion saw his unit pulled in every direction during 2020 as they assisted with elections, civil unrest responses, and COVID-19 support.

“All of those missions happened in addition to our normal drill duties, which were challenging in a virtual environment,” said Salm.

According to Sampa, the significant challenges posed by the demands of 2020 highlights the importance of readiness in the Wisconsin National Guard.

“Physical fitness really matters to me because we could get called at any time to any mission from combat to homeland response,” stated Sampa.

Spc. William Deane, a radio repairman with the 132nd Brigade Support Battalion, stated that in addition to medical readiness, his support system became a key part of his ability to respond quickly throughout the last year.

“You’ll get a call to be there at a moment’s notice,” stated Deane.

When someone in the crowd asked Sampa how he managed to balance his family and his careers, he responded that he included them in his military life by bringing them to dining outs and social gatherings on drill weekends.

“I also ensured there was a family vacation every year, even if it was somewhere five hours away just to get out of town,” said Sampa.

Sampa emphasized the importance of every person during his remarks.

“It matters every time you come here and do your job, even if it’s just a small repair on a truck,” said Sampa. “I want you to know that you matter.”

Sampa visited troops from the 1st Battalion, 147th Aviation in Madison, and Company B, 132nd Brigade Support Battalion in Mauston, during his visit.