

Dept. of Military Affairs: A birthday guide to the nation's oldest military organization

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Three hundred and eighty seven years ago, three militia regiments of the Massachusetts Bay Colony gathered to train for community defense. The concept of members of the community simultaneously serving in a military capacity for the greater good has endured even as the National Guard has evolved since that first muster in 1636.

Back in colonial times, militia units were not called National Guard. Members provided their own weapons and supplies, and training was developed and administered locally. Today's National Guard is federally trained, equipped and funded, and is a significant part of the Total Force that includes active duty and reserve components.

In addition to its federal mission as a primary combat reserve, the National Guard also serves a state mission and can be called to state active duty by the governor for disaster response or domestic unrest. During the COVID pandemic, National Guard members across the nation helped collect samples for testing and administered vaccines as they became available, among other tasks. When serving on state active duty, the National Guard always supports local authorities — it does not assert its own authority.

But the National Guard has a broad and diverse portfolio of domestic missions — it is much more than just auxiliary manpower.

Some of these missions are familiar, such as the National Guard Reaction Force, a temporary task force which provides a rapid response capability for emergency

incidents requiring law enforcement or security support.

Some may be less familiar, such as Civil Support Teams — a small but specialized unit of full-time Army and Air National Guard members trained to respond to chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear emergencies. Members can identify suspected hazardous materials and provide guidance to local authorities. All members are HAZMAT TECH certified and are interoperable with first responders, the FBI, Department of Energy, U.S. Secret Service and other federal agencies. Civil Support Teams also provide security monitoring for national special security events and events with a special event assessment rating — essentially, large events where a terrorist attack would result in significant damage or human casualties.

On a much larger scale, CERFP units — chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear enhanced response force package — reports to on-scene incident commanders in the event of large-scale emergencies. A CERFP typically includes a command and control element, a search and extraction element, a decontamination element, a medical element and a fatalities search and recovery team. Like the Civil Support Team, the CERFP is comprised of Army and Air National Guard members.

Some emergency responses may call for a dual-status commander — a specially trained officer who can serve in both state and federal statuses simultaneously. The principal benefit is to facilitate unity of state and federal forces and streamline response efforts by relaying federal orders to military personnel serving on federal status and state orders to those on state status. Wisconsin deputy adjutants general served in this capacity during the COVID pandemic and during Operation Allies Welcome.

National Guard units from one state can be called to state active duty to provide assistance in another state whose resources are overwhelmed, under a national mutual aid partnership agreement known as the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, or EMAC. Hurricane Katrina was perhaps the largest National Guard EMAC response effort. Recently, Wisconsin National Guard aviation assets have deployed to California to help battle wildfires there, and National Guard military police units from other states were sent to Wisconsin to assist with civil disturbances.

The National Guard also responds to threats in the cyber realm. The Department of Defense relies on cyberspace to execute its national security mission, and both the Army National Guard and Air National Guard field cyber units that specialize in

operations, protection, security, warfare and training. Governors can also command National Guard cyber forces in a state status, just as any other National Guard unit. National Guard cyber unit tasks and missions include defensive cyberspace operations, cyber command readiness inspections, vulnerability assessments, critical infrastructure assessment, theater security cooperation, and Federal Emergency Management Agency support.

The National Guard administers the State Partnership Program, a cost-effective initiative guided by State Department foreign policy goals, carried out by state adjutants general in support of security cooperation objectives and Defense Department goals. This program began in 1993 and currently has 88 partnerships with 100 nations. Through the State Partnership Program, the National Guard conducts military-to-military engagements in support of defense security goals, and leverages whole-of-society relationships and capabilities to facilitate broader interagency and corollary engagements spanning military, government, economic and social spheres. The Wisconsin National Guard's State Partnership Program involvement includes Nicaragua and, more recently, Papua New Guinea.

Not all National Guard response efforts are for emergencies. Innovative Readiness Training is a program that allows National Guard units to apply their training in support of community needs. These can include providing medical care such as dentistry, optometry, veterinary and behavioral health; civil engineer, construction and public works projects; planning and logistical support to communities; cyber security; and transportation. One example from the last decade involves the 128th Air Refueling Wing's Civil Engineer Squadron, in collaboration with volunteers from Oshkosh Defense LLC, to build a fish cleaning station at Camp American Legion. The same unit also helped construct veteran housing for the Crow Housing Authority in Montana in 2017.

STARBASE is a Department of Defense civil military program to grow interest in science, technology, engineering and math. The goal is to provide an outstanding and unforgettable educational experience for students and teachers in a hands-on, high-tech, discovery and inquiry-based environment on a military installation. In Wisconsin the program is hosted by the Wisconsin Air National Guard and operates out of facilities at the U.S. Army Reserve complex in Milwaukee.

One of the National Guard's best-kept secrets is the National Guard Youth Challenge — in Wisconsin it goes by the name Challenge Academy. This is a free, voluntary, multi-phased intervention program targeting youth ages 15½ to 18 years who are

at risk of not graduating high school. Youth who voluntarily enter this program begin a 22-week residential phase in a quasi-military setting — participants live in barracks, wear military-style uniforms, engage in daily physical training, but also attend classes, take part in community service projects. Most importantly, they unlearn bad habits and instill core disciplines and values that help them make the hard right choice over the easy wrong. This residential phase is followed by a 12-month phase where the graduated cadet, guided by a mentor, executes their post-graduate action plan developed during the residential phase. This plan can include completing high school or beginning college, moving into their own residence, gaining employment or joining the military.

From the very beginning in 1636, the National Guard has answered the call, drawing from its community to enhance and protect that community. Today that heritage of service continues in a more robust and diverse way than 387 years ago.